

The Failure of the American Baptist Culture

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

James B. Jordan

"The Failure of American Baptist Culture" might seem a puzzling topic for a symposium of essays, but the contention of the editors of *Christianity and Civilization* is that American culture or civilization has been, in the main, a Baptist modification of old catholic and Reformed culture. The New Christian Right, in its attempts to stem the tide of degeneracy in American life, is a Baptist movement, and this is the reason why the New Christian Right finds itself in a condition of crisis, confusion, and indeed impotence. The thesis the editors are setting forth, then, is that American Christianity must return to a full-orbed Biblical and Reformed theology, and set aside Baptist individualism, if it is to have anything to say to modern problems—indeed, if it is to survive.

The purpose of this introduction is to set forth, in broad strokes, the kinds of problems that the various essays in this symposium deal with. This introduction, then, is a kind of road map to the symposium as a whole, and it is our hope that the reader will read this introduction before turning to any of the particular essays of the symposium itself.

Most Christians who have wrestled with the question of infant baptism (or paedobaptism), over against professor's baptism (the Baptist position), have noticed that each side seemingly has strong Biblical arguments for its case. For several centuries, theologians and preachers have hurled Bible texts and theological arguments back and forth, without convincing the other side. Even at this date in history, the vast majority of Christendom holds to and practices infant baptism (and a large segment practices paedocommunion as well). In America, however, the Baptist mindset has prevailed to a very great extent. In fact, we might say that Americans are instinctive Baptists. During the brief efflorescence of the Jesus Movement a decade ago, we saw virtually no new converts who did not "feel a need" to be baptized by immersion. An individualistic, voluntaristic decisionism is endemic and pandemic to American culture.

These observations, we believe, point us to the true character of the debate between Baptists and catholics (broadly speaking, of course; catholicity is a matter of intent, and its opposite is

independency, also a matter of intent). The editors, obviously, are catholic, though by no means Roman. To be precise, we are Reformed catholics, committed to the theology of Calvinism as it has found expression (for instance) in Scottish Presbyterian government, Dutch Reformed thought, and (to an extent) in Anglican worship. We recognize, obviously, that evangelical Baptists are our Christian brethren. These essays are not a declaration of war against Baptists, but an invitation to them to reconsider their position.

What, then, is the true character of the debate between Baptists and Calvinists, between independents and catholics? That character is presuppositional, rather than exegetical. The purpose of the essays in this symposium is to expose these presuppositions, so that a more intelligent discussion of the problems can ensue.

In this introduction, I should like to paint the picture in broad strokes. I have no doubt but that much of what I have to say here will be offensive to some Baptist brethren. I ask only that they listen carefully. I am not trying to be offensive, but to provoke thought along unaccustomed lines. So to get right to it, let us look at some differences between Reformed and Baptist thought in the area of *the Trinity*.

The Bible teaches us that God is a Person, and so we can pray to God. The Bible also teaches us that God is three Persons, and so we can pray to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. God's Oneness is not the same as His Threeness, but God is every bit as much One as He is Three, and every bit as much Three as He is One. Consistent Christians, therefore, are not Tri-theists (three gods), nor are they pure Mono-theists (one God); rather, they are Trinitarian.

The doctrine of the Trinity teaches us that the one and the many are equally ultimate in God, and thus are equally ultimate in God's creation. This Christian belief preserves us from the errors of individualism on the one hand and corporatism on the other. Let's take some examples.

In some societies, the family is such a closed, corporate body that the individual has no place outside the family. Indeed, in many of the ancient world cultures, the father might kill his wife or children or slaves if he chose to do so. On the other hand, modern society has virtually destroyed the family through individualism. Rebellion surrounds us on every hand. The Bible presents the family as a balance between the one and the many. The family is a real entity, a genuine corporation, and God deals with the family as a

family. Thus, unlike the Baptists, Presbyterians baptize entire families, including wives and children; showing that the entire family is in some ways within the sphere of God's covenant life. On the other hand, each member of the family stands before God as a true individual both in this life and on the day of judgment, so that rebellious wives and husbands can, in extremity, be divorced, and rebellious children disinherited. Again, this stands over against some corporatistic forms of Christianity which do not allow divorce. Consistent Presbyterianism alone is able to produce a genuinely Trinitarian view of the family.

Second, in many societies the state is given all power over the individual, while in some others, the individual is given all power over against the state. Totalitarianism and anarchism are the result. Presbyterians have always been in the forefront of the political battle against both of these extremes. The War for Independence was characterized by the British as a "Scotch-Irish Rebellion," that is, a Presbyterian revolt. Presbyterians object to statism as an encroachment on true liberty, but they also object to anarchy. The Puritans and Presbyterians had little use for the anarchistic Anabaptists and Quakers of their day. As John Cotton put it, "If the people are governors, who then shall be governed?" Think about it. That is a good argument, in the light of the Biblical command to submit to the powers that be. Presbyterians, unlike the Anabaptists, did not rebel against the statist powers, but unlike the Romanists and Anglicans, they did not acquiesce in them either. They submitted and also worked for change. When forced to do so, they took up arms. Consistent Presbyterianism alone is able to produce a genuinely Trinitarian view of the State.

Third, in some circles the church is organized as a top-heavy corporation, with a legislative bureaucracy at the top which directs everything below. Indeed, a local church does not really exist unless it belongs to the larger, corporate church. This is the Roman, Anglican, and liberal Presbyterian and Lutheran way. At the other extreme we have the Baptists. Among the Baptists, each church is a separate corporation. No real connection among the churches is allowed to exist, and certainly no hierarchy. Independency, in varying degrees, is the rule. Only among the Presbyterians do we find the Trinitarian presupposition, the equal ultimacy of the one and the many, at work. In Presbyterianism, each local church is a real entity, but so is the connected church at large. The ascending courts of Presbyterianism are just that: courts of appeal, not legislatures. They only exist to deal with problems that cannot be handled at the

local level; but they do exist, and they do deal authoritatively with problems appealed to them. Thus, consistent Presbyterianism alone is able to produce a genuinely Trinitarian view of the church.

Thus, the Presbyterian presupposition, Trinitarianism, tends to produce a society protected from extremes. (R. J. Rushdoony's *The One and the Many* [Fairfax, VA: Thoburn Press, 1971] is the best treatment of the implications of Christian Trinitarianism.) Now, let me reiterate at this point that I am not saying that good Baptists are guilty of denying the doctrine of the Trinity! What I am saying, however, is that Baptist thinking errs on the side of individualism, and this betrays that the doctrine of the Trinity is not fully *functional* in Baptist thinking.

Various terms are used to describe the tendency toward individualism. I shall use the term "nominalism," though "atomism" might do just as well. Nominalism emphasizes the particulars to the virtual exclusion of universals, while realism emphasizes universals to the virtual exclusion of particulars. Nominalism grew strong in late Medieval thought. Luther professed to be a nominalist, for instance, following Ockham. The drift of Western civilization has been nominalistic for centuries. While it is not the subject of this symposium, I believe it can be shown that nominalism sidetracked the Reformation. Calvin's view of the Eucharist, for instance, was gradually nominalized in Presbyterianism until, during the 19th century, both Charles Hodge and Robert Dabney expressed puzzlement at Calvin's belief that the true humanity of Christ was sacramentally present and eaten in the Eucharist. The failure of most of the Reformers to advocate paedocommunion, the development of the rite of confirmation, the rise of scholasticism, and later on the development of individualistic revivalism and anti-liturgism, all evince the strong nominalistic drift in all Christian thought in recent centuries. (This is not even to mention the hyper-individualism common in charismatic circles, including Roman Catholic charismatics, nor is it to mention the hypernominalism of such heretics as Karl Barth.)

The bottom line is that it might well be contended that the Baptists have consistently followed through on certain nominalistic errors, popular at the time of the Reformation, and found here and there among the magisterial Reformers themselves. I offer this as a theory. Perhaps some eager Ph.D. candidate will search the matter out. At any rate, the goal of this symposium is to *start* us all to rethinking the matter.

Not only is nominalism (or individualism) a problem; so is

platonism, at least among predestinarian Baptists. (Peter Lillback's essay in this symposium demonstrates with finality that there can be no such thing as a "Calvinistic" or "Reformed" Baptist.) P. Richard Flinn has done a good job of exposing and demolishing the platonic thinking found in "Reformed" Baptist writings, so I shall be brief here. Platonism (usually realistic) makes a nice accomodation with nominalism when salvation is seen as the escape of individual "souls" from this world into heaven, instead of the rebuilding and resurrection of this world under the influence of heaven. Cornelius Van Til has written:

Would that all Christians saw the logic of their Christianity! They would not then seek by haphazard, nervous methods of revivalism, of individualistic preaching and teaching think of the salvation for eternity alone and thus fail in large part to accomplish what they set out to do. In covenant education [Van Til is writing on Christian education] we seek not to extract the human being from his natural milieu as a creature of God, but rather seek to restore the creature with his milieu to God. Incomparably the wiser is this method since it transplants the plant with, instead of without its soil. (*Essays on Christian Education* [Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974], p. 143.)

In Genesis 1:1, God set up two realms, heaven and earth. The goal of history is not for earth to be forsaken, but for heaven to impress its pattern on earth. "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done *on earth as it is in heaven*," we pray. The duality of heaven and earth is to be resolved, eschatologically, when earth has become so like heaven that they are one community. Thus, in Revelation 21 and 22, the New Jerusalem proceeds out from heaven to earth. Indeed, this is what the whole doctrine of the economic procession of the Holy Spirit is about.

In contrast to this Biblical position, platonist Walter Chantry, in a book full of appalling innuendos against some unnamed adversaries (probably British Israelites, from his description), writes:

Who needs stimulation to choose this present world order with its *physical* objects? This world holds out its arms to us with powerful appeals to the *senses*. A *temporal* system looks so inviting. We are drawn by this forceful magnetism of the *material*. (Emphasis mine; *God's Righteous Kingdom* [Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1980], p. 23.)

There is obviously no room in Mr. Chantry's docetic theology for a physical incarnation of God in human flesh, nor for a physical resurrection such as the Apostles' Creed teaches all catholics, nor for any

kind of physical sacramental worship. Of course, Mr. Chantry would not want to push the matter so far, but his disciples doubtless will!

Since the Baptist individualist sees salvation only in terms of the individual's journey to some other world, some evangelical Baptists have begun to teach that the Bible is inerrant only when it deals with matters of individual salvation. Broader cultural concerns, since they are not within the purview of Baptist salvation, are not dealt with by Scripture in an inerrant fashion, they say. Clearly, many Baptists reject such reasoning, but the position is consistent with the individualism of Baptist theology. Since the catholic and Reformed faith sees salvation as the restoration of the whole fabric of life, we must see inerrancy as pertaining to every detail of science and history in Scripture, for these are given us as part of our salvation.

Ideas have consequences.

You see, if we really *push* the matter, then Baptists disagree with catholics over such fundamental issues as the Trinity, the nature of salvation, and even the nature of Biblical authority! But we don't want to push the matter; we simply want to expose *tendencies* of thought, to provoke you, courteous reader, to rethink these matters.

More things could be said. For instance, there is a difference between the catholic Reformed and the Baptists over the nature of the sacraments and the Church. Paul K. Jewett has written: "Baptism, in an evangelical theology, is an act of confession on man's part in response to an act of renewing grace on God's part" (*Infant Baptism and the Covenant of Grace* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978], p. 162). If Jewett is correct, then the Reformed faith is not evangelical. Neither Augustine nor Calvin was an evangelical, for they did not see the sacrament first and foremost as man's response, but as visible words from God. The sacraments are not man's work of response, in catholic and Reformed thought, but they are God's gracious call, they are physical signs of God's Word. They are God's claim and promise, to which man is to respond in obedience and faith. Jewett's statement presupposes what he needs to prove: that baptism is man's profession, not God's claim. This foundational flaw renders Jewett's book of only marginal value for the real discussion at hand. (Parenthetically, the third issue of *Christianity and Civilization* is scheduled to be a symposium on the reconstruction of the Christian Church, and this issue will be more fully dealt with in that volume.)

In Baptist thinking (and many catholics and Calvinists are guilty of this as well), faith and the sacraments are not presupposi-

tions but attainments. It is as if man were supposed to eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, the Tree of Knowledge and Ethics, before he can eat of the Tree of Life. Rationalistic and evidential apologetics, even in the hands of Lutheran John W. Montgomery and Calvinists Gordon Clark and Francis Schaeffer, encourage men to approach faith by way of reason. Faith is not seen as the foundation of thought, but as an attainment. Naturally, the sacraments are seen the same way: men are to make a decision, and then be admitted to baptism (the Baptist view) or to the Eucharist (the Lutheran and Calvinistic view). The Bible, however, indicates that faith is presuppositional. The child is to be taught to believe from the beginning. It is not his initial decision which evidences his faith, but rather his perseverance to the end. He participates in the sacrament, in both its forms, from the beginning. The sacrament of God's grace is not something he must attain by making a decision, walking an aisle, memorizing a catechism, or going through a rite of confirmation; but rather the sacrament of eating dinner with Jesus at His House is the presupposition of the child's growth in grace. The difference between these two approaches, let me say it gently but straightforwardly, goes back to the Garden of Eden itself.

Perhaps one other observation can be made, to illustrate the differences between Reformed and Baptist thinking. That is the matter of human rights. From the standpoint of subjectivism, which emphasizes man's faith and man's actions, the foundation of human society will be seen as something proceeding out of men: human rights. Human rights are seen as the safeguard against tyranny. Even a moderately Reformed thinker such as Francis Schaeffer can subtitle his book *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* with the phrase "Exposing our rapid yet subtle loss of human rights."

Is the catholic and Reformed faith opposed to human rights? Yes, very much so. It is not human rights but Divine law which is the foundation of liberty and the safeguard against tyranny. It is not something proceeding from man (rights), but something proceeding from God (revealed law) which is to order Christian society. As T. Robert Ingram has brilliantly shown, the notion of human rights was introduced by Satan in the Garden of Eden, and the notion that men have inherent rights is simply a way of affirming original sin. (See Ingram, *What's Wrong with Human Rights?* [Houston, TX: St. Thomas Press, 1978]. If you would be wise, get this book and read it.)

The notion of human rights underlies all pagan revolutionism. As our civilization becomes more tyrannical, we must not adopt the

rhetoric of human rights, but hold forth the law of God as the answer to men's ills. (Parenthetically, the second issue of *Christianity and Civilization* is scheduled to deal with Christianity and resistance to tyranny, and in this volume the question of human rights will more fully be dealt with.)

Let me say again, in conclusion, that neither I nor the other editors of this symposium are maintaining that Baptists are wolves in the clothing of Christian sheep, nor that the ills of modern American civilization are to be blamed on the Baptists. We believe that our Baptist brethren have been *too much influenced* by certain secular trends, and we earnestly pray and desire that they *rethink their position*, and return to the catholic and Reformed faith.

* * * * *

The first part of the symposium is concerned with the Crisis of American Baptist Culture, as it comes to expression in the activities of the New Christian Right. Suddenly aware that our civilization is moving rapidly toward sodomy and tyranny, the New Christian Right is trying to mount an offensive to return America to more Christian moorings. The New Christian Right, however, has indicated time and again that it does not know what it is doing, and that its program is riddled with contradictions. For instance, many are concerned to get prayer to some nebulous and non-existent "deity" returned to the public schools. This has nothing to do with Christianity. Others are striving to have some "neutral" creationism (completely ignoring the Bible) taught in public schools. One was tempted to rejoice when this seemingly blasphemous attempt was thwarted in Arkansas. A third example of contradiction is the Moral Majority, which seeks for "moral" government based on "human rights" and completely apart from Christianity! Obviously, the New Christian Right is in deep crisis. The essays by **Gary North** and **Kevin Craig** deal with these contradictions, and show how the New Christian Right can find sure footing.

My own piece is a review of Robert Webber's book *The Moral Majority*. Mr. Webber's perspective is anabaptistic, and I suggest unwittingly gnostic as well. While Mr. Webber scores a few good observations against the New Christian Right, his book fails to come up with Biblical suggestions for reconstruction. This book, however, has been widely touted as a definitive answer to the New Christian Right, and it is important to answer it. (I have reviewed another book by Robert Webber, *The Secular Saint: A Case for Evangel-*

ical Social Responsibility, in *The Westminster Theological Journal* 44:1 [Spring, 1982].)

Since Mr. Webber includes in his book several confessional statements dealing with social responsibility, which I find to be very inadequate and misleading (see my review), I have enclosed in the symposium a confessional statement, *Of the Christian Mission*, adopted by the Association of Reformation Churches, which seeks to set out a Biblical, catholic, and Reformed view of social responsibility.

Michael Gilstrap summarized Richard Quebedeaux's very important book, *By What Authority: The Rise of Personality Cults in American Christianity*. Quebedeaux analyzes the tendency of American Christianity to degenerate into entertainment, especially on television. Those who do not have the time to read the book will profit from Mr. Gilstrap's summary, and from his criticisms.

The second part of the symposium is concerned with Background Studies in Baptist Thought and Culture. **P. Richard Flinn's** article treats of the theological issues between Baptists and other Christians, and does so from a presuppositional standpoint. Many of the matters which I touched briefly in this introduction are fully dealt with by Mr. Flinn. Those concerned with more specifically theological matters might read Mr. Flinn's essay first. Mr. Flinn argues that water baptism is not a sign of individual profession of faith in Christ, but a sign of the coming in history of the New Covenant order. Baptism incorporates men, women, and children into the New Covenant community. Those who persevere in faith, "improving" their baptisms to use the language of the Westminster Assembly, are saved, while those who apostatize and repudiate their baptisms are doubly damned.

Ray R. Sutton's essay deals largely with the Medieval roots of Anabaptism, and demonstrates that modern American Baptists betray many of the characteristics of their Anabaptist forebears. Primarily, Mr. Sutton concerns himself with the subjectivistic orientation of all Baptist thought, and argues that only a return to a Biblical objectivity can heal the church. Mr. Sutton shows how subjectivism leads ineluctably to pelagianism, monasticism, and perfectionism, and shows how these tendencies have continued to crop up in this history of the Baptist churches.

Peter Lillback demonstrates once and for all that there can be no such thing as a "Calvinistic Baptist." John Calvin's arguments against the Baptists of his day demonstrate that paedobaptism is of the essence of catholic and Reformed theology. It was the Biblical

doctrine of the covenant which Calvin employed against the Baptists of that time, and Mr. Lillback shows that Calvin's arguments are still relevant today.

The next two essays deal with the mythology surrounding Roger Williams and the idea of religious liberty. The extract from **Henry Dexter's** book on Roger Williams sets the record straight. **Craig Bulkeley's** article is an essay in the free and easy sense, taking the form of a letter written to a clergyman, now deceased, who was a relative of Mr. Bulkeley. Mr. Bulkeley shows that the notion of religious liberty is utterly vacuous unless defined by the boundaries set up by Scripture itself. The popular myth, however, is that American culture is founded on religious liberty, and that religious liberty was first set forth by Baptist Roger Williams against the evil theocrats of Puritan New England. Nothing could be farther from the truth, and as Mr. Bulkeley shows, it was those Puritan theocrats who bequeathed to America the true religious freedom we have enjoyed until recently.

Everett C. De Velde, Jr., has written a brief essay on Freemasonry. Since the Baptist faith is individualistic, so that churches are not to have much visible unity among themselves, the question comes of how social bonding takes place in a Baptist culture. In earlier times the Church formed the bond among people, but that has not been true in America. The Church has not been a strong force for social cementing, nor has it acted to restrain social innovations. That role, to a great extent, has been taken by Freemasonry. Especially in the Southern United States, membership in the lodge is virtually essential to any kind of success. In Europe, the Grand Orient Lodge of Freemasonry is simply the church of atheism, but the form of Freemasonry in America, called British Freemasonry, is more sort of a "good old boy network." All the same, the Masonic (Scottish Rite) advocacy of the public schools has led here and there to considerable opposition to Christian schools, and Masonry in general stands opposed to any truly moral and Spiritual renovation of American life. Part of the failure of American Baptist Culture is that it has given over part of the Church's task, that of providing covenantal social bonding, to a quasi-occult institution. The churches must cease being nothing but preaching points, and once again become true communities. Only then will the Church be able to overcome the lure of Freemasonry. (Dr. De Velde mentions a study by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. This pamphlet, "Christ or the Lodge," is available from Great Commission Publications, 7401 Old York Road, Philadelphia, PA 19126. He also men-

tions a study by the Christian Reformed Church in North America, which I personally regard as the best *long* analysis of Freemasonry available. Write to the CRC in NA, 2850 Kalamazoo Ave., Grand Rapids, MI 49560, and ask for the *Acts of Synod 1974*. Send \$5.00 plus \$1.50 for postage.)

The symposium concludes with two book reviews. **James Michael Peter's** review of Rorabaugh's *The Alcoholic Republic* touches on one of the pseudo-moral issues common in Baptist culture. The Bible praises the joy-inducing effects of the fruit of the vine, though it warns against drunkenness. The peculiar antipathy to all alcohol, which has led to the wicked substitution of grape juice (and soda-pop, and coffee, etc.) for communion wine, has its origins in the lawlessness of the American frontier. Mr. Peters's review is an introduction to this fascinating topic.

Finally, **Ray Sutton** reviews Kenneth Davis's *Anabaptism and Asceticism*, pointing out that Mr. Davis's work is probably the finest introduction to the study of the non-Christian influences in early Baptist theology.

Appendix

Just as this issue of *Christianity and Civilization* was going to press, we received a copy of Willem Balke's *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals* (trans. by William J. Heynen; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981). This excellent study is a history of the relationship between Calvin and the various Anabaptist personalities and groups of his day. It is very readable, and we cannot recommend it too highly. Anyone interested in further pursuit of the kinds of things discussed in the essays by Rev. Sutton and Mr. Lillback, should obtain this book.

THE INTELLECTUAL SCHIZOPHRENIA OF THE NEW CHRISTIAN RIGHT

Gary North

And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? If the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered not a word (I Kings 18:21).

He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad (Matthew 12:30).

IN August of 1980, the Religious Roundtable sponsored the National Affairs Briefing Conference in Dallas, Texas. The Religious Roundtable is a non-profit organization with headquarters in Washington, D.C. It serves as a kind of clearing house for the New Christian Right, with many of its board members selected from the leadership of the movement known to the press as the "moral majority." The Briefing Conference was specifically designed to bring thousands of American fundamentalists into the American political mainstream.

Some 15,000 people assembled in a large arena to hear dozens of the nation's religious conservatives tell them about the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), abortion, inflation, the nature of political organization, taxes, and the political responsibilities of Christian laymen. Over 2,000 pastors attended. Leaders of the New Christian Right asked them to take the message of political involvement back to their congregations.

The highlight of the conference was a speech by Presidential candidate Ronald Reagan. Both Jimmy Carter and third-party candidate John Anderson had been invited. Both of these men claimed to be Bible-believing Christians early in their careers (although neither was using this label extensively in the 1980 election), yet neither accepted the invitation. The final meeting was, in effect, a kind of political rally for Ronald Reagan, despite the fact that the sponsoring organization could not take a partisan political stand. Perhaps the other two candidates knew it would be a pro-

Reagan crowd, so they chose not to attend.

The news media showed up. This was the largest political gathering of fundamentalists and conservative religious people in recent memory. The attention given to the meeting by the television and newspaper representatives indicated that they understood the political importance of the meeting. What they apparently did not understand was that this meeting was abnormal. The fact that 15,000 people showed up at what was essentially a Christian political rally was not recognized for what it was: a kind of watershed for American fundamentalism. The rally was a political rally; more precisely, it was *a rally for politics as such*, and for *Christian involvement in politics*. It was a break from almost six decades of political inaction on the part of American fundamentalist religious leaders.

The humanists with the television crews no doubt always suspected that fundamentalists were rock-ribbed political conservatives. The fact that fundamentalists would come out to hear speeches denouncing the ERA or abortion probably did not surprise them. While media representatives seemed to be impressed by the sheer number of attendees, they did not comment on the radical break with American religious history that this meeting represented. What they all failed to mention was that this meeting would not have been held five years earlier, and if it had been held, hardly anyone would have shown up.

There is little doubt that post-1965 fundamentalists and traditional Roman Catholics have voted generally for candidates professing conservative values. But in the 1930's, the Roosevelt coalition carried most of these fundamentalists and Roman Catholics. Catholics supported John F. Kennedy in 1960, while fundamentalist leaders in 1960 did, on occasion, voice some general fears about a Roman Catholic in the White House, and they probably voted for Nixon. But Kennedy turned out to be a secular humanist, a pragmatist, and the darling of the intellectuals—hardly a heart-warming Presidency for traditional Catholics or fundamentalists. The late 1960's also brought massive changes to the Roman Catholic Church. The liberals and professional doubters gained control of the liturgy, while the seminaries steadily went bankrupt, or off into liberation theology. The traditionalists could no longer find comfort and psychological shelter in their churches.¹ They began to

1. One of the most fascinating accounts of this shift in theology within the Roman Catholic Church is Garry Wills' book, *Bare Ruined Choirs*, published originally in 1972 (New York: Dell, 1974). Wills was a leading traditionalist Catholic with a

recognize the threat that higher criticism, theological liberalism, and pragmatism posed for Christian values. The enemy was in the gates, and it turned out that it was not a specifically Protestant enemy.

Meanwhile, the Protestants suffered the same shocks. The denominational seminaries were almost universally liberal, or Barthian, which meant that the gap between the new pastors and their congregations widened.² The handful of conservative seminaries were generally committed to premillennial, dispensational theology, and they were almost defenseless intellectually against the rising tide of social and political activism within the neo-evangelical camp. The visible leadership of conservative Protestantism increasingly drifted toward a mild social activism—the cast-off political slogans of humanist liberalism—which left most laymen uncomfortable. The popularity of *The Genesis Flood*, by Henry Morris and John Whitcomb, indicated a hardening of the lines between traditional fundamentalism, with its commitment to biblical inerrancy, and the neo-evangelical Protestant leaders, who were virtually all opposed to six-day creationism.³ *The Genesis Flood* was published in 1961 by the tiny Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, which was not fundamentalist in orientation, but was just what its name announced. R. J. Rushdoony convinced the two authors to submit the manuscript to P&R after other Christian publishers demanded that the authors soften their hard line against theistic evolutionism. The traditional fundamentalist and evangelical publishers, by 1961, had long since abandoned any commitment to “anti-intellectual” creationism. *The Genesis Flood* became P&R’s first book to approach anything like best-seller status. The book created a new market for creationist materials.

Then, in 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court legalized abortion.

Ph.D. in classics. He was radicalized in the mid-1960’s. His book reflects his own shift in perspective.

2. The works of Cornelius Van Til stand as the most astute theological criticisms of this drift into theological liberalism. See, for example, *The Case for Calvinism* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1964); *Christianity and Barthianism* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1962); *The New Modernism* (Presbyterian & Reformed, 1947). See also the historical account of the National Council of Churches by C. Gregg Singer, *The Unholy Alliance* (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1975).

3. See Charles Clough, “Biblical Presuppositions and Historical Geology: A Case Study,” *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, I (Summer, 1974); Walter E. Lammerts, “The Creationist Movement in the United States: A Personal Account,” *ibid.*

This served as a catalyst to fuse together fundamentalists, traditional Roman Catholics, and Mormons. The generally agreed-upon evil of abortion overcame the historical differences between the conservative Protestants and Roman Catholics. Meanwhile, the increasingly liberal prelates in the Roman Catholic Church began to sound like the liberals who dominated Protestant seminaries and the larger denominations. The religious leadership fragmented, with each ideological camp closer to those across denominational and ecclesiastical boundaries than they were to the rival ideologues within the organizations.

The ecumenical movement of the liberals, which had been opposed by die-hard conservatives within the denominations for two generations, now faced a *rival ecumenism*: the New Christian Right coalition. Not surprisingly, the liberals cried out in horror at this other brand of ecumenism. It turned out that the conservatives were willing, after all, to get involved in politics. To the dismay of the liberals, the political preference of the new coalition was not the New Deal, as interpreted by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. The liberals had simply assumed that "social action" meant New Deal liberalism. Now that the fundamentalists were "coming out of the closet" of retreatist, emotional pietism, and getting involved in politics—which the liberals had called on the pietists to do for decades—the liberals were startled. "Get back into your closets," they shouted. "Separation of church and state," they screamed. In other words, *they started counting votes*—the liberals' version of the sacraments—and found to their horror that the New Christian Right seemed to have a majority, at least in 1980.

The news media could afford to ignore the voting habits of fundamentalists prior to the Carter candidacy. There was no organized bloc of fundamentalist voters. The "born-again Christian" was invisible politically prior to 1976. There were very good reasons for this invisibility, as historian George Marsden makes clear in his study of American fundamentalism. The theology of fundamentalism has been opposed to social and political involvement; this tradition goes back at least to the famous Scopes' trial of 1925. This retreat from political life has been called "the Great Reversal" by church historians. Marsden's lengthy description of this reversal is quite accurate:

In order to clarify matters, and to distinguish two quite distinct stages of the "Great Reversal," it is important to note first that social concern may emphasize one or both of the following: (1) political means to promote the welfare of society, especially of

the poor and the oppressed, and (2) reliance on private charity to meet such needs. Although before the Civil War many evangelicals displayed neither type of social concern, many others emphasized both. The ensuing transition came in two stages. From 1865 to about 1900 interest in political action diminished, though it did not disappear, among revivalist evangelicals. As we have just seen however, the revivalist evangelicalism of this era still included vigorous champions of social concern, especially in the form of private charity. The lessening of political concern, then, did not in itself signify a "Great Reversal" in social concern, even though it shifted the focus and prepared the way for what followed. The "Great Reversal" took place from about 1900 to about 1930, when all progressive social concern, whether political or private, became suspect among revivalist evangelicals and was relegated to a very minor role.

The preparatory stage, from 1860 to 1900, can be described in a number of ways. Using the terms broadly we may call it a transition from a basically "Calvinistic" tradition, which saw politics as a significant means to advance the kingdom, to a "pietistic" view of political action as no more than a means to restrain evil. This change can be seen as a move from Old Testament to New Testament models for understanding politics. It corresponds also, as is often noted, to the change from postmillennial to premillennial views of the relation of the kingdom to the present social and political order. In America it was also related to the rise of the holiness movement.

From the time of the Puritans until about the middle of the nineteenth century, American evangelicalism was dominated by a Calvinistic vision of a Christian culture. Old Testament Israel, a nation committed to God's law, was the model for political institutions. Hence the Christian ideal was to introduce God's kingdom—a New Israel—not only in the lives of the regenerate elect, but also by means of civil laws that would both restrain evil and comprehensively transform culture according to God's will.⁴

* * * * *

The factor crucial to understanding the "Great Reversal," and especially in explaining its timing and exact shape, is the fundamentalist reaction to the liberal Social Gospel after 1900. Until about 1920 the rise of the Social Gospel and the decline of revivalist social concerns correlate very closely. By the time of World War I, "social Christianity" was becoming thoroughly identified with liberalism and was viewed with great suspicion by many conservative evangelicals. The Federal Council of

4. George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism: 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 86.

Churches tried to maintain some unity in 1912 by instituting a commission on evangelism to counterbalance its well-known social activism. By this time the balance was precarious, and the issue of evangelism as opposed to social service was widely debated. World War I exacerbated the growing conflict. When fundamentalists began using their heavy artillery against liberal theology, the Social Gospel was among the prime targets. In the barrage against the Social Gospel it was perhaps inevitable that the vestiges of their own progressive social attitudes would also become casualties.⁵

This shift in religious perspective was complete by 1930. Pessimism concerning this world's future (premillennial dispensationalism) had replaced optimism about the future, in time and on earth (postmillennialism). Reliance on Old Testament law also diminished still further, a decline which had begun as early as 1660 in Puritan New England, accelerated after 1676,⁶ was institutionalized politically by the Great Awakening of the 1740s,⁷ and died in the twentieth century. Only with the postmillennial and theonomic movement of the 1965-75 period did a revival of interest in a revamped "puritanism" re-establish the outlook of the first generation of colonial American Puritans. But this revival was confined almost entirely to the Reformed tradition, and only a small minority of this tradition: a few Reformed Baptists and a handful of representatives within tiny Presbyterian splinter groups. American fundamentalism, not to mention neo-evangelicalism, was unaware of this theological revival in 1975.⁸

The Carter Presidency

When Jimmy Carter was hand-picked by David Rockefeller and the Trilateral Commission (which was formed in 1973) to

5. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

6. Gary North, "From Medieval Economics to Indecisive Pietism: Second-Generation Preaching in New England, 1661-1690," *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, VI (Summer, 1979).

7. Richard Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee: Character and the Social Order in Connecticut, 1690-1765* (New York: Norton, [1967] 1970); Alan Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind: From the Great Awakening to the Revolution* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1966), especially chapter 6.

8. The leading figure in this revival has been R. J. Rushdoony, whose books pioneered the revival, especially *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973). A third aspect of this revival is philosophical presuppositionalism, developed primarily by Cornelius Van Til, which Rushdoony helped to develop in his first book, *By What Standard?* (Presbyterian & Reformed, 1959).

become a candidate for President, few people outside of Georgia had ever heard of him. The humanists within the Trilateral Commission sensed a shift in the political wind. The public was ready for a self-professed "political outsider," a new face totally unconnected with Washington's establishment. Carter's campaign was successful. He freely admitted that he was a "born-again Christian." The fundamentalists were happy to receive attention at long last (although a majority of white voters in the South actually voted for President Ford), and few of them realized that Carter's preferred theologians were liberals: Karl Barth, Tillich, and especially Reinhold Niebuhr. He was also appreciative of the existentialist philosopher, Sören Kierkegaard. It took a non-Christian, libertarian columnist Jeffrey St. John, to point this out in his 1976 paperback, *Jimmy Carter's Betrayal of the South*. It was St. John who wrote, prior to the November 1976 election: "A Carter victory in 1976 would usher in an administration led by various liberal-to-left activist groups who have long pleaded for vast government powers over the private sector of industry and over middle-class Americans. In short, Carter appears to be leading a coalition of political and economic radicals who would go far beyond the massive expansion of the powers of the federal government Franklin Roosevelt instituted in 1933."⁹ His words were prophetic. The Carter administration had not a single self-proclaimed born-again Christian in the Cabinet, or in any other high position. It was staffed by liberals and Trilateralists, along with some old hands from the Council on Foreign Relations who had not entered the inner sanctum of Trilateralism.¹⁰

By 1980, the New Christian Right knew how little Carter's self-identification of himself as a born-again Christian really meant. It meant about as much as the same claim by *Hustler* publisher Larry Flynt, who was "converted" by the President's sister. The New Christian Right spoke for far more of the fundamentalists than the Trilateral Commission's incumbent did in 1980. The fundamentalists decided to "come out of the closet" and send the Baptist from Georgia back to Plains.

The Carter Presidency was a turning point. It made it clear to fundamentalist voters that platitudes about being born again did not

9. Jeffrey St. John, *Jimmy Carter's Betrayal of the South* (Ottawa, Illinois: Green Hill, 1976), p. 3.

10. Antony Sutton and Patrick Wood, *Trilaterals Over Washington* (Box 582, Scottsdale, Arizona: The August Corp., 1979). The Trilateral Commission is not a secret conspiracy, but an above-board cooperative of liberal humanist thinkers and activists. It publishes its agendas for all to see. Few people pay any attention.

mean much when compared with the actual policies of the administration. But this in itself was part of the great transformation, for it meant that *some policies were being identified by fundamentalist voters as being distinctly anti-Christian*. The speakers at the National Affairs Briefing Conference went to great lengths to spell this out: it was their support for "Bible principles," not for any individual—meaning, of course, conservative Republican Reagan—which was the central theme of the rally. The many speakers who dealt with specific issues testified to the concern of the leaders of the New Christian Right, especially since all of them feared the possibility of a Reagan sell-out to the establishment liberals and bureaucrats in the Republican Party. They feared being tarred by a retroactive "I told you so" from fundamentalist voters who had been stung by Carter's Presidency, and who did not want to be stung again by another self-proclaimed Christian President.

"Bible principles" is a euphemism for Old Testament law. The leaders of the fundamentalist movement are generally premillennial dispensationalists.¹¹ Some are believers in a pretribulation "rapture," meaning that Christians will be secretly "called into the heavens" before the great tribulation of the nation of Israel. Others, a growing minority, are post-tribulationists, who think that Christians will go through the tribulation period before Christ comes to transform Christian believers into sinless, death-free people who will rule the world under Christ's personal administration for a thousand years.¹² All premillennialists believe that the world will become worse before Christ returns in person to set up his thousand-year reign, so they have tended in the past to take a dim view of those who preached the moral necessity of social and political action. The campaign of 1980 changed this outlook. Now they are talking about restoring morality to politics by imposing "Bible principles" on the nation. Not Old Testament law exactly, yet "principles" based on Old Testament law.

Dispensationalism denies that Old Testament law has any validity as a comprehensive system of civil government in New Testament

11. The most important document in premillennial-dispensational circles is *The Scofield Reference Bible*, published in 1909 by Oxford University Press, and revised in the late 1960's to "plug the leaks" in the system. The most important institution is Dallas Theological Seminary. The best-selling book of the 1970's in the United States was Hal Lindsey's dispensational *Late, Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1970); something over 18 million copies were in print as of 1981.

12. Jim McKeever, *Christians Will Go Through the Tribulation* (Box 4130, Medford, Oregon: Alpha-Omega, 1978). This is a survivalist-type book.

times.¹³ Most Christians agree; however, the dispensationalists have been more outspoken on this topic. Few Protestants have been as vociferous in their condemnation of biblical law as the dispensationalist leader Donald Gray Barnhouse, who was quoted favorably by S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., in Dallas Theological Seminary's scholarly journal, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, in 1963: "It was a tragic hour when the Reformation churches wrote the Ten Commandments into their creeds and catechisms and sought to bring Gentile believers into bondage to Jewish law, which was never intended either for the Gentile nations or for the church."¹⁴ This was standard fare within dispensational circles, from 1870 until the late 1970's. As Marsden states, however, not many of them were absolutely consistent in their commitment against biblical law, and their abandonment of politics. There was always an ambivalence.

The growing emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit, however, almost demanded some sort of dispensationalism that would draw a clear line between the Old Testament dispensation of law and the New Testament dispensation of the Holy Spirit. In 1839, Charles Finney was already declaring that the day of Pentecost marked "the commencement of a new dispensation," in which the new covenant replaced the old. The distinction between the two covenants was not new, but the central place given to Pentecost and the Holy Spirit soon pushed interpretation in a new direction. In the new dispensation those who had received the anointing with the power of the Holy Spirit were radically different from professing Christians who were still in bondage to the law. Moreover, the freeing and empowering work of the Spirit was known experientially, not by laboriously conforming to codes of law and order. Accordingly, in the thirty years after Finney and Mahan first adopted their holiness views, the place of the law was drastically reduced in the writings of Reformed advocates of holiness. After 1870, when they spoke of the dispensation begun at Pentecost, they stressed the personal experience of being filled by the Spirit and the resulting positive personal power for service. By this time it was rare to find holiness teachers of any sort stress-

13. Writes Roy L. Aldrich: "In conclusion, the abrogation of the Mosaic law does not mean abrogation of the eternal moral law of God. Laws are not identical because they are based upon identical moral principles. Only a divinely instituted theocracy could enforce the Mosaic ten laws with their death penalties, and no such government exists today. The moral law of God belongs to all ages and its authority extends to all intelligent creatures whether men or angels." Aldrich, "Has the Mosaic Law Been Abolished?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* (Oct., 1959), p. 335. (Problem: who is to enforce this moral law, and using what sanctions?).

14. S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., "The Paralysis of Legalism," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (April-June, 1963), p. 109.

ing the Old Testament law as the secret to a happy Christian life. The mood of the revivalist evangelicalism of the day was suggested by Philip Bliss's verse, "Free from the law, oh happy condition. . . ."

The Spirit-oriented holiness teaching, spreading quickly in this period, encouraged a clear distinction between law and Spirit, Old Testament and New Testament, and seems to have been a major factor paving the way for the acceptance of a more definite dispensationalism in the later nineteenth century. By the 1870s when the dispensationalist movement began to take hold in America, holiness teachers already commonly spoke of "the Dispensation of the SPIRIT." This and similar phrases became commonplace within the premillennial movement, with the age of the Spirit sharply separated from the age of law. C. I. Scofield in his classic formulation called these two dispensations "Law" and "Grace." He did not make Pentecost itself the turning point but he did argue that the special characteristic of the age of grace was the presence of the Holy Spirit in every believer and the necessity for repeated "fillings" with the Spirit.

The contrast between the present New Testament age of the Spirit and the previous Old Testament age of law did involve a shift toward a more "private" view of Christianity. The Holy Spirit worked in the hearts of individuals and was known primarily through personal experience. Social action, still an important concern, was more in the province of private agencies. The kingdom was no longer viewed as a kingdom of laws; hence civil law would not help its advance. The transition from postmillennial to premillennial views was the most explicit expression of this change. Politics became much less important.

Few premillennial-holiness evangelists, however, carried the implications of their position to the conclusion—more often found in the Anabaptist tradition—that since Satan ruled this age and it governments, Christians should avoid all political action, even voting. Far more characteristic was a position—typical of the pietist tradition—that saw governments as ordained by God to restrain evil, so that politics in this respect was a means to do good. What they gave up—at least in theory—was the Calvinist-Puritan Old Testament covenantal view of the identity of the people of God with the advance of a religious-political kingdom. Even this idea was not abandoned totally or consistently. Sabbath legislation—despite its Old Testament origins and intention to promote both Christianity and human welfare—continued to be an interest of many. Likewise, prohibition, which was both an attack on a demonic vice and a progressive reform for improving civic life, received support from almost all evangelical quarters.¹⁵

15. Marsden, *Fundamentalism*, pp. 87-88. Note: he contrasts Anabaptism with Calvinism-Puritanism.

The prohibitionist movement was the "last hurrah" in politics for American fundamentalists. The backlash against prohibition, coupled with the backlash of the intellectuals against the Scopes trial in 1925, buried the fundamentalists for half a century. The chief spokesman for Bible inerrancy in the period of modernism's victory (1923-36) was J. Gresham Machen [MAYchen], a Calvinist and a Presbyterian who was personally opposed to prohibition. He was not a fundamentalist.¹⁶ At his death in January of 1937, the fundamentalist world was left without an intellectually respected spokesman. Furthermore, the Calvinists were left without a politically concerned, outspoken opponent to the expansion of Federal power. Machen was a nineteenth-century liberal in his political and economic views. His successors at Westminster Seminary were either silent on political issues (the political conservatives on the faculty, most notably Cornelius Van Til and John Murray) or not adherents of Machen's economic views (most notably Paul Wooley and, later on, the seminary's president, E. P. Clowney). It was only with the publications written by R. J. Rushdoony, beginning in the early 1960's, that any theologian began to make a serious, systematic, exegetical attempt to link the Bible to the principles of limited civil government and free-market economics. It must also be understood that Rushdoony was not able to get his historical and social books reviewed in the *Westminster Theological Journal* throughout the 1960's and the 1970's (with the exception of *Institutes of Biblical Law*, a review which was virtually forced into print by a faculty member, John Frame).¹⁷ He became a "nonperson," despite the fact that the *Journal* was filled with lengthy reviews of every liberal and obscure European theologian imaginable. Only one word fairly describes this book reviewing policy: *blackout*.

Thus, the fundamentalists have had no intellectual leadership throughout the twentieth century. Only with the revival of interest in creationism, which was made possible by Rushdoony's support and Presbyterian and Reformed's initial investment for *The Genesis Flood*, did the fundamentalist movement begin to get involved in arguments outside theology narrowly defined. When a more systematic fusion of theology and conservative social and political concerns finally became available—a revival of Machen's outlook—

16. Ned B. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir* (Philadelphia: Westminster Theological Seminary, [1954] 1977). Machen's book, *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923), was a kind of testament for anti-modernism. (Reprinted by Eerdmans.)

17. Frame, *Westminster Theological Journal*, Vol. 38 (Winter, 1976).

Machen's spiritual and institutional heirs ran for cover, hoping that the embarrassment would soon go away, in much the same way that fundamentalists ran from Jimmy Carter in 1980.

In the speakers' room at the National Affairs Briefing Conference, I spoke with Robert Billings, who had worked in Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority organization. (He subsequently was appointed to a high position in the Department of Education.) We were speaking of the conference, and what a remarkable event it was. We agreed that it was unfortunate that Rushdoony was not speaking. He said: "If it weren't for his books, none of us would be here." I replied: "Nobody in the audience understands that." His response: "True, but *we* do."

The Myth of Neutrality

From the earliest days of the Christian church, those who have served as apologists of the faith have been influenced (a better word might be "infected") by the myth of neutral human reason.¹⁸ It has been an article of faith that there is a common human reasoning, a common universe of discourse, between Christians and non-Christians. This common reason has been called many things: natural reason, natural law, natural reason rightly understood, right reason, and the principle of noncontradiction. In recent centuries, it has been called the scientific method, or the objective method.

If there were no universal discourse, communication between people of varying religious faiths (or rival political faiths) would be impossible. So there is, clearly, some sort of link. Cornelius Van Til argues that this link is *the common creaturehood of all men under God*. Paul said: "And [God] hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth. . ." (Acts 17:26a). He also wrote to the church at Rome concerning the Gentiles, "which have not the law," but who "do by nature the things contained in the law" (Rom. 2:14). These Gentiles "shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness" (Rom. 2:15). Not that they have the law of God written in their hearts. That, said the author of the Book of Hebrews, quoting Jeremiah 31:31-34, is something only regenerated Christians possess (Heb. 8:9-11). But they have the *work* of the law in their hearts—sufficient knowledge to restrain them somewhat and to condemn them ethically before God

18. Cf. Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Presbyterian & Reformed, 1969). See also his multi-volume classroom syllabus, *Christianity in Conflict* (1962-64).

(Rom. 1:18-22).

The "universal logic" of mankind is a myth. There is only a shared discourse among men to the extent that *God restrains the ethical rebellion of mankind*, and therefore restrains the intellectual rebellion. *He keeps men from becoming completely consistent with their own presuppositions*. This has been a continuing theme in Van Til's writings throughout his career. As men become more consistent in their thoughts and deeds with their anti-God presuppositions, they become more irrational. This is why the coming of modern, post-Heisenberg science has become so irrational; it is officially grounded in the chaos of the quantum, the ultimate randomness of the universe. Science cannot maintain its intellectual integrity in an ultimately chaotic and relativistic universe, as Prof. Stanley Jaki argues so forcefully in *The Road of Science and the Ways to God* (1978), yet scientists have adopted a philosophy which is unquestionably grounded in irrationalism. So have the leading intellectuals in every field of humanistic scholarship. The restraining hand of God is resisted; men are ever-more active in suppressing the testimony of God, in escaping the work of the law that is in their hearts. Existentialism, relativism, nihilism, historicism, and a host of other modern "isms" testify to the ever-increasing consistency of modern men's intellectual consistency. They are steadily abandoning the doctrine of objective knowledge as they abandon all traces of creationism.

The rise of relativism has made faith in a universal humanistic discourse far more difficult for all contending parties. Marx abandoned the idea from the beginning: all philosophy is class-oriented, he said, a weapon of a particular economic class. The advent of such movements as historicism, evolutionism, and the sociology of knowledge has shaken the faith of younger scholars in objective knowledge.¹⁹ Oddly enough, one of the last remaining groups still clinging to faith in objective knowledge is the creationist movement. The fundamentalists who serve as the scientists and intellectual defenders of the movement still believe that they can get a fair hear-

19. One of the most influential books in this regard is Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (2nd ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970). For a critique of Kuhn's relativism, see Stanley L. Jaki, *The Road of Science and the Ways to God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 236-42. Another important example in the social sciences is Karl Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1936), reprinted by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. Cf. Gary North, "The Epistemological Crisis of American Universities," in North (ed.), *Foundations of Christian Scholarship: Essays in the Van Til Perspective* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, 1976).

ing, in the halls of justice and the halls of ivy, from humanists who are committed to the scientific method. They still maintain that they are not arguing from a religious foundation, but rather from a scientific foundation. What they have not yet grasped is the point brought home in the writings of Rushdoony, and in the books written by the man who restructured Rushdoony's thinking in the early years of his ministry, Cornelius Van Til. What Van Til has argued for so many years is this: all positions are based on a religious foundation, including science. There is never a question of religion vs. no religion; it is always a question of *which* religion.

The fundamentalists have picked up the phrase, "secular humanism." They do not know where they found it. It comes from Rushdoony's writings throughout the 1960's.²⁰ Rushdoony influenced lawyer John Whitehead, who helped popularize it in a new widely quoted article by Whitehead and former Congressman John Conlan.²¹ The fundamentalists have understood the implications of this phrase, that humanism is a secular religion. Nevertheless, the creationists are still battling in the name of neutral, nonreligious science. Thus, a deep intellectual schizophrenia plagues the fundamentalists. It is ironic that Rushdoony's second book, *Intellectual Schizophrenia* (1961), pointed to just this problem in the field of private Christian education. (The book was itself an extension of his study of Van Til's philosophy, *By What Standard?*, published in 1959.)

What has blinded Christian thinkers for so long is their belief in the ability of men to interpret correctly the hypothetically "brute facts" of the creation. Men claim that they can examine the external world and make accurate conclusions about its operations. Men assume the following: 1) that an orderly world exists external to men's senses; 2) that men's minds are essentially unified, that basic operations of each man's mind are the same as the operations in the

20. "Thus, from the Civil War to World War II, the goals of the state were secularized and nationalized. The purposes of law became increasingly not the reflection of God's justice, without respect of persons, but social justice, the triumph of humanism. After World War II, the United States saw the steady internationalization of its religion of humanity, and at the same time, attention finally to the *legal* secularization of the states." Rushdoony, "The Attack on Religious Liberty," in *The Nature of the American System* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1965), p. 52; reprinted by Thoburn Press, Fairfax, Virginia, 1978. From 1965 on, Rushdoony's monthly newsletter, published by the Chalcedon Foundation, attacked humanism.

21. John Whitehead and John Conlan, "The Establishment of the Religion of Secular Humanism and Its First Amendment Implications," *Texas Tech Law Review*, X (1978):1-66.

minds of other "reasonable" men; 3) that the mind of man can discover the regularities of external nature; 4) that mathematics—the precise logic of the mind—is uniquely capable of describing the operations of the external world.²² Most important, *men assume that no prior reference to God the Creator needs to be made by any scientifically objective investigator*. Christians have accepted these assumptions of the humanists, despite the growing evidence that philosophy since Hume, Kant, and Hegel—let alone the followers of Heisenberg—cannot defend these presuppositions. Thus, Christians have granted to self-professed autonomous man the right to interpret the facts of existence apart from God and His revelation.

Cornelius Van Til has devoted his long career to a relentless refutation of these assumptions. In this sense, he broke with Machen and the older rationalistic apologetics, from Justin Martyr to Aquinas, to Bishop Butler, to Paley, and to the Calvinists at Princeton Theological Seminary. He also broke with virtually all fundamentalist philosophers. In 1932, in his syllabus, *The Metaphysics of Apologetics*, he wrote:

From these considerations it ought to be evident that one cannot take the possibility of neutrality for granted. To be philosophically fair, the antitheist is bound first of all to establish this possibility critically before he proceeds to build upon it. If there is an absolute God, neutrality is out of the question, because in that case every creature is derived from God and is therefore directly responsible to him. And such a God would not feel very kindly disposed to those who ignore him. Even in human relationships it is true that to be ignored is a deeper source of grief to him who is ignored than to be opposed. It follows then that the attempt to be neutral is part of the attempt to be antitheistic. For this reason we have constantly used the term antitheistic instead of *nontheistic*. To be nontheistic is to be antitheistic. The narrative of the fall of man may illustrate this point. Adam and Eve were true theists at the first. They took God's interpretation of themselves and of the animals for granted as the true interpretation. Then came the tempter. He presented to Eve another, that is, an antitheistic theory of reality, and asked her to be the judge as to which was the more reasonable for her to accept. And the acceptance of this position of judge constituted the fall of man. That acceptance put the mind of man on an equality with the mind of God. That acceptance also put the mind of the devil on an equality with God. Before Eve could listen to the tempter she had to take for granted

22. See especially the brilliant interpretation of the historian of science, Stanley Jaki, in *The Road of Science and the Ways to God*, ch. 16.

that the devil was perhaps a person who knew as much about reality as God knew about it. Before Eve could listen to the tempter, she had to take it for granted that she herself might be such a one as to make it reasonable for her to make a final decision between claims and counter-claims that involved the entire future of her existence. That is, Eve was obliged to postulate an ultimate epistemological pluralism and contingency before she could even proceed to consider the proposition made to her by the devil. Or, otherwise expressed, Eve was compelled to assume the equal ultimacy of the minds of God, of the devil, and of herself. And this surely excluded the exclusive ultimacy of God. This therefore was a denial of God's absoluteness epistemologically. *Thus neutrality was based upon negation. Neutrality is negation.*

This negation was bound to issue in a new affirmation of the supremacy of the human mind over the divine mind. Eve did not ask God, let alone her husband, to decide the issue placed before her. When there are claims and counter-claims someone must assume the role of absolute ultimacy. Eve was definitely placed before an "either or" alternative. Of course she would have denied this if you had told her so at the time. She would have resented being placed before any such alternative. She naturally thought that the issue was not irrevocable, but that she could experiment with the Satanic attitude for a while, and if it did not seem to work she could turn back to her old position of theism again. She thought that evil or sin was at the worst a stepping-stone to higher things, and that she could do all the stepping herself. In all this she was quite wrong. Whether she liked it or not she was, as a matter of fact, standing before an exclusive alternative. Only an action proceeding from the bosom of the eternal could place her on the right track again. It was God who had to reinterpret her deed and place it in its true setting in the universe. And this reinterpretation by God was a reversal of the interpretation given by man. Man had to be brought back to God. This in itself is proof sufficient that the decision on the the part of man was *antitheistic* and not merely *nontheistic*.²³

Van Til, developing a tradition of late nineteenth-century Dutch Calvinism, is a defender of the idea of *preuppositionalism*. Men make ultimate religious judgments when they begin to think. They accept certain limitations of their thought, or they adopt a view of the mind which grants to man's abilities more than he can prove. *Man assumes what he needs to prove*, and which cannot be proven, namely, *his own autonomy*.

23. *The Metaphysics of Apologetics* has been reprinted under the title, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*. Vol. II of *In Defense of the Faith* (Den Dulk Foundation, 1969), pp. 19-20. Distributed by Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co.

There is no "brute factuality." *Every fact is an interpreted fact.* It is interpreted by God, the Creator. It is reinterpreted by men, either as faithful adherents to God and God's revelation (interpretation) of Himself and the creation, or else as self-proclaimed autonomous interpreters. If this is true in science, then it is equally true in social and political affairs. Because fundamentalists after 1925 tended to grant to natural scientists and social scientists the right to interpret "brute factuality" by means of "objective investigations"—during the very period when the humanists were beginning to lose faith in the possibility of objective investigations—they abandoned the realms of politics and scholarship. They protected their ecclesiastical realm as best they could, allocating few if any resources for a systematic reconquest of the world outside the church. *The myth of neutrality was the historical handmaiden of the pietist retreat from the external social world.*

The fundamentalists ultimately failed in their attempt to preserve a degree of autonomy for their tightly knit theological world. They were invaded, year by year, by modernist theologians and political liberals, in their churches and in their tiny liberal arts colleges. They required their colleges' faculty members to earn Ph.D.s at humanist universities, and then found, to their surprise, that these Ph.D.-holding teachers wound up teaching the discarded humanist fads they had learned about in graduate school. Van Til warned Christians in 1932, but nobody paid much attention: *they had denied the cosmic significance of Christ.* He wrote:

We realize this if we call to mind again that if once it is seen that the conception of God is necessary for the intelligible interpretation of any fact, it will be seen that this is necessary for all facts and for all laws of thought. If one really saw that it is necessary to have God in order to understand the grass that grows outside his window, he would certainly come to a saving knowledge of Christ, and to the knowledge of the absolute authority of the Bible. It is true, we grant that it is not usually in this way that men become true Christian theists, but we put it in this way in order to bring out clearly that the investigation of any fact whatsoever will involve a discussion of the meaning of Christianity as well as of theism, and a sound position taken on the one involves a sound position on the other. It is well to emphasize this fact because there are Fundamentalists who tend to throw overboard all epistemological and metaphysical investigation and say that they will limit their activities to preaching Christ. But we see that they are not really preaching Christ unless they are preaching him for what he wants to be, namely, the Christ of cosmic significance. Nor can they even long retain the soteriological significance of

Christ if they forsake his cosmological significance. If one allows that certain facts may be truly known apart from God in Christ, there is no telling where the limit will be. It soon appears that the elephant wants to warm more than his nose. He will soon claim that the truths of the religious consciousness may also be known apart from Christ, and may therefore become the standard of what is to be accepted of the Bible.²⁴

State-Financed Education

Fundamentalists are still trying to win their battle for the public schools. Not all of them, perhaps, but enough of them, especially those who lead the creation science movement. In 1982, they were still trying to get the public schools of the state of Arkansas to adopt creationist materials to be taught as part of the schools' curricula in science. They had already given away the case by arguing only that creationism is a legitimate theory and explanation of the origins of the universe and man, to be taught alongside of evolution. The evolutionists know the threat posed by creationism, and they have always defined science since the days of Darwin to exclude cosmic purposefulness. Science is "true" science, in their view, only when pre-human cause and effect are seen as purposeless.²⁵ To admit that creationism *might* be valid, or *might* be an alternative explanation of origins, is to deny the fundamental presupposition of modern science. In other words, *the scientists recognize the exclusive and exclusionary nature of their intellectual endeavor*—an endeavor designed to shove God out of the universe of cause and effect.

The creationists, still dazzled by the myth of neutrality, can only come in the name of "equally as good." That is not good enough in a religious debate—and *the debate over creation is an inescapably religious debate*. The creationists grant to their rivals precisely what their rivals, since the day Satan tempted Eve, have demanded: the right to interpret the universe apart from any reference to God. The creationists stage debates with evolutionists in which they promise in advance not to mention God. They give away the case before they enter the meeting hall. It is this, above all, which they need to *deny*, that no fact in all the universe can be interpreted apart from God or in opposition to God's explicit revelation. The evolutionists are

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 206-7.

25. Gary North, "From Cosmic Purposelessness to Humanistic Sovereignty," Appendix A, in North, *The Dominion Covenant: Genesis* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1982).

never fooled: they make continual references to the underlying pre-supposition of the creationists, namely, that God did create the universe in six days a few thousand years ago. The creationists call "foul!" but the evolutionists keep talking about the God of the Bible. They see far better than the creationist apologists how intimate the relation is between *one's view of God* and *one's view of causality*.

"It is a dangerous view," the *New York Times* reports Dr. Wayne A. Moyer as having said. Dr. Moyer is the executive director of the national Association of Biology Teachers. "There is not a shred of evidence to indicate any scientific basis for the creationist view. They have the big truth and are trying to give it to everyone else. It is the big lie."²⁶ *Not a shred of evidence!* Indeed, how could there be, for it there were, God would have a potential claim on His creation once again. So not a shred of evidence can be accepted. This is precisely how the creationist scientists must argue against the Darwinists, and until they do—until they grant to Darwin not a shred of evidence for his Godless universe—they cannot hope to win their case. Satan has *no* potential claim on God's creation.

So they go into the courts and claim equal rights. They come in the name of the discredited myth of neutrality. The government-financed schools are legally established on just this myth. Yet school administrators seem to be able to resist the creationists every time. Why? Because the legal foundation is as mythical as the neutrality myth itself. The government schools are established as a humanist religion aimed at stamping out Christianity. This is what Rushdoony said in his pathbreaking scholarly study, *The Messianic Character of American Education* (1963). The creationists are still schizophrenic. They do not recognize the mythical nature of the objectivity hypothesis, and therefore they have chosen to do battle in terms of that mythical framework. They therefore have to grant to the evolutionists, in advance, equal rights with God's own revelation of Himself. If they refused to do this, they would have no legal case to get their materials into the public schools. Yet the public schools are a fraud; they are humanist schools that have had as their goal, since the days of Horace Mann, the express goal of wiping out Christianity. So the judges smile inwardly, as the creationists sell out their case—their epistemological case—to buy the mess of potage, namely, the right to get "equal time" (or any time at all) in the socialist, humanist schools. They know better than to take their case

26. *New York Times* (April 7, 1980).

to state-supported universities; nobody would give them five minutes in a courtroom. But they try to get some judge to listen to them regarding the high schools. Result, after almost fifteen years of lobbying: the schools teach evolution, and nothing but evolution.

What is the proper argument? Simple: there is no neutrality, and since there is no neutrality, the present legal foundation of government-financed education is a fraud. Conclusion: *close every government-financed school, tomorrow*. Refund the taxes to the taxpayers. Let the taxpayers seek out their own schools for their children, at their expense (or from privately financed scholarships or other donations). No more fraud. No more institutions built on the myth of neutrality.

But the fundamentalists instinctively shy away from such a view. Why? Because they see where it necessarily leads: to a *theocracy* in which no public funds can be appropriated for anti-Christian activities, or to *anarchy*, where there are no public funds to appropriate. It must lead to *God's* civil government or *no* civil government. In short, it leads either to Rushdoony or Rothbard.²⁷ Most fundamentalists have never heard of either man, but they instinctively recognize where the abandonment of the myth of neutrality could lead them.

How can one have compulsory education and the separation of church and state, if education is by nature religious? This was the issue which Rushdoony dealt with in *The Messianic Character of American Education*, and so did Sidney E. Mead, a prominent church historian in the early 1960's. In a book published in the same year as *Messianic Character*, Mead wrote:

Here are the roots of the dilemma posed by the acceptance of the practice of separation of church and state on the one hand, and the general acceptance of compulsory public education sponsored by the state on the other. Here is the nub of the matter that is all too often completely overlooked. It was very clearly stated by J. L. Diman in the *North American Review* for January, 1876. If it is true, he said,

that the temporal and spiritual authorities occupy two wholly distinct provinces, and that to one of these civil government should be exclusively shut up . . . it would be difficult to make out a logical defense of our present system of public education. If,

27. Murray N. Rothbard, *Power and Market: Government and the Economy* (Menlo Park, California: Institute for Humane Studies, 1970). Rothbard is the chief economist in the anarcho-capitalist movement.

on the contrary, it be the right and duty of the state to enforce support of public education . . . [upon all citizens], then our current theory respecting the nature and functions of the state stands in need of considerable revision.

Diman's point is based upon the recognition that of necessity the state in its public-education system is and always has been teaching religion. It does so because the well-being of the nation and the state demands this foundation of shared beliefs. In other words, the public schools in the United States took over one of the basic responsibilities that traditionally was always assumed by an established church. In this sense the public-school system of the United States *is* its established church. But the situation in American is such that none of the many religious sects can admit without jeopardizing its existence that the religion taught in the schools (or taught by any other sect for that matter) is "true" in the sense that it can legitimately claim supreme allegiance. This serves to accentuate the dichotomy between the religion of the nation inculcated by the state through the public schools, and the religion of the denominations taught in the free churches.

In this context one can understand why it is that the religion of many Americans is democracy—why their real faith is the "democratic faith"—the religion of the public schools. Such understanding enables one to see religious freedom and separation of church and state in a new light.²⁸

How can creationists and fundamentalists support "the religion of democracy"—the legitimacy of public education—and simultaneously deny the validity of the religion of secular humanism? The religion of democracy *is* secular humanism in America.

The Christian School Movement

Some fundamentalists have begun to understand the implications of the myth of neutrality, at least in the field of primary and secondary education. They have pulled their children out of the humanist schools. Sometimes this has been because they are tired of the drugs, or the permissiveness, or the sex education classes, or some other "side-effect" of humanist education. But steadily, the parents and headmasters are coming to a better understanding of the *positive* aspect of the Christian school movement: the new religious and philosophical foundation which the Christian school offers to their children, and even to society in general. As Christians

28. Sidney E. Mead, *The Lively Experiment: The Shaping of Christianity in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), pp. 67-68.

have abandoned the most important institution of humanism, the public school—America's only established church, with its ordained priests, the certified teachers—they have begun to realize what a radical break such a move really is. As they have faced the pressures put on them by desperate, hostile, humanist school boards and judges, they have learned that they must fight for their rights on principle. They must fight in the name of religious liberty. At least, they *think* they should fight on that legal foundation.

R. J. Rushdoony has gained his reputation among the fundamentalist world primarily because of his commitment to Christian education. He is chosen by defense attorneys again and again to testify in the courts around the nation. He has developed a philosophy of Christian education which is not neutralist. He sees education as *the imparting of a comprehensive world-and-life view to the children of deeply religious parents*. Whenever a church compromises this perspective—whenever the pastor says that Christian education is one option among many—it has, in principle, lost its case. But when parents and pastors stand firm, and declare that they are conscience-bound to put their children in a private Christian school, the courts frequently decide in favor of the parents. Parents, in short, are not neutral.

Yet the case made by the fundamentalists to defend the integrity of their schools is ultimately schizophrenic. They argue that religious liberty is the foundation of their right to send their children to schools of their choice. This argument may be sound tactically, but only for as long as the religious liberty argument is recognized as valid by the courts. The ultimate basis of the Christian school movement is the authority of God over the family, and the delegated authority of the parents over the children. In short, the *real* reason why Christian parents can support, and must support, Christian education is this: the God of the Bible has made them legally responsible in *His* court for the education of their children. *It is God, not the constitutional doctrine of religious liberty, who undergirds the Christian school movement*. If the constitutional doctrine of religious liberty were removed, or undercut by humanistic interpretations by the judges, it would still be the obligation of Christian parents to send their children to a Christian school. The issue is not religious liberty.

The Christians are caught in an intellectual bind. They use the doctrine of religious freedom to defend themselves, yet this involves, necessarily, the right of all other religious groups, including the satanic cults, to set up schools for their children, and other people's children. It means, in short, that *Christians wind up giving "equal time"*

in society to the devil. It means that the civil government has absolutely no responsibilities in the area of education. It is, once again, the recurring problem of neutrality. The doctrine of religious liberty drags society into the camp of the anarchists.

If there is no such thing as neutral education, then the public schools are illegitimate. They are using one man's taxes to support a philosophy which he may be opposed to on principle. Now, do we shut down the public schools? Or do we openly announce that since there is only one true God, and one true system of education, it does not matter whether someone opposes paying taxes to the schools or not? He *must* pay. The humanists take the latter position—the “one true god” being the state—while consistent Christians take the former. It is a war between anarchism (zero civil government in this area) and humanist theocracy (autonomous man is God, and he deserves his tithe—the tithe of the culture's children).

We can see the same sort of problem with the prevailing intellectual defense of the Christian schools. The independent schools are legitimate, but they are being defended with an argument that will eventually backfire. The legitimacy of the Christian school movement is not grounded in the doctrine of religious liberty; it is grounded on the Bible's moral law. The moment we bring up the *religious liberty argument*, we have opened the floodgates to *religious anarchy*. When we argue that anyone can educate his children any way he likes, we are upholding the right of the “stranger within the gates” to conduct his family religion as he likes. This is legitimate; the stranger within the gates of Israel had this right. But if he opens up a school and invites others to send their children to his school, then he is involved in *religious proselytizing*. This was forbidden in Israel; anyone calling others to worship a God other than the God of Israel received the death penalty (Ex. 22:20; Deut. 13:6-10). King Josiah slew all the false priests of Israel (II Ki. 23:20). Elijah did the same to the prophets of Baal (I Ki. 18:40). The argument from religious liberty leads directly to a doctrine of competing religions, which is in flagrant opposition to the clear teaching of the Bible concerning religious proselytizing for foreign gods. Conclusion: *the myth of neutrality, when coupled to the argument for religious liberty, produces a concept of the kingdom of God which is radically anti-biblical.*

Education is deeply religious. So is any system of legislation. We cannot escape religion. There is no neutrality. *Everyone uses the neutrality doctrine in order to create his own version of theocracy:* humanist theocracy (man is God), Marxist theocracy (the proletariat is God), anarchist theocracy (the free market is God), or whatever. They use

the doctrine of religious liberty to enthrone an anti-Christian social order—an order which does not allow Christians to establish their God-ordained theocracy. (I am using theocracy here as “the rule of God,” not the rule of ordained priests or the institutional church.) In short, those using the religious liberty argument say that they are maintaining a society open to all religions, when in fact it will be a *society closed to the God of the Bible and His law-order*. Rushdoony has expressed this point well in his critique of humanistic law:

Humanistic law, moreover, is inescapably totalitarian law. Humanism, as a logical development of evolutionary theory, holds fundamentally to a concept of an evolving universe. This is held to be an “open universe,” whereas Biblical Christianity, because of its faith in the triune God and His eternal decree, is said to be a faith in a “closed universe.” This terminology not only intends to prejudice the case; it reverses reality. The universe of evolution and humanism is a closed universe. There is no law, no appeal, no higher order, beyond and above the universe. Instead of an open window upwards, there is a closed cosmos. There is thus no ultimate law and decree beyond man and the universe. In practice, this means that the positive law of the state is absolute law. The state is the most powerful and most highly organized expression of humanistic man, and the state is the form and expression of humanistic law. Because there is no higher law of God as judge over the universe, over every human order, the law of the state is a closed system of law. There is no appeal beyond it. Man has no “right,” no realm of justice, no source of law beyond the state, to which he can appeal against the state. Humanism therefore imprisons man within the closed world of the state and the closed universe of the evolutionary scheme.²⁹

As a *tactic* for a short-run defense of the independent Christian school movement, the appeal to religious liberty is legitimate. Everyone who is attempting to impose a world-and-life view on a majority (or on a ruling minority) always uses some version of the liberty doctrine to buy himself and his movement some time, some organizational freedom, and some power. Still, nobody really believes in the whole idea. Politics always involves establishing one view of the “holy commonwealth,” and excluding all other rival views. The Communist Party uses the right of free association to get

29. R. J. Rushdoony, “Humanistic Law,” introduction to E. L. Hebden Taylor, *The New Legality* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1967), pp. vi-vii. Two lines were dropped in the original; Rev. Rushdoony corrected the citation for me. It appears in my book, *Marx's Religion of Revolution: The Doctrine of Creative Destruction* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1968), pp. 118-19.

an opportunity to create a society in which all such rights are illegal. The major churches of any society are all maneuvering for power, so that their idea of lawful legislation will become predominant. They are all perfectly willing to use the ideal of religious liberty as a device to gain power, until the day comes that abortion is legalized (denying the right of life to infants) or prohibited (denying the "right of control over her own body," after conception, to each woman). Everyone talks about religious liberty, but no one believes it.

So let us be blunt about it: we must use the doctrine of religious liberty to gain independence for Christian schools until we train up a generation of people who know that there is no religious neutrality, no neutral law, no neutral education, and no neutral civil government. Then they will get busy in constructing a Bible-based social, political, and religious order which finally denies the religious liberty of the enemies of God. Murder, abortion, and pornography will be illegal. God's law will be enforced. It will take time. A minority religion cannot do this. Theocracy must flow from the hearts of a majority of citizens, just as compulsory education came only after most people had their children in schools of some sort. But religious anarchy, like "democratic freedom" in ancient Greece, is a temporary phenomenon; it lasts only as long as no single group gets sufficient power and accepted authority to abandon the principle. Religious anarchy, as a long-term legal framework for organizing a society, is as mythical as neutrality is. Both views assume that the institutions of civil government can create and enforce neutral law. They are cousins, and people believe in them only temporarily, until they make up their minds concerning which God they will serve.

The defense of Christian education today is therefore schizophrenic. The defenders argue that there is no neutral education, yet they use the modern doctrine of religious liberty to defend themselves—a doctrine which relies on the myth of neutrality in order to sustain itself. As a tactic, it is legitimate; we are jockeying for power. We are buying time. *But anyone who really believes in the modern doctrine of religious liberty has no option but to believe in some variant of the myth of neutrality.* Those who have abandoned the latter view should also abandon the former.

Christian Religious Liberty

Men are free before God as responsible agents. There must therefore be constraints on the power of all human institutions, for

no man is divine,³⁰ and no institution mediates monopolistically between God and man. The sin of man means that God restrains the outworkings of sinful man's evil tendencies (Rom. 13).

There are tasks that the civil government must accomplish. These relate to the restraint of *public* evil. All such evil must be defined in terms of God's law-order. There is no law without *exclusion*. Certain acts must be excluded in public life. Every law-maker knows this. Someone's "rights" must be infringed on. God grants men rights, but he does not grant to all men the right to perform all conceivable acts at all times. The Bible tells us which acts are to be prohibited from public places. It also provides principles of law that can be extended to areas unforeseen by biblical authors (traffic control, for example). The point is: freedom of religion does not, in a Christian commonwealth, involve total license. There is no such thing as legitimate Christian anarchism. The civil government is allowed to restrain public evil.

I stress the word *public*. The idea that the state has the right to get inside one's mind, or attempt to do so, is humanistic. It makes the state into a pseudo-God. It also drains the resources of the state, which means that the state must collect taxes far above the tithe, yet the state's taking a tithe was considered an affront to God (I Sam. 8:15). The state is not God. It, too, must be limited. It is limited, before God, by the tithe: no state ever has the right, before God, to collect in taxes what God collects, through the tithe, from His people. A civil tax of 10% or more of one's annual increase is satanic.

Thus, the Christian view of religious liberty is "liberty with limitations," as every view of liberty must be. The Christian view of religious liberty is *exclusionary*, as every view of liberty must be. Mormons are not allowed to take more than one wife. This is a distinctly religious law. They have been wise enough to drop the doctrine of polygamy from the general public's view, although the doctrine is still held officially. They have become visible defenders of the monogamous family, which is one reason why they have grown so rapidly, and have gained so much public support. Are they hypocrites? No more than any other defender of religious liberty. They are biding their time, just as the rest of us are.

Does this mean that there is such a thing as a distinctly Christian social order? Of course. If we do not affirm this, then how can we

30. Nor is the humanity of Jesus Christ divine; rather, the *Person* of Christ is both divine and human, without mixture.

legitimately keep Mormon men from taking multiple wives? Of course there is a distinctly Christian civil order. If there were not, then how could Christians legitimately pass laws to stop the abortionists?

There is one answer that we hear in some fundamentalist circles: "Abortion is a universally recognized evil." But this cannot be true, or else there would be no need of passing laws against it. In fact, as abortion becomes more common, there is an increasing tendency for people to regard it as a legitimate practice, since more and more families have members who have had abortions, and it becomes more difficult psychologically for one family member to criticize a close relative. "Blood," in a humanistic culture, is "thicker" than moral law. *The longer abortion goes on, the less universally is this evil recognized as an evil.*

Christians who argue that a "moral majority" exists, and that its common morality is sufficiently universal as to make it "almost neutral," have fallen into the trap of the religion of democracy. *Majority rule is a poor substitute for God's law*, at least as a matter of principle. Majorities in ages of great apostasy steadily abandon biblical morality. There is no neutrality, even when we successfully create a coalition which enacts a certain piece of legislation. American fundamentalists, along with other deeply religious people, have made a serious mistake by equating a temporary majority with neutrality. They are not the same. We can and do assemble majorities, but neutrality is a myth. *Majorities* are temporary coalitions; *neutrality* is a hypothetically universal method of attaining a correct knowledge of reality. The two must never be confused. Humanists seem to understand this today; many Christians do not.

We can illustrate this confusion by examining the recent public career of Rev. Jerry Falwell. Until he began to assemble his Moral Majority, the humanists in the media ignored him. There was an occasional article about how rapidly this "country preacher's" church was growing, or how much money he was raising, but these articles were buried in the religion sections of the newspapers and magazines. But when Rev. Falwell began to challenge the *political* order of the humanists—meaning the very heart of their religion—they began to attack him. He became the shibboleth of the humanist commentators, almost equivalent to Senator Joe McCarthy in the mid-1950's (in the early 1950's, he was too powerful for the liberals to attack openly). Jerry Falwell has all the right enemies. They recognize the threat he and his followers pose to their power.

Why do they oppose him so fanatically? They have made peace

for years with Rev. Billy Graham, who is also a T.V. evangelist. No one associates Rev. Graham's ministry with the "electronic church." The commentators never attacked Kathryn Kuhlman. They ignore Bill Bright's Campus Crusade for Christ. They ignore Rex Humbard, too. But Jerry Falwell is fair game. Why? Because Jerry Falwell is getting mixed up in politics. This scares traditional fundamentalists, too. They think he has "quit preaching the gospel," meaning the religion of retreatist pietism. The same hatred by the press has been aimed at evangelist James Robison, and the same criticism has been made by traditional fundamentalists.

Yet both Falwell and Robison claim to believe in religious liberty. They both have forthrightly proclaimed the right of free speech. Why, then, are they attacked? The Moral Majority is explicitly non-theological; it is strictly a political movement, its founder and governors maintain. When Rev. Falwell appears on a talk show, he is painfully careful to stress that he is not speaking as a potential theocrat, but only as a concerned citizen. In his interview in *Penthouse* (which is analyzed in detail by Kevin Craig in an essay which appears elsewhere in this journal), he explicitly denied that he was trying to impose his religious views on other people. But the humanists know better: *his political views are the product of his religious views*. One cannot successfully separate religion from politics, for one cannot separate morality from legislation. There is no moral neutrality, just as there is no political or legislative neutrality. Rev. Falwell's political opinions are shaped by his religious conclusions, just as his opponents' political opinions are shaped by their humanistic religious conclusions. In short, the humanists recognize far better than even Mr. Falwell—if his words are to be believed—that he is indeed trying to legislate his religion. Rev. Falwell certainly recognizes that his humanistic opponents are themselves defenders of a rival religion. Why fight a religious war—Christian morality vs. humanistic morality—in the name of religious neutralism (unless it is a tactical move)? It is a religious war. Why try to conceal it (unless it is a tactical move)?

Here is the intellectual problem that is disrupting the New Christian Right. If there is no neutrality—and the argument against the religion of secular humanism is based on this conclusion—then no moral system can legitimately be constructed in terms of neutrality. But if neutrality is removed as a foundation for morality, then what must be put in its place? A political majority? But that is the argument of the humanists, who cling to the religion of democracy. What must be the foundation of morality? *By what standard* must we

judge right and wrong? If there is no universal morality, then there can be no universal politics. All legislation is exclusionary. Which public or private acts are to be excluded? *How do we know* which acts should be excluded from public life by law? By an appeal to neutral human reason? Tradition? Or the Bible?

As fundamentalists begin to face the political implications of the loss of faith in neutrality, they see their old political assumptions sinking. The Marxists faced this from the beginning: Marx's savage attacks in the *Communist Manifesto* (1848) on the "utopian socialists" who believed in a universal morality made his position clear. He was willing to impose "proletarian ethics" on everyone. Opponents should be liquidated. Marx was a consistent thinker; once he abandoned the myth of neutrality, he followed one of its two logical pathways. He became a *theocrat* for his god, the proletariat.

The other pathway is *anarchism*. No civil government is legitimate because all law is legislated morality. Avoid politics. Seek to eliminate politics by non-political means (generally revolution, but possibly education). Let politics self-destruct. (Marx actually believed that communism would be state-less, but only after generations of revolution, liquidation of opponents, and compulsory re-education.) This pathway has been taken by the more consistent Anabaptists—Mennonites, Amish, and the anti-political sects—and, at least in their actions, by generations of premillennial dispensationalists. These pietists recognize where Rev. Falwell is headed, despite his protests of "political neutrality," and he has received criticism about "getting involved in politics" (the fundamentalists' criticism), which parallels the humanists' criticism that he is "mixing religion and politics."

I feel sorry for those visible leaders of the New Christian Right who have to face the savage attacks of the humanists, and who also face the moralistic attacks of those former supporters who are remaining true to their anti-covenantal, anti-political presuppositions. The radical independents are upset that men like Falwell and Robison are challenging them with new, unfamiliar responsibilities—responsibilities that are meaningful only within a Christian framework of covenant theology. But neither Falwell nor Robison believes in covenant theology, with its doctrine of multiple institutions, including churches and civil governments, that possess lawful, quasi-hierarchical chains of command. Covenant theology flies in the face of independency, and the more consistent of the independents are not misled by the protests from the New Christian Right's leaders that they are not mixing politics and religion—that

is, that they are not campaigning for a new social order based on Christian law, Christian covenants, and the suppression of the humanist world order. The Baptists who are influential in the New Christian Right movement are being torn apart, epistemologically speaking. Their political conclusions lead straight into covenantal theocracy, but their Anabaptist presuppositions lead right back into pietism and ultimately into anarchism. Once a man acknowledges that there is no neutrality, he has to confront this crucial intellectual problem. Will it be covenant theology or Anabaptism? Will it be theocracy or anarchism? Or will it be a life of being caught in the middle, with humanists and independents both calling for your scalp, and with covenant theologians standing on the sidelines, watching you get ripped to pieces?

It is revealing that Bailey Smith, who was President of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1980, when he spoke at the National Affairs Briefing Conference, was not in agreement with its aims. He complained to the humanist press after his speech that he was not impressed by "people who worry more about missiles than missions," and said that he had agreed to speak only because his friends James Robison and Adrian Rogers had asked him to come. (Yet it was Smith who made the widely quoted remark, "God does not hear the prayer of the Jew." I was sitting on the speakers' platform behind him at the time, and I thought then that it was not the thing to say.) Smith is a more consistent representative of the tradition of Baptist independence. He could see where the New Christian Right is headed.

How can Christians avoid *anarchism*, avoid *religious tyranny*, and avoid *humanistic statism*? We want to avoid all three. It does no good to accept one or two of these possible results as an ideal, just to avoid the others. While we may have to decide among them temporarily, as we work to create a biblical alternative, we cannot accept as a long-term goal any one of the three possibilities. Christian covenantalism needs an alternative. How can we achieve this?

Rushdoony has struggled with this problem, in an article called "Religious Liberty," which was *Chalcedon Position Paper No. 12* (no date, but sent out in mid-1980). He speaks of the co-operation between Martin Luther and the Roman Catholic Elector of Saxony, Frederick III ("the Wise"). Frederick did not attempt to control Luther. (Luther, however, was a philosophical dualist, who believed in a neutral state, and who once wrote that if all citizens were Christians, there would be no need of a state.³¹ So this co-operation is

31. On Luther's dualism, see my essay, "The Economic Thought of Luther and

somewhat suspect. Luther was no Cromwell.) Rushdoony writes:

In the United States, the First Amendment to the Constitution represents a development of this faith. This amendment was added at the insistence of the clergy. The amendment reads: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition for a redress of grievances." We miss the point of this law if we fail to note that each of the original ten amendments, as well as subsequent ones, is a single body of thought and law, a unified whole, a single subject. We are not talking about three, four, or five things here (freedom of religion, speech, press, assembly, or petition), nor one (freedom). After all, other amendments deal with freedom as well, and, if freedom were the key legal concept, the first five amendments could have been made one amendment.

The unifying fact in the First Amendment is a man's immunity in his faith and beliefs: the freedom to express his beliefs in religious worship, in speech, press, assembly, and petition. This law was framed by colonial men for whom these things were matters of faith and principle. There was therefore for them a necessary unity in this statement: instead of five rights they saw one fact. Their separation today means their diminution. It means also the steady decline of freedom in every aspect of the First Amendment.

Thus, the purpose of the First Amendment was to bar the state from entrance into, or powers over, the principled or religious stand and expressions of law-abiding men in worship, instruction, speech, publication, assembly, and petition.

This sounds good. Indeed, it was good. But allowing "law-abiding men" certain rights necessarily begs the question in the mind of the modern humanist: *Whose law* must men obey? *Who enforces* this law? Who has the right to put this law-order into

Calvin," *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, II (Winter, 1975), pp. 84-88. Cf. Charles Trinkaus, "The Religious Foundations of Luther's Social Views," in John H. Mundy, et al., *Essays in Medieval Life and Thought* (New York: Biblo & Tannen, 1955). Luther wrote: "Certainly it is true that Christians, so far as they themselves are concerned, are subject neither to law or sword, and have need of neither. But take heed and first fill the world with real Christians before you attempt to rule in a Christian and evangelical manner. This you will never accomplish: for the world and the masses are and always will be un-Christian, even if they are all baptized and Christian in name. Therefore, it is out of the question that there should be a common Christian government over the whole world, or indeed over a single country or any considerable body of people, for the wicked always outnumber the good." Martin Luther, "Temporal Authority: To What Extent Should It Be Obeyed?" (1523), in *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1962), Vol. 45, p. 91.

legislative pronouncements?

The Founding Fathers were, almost to a man, Christians, as Prof. M. E. Bradford of the University of Dallas has shown in his biographical sketches.³² So were Luther and the Elector. Problem: To what use will humanists put the Christian version of religious liberty? The answer is obvious: *to carve out an ever-widening sphere of influence for the construction of an anti-Christian, pro-humanist commonwealth.* This is being done in America today, and has already been done in every Western European society, except Spain (so far).

In order to survive the onslaught of the humanists, Christians must oppose the humanists' version of religious freedom, which is officially grounded in the myth of neutrality, and which is really being used to construct a temple of man, with tax revenues. We must argue that true religious liberty is exclusively public liberty for people to obey the social laws of the Bible. Yes, humanists will yell and ridicule such a statement, but every ideological movement in history (including humanism) uses some variant of this argument. Marxists in Poland say that a true workers' paradise must necessarily exclude independent trade unions. Humanists argue that true religious freedom must involve the exclusion of laws formulated in the Bible, even if deeply religious people want to see them enforced. Self-styled "moderates" proclaim moderation in everything. But they are *fanatic* about their commitment to moderation; if they weren't, then there would be occasional excesses. When a man gets to the heart of his philosophy or religion, he will inevitably speak of the "true" faith—humanism, Marxism, capitalism, Christianity, Mormonism, etc.—and when he says "true," he means to *exclude or limit all the false versions*, one way or another.

The defender of Christian religious liberty does not worship the state. He worships God. He does not seek to expand state intervention as a means of establishing a utopia on earth. He acknowledges the state as a lawful, restrained institution under the sovereignty of God, and challenged on all sides by legitimate, delegated, co-sovereignties: family, school, charitable association, business, market, etc. Liberty is granted to the Christian by God, not by the state. Constitutions restrain the state. As the humanists have promulgated a new doctrine of religious liberty—which is another way of promoting moral license—the power of the state in all other areas has expanded. Aldous Huxley, of *Brave New World* fame (rationalist

32. M. E. Bradford, *A Worthy Company: Brief Lives of the Framers of the U.S. Constitution* (Box 425, Marlborough, New Hampshire: Plymouth Rock Foundation, 1982).

tyranny vs. suicide), of *The Doors of Perception* fame (psychedelic drugs), and of that famous family of evolutionists and atheists, made no bones about the humanists' motivation. He chose *meaninglessness* as his philosophy — the end result of the myth of neutrality and relativism — for distinctly perverse reasons:

For myself as, no doubt, for most of my contemporaries, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation. The liberation we desired was simultaneously liberation from a certain political system of morality. We objected to the morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom; we objected to the political and economic system because it was unjust. The supporters of these systems claimed that in some way they embodied the meaning (a Christian meaning, they insisted) of the world. There was one admirably simple method of confuting these people and at the same time justifying ourselves in our political and erotic revolt: we could deny that the world had any meaning whatsoever.³³

Rushdoony's analysis is relevant. We must not worship the state, and it is Christianity, above all, that frees men from faith in the state. The creed of Chalcedon, formulated in 451 A.D., is the foundation of Western liberty: Christ, and He alone, serves as full mediator between God and man.³⁴ Christian civilization must be built on the implications of this creed. *The state must protect Christian civilization from rival religious views which would deify the state.* This is why the Founding Fathers put constitutional restraints on the Federal government. Again, quoting Rushboony:

If man's faith is in the state, then the state is the protector of man's freedom, and the author thereof. Then, in every area, we are dependent upon the state: the state giveth, and the state taketh away: Blessed by the name of the state!

The national favorite of the United States, "America," still celebrates in song an older and theocratic faith. The last stanza of Rev. Samuel Smith's song (1832) declares

Our father's God, to Thee,
Author of liberty,
to Thee we sing.

33. Aldous Huxley, *Ends and Means: An Inquiry into the Nature of Ideals and into the Methods Employed for Their Realization* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1937), p. 316. Cited by Stanley Jaki, *Cosmos and Creator* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1980), p. 116.

34. R. J. Rushdoony, "The Council of Chalcedon: Foundation of Western Liberty," in Rushdoony, *Foundations of Social Order: Studies in the Creeds and Councils of the Early Church* (Fairfax, Virginia: Thoburn Press, [1968] 1978), ch. 7.

Long may our land be bright
 With freedom's holy light;
 Protect us by Thy might,
 Great God, our King.

Protection, in this theocratic perspective, is not by state controls, but by the might of the "Great God" who is "our King." The brightness of the land is not in regulatory agencies but in "freedom's holy light." This phrase is an echo of the premise which undergirds the First Amendment, the relationship of freedom to faith.

But this is not all. Article II, Section One, of the U.S. Constitution requires an oath of office from the president. Such an oath is now a meaningless and even blasphemous fact. However, to the framers of the Constitution, an oath was a Biblical fact. To them, an oath was, *first*, a covenant fact, i. e., of a covenant between the state and God, and, *second*, a theocratic fact, an oath of loyalty to the sovereign. In the Constitutional Convention, an objection was actually made to adding anything to the oath such as "and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States." The fact of an oath, Wilson held, made this addition unnecessary; it was, however, still retained. *Third*, an oath invoked the covenant blessings for obedience, and curses for disobedience, as declared in Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26. An oath thus invokes a judgment from God rather than man as the basic judgment. It sees God, not the state, as the Author of all blessings, including liberty.

Today, we are in a time of judgment, because men have sought, all over the world, both freedom and blessings from the state rather than from God our King. As a result, they have gained slavery and curses.

In the humanistic, statist conception of things, freedom is not a privilege and a blessing from and under God, but either a human right, or a state grant. Man the sinner, however, is a slave, and his freedom is in essence a freedom to sin. The love of slavery has more clearly marked human history than the love of freedom. Mankind has largely been in chains throughout history, because men have preferred security to freedom. Men have often rebelled against the limitations imposed by slavery, but even more against the responsibilities imposed by freedom.

Freedom is not a natural fact but a religious principle, and the decline of freedom is an aspect of the rise of false faiths, false forms of "Christianity," as well as other varieties of faith.

This century has seen, moreover, the divorce of freedom from faith, with great damage and decay on both sides.³⁵

Can the state as an autonomous institution prevent the growth

35. Rushdoony, *Chalcedon Position Paper No. 12* (no date; mid-1980).

of the state? No. Men's faith must restrain them, and this *self-restraint reduces pressures on the state to take control of society*. Christian self-government is basic to the survival of the free society. We have freedom only under God. If God departs from this society, then we shall have tyranny. Humanist religious freedom will not produce religious or political or economic freedom. It will produce massive bureaucracy—the revival of the statist *megamachine* (Lewis Mumford's term) of ancient Egypt. Men must see to it that the civil government, like all other human governments, must honor God and His law-order. Freedom can be achieved and preserved by no other means.

The Tactics of Victory

Should Christians use the argument for religious liberty—today, in its humanist version—to defend themselves from state power? Of course. Even if they ultimately do not believe in the humanist version of the religiously neutral state? Of course. The humanists stole their version of religious freedom from the theocentric, Christian version written into the Constitution by the framers, who were Christians. We are only using the same tactic to repossess our spiritual heritage. Men without guns use ju-jitsu or karate. We use Constitutional law.

The eschatological pessimists among us may have qualms about all this. They do not believe that Christians, acting to reconstruct today's institutions by means of God's law, can hope to succeed in their efforts. They adopt the phrase of Rev. J. Vernon McGee: "You don't polish brass on a sinking ship." The pessimist sees the church as totally dependent on a doctrine of religious liberty that is humanist in orientation. If we, as Christians, go along with the prevailing system of humanist statism, and if we keep "church and state" separate—meaning religion and state—then humanists may allow us to conduct our impotent affairs, building our churches (after the zoning board approves), establishing our small schools (after being licensed by the state), and generally minding our own business. But the state cannot permit even this in a humanist order. There is always the threat of a revival—a real revival—where Christians get a vision of the kingdom of God on earth. This is beginning to take place today, and the humanists, who have built a messianic state under the noses of the Christians, in the name of neutrality, are on a rampage against both churches and Christian schools. The rampage may be delayed for a while as a result of a particular Presi-

dent in Washington, but other Presidents will follow. The pessimists cling to the humanists' version of religious freedom—Christian social and political impotence, self-imposed—as drowning men cling to a life preserver. “Just give us the freedom to hand out tracts. Just a few more years, and Jesus will come back to bail us out. Give us our tiny zone of autonomy from the state, and we’ll be satisfied. Just give us some slack in our chains!”

The proper tactic must be based on a long-term strategy. The tactic is this: use the humanists' version of religious freedom, based as it is on the myth of neutrality, in order to gain time. But let us not be self-deceived. *We are gaining time in order to reconstruct the world. This reconstruction will ultimately involve a return to comprehensive biblical law, in every sphere of life.* When this happens—not by a revolution, but by the steady preaching of the gospel, and the progressive self-government of biblical law-abiding Christian citizens—the new social order will return to the doctrine of Christian liberty set forth in the Old Testament, and in the U.S. Constitutional republic, prior to 1865. We are gaining time, not to perpetuate the myth of neutrality, but to overturn it, since nobody really believes it today anyway.

The eschatological optimist can adopt this strategy without any qualms. He knows that he is gaining time in order to achieve long-term religious freedom. He is not going to see his labors wasted. He does not cling to a neutrality-based version of religious social anarchism. That is not his hope. He can work with people of various religious views in order to retard the spread of humanist horrors like abortion. This may delay the wrath of God. It buys time, and it may save lives of the innocent unborn. But the serious Christian optimist knows that he is in a battle comparable to the battles of the European underground against the Nazis in World War II. Communists and freedom-loving patriots worked side by side to defeat a common enemy. It is our responsibility, as optimists, not to wind up as so many patriots wound up after the war: in front of the firing squads of the Communists. It is our job to build the future society. We must recognize, in advance, the limits of co-operative resistance movements. They do not survive after the common enemy has been defeated. Roman Catholics and Protestants could join forces in the sixteenth century to battle the invading Turks. That did not serve as a moral, legal, or theological foundation for a universal Christian society in Europe after the Turks had retreated.

We must forever abandon the myth of neutrality, the reigning myth of this age of secular humanism. We must come to grips with Rushdoony's assertion concerning the fate of Christianity in a

humanist culture—a warning issued in 1969, a decade before the New Christian Right came into existence:

But, to continue, a man may claim to believe in God when he is actually an atheist to all practical intent if he tries to separate religion and state, if he denies God His sovereignty over the state. It is impossible to separate religion and state. *All law is enacted morality, and all morality rests on religious foundations, and is the expression of religion.* Thus, every legal system, i. e., every state, represents a religious order and is a religious institution. The state cannot be neutral to religion. It is either Christian or anti-Christian. A state may be neutral with respect to churches, i. e., the particular institutional forms of Christianity, but it cannot be neutral with respect to Christianity. Today, Christianity is in the process of being disestablished as the religion of Western states, and Humanism is rapidly being established as the official religion of church, state, and school. The decisions of the courts increasingly have little reference to Christianity and older legislation: they are religious decisions which promulgate the faith of Humanism. . . .

In every area, all authority is in essence religious authority. The religious vary from country to country, but authority is in essence religious. When men deny the ultimate and absolute authority of God, they do so in the name of another ultimate authority, the autonomous consciousness of man. Where authority is broken, either chaos and anarchy will reign after a time, or brutal coercion will prevail. . . .

As Christians, we may rightly hold that a Christian-theistic doctrine of authority should prevail, but we may not destroy institutions by revolutionary activity: we must create new institutions by means of new (converted) men.³⁶

Conclusion

The traditional goal of ecclesiastical independents, namely, the rigid separation of church from civil government, must not be misinterpreted to mean the separation of *religion* from civil government. We must not be blinded by the myth of neutrality in any form. We can make use of it, however, whenever we face those who still cling to it, and who can, in a court of law, be challenged successfully to leave us alone while we go about our business of Christian reconstruction.

We have to face up to the choice that must be made between God's law or man's law. We have to acknowledge the inescapable

36. Rushdoony, *Newsletter* 41 (January 1, 1969), p. 2.

decision: *God's covenant* or *natural law*? The neutrality doctrine has reigned in certain Christian circles because so many Christians are committed to ecclesiastical independency—a truncated covenant limited to a single congregation. Since they have not been willing to adopt a hierarchical ecclesiastical covenantal arrangement—a court of appeals for the settling of inter-church disputes—as a biblical ideal, they have necessarily adopted a version of the myth of neutrality. All inter-church conflicts, they believe, can be settled by an appeal to natural law, or else ignored, and therefore left to simmer. This attitude has been transferred to the civil government. Either we settle disputes by an appeal to general principles of natural law—which all “reasonable” and “moral” members of society will always be willing to acknowledge as binding—or else the disputes remain unsettled. In other words, we wind up with a social order built on a false presupposition, meaning the myth of neutrality, or else we wind up with anarchism, in which there is no binding decision-making process for settling disputes.

Which gods rule in the social order? Gods created by men, or the God who created man? Which law-order is sovereign, the law-order designed by autonomous man, or the law-order specified by the God of the Bible? What principles are morally and also legally binding on men, those proclaimed by defenders of the myth of neutrality, or those proclaimed in the Bible? Should the civil government enforce biblical laws or humanist laws? With which god should man make his covenant: himself or the God of the Bible? There will always be covenants; the only relevant question is, *whose* covenants? The attempted denial of covenant theology on the part of many ecclesiastical independents is really a process of *substitution*: the implicit adoption of a covenantal social bond which is not biblical, and which is therefore anti-biblical. There is no neutrality.

Let us not be self-deceived. *Our goal is a Christian commonwealth, not a revival of the Roman Pantheon.* God's covenants are to be established and developed within a Christian social order. There will always be coercion in life; the question is: *Whose standards* will govern the State's engine of coercion? We are not to spend our time building a new Athens, or a new Egypt. We are not to set forth as our self-appointed task the creation of a new Tower of Babel. In heaven, the devil will not get equal time. On the day of judgment, there will be no rebuttals from the enemies of God. Our task is to build, step by step, institution by institution, an alternative to humanistic civilization. It will be a *decentralized* alternative, but it will have a head, Jesus Christ (I Cor. 12), It will not be a mythical

headless anarchistic civilization, where any moral laws are acceptable except the laws of the Old Testament commonwealth. Day by day, we should study to show ourselves approved (II Tim. 2:15). This intellectual effort should not bring forth an even more unrealistic version of neutral civil government, where the enemies of God set the moral tone, and the people of God are daily assaulted by the God-despisers: in the magazine racks, the movie theaters, the radio waves, the television waves, and anywhere else in public. Let the God-despisers get back into their closets and keep silent. They will be silent on that final day; they should begin practicing early.

To avoid struggling for a society which resembles heaven in its absence of lawlessness is to admit defeat. It is to write off the world. It means that the faithful servants have gone over to the houses of their Master's enemy. We cannot build heaven on earth, but we can construct an analogous civilization, just as we strive to do in our family life. "Thy will be done, *on earth as it is in heaven*," we pray. We do see our responsibility to construct an alternative inside our homes. Sadly, Christians think of themselves as "strangers in the gates" of the humanists' unholy commonwealth. Christians seem content to live as strangers (foreigners) lived in Israel: free to practice their religion in their homes, but impotent to affect the culture at large. Instead of regarding themselves as elders in the gates of the city, Christians are content to become strangers in the land. Their pessimism regarding the future has led to this situation, where Christians are willing to accept the great reversal: humanists dominant, and Christians huddling in their homes and culturally impotent churches. They have not seen the revealed laws of God as tools of Christian reconstruction. They have no dynamic of history (optimism), nor the means of implementing a new social order (biblical law). They have voluntarily adopted pessimism and social antinomianism in the name of Jesus Christ. Finally, they have adopted some variation of the myth of neutrality, the "common ground" in reason, law, and culture that supposedly links the enemies of God in co-operative ventures with the faithful. This strategy cannot work. Temporary truces, yes. Resistance movements, yes. But a long-term social order based on neutrality? Impossible.

The taste of political victory is sweet. The New Christian Right has had some victories. They have developed satellite television networks. They have created newsletter and mailing list networks. In short, they have the means of achieving victory. What they lack is: 1) eschatological dynamism, 2) a program of social reconstruction, and 3) the willingness to abandon all traces of the myth of

neutrality.³⁷ When the taste of victory finally overcomes a century of pietistic retreat, the humanists will see their civilization salted over; a new society will replace the collapsing social order of today. If the New Christian Right abandons its schizophrenia—eschatological pessimism in the face of victories, antinomianism in the face of the power of biblical law, an outmoded “common ground” philosophy (neutrality doctrine) in the face of a consistent presuppositional biblical philosophy—then the humanists will at last have a real fight on their hands. Until then, the New Christian Right will have some successes, in spite of its schizophrenia, but these successes will not be translated into a comprehensive program of Christian reconstruction. The present ad-hockery will fail; we will see progressive external victory or temporary external defeat. The truce with humanism is over. A war is in progress.

Let us remember the words of General Douglas McArthur: *there is no substitute for victory.*

37. Gary North, “The Eschatological Crisis of the Moral Majority,” *Christian Reconstruction*, IV (Jan./Feb., 1981). For Christian alternatives, see two issues of *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*: “Evangelism” (Vol. VII, No. 2) and “Social Action” (Vol. VIII, No. 1).

SOCIAL APOLOGETICS

Kevin Craig

I. Introduction

AFTER three-quarters of a century, fundamentalism and "social action" seem to be making amends. For some seventy-five years, "social action" has been the domain of the "liberals." Fundamentalism chided any political activity beyond voting as "the social gospel." The light dawned on Rev. Jerry Falwell of the Thomas Road Baptist Church in 1973 with the Supreme Court legalized the murder on demand of unborn babies in *Roe v. Wade*. That decision woke a number of sleeping fundamentalists.

But there is something strange about the fundamentalist involvement in social action. *The Bible-thumpers are no longer thumping their Bibles*. Coming out of a liberal church myself, I learned from the fundamentalists to accept the Bible as the inerrant Word of God. Now they seem to be asking me to appropriate political *goals* from the conservative humanists and political *strategies* from the liberal humanists. If Cornelius Van Til, the eminent apologist from Westminster, were to write *Christian-Theistic Social Action*,¹ he would surely criticise the leaders of the "Religious Right" for leaving the Bible out of their social action. Embarrassed, perhaps, by their historic reputation for obscurantism, the politically active fundamentalists hide their Biblical convictions to gain respectability in the eyes of an unbelieving nation. Their message "has no Christ who could challenge the thought and life of the natural man in order to save him and his culture."²

Yet it is precisely the political thought and civil life of non-Christian America that must be challenged, and, as this paper will attempt to show, it can only be challenged by declaring the absolute authority of Christ and His Word. "If Christ is to be presented to

1. Cornelius Van Til wrote *Christian-Theistic Evidences*, dealing with the philosophy of science, and *Christian-Theistic Ethics*, dealing with ethical philosophy. Van Til taught that the only true theism is Christianity, and the Reformed faith is Christianity come to its own. His book, *The Defense of the Faith*, is the essential work for any apologist. No one is prepared for any kind of Biblical social action who has not read it.

2. *The Defense of the Faith*, pp. 3-4.

men as a challenge to their thinking and living, then he must be offered without compromise. Nothing short of the Christ of the Scriptures, as presented in historic Reformed theology, can challenge men to forsake their sin and establish them in truth and life."³ The "Religious Right" has consigned itself to long-run defeat by hiding its Biblical distinctives.

II. *Evaluating Christian Social Action*

Proposition I: Only "Postmillennial, Theonomic Reconstruction" Can Provide the Proper Goals, Motivation, and Standard for Biblical Social Action.

This proposition is easily explained. What is it that those engaged in Christian social action should seek to accomplish? How should they accomplish this? What should motivate them? For some, the perspective in which these questions are answered is exceedingly *short-run*. Ever since its invention in 1830, a curious doctrine known as "the Rapture" has left most dispensationalists paralyzed and unable to think or plan beyond the next fiscal year. For such men, political involvement is concerned mainly with a few isolated laws: abortion, homosexuality, the Equal Rights Amendment. This paper reflects a more Biblical approach: "Postmillennial, Theonomic Reconstruction," as it is becoming known. As Postmillennialists, we hold an "Eschatology of Victory." The Church is promised success in her efforts to make the nations Christian (Matt. 28:18-20).⁴ As "Theonomists," we hold that not one jot or tittle of Old Testament Law will pass away until the "Eschatology of Victory" becomes a reality.⁵ And as "Reconstructionists," we hold that it will not become

3. *Ibid*, pp. 3, 5.

4. Post-millennialism is the doctrine that Christ returns *after* the world-wide prosperity of the gospel. Christ does not return to set up His Kingdom; He comes to judge and melt away the heavens and the earth. For an excellent, albeit short, defense of postmillennialism, see David H. Chilton, *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt Manipulators*, published by the Institute for Christian Economics, P. O. Box 8000, Tyler, TX 75711, chapter 17. Also see Part Three of Gary North's *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory* (Geneva Press, 708 Hamvassy, Tyler, TX 75701).

5. "Theonomy," from the Greek, *Theos*, "God," and *Nomos*, "law," means simply "God's Law." Greg Bahnsen's book, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, defends the thesis that the Old Testament Law, *except* where specifically set aside in the New Testament, is still binding on the Christian as a rule of life, and the "judicial law" binding upon all civil magistrates. The argument that this would constitute a "theocracy" is, of course, true. A "theocracy" is literally the rule of God in society. The

a reality until the church is awakened and begins to apply the Law in every area of life, including (relevant to our subject) the civil magistrate.⁶ In both the Old and New Testaments, then, we have a complete social program that *must* be implemented, and *will* be implemented.

But any program of social action that seeks to impose a Christian political order on a non-Christian population is doomed to failure. No law-order can be imposed, for the simple reason that *all political systems are a reflection of the faith of the people*. If the people are slaves, you will have a slave-State. If the people are responsible and mature Christians, then—and only then—will you have an appropriately Biblical political system. Without doubt, then, education and evangelism are necessary components of Biblical social action. R. J. Rushdoony, who has been accused of overemphasizing politics and minimizing evangelism,⁷ has made these observations:

The only true (social) order is founded on Biblical Law. All law is religious in nature, and every non-Biblical law-order represents an anti-Christian religion. But the key to remedying the situation is *not* revolution, nor any kind of resistance that works to subvert law and order. The key is regeneration, propagation of the gospel, and the conversion of men and nations to God's Law-Word.⁸

Evil men cannot produce a good society. The key to social renewal is individual regeneration.⁹

In terms of God's Law, true reform begins with regeneration and then the submission of the believer to the whole Law-Word of God.¹⁰

If not enough regenerate men exist in a society, no law-order can be maintained successfully. Thus, a healthy society needs an operative law-order and an operative evangelism in order to maintain its health.¹¹

"Christocracy" under Jesus Christ is described in Isa. 11:4 and Rev. 19 (esp. vs. 15). When the saints rule according to the whole Law of God (Ps. 149:4-9) then God governs that nation, and Christ the King is here with us (Matt. 28:20). A theocracy is not be equated with an *ecclesiocracy*, the political rule of the clergy.

6. The basic text of Christian Reconstruction is R. J. Rushdoony's *Institutes of Biblical Law*, (Vol. I, the Craig Press; Vol. II, Ross House Books). Here the substance of the whole law of God is applied to contemporary social problems. If you have not read and digested *Institutes*, you are not prepared to be involved in Biblical social action.

7. Chiefly by those who have never fully read the *Institutes*.

8. *Institutes*, Vol. I, p. 113.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 122.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 627.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 321.

It is paradoxical that evangelism plays no part in the political action of the "Religious Right." It is paradoxical, but not unexpected. The fundamentalist views of both evangelism and social action are less than Scriptural. This is the subject of our second proposition:

Proposition II: Social Action must be Evangelistic in order to Produce Real Social Change.

If our eventual goal is to have this country once again governed by Biblical law,¹² then we need to see men converted by the Holy Spirit and submitting to the Word of God. Rushdoony is clear: without the work of the Holy Spirit, working through the preaching of the Word to produce conversion (Romans 10:14-17), we cannot expect a lasting Christian society. Perhaps the need for Biblical preaching in the context of social action will be made clearer if we examine the paradox of the "Religious Right." *The "Religious Right" unbiblically separates evangelism and social action.* They make no bones about it: they have one organization that is "religious" and another that is "political." The practice reflects some very unbiblical thinking.¹³ Let us examine the two sides of this paradoxical tendency.

They Divorce Social Action from their Evangelism.

But you knew that. Altar-call evangelism has been thoroughly critiqued.¹⁴ Relevant to our thesis are four characteristics of the "nothing-but-evangelism" evangelism of the fundamentalists.

First, there is no preaching the sovereignty of God. In certain

12. As was the case in our early American history under the New England Puritans. It is strange how, by celebrating our "200th Anniversary" in 1976, we calmly erased nearly 200 years of prior history in which our country was governed substantially by Biblical law. The modern "Reconstructionists" go back to the early 1600's and find documents more noble than the Declaration of Independence: documents that see the Bible as a blueprint for society. One such document, John Cotton's "Abstract of the Laws of New England," is reprinted in the *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, Vol. II, No. 2 (Winter 1976-76), pp. 110-128. In the abstract it can be seen that the laws of New England were taken almost verbatim out of the Bible, and notably, from the Old Testament. We should take our cue from Puritan social action.

13. It also represents some very devious government regulation. Humanistic tax laws ingeniously force the separation of the Bible and social action by playing upon the covetous fears of empire-building churchmen, who, by virtue of their tax-exempt status, will not preach God's law in their tax-sheltered church-monuments, and are "religiously neutral" in their separate, political organizations.

14. See Iain Murray, *The Invitation System* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967).

areas of the universe God is not God; man is. Man's free-will is all-determining. Fundamentalist preachers tell the sinner that he is in control, and thus there is *no challenge of man's authority*. The sinner's assumed autonomy is never contested. From the beginning, he is as God, and whether he comes down the aisle or stays in the pew, the Lord of hosts is at his beck and call.

Second, preaching is not for nurturing or edification: there is no exposition of God's Law. Week after week, fundamentalist congregations are told that God stands helpless while the sinner decides either for or against Him. And the congregation hears this "altar-call" whether or not there are any *bona fide* sinners in the house. The Word of God is never explicated and concretely applied. The church member is never fed, and the sinner is never challenged.

Thus, *third*, there is no true call for *repentance*. Men are never told that the Sovereign of the universe commands them to change their ways and submit to Him (Acts 17:30). Men are never told to turn from their selfish ways and begin to exercise dominion under God. No lawyer or congressman is ever told that he must terminate his unbiblical practices and begin immediately to apply the law of God in his vocation.¹⁵ "The Bible says . . ." is seldom followed by "conform your lives and your society to the Law of God." "Soul-winning" turns out to be the selling of fraudulent promises of *soul-insurance for the after-life*.

Not unexpectedly, *fourth*, being a Christian has no real social implications. Suppose a sinner decides to save God from cosmic embarrassment by graciously going down the aisle. He is not told that his life has been characterized by rebellion and insubordination against the Bible's Holy God. And even if he has been told that his life is not as "fulfilled" or "rich" as it could be, he will not be told what the Lord requires of him. This situation is mainly a result of a dispensational view of the Law. A good strong dose of *Theonomy* is needed. Christ is not Lord over every area of life, because His Word in the Old Testament is not upheld. How *can* Christ be Lord if He issues no commands?

Obviously, the attitude that the law and the social implications of the Word of God are not a part of evangelism is an unbiblical attitude. To "preach" is to herald the claims of Christ the King before men. David was a true evangelist. He understood the requirements of the Great Commission: "I will teach transgressors thy ways, and

15. The Westminster Confession of Faith rightly points out that unless a man subjects every aspect of his life to the authority of God speaking in the Bible, he really does not have *saving* faith (14:2).

sinner shall be converted unto thee" (Ps. 51:13). The evangelism of the fundamentalists is not Biblical as long as the demands for Biblical social action are not proclaimed. And the opposite error renders their social action impotent as well.

They Divorce Evangelism from their Social Action.

The separation of social action from evangelism is somewhat unconscious, being dictated by the dispensational theology of evangelicals and fundamentalists. But the separation of evangelism from their social action is more deliberate, and this is what is so ironic. It is no longer the fundamentalists, or the evangelicals, but the "Reconstructionists," who are stressing the importance of evangelism. Evangelism strangely plays no part in the social action strategy of the "Religious Right." Dr. Jerry Falwell, in an article enigmatically entitled, "Moral Majority Opposes Christian Republic," declares, "Moral Majority is a political organization and is not based on theological considerations."¹⁶ The Moral Majority apparently asks no one to believe the Bible and to obey it. The legitimate "right" of all men to be as gods, deciding for themselves what is right and what is wrong, is defended. The Moral Majority merely wishes that men would exercise their sovereignty as *traditional conservative gods*, rather than as progressive liberal ones. Once this awesome program of conversion takes place, Congress should recognize the new consensus and pass laws accordingly. That this commitment to *religious neutrality* is wrong should be immediately apparent. But it deserves scrutiny.

Proposition III: Biblical Social Action Must, in the Name of Christ, Self-Consciously Challenge Man's Autonomy.

The "Religious Right" will not *convert* men — fully *turn them around* to a changed direction of life in obedience to God's Word. Thus, they cannot achieve lasting, meaningful social change. They refuse to challenge man's claims to political autonomy with the claims of "the self-attesting Christ of Scripture," of Him Who demands faith and obedience to His Word because He is the Lord. Four popularly accepted political myths fly in the face of the claims of the King of Kings. None of them is challenged by the "Religious Right." Let us examine each.

16. Jerry Falwell, "Moral Majority Opposes Christian Republic," *Moral Majority Report*, Vol. I, No. 13 (Oct. 15, 1980), p. 4.

*Myth #1: The Myth of Pluralism: The "Religious Right"
Will not Challenge Idolatry.*

The idea of pluralism has many problems. Ultimately it is the assertion that all religions are equally valid (or *invalid*). It also denies that the Bible can govern directly the operation of political systems. Finally, it is based upon an alleged "right" of all religions to exist in a given social order.¹⁷

"You can't legislate morality." So we are told. But Rushdoony has thoroughly disposed of this notion.

Now it must be granted that there is a measure of truth to this statement. If people could be made moral by law, it would be a simple matter for the board of supervisors or for Congress to pass laws making all Americans moral. This would be salvation by law.

We can agree, therefore, that people cannot be *saved* by law, but it is one thing to try to *save* people by law, another to have moral legislation, that is, laws concerned with morality. The statement, "You can't legislate morality," is a dangerous half-truth and even a lie, because *all* legislation is concerned with morality. Every law on the statute books of every civil government is either an example of enacted morality or it is procedural thereto. Our laws are all moral laws, representing a system of morality. Law is concerned with right and wrong; it punishes and restrains evil and protects the good, and this is exactly what morality is about. It is impossible to have law without having morality behind that law, because all law is simply enacted morality.

There are, however, different kinds of morality. Biblical morality is one thing, and Buddhist, Hindu, and Moslem morality radically different moral systems. For Plato's morality, some acts of perversion were noble acts of love, whereas for the Bible the same acts are deserving of capital punishment.

The point is this: all law is enacted morality and presupposes a moral system . . . and all morality presupposes a religion. Law rests on morality, and morality on religion.¹⁸

17. The notion of "human rights" is examined below. The Biblical society would not, of course, deny the freedom of conscience; only certain *external acts* are governed by Biblical law as it pertains to society. Nevertheless, the character of the civil government should be explicitly Christian, and non-Christians should *act* like Christians, even if they don't *think* like them.

18. R. J. Rushdoony, *Law and Liberty* (Fairfax, VA: Thoburn Press, 1977), pp. 1-4. That the "Religious Right" has not thoroughly studied this and other works published by the Chalcedon Foundation is evident in Falwell's statement: "Moral Majority is a political organization and *is not based on theological considerations.*" (Falwell, *ibid.*, my emphasis.) One could compare similar statements in Tim LaHaye,

If our social action is going to advocate the passage of certain laws, then those laws *must*, if we are Christian, be the laws of the Bible.¹⁹ There is no other choice.

Can two religious-legal systems co-exist? A man's religion holds as the pinnacle of morality the *ritual sacrifice and cannibalistic consumption of his first-born*. According to the myth of pluralism, where no single religion is allowed to impose its views on others, this man would fit in just fine, even if everyone else's religion commanded "Thou shalt not kill." Nonsense. Pure pluralism would result in social chaos and the breakdown of law and order. It *could not* function. The religion of the people of a nation determines its laws. Three hundred years ago, the morality of this nation was directed by Biblical Christianity. This moral system has very nearly been replaced by the morality of the religion of secular humanism. The moral system of the secular humanists seems to parallel the moral system of Christianity in many respects. Many humanists do not murder. But they refrain from murder *because they want to*, not because the God who is there has said, "Thou shalt not kill." The humanist could decide to kill at any moment. A fundamental tenet of secular humanism is "freedom of individual choice." As a result, many humanists *do* murder, and a Christian nation ought to pass laws forbidding, for example, abortion, even if it restricts the "freedom of individual choice" of the humanists. The government ought not allow secular humanists to do all that their religion says is moral. If humanists decide not to kill their children, and, consistent with their religion, they do so *because they want to* (i.e., because they do not want to suffer the penal sanctions of a godly government [Ex. 21:23]), fine. But where the Bible restricts the "religious freedom" of the humanists, governments ought to restrict accordingly.

It is impossible that a government could give absolute freedom to all religions.

Battle for the Mind (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co.), p. 187, and many others. Although *Newsweek* identified Chalcedon as the "Religious Right" "think tank," it is hoped that the "Religious Right" will begin doing their homework a little more diligently. *Newsweek*, Vol. XCVII, No. 5 (Feb. 2, 1981), p. 60.

19. The rhetoric of the "Religious Right" is surprisingly two-faced. Appeals to Christians are usually Biblical. Jerry Falwell admonishes a crowd at an "I Love America" rally, holding up a Bible, "If a man stands by this book, vote for him. If he doesn't, don't" (*Time*, Oct. 1, 1979, p. 62). But when appealing to unbelievers, he changes his tune. When the interviewer for *Penthouse* accused Falwell of imposing his own view of the way things "ought to be," he responded, "Well, I think that the American tradition—forget the Bible—is the sanctity of the family, the husband, wife, legally married relationship, is unquestionably the cornerstone of this republic." *Penthouse* (March, 1981), p. 152. "Forget the Bible"?! Dr. Falwell!!

Jesus Christ said, "He that is not with me is against me" (Matt. 12:30). One religion must always be preferred. If it is not the Christian religion, it will be a humanist religion. Suppose President Reagan is approached by both sides of the abortion question. The humanists say, "Mr. President, you must let each woman decide for herself what is right and what is wrong." Genesis 3:5 is the fundamental tenet of humanism. The Christians say, "No, Mr. President. The Bible says abortion is a capital crime. You must pass a law making abortion a capital offense. And you must do it *now* (II Cor. 6:2)." There is no escaping it: *one religion is going to be favored over the other*. Reagan's decision will either be for Jesus Christ or against Him, and if it is not *for* Him, it will inescapably be against Him. Suppose that the President, merely as a political sluff, forms a committee to "study" the issue. Obviously he doesn't accept the assertion that he must obey God and legislate *now*. God may command, but not with such force that obedience cannot be postponed. Suppose instead that the President says, "Friends, I have studied this issue carefully, and I think it is such an intimate and deeply personal issue, and so complex an issue, that I am going to remain *neutral*. I will not take an official stand with either of your fine organizations." Did he pass a law against abortion? Was the humanist religion *favored* at the expense of Christianity? There is no neutrality when it comes to law and religion. Pluralism is a myth.²⁰

What a shame, then, to find Jerry Falwell saying things like, "Moral Majority strongly supports a pluralistic America."²¹ The

20. The Supreme Court's assertion that they did not know when life began was actually a (not-so-) veiled assertion that it *did not* begin at conception. Harold O. J. Brown notes the Court's dogmatism-disguised-as-neutrality:

The Court's words on this subject sound very modest: "We need not resolve the difficult question of when life begins. When those trained in the respective disciplines of medicine, philosophy, and theology are unable to arrive at any consensus the judiciary, at this point in the development of man's knowledge, is not in a position to speculate as to the answer." (But apparently it *is* in a position to deny that the unborn child is a human being and thus to legalize his destruction, as Justice Whit complains, "for any . . . reason, or for no reason at all.") *Death Before Birth* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1977), p. 83.

Not only is permanent pluralism impossible, but it is also forbidden by the law of God. When the Westminster divines explicated the implications of the Second Commandment, they mentioned as one of the sins forbidden, "tolerating a false religion," appending for Scriptural proof Deut. 13:6-12.

21. Falwell, *Penthouse*, *op. cit.* We could only wish that he would instead point out the great inconsistencies of those who demand freedom for every man, "as long as they do not interfere with the freedom of others." Where does this exception come

"Religious Right" has no intention of bringing this nation's laws captive to the obedience of Jesus Christ (II Cor. 10:5). They are apparently not committed to the Great Commission of our Lord, to make all nations Christian by teaching them to observe whatsoever Jesus Christ commanded (Matt. 28:18-20). Biblical social activists must command all men everywhere, even in Washington, D.C., to repent of their political disobedience, and turn to the Word of God for social guidance, submitting to the absolute authority of the Bible in the realm of politics.

*Myth #2: The Myth of Human Rights: The "Religious Right"
Will not Challenge Man's Claim to Autonomy.*

Like the Myth of Pluralism, the Myth of autonomous human rights is rooted in a denial of God and His Law. The idea of "rights" is the outgrowth of theories of government from Enlightenment humanism. T. R. Ingram has countered the notion that men, simply because they are men, have certain "inalienable rights." "Human rights"

. . . are in fact a kind of back-handed statement of benefits of the common law which Christians enjoy. Common law rights are blessings of public peace in which wrongs are punished. Wrongs are not seen as infringements of individual rights, but as violations of God's commands. It is wrong to murder, not because each has a right to live, but because God said it is wrong. . . .²² It is easy to understand why the human rights idea came into popularity in Christendom. It is simply that men living in Christendom enjoyed that "blessed liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free" to such an extent and over so many centuries that they found it easy to take for granted. Liberty, instead of being recognized as the gift of Christ and the reward of Christian justice, was something that would easily be seen as an end in itself. It was easy to confuse logical origins. The common law punishes any dishonest violation of each man's person or his goods

from? On what basis do we restrict our cannibal "friend" above? Isn't this the imposition of a moral system? How can we call this pluralism? Much can and should be done by way of exposing the contradictions and inconsistencies of the humanists. Use their premises against them.

22. Not that God could ever legislate "arbitrarily," i.e., against His character. The point is that *God*, not man, has legislated. God surely commands us to respect our fellow man because he reflects the image of God (James 3:9). God also commands *capital punishment* for the same reason (Gen. 9:5-6). But understanding why God was commanded is not license for man to legislate. God is our Law-giver (Isa. 33:22). We as men cannot pick a doctrine (e.g., man's dignity) and attempt to construct public policy deductively. Public policy is found in Biblical *law*.

and so it is easy to understand a condition in which each may be said to enjoy the right to life, liberty and property.²³

When people speak of "human rights" they are referring to something that really does exist, but by inappropriately calling it "human rights" they suggest that it would hold even without God and His law. What really exists is the *blessing of God*. God promises that if a nation obeys His law, He will bless them with security, peace, and stability. The poor and defenseless are protected and safe, when justice prevails, that is, when Biblical law is implemented not merely by the State, but by each Christian and his family. God promises us a good and prosperous land if we hear His voice. The people of an obedient nation shall be safe, and "they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree" (Mic. 4:4). Such are the blessings of God (Deut. 28:2). To call the rewards of obedience "human rights" is to assert that they rightfully belong to man apart from his obedience to the Word of God. It is to say that man has a *claim* on the blessings of God.²⁴

Perhaps this sounds like so much nit-picking. But the results of the "human rights" rhetoric have been deplorable. The purpose of those humanists who, in the period known as the "Enlightenment," developed the "human rights" concept, was to remove God as Law-Giver, and enthrone man. As could be expected, when God was removed as Law-Giver, the State became the "*right-giver*." As Ingram notes, "It is no accident that government sees itself today in the role of being the 'protector' of its citizens instead of enjoying along with its subjects the protection of law and order."²⁵ "Human

23. T. Robert Ingram, *What's Wrong With Human Rights* (Houston: St. Thomas Press, 1978), pp. 5, 21, 49.

24. Many modern translations of the Bible have unfortunately picked up this humanistic concept. In every case God and His Law take a back seat to man and his claims. Revealing examples are Proverbs 31:5, 8, and 9, and Isaiah 5:23. In Proverbs the emphasis is literally on "judgment," i.e., the efficient application of Biblical Law to the case at bar, not on the "rights" of man. In Isaiah, in the KJV, the emphasis is God-ward: "righteousness." The modern versions subtly emphasize *man's* claims. The Scriptures teach that man is blessed for obedience. Today we claim these blessings as a "right." We do not have a *right* to cultural and social stability. Man has no "right" to protection, but all men have a *duty* to obey God's Laws concerning our fellow man. A government that enforces these laws creates a climate of safety and peace. But social peace is not a "right" of man, or something that God owes man. It is a gift from God. One need only substitute "rights" in Deut. 9:4-5 where the word in Isa. 5:23 occurs to find an explicit condemnation of the "rights" perspective.

25. Ingram, *Rights*, p. 55.

rights" rhetoric inevitably removes the burden upon the State to obey the concrete and specific demands of Biblical law. Instead of enforcing the Law of God, the State merely "protects" the rights of men.

You may wonder, What, precisely, *are* my "rights." You needn't worry. Our Supreme Court will decide exactly what your "rights" are.²⁶

Let us examine the "Right to Life" campaign of the "Religious Right." Virtually all the leaders of the movement have used the "human rights" vocabulary. Surely the most important is Francis Schaeffer. One must necessarily approach Dr. Schaeffer with a great deal of awe and respect for the work he has done. One approaches any hardworking saint in much the same way, yet we should not be afraid to go against even John Calvin where Calvin is inconsistent with the Scriptures.

To begin, there is obviously nothing in Scripture to support man's "Right to Life." All men have only a "right to death." Because of Adam (Romans 5:12) and their own sin (Rom. 3:23), all men deserve death, not life (Rom. 6:21, 23). Every second of life on earth is the undeserved gift of God. Our lives are protected only if society follows the Law of God (Deut. 4:40).

But Francis Schaeffer does not hold to the abiding validity of the Law in all its detail, and in its principled application today. Instead of calling our nation's leaders to repent and begin to implement the specifics of Biblical law, Schaeffer contents himself with "exposing our rapid yet subtle loss of human rights."²⁷ By substituting the rhetoric of "human rights" for explicit application of Old Testament law, Schaeffer has thrown away his only real claim to "absolutes." As a result, he really cannot effectively challenge our nation's leaders.

The absence of Biblical law in Schaeffer's apologetic leaves him with a kind of "social action deism." God does not govern the affairs of State; His "judicial" laws have no power in the modern world.

26. After *Roe v. Wade* no other conclusion than that drawn by Harold O. J. Brown is possible: "The only human rights are those granted by the state." *Ibid.*, p. 82, his emphasis.

27. The subtitle of the book Schaeffer co-authored with C. Everett Koop, M.D., *Whatever Happened to the Human Race* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, Co., 1979). If the book is supposed to be a positive setting forth of the Christian view, it should have been entitled, *Whatever Happened to Biblical Law?* It may be, however, that Schaeffer is merely taking an assumption of the humanists and showing that the position cannot be logically maintained without running into severe social problems and ethical relativism. This negative critique of the humanist use of "human rights" is the only legitimate use of the concept.

God created men and left them alone to work out the implications of their having been created in His image. But without concrete Biblical law as a basis of definition and public policy, it turns out that "human dignity" is as elusive a term as "love." How does one "love" one's neighbor other than by fulfilling God's law with respect to him (Romans 13:8-10)? "The Dignity of Man" can be and has been defined in almost every conceivable way. Schaeffer is concerned not merely with abortion, but also with infanticide and euthanasia. Our care for the handicapped and disabled also has to be considered in all this. But if one starts from man alone, or even from "man-as wonderful," one takes the path that leads to relativism and ethical imprecision. Schaeffer cites many humanists who believe that aborting the severely handicapped is the only compassionate thing to do. These situation ethicists speak of "meaningful humanhood,"²⁸ even as Schaeffer extolls the worth of every individual life. Christians who begin with the "rights" and dignity of man, instead of the rights and dignity of God, face the tortuous road of autonomous human reason. Somehow, *starting with man*,²⁹ these Christians must reason their way to the proscription of abortion. And they must compete with the humanists, who have had far more practice than we at making man the measure of all things.

The courts have consistently taken various "rights" of men and used them against the Kingdom of Christ. The California supreme court ruled "that California must pay for welfare abortions because the state constitution explicitly guarantees the right of privacy."³⁰ The concept of a "right to life," that is, the *mother's* "right to (quality) life," was used by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton* to legalize abortions.³¹ Justice Douglas, in his concurring opinion, cited the existence of virtually every "right" imaginable; from the right to life to the right "to loaf."³²

28. Schaeffer, *Whatever*, pp. 78ff.

29. And ironically, when it comes to public policy, this seems to be the way Schaeffer starts. His approach is not as consistent as it is at times in other of his works. The "rights" rhetoric works against him.

30. Walter Isaacson, "The Battle over Abortion," *Time* (Apr. 6, 1981), p. 24.

31. Cf. *Doe v. Bolton*, 410 U.S. 179, at 190. See also Justice Douglas' concurring opinion at 214.

32. 410 U.S. 179, 213. Jerry Falwell has said he would be willing to die, apparently, in defense of the right to loaf. Says he, "We philosophically disagree with the American Civil Liberties Union, but we would die for their right to do what they are doing." Falwell, *ibid.* Ingram has picked this notion apart: "This is utter nonsense." It is, he continues, a defense of "a claim to the worst of all moral evils, the right to be wrong." Ingram, *Rights*, pp. 16-17.

A most important lesson can be learned from the twin-abortion cases of 1973. In a 1925 Supreme Court case, *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*,³³ an Oregon compulsory public schools law was struck down because it violated the rights of the parents, teachers, and children involved. Biblical laws concerning parents and the education of their children, or concerning the state and education, were not cited by the dear sisters. The issue was "human rights."³⁴ Many would think it a good thing that the Court ruled in favor of the parochial schools and against the state compulsory education law. But the human rights reasoning in *Pierce* was cited *five times* in support of abortion on demand in the two 1973 cases.³⁵

Because the notion of "human rights" is unbiblical, it is inherently nebulous.³⁶ To rely on a doctrine of "human rights" rather than forcing the State to follow the statutes, judgments, and case law of the Bible is to grant the State a *carte blanche* of legislative-judicial power.

What is the alternative to "human rights?" Man's duty to obey God's law. In a word, "theonomy." For the "theonomist," the road to public proscription of abortion is direct: Abortion is declared to be murder and God demands the death penalty (Ex. 21:23).³⁷ The

33. 268 U.S. 510.

34. Cf. 268 U.S. 510 at 515, and 534-535.

35. Including concurring opinions: 410 U.S. 113, 153, 159, 168, and 169; 410 U.S. 179, 212. Surely the reverse will be true as well: those who are going to argue against abortion on humanistic grounds, rather than on Scriptural grounds, be prepared to have your reasoning turned against those who are trying to establish Christian schools.

36. Not only does the State have total power to decide which "rights" exist, they determine how they will be applied. Consider the "right to privacy." The "right" has obvious importance when it comes to a "mother's" freedom to kill her unborn "invader." But as Brown notes,

In a recent series of Supreme Court decisions and federal laws, the "right to privacy" has been almost abolished with respect to financial transactions. Banks must keep and furnish to the government on demand elaborate records of all transactions by their customers, and they are not required to tell their customers when they do it. Federal agents have the right to enter businesses and confiscate their records without respect for the "right to privacy." It seems that this "right" is a very flexible one, applying to hospitals for the purposes of abortion, but not to individuals for banking transactions. Or, to put it bluntly, what you do with your money is more important to the federal government than what you do with human lives. Brown, *Death*, pp. 91-92.

37. For an analysis of the modern re-interpretations of this passage, and a defense of the view that Ex. 21:22-25 speaks of the abortion of the fetus, see Jack W. Cottrell, "Abortion and the Mosaic Law," *Christianity Today* (Mar. 16, 1973), pp. 6-9.

Bible sets down a complete social pattern for parents and for the State. It is only the slightest exaggeration to state that judges need walk into their courts with their Bible and nothing else. Men are not given the prerogative to legislate new laws or even to *confirm* God's law on the basis of the "dignity of Man" (or any other theological concept). *God has spoken*. Man is now to obey. God's law, not "Human Rights," is the source of justice; God's law guarantees our freedoms.

Myth # 3: The Myth of Neutrality: The "Religious Right" Will not Challenge Man's Claims to Religious Neutrality.

Biblical social action is the reconstruction of our society according to the standards of God's law as revealed in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. We who seek to please the Lord Jesus Christ wish to persuade all men to submit to the Biblical world-and-life view. Even if we separate our political efforts from our attempt to evangelize, we still view evangelism as somehow important, and our involvement in the political arena affords us new evangelistic opportunities. We throw these opportunities away if we accept the myth of neutrality.

There is no such thing as an agnostic. The agnostic claims that he does not know whether or not God exists, but that he is willing to search and perhaps someday find out. Much less is there such a thing as an atheist. The atheist says he sincerely, honestly, and genuinely does not believe that there is a god, and certainly not the God of the Bible. The Bible has some very strong words for such men: *They are liars*. When the atheist tells you "he's just looking at the facts" when he concludes that there is no God, he is lying. *The "facts" are not neutral*. There is only one legitimate conclusion one can draw from the "facts" and that is that the LORD He is God.

Let us look at two passages from the Bible that declare the non-neutrality of all "facts." First, Psalm 19:1-4:

The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament is showing His handiwork. Day after day pours forth speech, and night after night declares knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.

Every day, men look out onto the world and see *inescapable proof* that the God of Scripture is their Creator and Lord. Even the unique ability to communicate verbally with one another evidences our *created* nature. The "facts" are not neutral: they *declare* the glory of God!

The Apostle Paul emphasizes this truth in Romans 1:18-25:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which can be known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. From the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they know God, they did not honor Him or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and fourfooted animals and creeping things. They exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, Who is blessed forever. Amen!

Of all the "facts" and the so-called "laws of nature," we must certainly say they are far from neutral. They give *absolute proof* that God is our Creator and must be served. There are no maybe's, no reservations; there is no neutrality. And of those who look at the "facts" and say in their heart, "there is no God," we must certainly say "they are without excuse."

This obviously says something important about the unbelievers we encounter, does it not? They all claim to be "impartial" and "objective." They are, oh, so "modern" and "scientific." They are just "honest searchers for truth," but just haven't seen enough evidence for the existence of God. So they merrily continue devising political systems "in the form of corruptible man." Professing to be unbiased and neutral academicians of political thought, they show themselves, by their politics of tyranny and murder, to be fools. The "Religious Right" as a whole is to be congratulated, therefore, in their largely successful efforts at reducing humanistic politics and legal decisions to absurdity and self-contradiction. But the "Religious Right" has done nothing to challenge this grand pretension of neutrality and objectivity. The Bible says that the "facts" bear inescapable and absolute proof of the governance of God, yet the secular humanist, claiming to be "objective," does not see it! How can this be? Only two explanations are possible. Either as a political "scientist" he is a dull and ignorant Philistine of the most startling dimensions (what? with all his Ph.D.s?), or else he maliciously suppresses the true nature of the "facts" because he hates God and violently opposes the Christian system. Both *may* be

true, but the Bible tells us that the latter is always true.³⁸

The myth of neutrality is obviously the *theological first-cousin* of the myth of free-will, so ably destroyed by Martin Luther in his debates with Erasmus over the *Bondage of the Will*. Because so many in the "Religious Right" are governed by an Arminian, rather than Augustinian, theology, they easily fall prey to the myth of neutrality. The presumptuous claim of the unbeliever is that he *could* become a Christian if he wanted to; that he *could* agree with the teachings of Scripture if he chose to, but just hasn't been persuaded for lack of evidence. The Arminian agrees. The unbeliever tells himself and the world that his thinking processes are just fine. Not just in the area of "religion" or "spiritual" matters,³⁹ but in every subject, and every discipline. And there is no dissent from the Arminian. In fact, the Arminian would be the first to tell the natural, unregenerate man that, if he wanted to, he could see the Kingdom (John 3:3), understand the Christian system (I Cor. 2:14), objectively hear the Word of God (John 8:43), and receive its truth (John 14:17). Following this fair-minded and non-partisan examination of the truths of Christianity, the unregenerate man could then submit to the Lordship of Christ (but only if *he* made the decision—I Cor. 12:3), and then subject himself to the whole law of God, surely becoming a great Christian statesman (Rom. 8:7). Clearly, the Arminian, in affirming the sovereign will of unsaved man over the sovereign grace of the Triune God, runs pell mell against the Word of God. According to the Arminian,

There is not necessarily any sin involved in what the unbeliever, or natural man, does by way of exercising his capacities for knowledge and action. On this view the natural man does not need the light of Christianity to enable him to understand the world and himself aright. He does not need the revelation of Scripture or the illumination of the Holy Spirit in order that by means of them he may learn what his own true nature is. . . .

38. Many Christian social activists fail to understand just how non-neutral the natural man is. Many have the idea that the non-Christian is not neutral with respect to "religion" in general. The humanists assert that Christianity is not "scientific," to which some will reply, Oh yeah? Well it takes just as much faith to be an atheist, buddy! In other words, no man is neutral because all men hold to some beliefs that are not susceptible to the "scientific method." But the Bible says more. Religion is not defined by the scientific method; it is defined by the sense of deity that every man has: all men know of the Triune God, but actively hate Him and rebel against Him. In *this* respect no man is neutral.

39. Of course, we must recognize that *all* subjects are ultimately religious (cf. note 18 above).

But without the light of Christianity it is as little possible for man to have the correct view about himself and the world as it is to have the true view about God. On account of the fact of sin man is blind with respect to the truth wherever the truth appears. And truth is one. Man cannot truly know himself unless he truly knows God.⁴⁰

This is why we cannot accept the myth of neutrality. The unbeliever is at war with himself and with the world around him; both reveal God, and he is at war with God. He is not subject to the Word of God, and cannot be, because he enters this world behaving as though *he* himself were God, deciding for himself what is right and what is wrong. The non-Christian may *think* of himself as neutral:

The non-Christian thinks that his thinking process is normal. He thinks that his mind is the final court of appeal in all matters of knowledge. He takes himself to be the reference point for all interpretation of the facts.⁴¹

But the Bible tells us that he *hates* God, and cannot submit to Him.

The non-Christian seeks to suppress the truth, to distort it into a naturalistic scheme, to preclude the interpretation of the God who makes things and events what they are (determining the end from the beginning. Isa. 46:10). Specifically, and very much at the heart of disagreements with unbelieving scholars or thinkers, we should see that the unbeliever has an incorrect diagnosis of his situation and of his own person.⁴²

This is, in the last analysis, the question as to *what are one's ultimate presuppositions*. When man became a sinner he made of himself instead of God the ultimate or final reference point. And it is precisely this presupposition, as it controls without exception all forms of non-Christian philosophy that must be brought into question. If this presupposition is left unquestioned in any field all the facts and arguments presented to the unbeliever will be made over by him according to his pattern. The sinner has cemented colored glasses to his eyes which he cannot remove. And all is yellow to the jaundiced eye.⁴³

The notion of neutrality must be challenged head-on. We cannot

40. Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Phila. PA: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1967), p. 73.

41. Greg L. Bahnsen, *A Biblical Introduction to Apologetics* (Fairfax, VA: Thoburn Press, 1976), ch. 11.

42. *Ibid.*

43. Van Til, *Defense*, p. 77.

simply appeal to vague notions of "human rights" or of the creation of man in the image of God, and let the unsaved man re-work them according to his hatred of the things of God.⁴⁴

The unbeliever does not accept the doctrine of his creation in the image of God. It is therefore impossible to appeal to the intellectual and moral nature of man, *as men themselves interpret this nature*, and say that it must judge of the credibility and evidence of revelation. For if this is done, we are virtually telling the natural man to accept just so much and no more of Christianity as, with his perverted concept of human nature, he cares to accept.⁴⁵

Van Til asks the practical question, Is there an area known by both the unbeliever and the believer from which, as starting point, we may go on to that which is known to believers but unknown to unbelievers? What *point of contact* is there in the mind and heart of the unbeliever to which the believer may appeal when he presents to him the Christian view of life?⁴⁶ Is it just "the facts"? Is it "logic"? The point of contact for the gospel must be sought within the natural man.⁴⁷ Deep down in his mind, every man knows that he is the *creature of God* and *responsible to God*. Every man, at bottom, knows that he is a *covenant-breaker*. But every man acts and talks as though this were not so. It is the one point that cannot bear mentioning in his presence. A man may have internal cancer. Yet it may be the one point he will not have one speak of in his presence. He will grant that he is not feeling well. He may admit that he is experiencing many terrible symptoms. He will accept any sort of medication so long as it does not pretend to be given in answer to a cancer diagnosis. Will a good doctor cater to him on this matter? Certainly not. He will tell his patient that he has promise of life, but promise of life on one condition, that is, of an immediate internal operation. So it is with the sinner. He is alive, but alive as a covenant-breaker. But his own intellectual and political activity proceeds on the assumption that such is not the case. The "Religious Right," by failing to appeal exclusively to that which is within man, but which is also suppressed by every man, virtually allows the legitimacy of the natural man's view of himself. They do not seek to explode the last stronghold to which the natural man always flees and where he

44. Romans 2:15 tells us that the unbeliever has the work of the law written on his heart. Whatever policy the "Religious Right" will propose, the unbeliever will oppose, unless God restrains his lawlessness.

45. Van Til, p. 81.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 67.

47. What follows is adapted from *Defense*, pp. 94-95.

always makes his final stand.

The truly Biblical view, on the other hand, applies atomic power and flame-throwers to the very presupposition of the natural man's ideas with respect to himself. It is assured of a point of contact in the fact that every man is made in the *image of God* and has impressed upon him the *law of God*. That fact makes men always accessible to God. That fact assures us that every man, to be a man at all, must already be in contact with the truth. He is so much in contact with the truth that much of his energy is spent in the vain effort to hide this fact from himself. He efforts to hide this fact from himself are bound to be self-frustrating.

Only by thus finding the point of contact in man's sense of God's deity that lies underneath his own conception of himself as ultimate can we be both true to Scripture and effective in reasoning with the natural man. Man, knowing God, refuses to keep Him in remembrance (Rom. 1:28).

Failure to reject the Myth of Neutrality inevitably leads to the fourth and final myth we must avoid at all costs if we are to engage in fruitful, Biblical Social Action.

Myth # 4: The Myth of "Practical Compromise."

Kent Kelly, Pastor of Calvary Memorial Church in Southern Pines, North Carolina, and extremely active in the struggle for Christian Schools, has written a book that, were it not for its acceptance of many of the myths we have discussed, would be a fine book.⁴⁸ The research is thorough, and the task of reducing arguments for abortion to rubble is admirably discharged. There have been many good books against abortion that are not written from a Biblical perspective, and this is one of them. Only about 3% of the book has to do with the Bible, and Kelly is very open about his appeal, *not* to the authority of Scripture, *but* to the authority of the unregenerate mind of man:

Most of this volume is directed toward reason for a specific purpose. Pro-abortionists across the entire spectrum have little or no regard for the Bible and its implications for the question at hand. Our message to the nation must be communicated in a *practical* manner or no change will be forthcoming. Approaching the world at large with Bible in hand is an exercise in futility.⁴⁹

48. Kent Kelly, *Abortion: The American Holocaust* (Southern Pines, NC: Calvary Press, 1981). Thesis: If you adopt a humanist view of abortion you are on the ethical road that leads to Naziism. An excellent critique of the Humanist position.

49. *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64, my emphasis.

This is such a tragic statement. It is all the more tragic when one realizes that *the great majority of the evangelicals and fundamentalists involved in social action accept the idea*. It is the practical denial of Hebrews 4:12:

The Word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

The Bible tells us to bring the Bible into our conversation and our social action.

For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater, so shall my Word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereunto I sent it (Isa. 55:10-11).

The Bible is powerful and effective precisely because it is the voice of the Father which the natural man knows down to the joints and marrow, but refuses to know. He hears this voice, but refuses to hear. How shall we make him hear? Do we use the words which man's wisdom teaches (I Cor. 2:13), depending on our own rhetorical gifts for persuasion? Or do we use the methods of the Spirit, depending rather on the grace of God for success? Men must submit to the Lord and His Word if our culture is to be saved.

How then shall they call on Him in Whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in Him of Whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:14, 17).

Answers to political problems are found in the Bible. We must confront legislators with *the Word of God*.

"I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed" (Psalm 119:46). It is the Word of God that tells men who they are and what they must do to save themselves and their society. Satan has deluded Christians into thinking that man is not "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2), but alive and religiously neutral.⁵⁰ He has then convinced us that we must cater to the unbeliever's scholarship and scientific outlook by not bringing up the Word of God. The

50. The gospel of redemption comes into *enemy territory*. See Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Book House, 1969), pp. 26-27.

strategy is brilliant: by taking away the Bible, Satan has disarmed the Church.

What is it that seems to be worrying the "Religious Right"? Kelly voices his fears:

Our response will determine our ability to be heard. We need not give them the ammunition they seek with which to shoot our arguments. If they can relegate us to some isolated corner of the theological world by slander and innuendo, they will do so. If, on the other hand, we meet them on their own ground, we will get results. This book is designed to give you ideas which defeat humanists on their own battlegrounds. God says abortion is wrong. But to lead with that statement is to play into the hands of those who would negate sound argument by pseudo-intellectual hatchet jobs on the source of our reasoning. Far better to say—history is against abortion, public consensus [sic], science, and logic all militate against abortion. . . . ⁵¹

A Two-Fold Social Apologetic

Is the Christian position so weak and untenable that we have nothing to say even against "pseudo-intellectual hatchet jobs"? Proverbs 26 gives us a two-fold social action program. Verse 5 says we are to "answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit." The conceit of the humanist is his claim to be able to construct a cohesive pattern of society and of life in general *apart from the Word of God*. But no knowledge, no political action, no real functioning in life, is possible unless you begin by assuming the truth of the Word of God. The humanist says he will construct a political order based not on God's Law, but on himself. Where will this lead? The Christian must give a scenario "according to *his* folly."

The Christian apologist must place himself upon the position of his opponent assuming the correctness of his method for argument's sake, in order to show him that on such a position the "facts" are not facts and the "laws" are not laws. It is not as though the Reformed apologist should not interest himself in the nature of the non-Christian's method. On the contrary, he should make a critical analysis of it. He should, as it were, join his "friend" in the use of it. But he should do so self-consciously with the purpose of showing that its most consistent application not merely leads away from Christian theism, but in leading away from Christian theism, leads to destruction of reason and science as well.⁵²

Van Til has done much work in showing how science is impossi-

51. Kelly, *Abortion*, pp. 65, 66.

52. Van Til, *Defense*, pp. 100, 102.

ble unless the truth of the Word of God be presupposed. The same holds true for politics as well, of course. Rushdoony has shown that if men try to engage in politics without relying on Biblical law, they will move inexorably toward totalitarianism or toward anarchy, and will eventually destroy their society.⁵³ Van Til has gone further, and shown that the humanist destroys any possibility of *thinking*!⁵⁴ However, no humanist is a consistent humanist; he always cheats and pulls truths out of the Bible for his own convenience and claims them as his own. We must argue on the unbeliever's ground only to show him that on his ground there can be no arguing: We temporarily assume his position to show him the hopelessness of unbelief.

But having reduced the unbeliever to absurdity, we must not stop there. Proverbs 26:4 has given us the next step. "Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou be like unto him." This means that we must present *our* case on *Christian grounds*. Yet the "Religious Right" has swallowed the myth of practical compromise, hook, line, and sinker. They present no answers. They battle the humanists on their battlegrounds, but never leave. And by arguing their final case on humanistic grounds, rather than Biblical grounds, they undermine their whole cause.⁵⁵

Setting forth the impact of Biblical law on politics is obviously beyond the scope of this paper. Our purpose will be rather to show

53. Rushdoony, in *The One and the Many*, shows how all non-Christian political systems wind up either in totalitarianism or anarchy (Craig Press, 1971). In order for the humanist to avoid these two extremes, he has to assume some truth or law from Scripture. He is always inconsistent, and his inconsistencies are fair game for the Christian.

54. "An illustration may indicate more clearly what is meant. Suppose we think of a man made of water in an infinitely extended and bottomless ocean of water. Desiring to get out of water, he makes a ladder of water. He sets this ladder upon the water and against the water and then attempts to climb out of the water. So hopeless and senseless a picture must be drawn of the natural man's methodology based as it is on the assumption that time or chance is ultimate. On his assumption his own rationality is a product of chance. On his assumption even the laws of logic which he employs are products of chance. The rationality and purpose that he may be searching for are still bound to be products of chance. So then the Christian apologist, whose position requires him to hold that Christian theism is really true and as such must be taken as the presupposition which alone makes the acquisition of knowledge in any field intelligible, must join his 'friend' in his hopeless gyrations so as to point out to him that his efforts are always in vain" (*Defense*, p. 102).

55. We must not fail to see the underlying truth in Pastor Kelly's fears. He fears those who would "relegate us to some isolated corner of the theological world by slander and innuendo," or by "pseudo-intellectual hatchet jobs" (pp. 65, 66). There

why the Christian involved in social action must not be like the humanist, battling on his grounds. Kent Kelly has said that we must not use the Bible as our authority: "In speaking to media, in public debate, as we write to newspapers and lobby the lawmakers, we need not appeal to faith in the Word of God." Then how shall we be the "salt of the earth"? "Far better to say—history is against abortion, public consensus (sic), science, and logic all militate against abortion. . . ." ⁵⁶ Let us examine each of these and show that they simply cannot be our battleground.

History

Pastor Kelly says that when we battle the pro-death humanists, "We have history on our side. American history says that 'We are endowed by our Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are . . . the right to life!'" ⁵⁷ It is true that history is on our side. But it is only because every event and object in history has been predestined by the God of Scripture. Thus, all things in history have a certain, unique meaning: the meaning that God gives them.

This does not mean, however, that we can appeal to some kind of "neutral" history in which humanists will agree with us. All history is Christian history. It is not neutral. All men by no means agree on what history is or means. Christians have one view of history (the Biblical view) and non-Christians have quite another (the humanist view[s]). If we do not impose God's meaning on history by speaking in terms of the Word of God, we are not left with "neutral" history;

is some basis for these fears. If we tell the world we are Bible-believers, what is the world (initially) going to think? When the world thinks of fundamentalists, or evangelicals, the world thinks of incompetence, isolationism, and reactionary obscurantism. And do you know what? The world has almost 100 years of theological incompetence, isolationism, and reactionary obscurantism to back them up! In general, ever since Christian scholarship went out with the postmillennialism of B. B. Warfield, the Hodges, J. Gresham Machen, et al., Bible-believers *have been* incompetent! Their inability to answer even "pseudo-intellectual hatchet jobs" is a sign of this incompetence. Because most evangelicals and fundamentalists have never *seriously* considered the Bible in all its social implications, they feel, deep down, that the Bible has nothing to say about politics, law, education, or anything else that requires social action. If they would study the Bible for its political and economic implications, they would be more assured that the Bible really does "have all the answers." If we begin with the Scriptural assumption that the Word of God is forever, not just for Israel, we will make progress. The Christian need not be ashamed of being a Bible-believer, and should be able to *defend* his position, not be forced to hide it.

56. Kelly, *Abortion*, p. 66.

57. *Ibid.*

we are left with humanistic history.⁵⁸ We must have a Biblical history, yet that will, as Kelly rightly fears, offend the natural man. But without it, we have a humanistic history that cannot win us a thing.

We have established, from Romans 1 and elsewhere, that all men know God. Man cannot be aware of himself without also being aware of objects about him and without also being aware of his responsibility to manage himself and all things for the glory of God. But man's consciousness of himself and the created world is not static. He is conscious of God's handiwork *in time*. This means that his consciousness of himself and of God's creation in time results in an awareness of *history* in relationship to the predestined plan of God in back of history.⁵⁹

But man suppresses the knowledge of God in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18). This means he distorts history. No unbeliever is an honest historian. Bluntly, he is a liar. Never was this more evident than in the Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion (*Roe v. Wade*). The Court very definitely used history to justify the decision on abortion, but it was not Christian history; it was "neutral" history.

First, the Court said, "It perhaps is not generally appreciated that the restrictive criminal abortion laws in effect in a majority of States today are of relatively recent vintage."⁶⁰ It is not enough that a majority of the states have the laws;⁶¹ the Court wants to look at their *history*.

It is certainly true that the statutes enacted against abortion were enacted in the 1800's.⁶² It might be assumed that the laws against murder were sufficient, but it is easy to understand why they were not. The law "grows," in applications and precedents. As men gain experience in judging, new applications of case law are encountered and codified. We presently have few, if any, criminal laws against ritual cannibalism. Perhaps, if the current punk rock craze

58. For a Calvinistic treatment of history, see Gordon H. Clark, *Historiography: Secular and Religious* (Nutley, NJ: The Craig Press, 1971).

59. Van Til, *Defense*, p. 91.

60. *Roe v. Wade*, 410 U.S. 113, 129.

61. We see already problems with Pastor Kelly's "argument from public consensus."

62. And we must also admit that these laws were not strictly Biblical. They were plagued with compromises that weakened the position (e.g., abortion allowed when mother's "health" was endangered), and by Aristotelian, pagan notions of the "Quickening" of the soul, a few months into the pregnancy, as the Court rightly notes at 133-135.

develops, we may see the reintroduction of some form of ritual cannibalism, and the need for a specific statute forbidding it. May God help us if the Supreme Court then strikes down such statutes because of their "relatively recent vintage."

But, *second*, the Court was not content to look at American history alone:

. . . abortion was practiced in Greek times as well as in the Roman era, and . . . "was resorted to without scruple." Greek and Roman law afforded little protection to the unborn. If abortion was prosecuted in some places, it seems to have been based on the concept of a violation of the father's right to his offspring. *Ancient religion did not bar abortion.*⁶³

This is incredible. The United States Supreme Court, in an effort to justify striking down state abortion laws, *appeals to pagan Rome*. Can the Christian appeal to "neutral" history? Is "history" on our side? Not unless it is brought under the authority of the Word of God, and given God's interpretation.

The Court was not unaware of the ancient *Hippocratic Oath*, which forbade abortion. But this Oath was easily dismissed. It did not represent the true genius of the pagans. Its popularity came with "the emerging teachings of Christianity."⁶⁴ It therefore could not be of any historical significance: "Most Greek thinkers, on the other hand, commended abortion. . . ."⁶⁵ History is full of sin: sinful men and sinful societies. The unbiased and objective humanistic historian will always throw out the Puritans and their culture, and cling to pagan Rome. If there were no Rome, there would be some obscure African or South Pacific tribe that would, in their practice of infanticide, "embrace the most progressive of man's ideals." History is not neutral, and certainly not in the hands of depraved man. Pastor Kelly's observations in other places in his book are most astute:

Humanism is, without question, the major driving force behind the abortion movement. A humanist is one who believes the source of ultimate truth in his own evaluation of observable facts. A humanist does not accept the validity of God in our first document of government as the One who has endowed us with certain inalienable rights, such as the right to life.⁶⁶

This is so true! A humanist will *make up history* if he has to: *anything to*

63. At 130, my emphasis.

64. At 132.

65. At 131.

66. Kelly, *Abortion*, p. 28.

avoid submitting to the Lord of hosts. Can we blithely hand history over to the humanist and let him "judge for himself"? That is already his problem!

Public Consensus

Next, Kelly says, "we have public consensus on our side."⁶⁷ Do we? Kelly himself cites an amazing example of how indicators of public opinion can be manipulated. Even if an honest poll revealed that a majority of Americans said that they were opposed to abortion, even to the point of agreeing with the Bible that it is a capital crime, I should still be skeptical. I should bet that if they were the typical juror, trying such a case, the defense attorney would ask, "What if she were *your* daughter?" and the jury would unhesitatingly vote to acquit. Most "conservative" Americans talk big, but when they have to push the button, they really aren't opposed to abortion after all.⁶⁸ If, to prevent an abortion, Mr. and Mrs. Joe Christian would have to get involved personally and help a young girl through her pregnancy and then perhaps adopt the child themselves, we would find them saying they were "opposed to abortion, sure," but they "aren't *fanatic* about it!" Legislation without works is struck down (James 2:20).

Could Elijah appeal to "public consensus" (I Kings 19:10)? Should we?

Science

After all the hassle we've had with the evolutionists, it seems a bit odd to have appeal to "science." What Kelly means is that the "public consensus of scientists" is on our side. This is, of course, a far more reliable source of argument than the public consensus of *historians*. Historians, as we have seen, tend to make the source of ultimate truth their own evaluation of observable facts.⁶⁹ Scientists, as we all know, are "objective." And because of their dispassionate searching for truth, the consensus of scientific opinion never changes. The Supreme Court, in *Roe v. Wade*, recognized medical and scientific authority. Acknowledging that medical technology has

67. *Ibid.*, p. 65, Cf. p. 66.

68. Their principle of action is a selfish, humanistic one, not a theistic one, and is subject to immediate change. This is why evangelism must be a part of our social action.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 28. Even secular scientists such as Kuhn and Polanyi are admitting that science is not strictly without pre-theoretical presuppositions.

made an abortion so much *safer* than it was decades ago, the court saw no reason to forbid it.⁷⁰ Medical science, it seems, was on *their* side. The Court wrestled with the problem of when life begins. Some say life begins at conception. But the Court said science was not on their side:

Substantial problems for precise definition of this view are posed, however, by new embryological data that purport to indicate that conception is a "process" over time, rather than an event, and by new medical techniques such as menstrual extration, the "morning-after" pill, implantation of embryos, artificial insemination, and even artificial wombs.⁷¹

We cannot appeal to the "neutral" facts of "science."

Logic

The "Religious Right," as it seeks the favor of the humanists for their policies, grants to the natural man the right and the ability to engage in history, science, and all things else, utterly unhindered by sin. The Fall, it seems, affected the religious dimension of man, but nothing else. Certainly sin does not affect logic. If ever there were anything "neutral," logic is it. Surely we can appeal to logic. Logic is something that operates rightly wherever it is found. Van Til dissents:

But the "reason" of sinful men will invariably act wrongly.

70. 410 U.S. 113, 148-149.

71. At 161. Of course, "science" usually boils down to public consensus. The Court relied heavily on public consensus to determine the beginning of life:

It should be sufficient to note briefly the wide divergence of thinking on this most sensitive and difficult question. There has always been strong support for the view that life does not begin until live birth. This was the belief of the Stoics. It appears to be the predominant, though not the unanimous, attitude of the Jewish faith. It may be taken to represent also the position of a large segment of the Protestant community, insofar as that can be ascertained; organized groups that have taken a formal position on the abortion issue have generally regarded abortion as a matter for the conscience of the individual and her family. (At this point, in a footnote, the Court cites the "Amicus Brief for the American Ethical Union et al. For the position of the National Council of Churches and of other denominations, see Lader 99-101.")

Any Christian who recognizes the humanist character of those two groups must surely recognize also the need for an explicit statement of the Biblical position to counter it. The non-neutrality of the Court is surely evident here. If it were a "fact" that 99% of all Christians vigorously opposed abortion, it would mean nothing to a humanistic Court. When the Court sets out to make a judgment concerning the "will of the people," their hatred of God and His servants will determine who "the people" are. The "facts" are molded and interpreted to fit the faith.

Particularly is this true when they are confronted with the specific contents of Scripture. The natural man will invariably employ the tool of his reason to reduce these contents to a naturalistic level. He must do so even in the interest of the principle of (logic). For his own ultimacy is the most basic presupposition of his entire philosophy. It is upon this presupposition as its fulcrum that he uses the law of contradiction. If he is asked to use his reason as the judge of the credibility of the Christian revelation without at the same time being asked to renounce his view of himself as ultimate, then he is virtually asked to believe and to disbelieve in his own ultimacy at the same time and in the same sense. Moreover this same man, in addition to rejecting Christianity in the name of the law of contradiction, will also reject it in the name of what he calls his intuition of freedom. By this he means virtually the same thing as his ultimacy. We seek our point of contact not in any abstraction whatsoever, whether it be reason or intuition. No such abstraction exists in the universe of men. We always deal with concrete individual men. These men are sinners. They have "an axe to grind." They want to suppress the truth in unrighteousness. They will employ their reason for that purpose. And they are not formally illogical if, granted the assumption of man's ultimacy, they reject the teachings of Christianity. On the contrary, to be logically consistent they are bound to do so.⁷²

The basic tenet of humanism is that every man is his own god. It would be *illogical* for humanists, as long as they are humanists, to pass a law against abortion; every man must decide for himself what is right and what is wrong. *This* is the problem in America today. It isn't a *lack* of logic; it is *increasing consistency* to a position of humanism. Men do not need to take a course in logic. They need to submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. In our day, there is no King in America. Every man does that which is logical in his own eyes (Judges 21:25).

The Facts Versus the Faith

Leaders of the "Religious Right" seem embarrassed to be Bible-believers, so they encourage the troops to appeal to neutral things like history, public opinion, modern science, and logic. As Kelly exhorts, "Force people to fight the facts before they fight the faith."⁷³ But as we have seen, men fight the facts *in order to* fight the faith, because the "facts" reveal God.

The issue between believers and non-believers . . . cannot be settled by a direct appeal to "facts" or "laws" whose nature and

72. Van Til, *Defense*, pp. 83-84.

73. Kelly, p. 66.

significance is already agreed upon by both parties to the debate. The question is rather . . . what is the final reference point required to make the "facts" and "laws" intelligible. The question is as to what the "facts" and the "laws" really are. Are they what the non-Christian . . . assumes they are? Are they what the Christian . . . presupposes they are? The answer to this question cannot be finally settled by any direct discussion of "facts." It must, in the last analysis, be settled indirectly.⁷⁴

"Practical Compromise"

The preaching of the whole counsel of God will, undoubtedly, offend many. It is for this reason that the "Religious Right" would like to tone down their message. Will the humanists listen to us when we tell them they must believe and obey the Bible? Kelly says, "Approaching the world at large with a Bible in hand is an exercise in futility." To hide the Bible from our opponent is to communicate our message in a more "practical manner."⁷⁵ The Reformed defender of the faith has a different answer:

As for the question whether the natural man will accept the truth of such an argument, we answer that he will if God pleases by His Spirit to take the scales from his eyes and the mask from his face. It is upon the power of the Holy Spirit that the Reformed preacher relies when he tells men that they are lost in sin and in need of a Savior. The Reformed preacher does not tone down his message in order that it may find acceptance with the natural man. He does not say that his message is less certainly true because of its non-acceptance by the natural man. The natural man is, by virtue of his creation in the image of God, always accessible to the truth; accessible to the penetration of the truth by the Spirit of God. Apologetics, like systematics, is valuable to the precise extent that it presses the truth upon the attention of the natural man. The natural man must be blasted out of his hideouts, his caves, his last lurking places. Neither Roman Catholic nor Arminian methodologies have the flame-throwers with which to reach him. In the all-out war between the Christian and the natural man as he appears in modern garb it is only the atomic energy of a truly Reformed methodology that will explode the last fortress to which the Roman Catholic and the Arminian always permits him to retreat and dwell in safety. (The use of such martial terminology is not inconsistent with the Christian principle of love. He who loves men most will tell them the truth about themselves in their own interest.)⁷⁶

74. Van Til, p. 100.

75. Kelly, p. 66.

76. Van Til, pp. 104-105.

The Libertarians are convinced that they have all the answers. They believe that if you eliminate the government, all social problems will disappear.⁷⁷ They are confident. They have studied their system, and know its various implications. We can learn a great deal from them as we become involved in social action. Murray Rothbard, in his book, *For a New Liberty*, gives us some helpful suggestions.

First, we must recognize our strategy. Our strategy is one of *education and conversion*.

There is no magic formula for strategy; any strategy for social change resting as it does on persuasion and conversion, can only be an art rather than a science. But having said this . . . on one point there can scarcely be disagreement: a prime and necessary condition for libertarian victory (or, indeed, for victory for *any* social movement, from Buddhism to vegetarianism) is *education*: the persuasion and conversion of large numbers of people to the cause. Education, in turn, has two vital aspects: *calling people's attention* to the existence of such a system, and converting people to the libertarian [read: "Christian"] system. If our movement consisted only of slogans, publicity, and other attention-getting devices, then we might be *heard* by many people, but it would soon be discovered that we had nothing to say—and so the hearing would be fitful and ephemeral. Libertarians must, therefore, engage in hard thinking and scholarship, put forth theoretical and systematic books, articles, and journals, and engage in conferences and seminars. On the other hand, a mere elaboration of the theory will get nowhere if no one has ever heard of the books and articles; hence the need for publicity, slogans, student activism, lectures, radio and TV spots, etc. True education cannot proceed without theory *and* activism, without an ideology and people to carry that ideology forward.⁷⁸

The Bible is a system. We may speak of *systematic politics* as much

77. The Libertarians would have been the major third party in 1980 had not the media decided to build John Anderson into a "major force." The Libertarians are humanistic, but are surprisingly close to Biblical Law on many positions. The obvious exception is in the area of "victimless crimes," which the Libertarians would legalize. I personally voted Libertarian in many cases in 1980, among them for President, concluding that the election of Mr. Reagan would put many then-battling conservative Christians to sleep. Politically, the Libertarians do not owe anything to the Eastern Liberal Establishment, which is to say, I would rather have a Libertarian as President than George Bush. Their basic assumption, that elimination of government would solve most problems, is a half-truth. It is a whole truth if Christian families will assume *their* duties.

78. Murray N. Rothbard, *For a New Liberty* (New York: Collier Books, 1978), pp. 297-298. See also Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender*, chap. 9, "A Strategy for Dominion."

as we may speak of *systematic theology*. The Bible is a textbook for both, and in the same degree. We must defend the ideology of Biblical politics, not a freshened-up conservative Humanism.

Second, we must be "Utopians." The vast majority of the "Religious Right" believes that we cannot apply anything from the Old Testament to modern politics. Even if we may, we *couldn't* because our premillennial eschatology says we can't. The postmillennial "theonomists" can be Biblical "Utopians." They have done their Biblical homework, studied their system, and are coming to know its various implications. And they believe that Christians will have victory before Christ comes again to melt away the old heavens and the old earth. The Biblical "Utopian" has a vision of a Christian nation. He has an idea of what it would be like to live in a world under God's Law. It is this vision of salvation *in the fullest sense of the word*⁷⁹ that he holds out before all men. Rothbard stresses an important reason for keeping our ultimate goal,—the discipling of all nations for Jesus Christ, and the implementation of the obedience of faith—open and in front of all men's eyes:

There is another vital tactical reason for cleaving to pure principle. It is true that day-to-day social and political events are the resultants of many pressures, the often unsatisfactory outcome of the push-and-pull conflicting ideologies and interests. But if only for that reason, it is all the more important for the Libertarian to keep upping the ante. The call for a two percent tax reduction may achieve only the slight moderation of a projected tax *increase*; a call for a drastic tax cut may indeed achieve a substantial reduction. And over the years, it is precisely the strategic role of the "extremist" to keep pushing the matrix of day-to-day action further and further in his direction. The socialists have been particularly adept at this strategy. If we look at the socialist program advanced sixty, or even thirty years ago, it will be evident that measures considered dangerously socialistic a generation or two ago are now considered an indispensable part of the "mainstream" of the American heritage. In this way the day-to-day compromises of supposedly "practical" politics get pulled inexorably in the collectivist direction. There is no reason why the libertarian cannot accomplish the same result. In fact, one of the reasons that the conservative opposition to collectivism has been so weak is that conservatism, by its very nature, offers not a

79. *Salvation* comes from a Hebrew word, *yasha*, which literally means, "To be safely set in a wide, open place," and can be translated, "defense," "preservation," "safety," "liberty," "prosperity," "health," and a number of other, *very worldly*, words. Biblical eschatology sees the entire world being restored to conditions similar to the Garden of Eden, and the building of the City of God, the New Jerusalem.

consistent political philosophy but only a "practical" defense of the existing *status quo*, enshrined as embodiments of the American "tradition." Yet, as statism grows and accretes, it becomes, by definition, increasingly entrenched and therefore "traditional"; conservatism can then find no intellectual weapons to accomplish its overthrow.⁸⁰

The only reasons "liberals" have been able "to relegate us to some isolated corner of the theological world" is that they outnumber those who espouse a Biblical politics. But now fundamentalists are beginning to see that a consistent position, when it builds force, can withstand "pseudo-intellectual hatchet jobs." Even the Moral Majority, with its less-than-Biblical presentation, has had some good effects, and has incurred the wrath of the liberal politico-theologians. But Jerry Falwell has at least a glimmer of the answer:

The problem is that they have never had credible opposition. They had always been able to portray the Conservatives as religious fanatics and got by with it. They can't do that anymore.

80. Rothbard, *Liberty*, pp. 301-302. F. A. Hayek, Nobel Prize-winning free-market economist, is no "extremist," but echoes Rothbard's thinking:

We must make the building of a free society once more an intellectual adventure, a deed of courage. What we lack is a liberal Utopia, a programme which seems neither a mere defence of things as they are nor a diluted kind of socialism, but a truly liberal radicalism which does not spare the susceptibility of the mighty (including the trade unions), which is not too severely practical and which does not confine itself to what appears today as politically possible. We need intellectual leaders who are willing to work for an ideal, however small may be the prospects of its early realization. They must be men who are willing to stick to principles and to fight for their full realization, however remote. . . . Free trade and freedom of opportunity are ideals which still may rouse the imaginations of large numbers, but a mere "reasonable freedom of trade" or a mere "relaxation of controls" is neither intellectually respectable nor likely to inspire any enthusiasm. The main lesson which the true liberal must learn from the success of the socialists is that it was their courage to be Utopian which gained them the support of the intellectuals and thereby an influence on public opinion which is daily making possible what only recently seemed utterly remote. Those who have concerned themselves exclusively with what seemed practicable in the existing state of opinion have constantly found that even this has rapidly become politically impossible as the result of changes in a public opinion which they have done nothing to guide. Unless we can make the philosophic foundations of a free [read: "Biblical"] society once more a living intellectual issue, and its implementation a task which challenges the ingenuity and imagination of our liveliest minds, the prospects of freedom are indeed dark. But if we can regain that belief in the power of ideas which was the mark of liberalism at its best, the battle is not lost. "The Intellectuals and Socialism," in *Studies in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 194.

The people on our side now have tremendous media coverage. We have our own networks, our own magazines and newspapers. We have the ability to answer fully and logically. What they are now screaming about is that we outnumber them; we are mobilized; we are effective; and, we are not going away.⁸¹

If it is this easy to battle for the cause of conservative humanism, it should cause us no fear to fight the Lord's battles in the Lord's armor.

The Myth of Christian Impotence

Perhaps the most important myth that needs to be challenged is one held by the "Religious Right" itself. This is the notion that God is not omnipotent, that the world was lost in the Garden of Eden, and that God is voluntarily powerless to save it. Christ came to be King but was not powerful enough to get elected. But *God is sovereign*, and His promises of victory *will* be realized. We will fulfill the Great Commission: all nations shall obey the Son (Psalm 2; 72:11), and it is the saints, armed with *the Word of God*, that shall accomplish this in His power (Ps. 149:4-9; Rev. 19:15). As long as the "Religious Right" believes that man is stronger than God in any area of life, including conversion, very little will be accomplished in the long run. But when Christians finally realize the power of God to fulfill his promises, they will no longer consider *themselves* impotent. When Christians finally see God as omnipotent, and no longer see themselves as impotent, then two things will happen.

First, we will see Christians unafraid to challenge the humanistic political system *head-on*. Christians will begin to run for political office on an explicitly Biblical platform. The Libertarians recognize that they will lose a few at the start, but they believe that in running on such a platform they educate and convert. Christians must do the same.⁸²

81. Jerry Falwell, interviewed by John Rees, *Review of the News*, Vol. 17, No. 18 (May 6, 1981), p. 51.

82. Great encouragement can be gained by reflecting on the origin of the Libertarian Party:

On election day, 1976, the Libertarian Party presidential ticket of Roger L. MacBride for President and David L. Bergland for Vice President amassed 174,000 votes in thirty-two states throughout the country. The sober *Congressional Quarterly* was moved to classify the fledgling Libertarian Party as the third major party in America. The remarkable growth rate of this new party may be seen in the fact that it only began in 1971 with a handful of members gathered in a Colorado living room. The following year it fielded a presidential ticket which managed to get on the ballot in two states. And it is now America's third major party. (Rothbard, *Liberty*, p. 1)

Second, and simultaneously, we will see the full power of Biblical preaching. James Robison has recognized the potential power of the pulpit.

The American clergyman has one of the few channels by which morally sound conservatives can go directly to the people without media distortion. For example, I can speak with Americans not only in church buildings and on crusades, but also through our pulpit ministry on television.

In America, the Establishment media play such a role in distorting the truth that we need people who will challenge the false gods of the state's secular "religion." Preachers can deliver this challenge directly to the American people, and they must. A businessman cannot communicate his message directly to the people; a housewife cannot make her voice heard widely. Only the President among politicians has the ability to use the mass media to go directly to the American people with an unfiltered message. We preachers therefore have an extraordinary responsibility and a unique opportunity.⁸³

The responsibility of the pulpit is two-fold: First, to challenge unbelievers to forsake their supposed ultimacy as would-be-gods.

The depravity and alleged autonomy of man's thinking prevent the regenerate Christian from seeking common ground in the unbeliever's understanding of things, whether they be the laws of logic, the facts of history, or the experience of human personality. Rather than agreeing with the sinner's conception of his experience, the Christian seeks his repentance—repentance in the world of thought. Our approach should be that of Isaiah 55:7: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord."⁸⁴

Second, the preacher must set before believers the vision of a Biblical society. This is an encouragement toward sanctification and Christian maturity. The Biblical system works! The Bible really does have the answers, and any preacher who doesn't show these answers, who does not think along the lines set forth in the seminal social action work, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, and does not present the full ideal of a consistent Christian society, cannot inspire his con-

83. James Robison, interviewed by John Rees, *Review of the News*, Vol. 17, No. 26 (July 1, 1981), pp. 43-45.

84. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Apologetics*, ch. 11. Needless to say, the Old Testament prophets as a whole should be our guide in social action.

gregation to Biblical social action.⁸⁵ If we wish to restore the peace and prosperity left us by our Puritan forefathers, we must accept their vision, and preach their theology. If this generation will follow the Biblical social action of the Puritans, our nation will again become a Christian nation.

85. Rothbard speaks of "the excitement and enthusiasm that a logically consistent system can inspire. Who, in contrast, will go to the barricades for a two percent tax reduction?" *Liberty*, p. 301.

THE MORAL MAJORITY: AN ANABAPTIST CRITIQUE

A Review by James B. Jordan

The Moral Majority: Right or Wrong?, Robert E. Webber. Crossway Books, Westchester, Illinois, 1981. 190 pp., hardcover. \$9.95.

IN his latest book, Mr. Webber uses the so-called Moral Majority as a springboard to advance the general party line of what he calls "centrism," a position which, as the term indicates, steers a middle course between left and right wing political concerns, and generally a middle course among evangelical, Catholic, and modernist theological positions. The book opens with a summary of the thinking of the Moral Majority, as interpreted through the writings of the movement's leader Jerry Falwell. Then, Mr. Webber balances his discussion and critique of the New Christian Right with a discussion and critique of the Old Liberal "Christian" Left. The third and fourth sections of the book are devoted to further shots at the left and right, and a further development of the "centrist" position. The book closes with four appendices, which reprint four "centrist" creedal statements, and with a bibliography of recommended readings.

While Mr. Webber does make a number of valid points, some of which I shall try to note in this review, his book is open to major criticisms on four counts: He has too facile a view both of the New Christian Right and of the Old Liberal "Christian" Left; he makes a number of historical errors; he has a naive understanding of civil religion; and his theological perspective is (unwittingly, we trust) far more similar to the gnostic heresy at certain crucial points than it is to orthodox, catholic Christianity.

The New Christian Right and the Old Liberal Left

Mr. Webber makes no claim to be interacting with the entire New Christian Right; rather, the title of his book indicates that his concern is only with one organization, the Moral Majority, headed by Rev. Jerry Falwell. At the same time, the Moral Majority is only one part of a larger group of men and organizations loosely termed

the New Christian Right, and throughout the book Mr. Webber actually treats conservative evangelicalism as a unit. The book is advertised and sold as a general investigation of the New Christian Right as a whole. Thus, Mr. Webber must be held to account, to some degree at least, for failing to deal adequately with the whole movement.

The most pointed omission in his discussion is any mention of the Christian Reconstruction movement. *Newsweek* magazine, in its review of the New Right, called attention to the "Chalcedon Institute" (sic) as the "Think-tank" of the New Christian Right (*Newsweek* XCVII:5 [2 Feb. 1981] :60). During the past two decades, author Rousas J. Rushdoony and other Christian Reconstructionists have published well over thirty books, in addition to generating the semi-annual *Journal of Christian Reconstruction* for eight years to date, not to speak of innumerable newsletters. Rushdoony is known everywhere as a speaker, and has been in the forefront of the battle against Statist encroachment on Christian school territory. Yet, in the "Select Bibliography" on pp. 189 and 190 of Mr. Webber's book, not one scholarly, Reconstructionist work appears. A list of "Reformed" books reflecting on politics, on p. 93, also conspicuously omits any reference to Reconstructionist literature. The strong theological position that underlies the thinking of much of the New Christian Right is ignored. By focussing only on Rev. Falwell's *Listen America* (Doubleday, 1980), Mr. Webber creates in the reader's mind an impression that this lightweight book is all the New Christian Right has to offer. This is hardly fair. While few public leaders in the New Christian Right would identify themselves wholly with the Christian Reconstructionist movement, most would readily admit their debt to the writings of Rushdoony and others. In short, either Mr. Webber has not really done his homework, or he is picking on something of a straw man.

Insofar as he criticizes Rev. Falwell, Mr. Webber scores a number of quite valid points. He points out that Falwell gives no real Biblical defense of his pro-capitalistic position (p. 28). He points out that the New Christian Right seems most dependent on secular free market economists like Milton Friedman and William E. Simon (p. 28). He points out that Rev. Falwell seems to want a civil religion in a bad sense, when he calls for a moral consensus not grounded in religious confession (p. 39). All these things seem to be true for certain members of the New Christian Right, and they are justly criticized by Webber.

Not all of Mr. Webber's criticisms are valid. For instance, it is repeating a smear to refer to the Conservative Caucus as "identified by critics as the largest 'extremist' right-wing organization" (p. 29). Why tell us what the critics say of it? The fact is that the Conservative Caucus is a normal, responsible conservative organization. It is not an arm of the John Birch Society, nor is it connected with the anti-Israel Liberty Lobby organization. The Conservative Caucus is no more extreme than "National Review," and to paint Christian activist E. E. McAteer in such tones is quite unfair.

Similarly, Mr. Webber faults Falwell for calling for a "mighty man." "This notion of a mighty man raised up to lead the nation back to morality is extremely dangerous. It smacks of Nietzsche's superman—Hitler's model for himself—or Jim Jones, of Sun Myung Moon" (p. 32). Yet all Rev. Falwell had written, according to Webber (p. 26) is " 'when society begins to fall apart spiritually, what we find missing is the mighty man—that man who is willing, with courage and confidence, to stand up for what is right.' " It sounds to me as if all Rev. Falwell is saying is that all Christians should be "mighty men and women," standing for God against evil, and this includes Christian leaders in church and state. Mr. Webber surely agrees with this, so why distort Rev. Falwell's meaning? At the very least, Mr. Webber should have given reasons why he thinks Falwell's words imply tyranny.

Rev. Falwell's problem, of course, is that he wants morality without religion. He wants good government apart from Christian government. He wants America to be moral, without being specifically, theocratically, Christian. This is, of course, impossible. It causes Rev. Falwell, and others like him, to fall into the advocacy of a blandly moralistic "civil religion," a religion which satanically pretends to righteousness apart from submission to Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, as we shall see, Mr. Webber has no answer for Rev. Falwell. He, too, rejects the notion of a Christian Republic ruled by God's law; and since he also rejects moralism, he is left in the curious position of advocating, *de facto* to be sure, that civil government be demonized (or, as he would put it, that we recognize that civil government is demonized and that we can do nothing about it). At any rate, Rev. Falwell is caught in the middle, and while the perspective of this reviewer is at this point the opposite of Mr. Webber's, we can agree that Rev. Falwell simply cannot have it his way.

Mr. Webber's view of the Old Liberal "Christian" Left is as naive as his description of the New Christian Right is jaundiced. Neither Liberal nor Modernist "Christianity" is Christian in any

normative sense of the term. If we approach our conception of Christianity from the Bible, liberal "Christianity" can hardly be regarded as in any sense Christian, for it treats the Bible with contempt. If we approach our conception of Christianity from the standpoint of catholicity and tradition, liberalism again fails the test, for the church catholic has never questioned the inerrancy of Scripture, the virgin birth of Christ, the bodily resurrection, or any other of the basic articles of the faith whose rejection is the hallmark of World Council of Churches "Christianity." This point has been made over and over again,¹ and Mr. Webber's treating liberalism as if it were Christian is quite misleading.

Mr. Webber states that "centrists" share the concern of liberals regarding the poor, regarding racism, regarding sexism, and so forth. He feels that conservative Christians do not care enough about these matters. While this is true, most would agree, there are a couple of caveats that need to be kept in mind. First, Biblical concern for the poor, etc., is a reflex of Biblical concern for the righteousness of God's law. Nowhere in liberalism (or in Mr. Webber's book for that matter) is God's law regarded as the norm for society. The poor have no claim on Christians simply by virtue of being poor; to assert the contrary is to fall into a manicheanism which identifies goodness or election with external position. Liberal concern for the poor, for racism, for women, etc., does not develop out of Scripture but out of Enlightenment humanism and Marxism. The agendas are set long before the Scriptures are consulted, and the Scriptures are generally grossly distorted. (How often, for instance, do we hear anything about righteous Job, the "richest man in the east," whose riches were doubled by God after his trial? Or of wealthy Abraham?) Liberalism has always gone to Scripture to pick and choose phrases which support the humanistic agenda. This has nothing to do with Christianity. It is simply an intellectual form of occultist Bible-mancy. Nor will it do to say that conservative Christians also pick and choose (though this is very true), because orthodox Christians at least try to do justice to what the Bible actually says, treating it as God's Word (infallible and inerrant).

Second, as Mr. Webber rightly asserts throughout his book (e.g., pp. 146-149), Biblical concern for the poor and the oppressed is

1. The classics in this area are J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1923] 1977); and Cornelius Van Til's definitive expose of Karl Barth, *The New Modernism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1946).

manifested through the actions of the church, not through the state. Liberalism, however, has always insisted that statist action, not ecclesiastical action, is the remedy, thus aligning itself with the Beast against the Bride. This is no small matter. Mr. Webber includes Ronald Sider among the "centrists," but Sider is a militant statist.² One cannot have it both ways.³

The present reviewer believes that Mr. Webber was unwise in selecting the term "centrist" to denote prophetic Christianity. The proper position for the Biblical prophet is not in the center between two extremes, but at the extreme of Godliness. An attempt to reconcile liberal pseudo-Christianity with conservative Christianity is bound to fail, not only because neither side can give in, but primarily because it does not attract the true Christians in either camp. After all, conservative Christians, and Mr. Webber himself, also sinfully pick and choose what to accept in Scripture and what to reject, generally according to a quasi-Marcionite rule that the Old Testament is inferior to the New and is not to be hearkened to. The only way to develop a genuinely prophetic Christian voice, such as Mr. Webber calls for throughout his book, is to raise high the flag of Biblical truth and see who rallies to it.

Misreading History

A second group of criticisms one must make of Mr. Webber's book centers on the accuracy with which he sets forth and/or interprets history. Capitalism, for instance. On p. 31, Mr. Webber says, "The history of capitalism and the free enterprise system shows how sinful persons motivated by the desire for material wealth and power have created an imbalance between the rich and the poor, promoted or allowed discrimination, abused nature, and contributed to the dehumanization of the working masses." This is hardly the case. The tendency of the free enterprise system, when left alone, has always been to bring rich and poor closer to the middle. It is only when the "haves" are given access to the power of the state to protect their position that the imbalance between rich and poor is increased; but such an invasion by the power of the state to assure monopolistic

2. Cf. David Chilton, *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators* (Box 8000, Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1981). Chilton's book is a critique of Sider from a Christian standpoint. Sider's statist commitments, however, are no secret.

3. The best treatment of liberal "Christianity" in America is C. Gregg Singer, *The Unholy Alliance* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1975).

privileges to the "haves" is precisely an abandonment of free enterprise. The protectionistic tariff, designed to keep the "third world" from competing with American business, is condemned by every free enterprise economist. What Mr. Webber means by "free enterprise" is in fact neo-mercantilism, and we may agree that it is a great evil, but a critique of mercantilism is not a critique of capitalism.

Similarly, discrimination and abusing nature are not problems of free enterprise as such; they are found in far worse forms in the U.S.S.R. today. The theory of laissez-faire capitalism protects the free market from statist interference in the supply of money and from statist interference in the granting of monopoly. It does not imply that the state may not outlaw certain forms of enterprise (e.g., prostitution), nor does it imply that the state has no interest in pollution.

Mr. Webber's point, of course, is not that free enterprise has given rise to these evils, but that evil men using that system have committed these sins. We may grant that point, and affirm that a Christian social order, though it may be committed to free enterprise *economics*, is not committed to a libertarian *political* philosophy. Mr. Webber, however, asserts that the Bible teaches no "system" of economics (or politics) whatsoever (p. 18). This may or may not be true, depending on what one means by "teaches" and by "system." The Bible certainly does teach the following: "Six days shalt thou labor. . . . Thou shalt not steal. . . . Thou shalt not covet." Mr. Webber to the contrary, some kind of work ethic is implied by the first of these, and all forms of state-expropriation are countermanded by the second (including all forms of socialism), while the third injunction forbids men to use the state as a means to "soak the rich." It is true that men may commit sins within the free enterprise system, but every other system is simply an enactment of sin itself.

Mr. Webber errs in his reading of American history at a number of points. For one, he rightly states on p. 100 that "the Puritans exalted the Old Testament model of church and society in which the state is seen as distinctly Christian." He then goes on, wrongly, to add "that the Puritans did not believe in the separation of church and state and practiced a corporate and heirarchic view of society within which there was no freedom of dissent." This is preposterous. The entire Puritan movement was formed largely in protest against the Church-State mix known as Erastianism, found in the Church of England at the time. Anyone in the least familiar with New England history knows that, while Church and State cooperated, they were rigorously kept separate as institutions. Indeed, there was

more than a little tension from time to time between the two. Moreover, the idea that there was no freedom of dissent in Puritan society is sorely mistaken. To be sure, Quaker women were not permitted to parade nude in the street, and Roger Williams was made to leave when he persisted in disrupting society (and not because he was a Baptist, by the way), but there was a good deal of diversity in New England, and those holding private opinions contrary to the religious establishment were not molested unless they stirred up trouble.

Mr. Webber is opposed to the notion that America was ever a Christian nation. The reason for his opposition to that notion is taken up in the next section of this review, but one effect of this prejudice is that he insists that the founders of America did not intend to set up a Christian nation. There are two problems with this. First, properly speaking the founders of America should not be dated in 1776 but in 1620-1680. The fact that America separated from Britain in 1776 does not mean that some wholly new culture popped into existence at that point. As a civilization, America was already 150 years old, and was definitely Christian in consensus.

Second, although some of the most brilliant men at the time of the War for Independence were Deists, such as Franklin and Jefferson, the large majority of the men involved in the production of the Constitution were active, practising Christians.⁴ A large number were Presbyterian elders, for instance. At this point, Mr. Webber has fallen for the mythology promoted by Public Television. The facts are otherwise. The Christianity of this period may have been more superficial than is desirable, but the fact remains that America in its earlier centuries was Christian in intent, and largely so in content.

Lastly, but sadly not least, Mr. Webber's discussion of the plight of black people in America is highly stereotyped. "It was *not uncommon* to sell a husband to one master and a wife to another. Children were *frequently* severed from their parents and sent to other masters where they were deprived knowledge of or contact with their parents" (p. 72, italics mine). This simply is not the case, despite the romantic portrayal of black suffering in such dreamscapes as *Roots* and other modern fiction. As Fogel and Engerman have argued, families were very seldom broken up under

4. Cf. M. E. Bradford, *A Worthy Company: Brief Lives of the Framers of the U.S. Constitution* (Box 425, Marlborough, NH: Plymouth Rock Foundation, 1982).

slavery, and many blacks enjoyed a relatively comfortable life.⁵ It strains credulity to assert that thousands of earnest evangelical Presbyterians and Episcopalians (the main slaveholding groups) engaged in or tolerated the kinds of brutal treatment of blacks portrayed in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Had conditions been so bad, they would have been protested. The fact is, however, that slavery was frequently not a very bad lot for blacks. This is not to say, of course, that there were no problems. Indeed, in a sinful response to the fear of uprisings, whites did indeed mistreat blacks on occasion; and Southern slavery did depart from Biblical norms at several important points.⁶

It was after the War, when blacks were set "free," that their condition worsened. Racism was not characteristic of the slaveholding class, and after the war the upper-class Southerner felt an obligation to employ and otherwise help blacks. Racism was, however, characteristic of the lower class of whites, "poor white trash," who maintained a sense of Pharisaical self-esteem by putting down the blacks. Under slavery, blacks were protected from this class of people, but after emancipation blacks were left exposed to harassment and mental torture from the racist element in the South. The emancipation of the blacks worsened their lot terribly, for it threw a large number of people onto a labor market which was not ready to employ them, especially after the devastation of the Sectional War, and it removed from blacks the protection of the aristocratic class. In other words, racial hatred in the South, and elsewhere, developed largely after slavery as an institution was abolished.

Mr. Webber is right, of course, to point to racism as a problem in the United States, and to encourage the church to do more to help the blacks. The idea, however, that the church over the years has done little or nothing is mistaken. Assistance from white churches to black churches was not uncommon in the era of paternalism, before the civil rights movement. Such quiet charity and help, however, did not have the kind of visibility demanded by the Pharisee, who trumpets his entrance into the marketplace, and so it is not reckoned with by many who presume to speak to the issue.

5. Robert W. Fogel and Stanley Engerman, *Time on the Cross* (1974: Little, Brown, and Co.). For a picture of life in the Old South, see Robert M. Myers, ed., *Children of Pride: A True Story of Georgia and the Civil War* (Yale University Press, and Popular Library paperback).

6. On Biblical slavery, see James B. Jordan, *Slavery and Liberation in the Bible* (forthcoming).

Civil Religion

Orthodox catholic Christianity has never questioned whether or not the state should be Christian. 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. These are different ways in which the rule of Christ is made manifest in the various spheres of life.

For reasons which we shall investigate in the next section of this review, Mr. Webber rejects the notion of a Christianized state. Biblical Christianity is, in his view, limited to the institutional church and to the souls of believers. Thus, when Mr. Webber asserts that "the relationship between religion and the American government from the very beginning has been one of civil religion, not biblical Christianity" (p. 38), he is engaged in a tautology, for in his view biblical Christianity can have no relation to the state by definition. A similar example of tautologous reasoning is on p. 19, "In a fallen world there can be no such thing as a 'Christian nation.' America is not now, nor has it ever been a Christian nation." From the standpoint of orthodox Christianity, it is entirely possible that America may once have been a relatively Christian nation; but from Mr. Webber's gnostic-anabaptistic perspective, there is no such possibility.

Thus, for Mr. Webber, "civil religion" is always bad. At the same time, Mr. Webber issues some good criticisms of the brand of civil religion advocated by the Moral Majority. "The idea that all people of high principle should unite to recover America's moral heritage is a moralism . . ." (p. 105). Precisely; and a neutral moralism is not Christianity. "True moral reform comes as a result of faith in Jesus Christ, not from the desire to create 'national solidarity and stability'. . . . The most powerful weapon the evangelical church has against the breakdown of morals in our culture is not the restoration of a civil religion. It is rather the preaching of Jesus Christ as Lord, the invitation for people to join with Christ's church, and a renewed understanding of the church as the universal society of God's people called to live in obedience to Jesus Christ's teachings" (p. 106). As far as they go, these statements are a salutary warning against a merely moralistic civil religion.

Mr. Webber aligns the term "civil religion" only with conservatives. What he fails to point out is the rather obvious fact that the civil religion in the United States today, and for many years previously, is secular humanism, supported by its running dogs in the old liberal clergy. Some kind of civil religion is inescapable; the only question is what the civil religion will be.

Gnostic Assumptions

There are many descriptions of gnosticism, but the best is that which recognizes that gnosticism is the great counterfeit of Christianity, which has hounded it since the beginning. Gnosticism sees the issues of history in terms of knowledge and power, instead of in terms of faith and obedience. Gnosticism approaches history in terms of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, rather than in terms of the Tree of Life (which is approached on the basis of faith).

Gnosticism sees good and evil dualistically. For the gnostic, there is a realm of evil, with an evil god (Satan) ruling over it. This evil realm invaded God's domain, seduced humanity, and presently rules the world. God has sent Christ to defeat Satan and to rescue men from his domain. The essence of the work on the cross was not the satisfaction of Divine justice, but a defeat of evil powers. The world is still controlled by these evil powers, and "Christians" are to forsake this world, and contemplate the next world. Salvation is rapture out of this world. Individualistic gnosticism focuses only on the souls of believers and looks only to salvation in the next world. Communal gnosticism goes one step farther, and calls on Christians to forsake society for a separate community within this world, while awaiting some form of rapture into the next world.

This may sound like popular evangelical Christianity. It should, for most of popular evangelical Christianity is highly infected with gnosticism. Orthodox Christianity does not conceive of evil in the same way as gnosticism. According to the Bible, Satan is a member of God's court (Job 1,2). While Satan is evil, and will be punished for his rebellion, his rule over some men is entirely at God's discretion. Indeed, when men sin, God sends Satan and his demons to punish men; and in this sense, the demons are servants of God (see I Kings 22:19-23). Throughout the Bible, evil men are called servants of God when they act (unwittingly) to punish the sins of men, though to be sure they themselves will also in time be punished. The whole book of Habakkuk is concerned with this, for instance.

In orthodox Christianity, salvation is not primarily deliverance from Satan's realm, for Satan has no real realm; rather, salvation is

deliverance from the wrath of God. Satan's oppression of men is but an expression of the wrath of God, and it is not Satan who must be dealt with, but the wrath of God. On the cross, Jesus Christ satisfied God's wrath, and since God is no longer angry, God no longer allows Satan to punish His children. Thus, orthodoxy does not see salvation primarily in terms of the defeat of evil powers, but in terms of the satisfaction of justice. There was never any need for God to defeat Satan, for Satan has never had any independent power. In the Bible, angels (including Satan) are mediators of the word-revelation of God; thus, they are advisors to humanity. Satan acted as an anti-mediator, advising Adam with an anti-word. Adam chose Satan's anti-word over the Word of God. Essentially, however, it was humanity which was created to rule the world; angels were created as advisors. If Satan can be said to rule the Old Creation, it is only because men have allowed him to. The Old Creation has begun to pass away with the enthronement of the Son of Man as king. If we resist the devil, he will flee from us (James 4:7), for in Christ, renewed humanity is the ruler of the world.

Sadly, Mr. Webber falls into the gnostic trap repeatedly throughout his book. Never once is salvation couched in the *legal categories* of propitiation of Divine wrath; always salvation is phrased in the *power categories* of the defeat of evil:

Jesus Christ . . . is the God-Man who by his death and resurrection destroyed the power of evil and the dominion of the devil in this world (a work to be completed at the second coming of Christ) (p. 20).

The second conviction of the centrists is that humanity is fallen. The doctrine of the fall not only accounts for the origins of evil in the world, but also explains the origins of the satanic "powers" which seek to destroy persons and the creation. These satanic powers have unleashed a demonic and destructive force within creation which leads people and nations to a narcissistic self-interest, and generally, except for God's common grace, thwarts the purposes God meant for his image-bearers to fulfill on earth. Furthermore, centrists believe that the unfolding of culture throughout history reveals a commitment to the powers of evil (p. 94).

In this human flesh God, the creator, lived in his own creation, taking into himself the sin and alienation of the creation. In this "body of death" Jesus was unjustly crucified and put to death. Although this seemed to be a victory for evil, it was in fact the victory of God. For God in Christ destroyed the power of death over his creation in the death of Christ. On the cross Christ, as Paul tells us, "disarmed the principalities and powers making a public

example of them" (Col. 2:15) (pp. 95-96).

Paul warns against superhuman demonic powers which control the minds, hearts, and actions of a fallen human society and determine the outcome of human events (pp. 129-130).

It is not that Mr. Webber is always formally wrong in these statements, but rather that his "defeat of evil powers" language is wrenched out of its Biblical context, which sees the essential matter as the satisfaction of Divine wrath. Moreover, Mr. Webber's statement in the first quotation that Christ's work is to be completed at the second coming is theologically very dangerous. Christ's work was finished at the cross; it is only the outworking of that finished labor which remains. Also, the statement in the third quotation that God took into Himself the sin and alienation of the creation is, on the face of it, heretical (though doubtless this was not Mr. Webber's actual intention). Sin is not a *substance*, but a *relationship* of insubordination, of disobedience; and God certainly did not take sin into Himself. Rather, Christ took upon Himself the legal *punishment* for sin, not sin itself. At this point, Mr. Webber is using gnostic categories, not Biblical ones.

The gnostic misreading of Scripture has found expression historically in anabaptistic groups. Some were militants who sought to destroy the "power of evil" by use of force, and establish a kingdom of God on earth. Others, by far the majority, were pacifists, who resigned the world to the devil and sought refuge in dropout societies or in contemplation of the world to come. Orthodoxy, by contrast, has always affirmed that the kingdom of God is called to grow in the world, not by means of force but by means of obedience, not by warring against Satan but by cultivating the blessing of God. Orthodoxy has expected Christianity to mature and develop, creating Christian individuals, Christian families, Christian churches, Christian businesses, and, yes, Christian civil governments. A civil government is Christian when it wields the sword of iron in accordance with the laws of the Bible, instead of in accordance with the opinions of men.

Since gnostics have resigned the "world" to Satan, they oppose any attempt to Christianize the civil order. Gnosticism (anabaptism) pits inward conversion against external order, as if the two were somehow incompatible. Mr. Webber gives expression to this error:

The church needs to make its voice more prominent in societal matters, speaking the prophetic word, confronting the govern-

ment and other aspects of the social order with the claims of Christ and his church. But it must be remembered that this confrontation is a witness, not an attempt to take over the social order and make it obey the moral mandates of the Christian faith. That would be moralism. The claim of the church goes deeper. It calls people to regeneration and invites them to enter the church, where true values are lived out. Through the witness of the church the immorality of society may be temporarily restrained. But to hope to convert the powers and to create a Christian nation or society is to reject Christian eschatology. Only God can do that and only after the consummation when the powers of evil have been completely destroyed (p. 139).

There are several things badly wrong with these assertions. First, suppose the civil magistrate does, wonder of wonders, hearken to the prophetic voice of the church? Mr. Webber, tells us that the social order must *not* "obey the moral mandates of the Christian faith." What is the poor magistrate to do? If he hears the prophetic Word, he is forbidden to obey it. This is ridiculous. Mr. Webber goes on to say, second, "That would be moralism." No, moralism is the belief that men can earn their way to heaven autonomously by good works. A Christian state, restraining evil by the sword, is not trying to get anyone to heaven; all it is doing is acting as a terror to evildoers. This has nothing to do with moralism. Third, Mr. Webber says that any attempt to convert the world to Christian order is a rejection of Christian eschatology. This simply is not the case. Historic orthodox Christianity has always expected the church to make significant progress toward the Christianization of the world prior to the return of Christ.⁷ Mr. Webber rightly says that the "claim of the church goes deeper. It calls people to regeneration . . .," but, that is just the difference between the form Christianity takes in the church and the form it takes in the state. By pitting the two against each other, Mr. Webber falls into a gnostic construction.

Since *gnosticism* sees salvation in terms of *power*, it focuses on the experience of believers. The focus of orthodoxy, *by way of contrast*, is *on the objective government of God*. The defining mark of a Christian is not, as in gnosticism, some "conversion experience," but rather an evident submission to the government of God, signed and sealed in baptism and manifest in a holy walk. There is, to be sure, an

7. For a comprehensive demonstration of this fact, see Roderick Campbell, *Israel and the New Covenant* (Tyler, TX: Geneva Divinity School Press, 1982). This book can be ordered for \$12.95, postpaid, from GDS Press, 708 Hamvasy, Tyler, TX 75701.

experiential aspect to Christianity, found in the individual and in the worship of the church, but this is not the defining mark of Christianity. When we look at things from the standpoint of government and submission either to God's law or to man's anti-law, then we can understand how a civil government can be Christian. A Christian individual obeys God's law; a truly Christian church obeys God's law; and a Christian state obeys and enforces God's law. Gnosticism, though, will have nothing to do with this "legalistic" viewpoint, but insists on using only the language of experience. Mr. Webber points out that the Christians of early America "believed that the expansion of a republican form of government would accompany the spread of the gospel" (p. 104). This is true, and it is also the standpoint of Biblical Christianity. Republicanism is the rule of law; a Christian republic is founded on Biblical law. Republicanism in the Christian sense was not new in 1776; kings were called to account before the law of God repeatedly throughout the Middle Ages, Magna Carta being but one example. Wherever God's government is established in the earth, Christian republicanism is sure to follow.

Sadly, anabaptistic and gnostic ideas run all the way through Mr. Webber's book. He rightly criticizes the Moral Majority for wanting the fruits of Christian civilization without the roots thereof, but he has nothing to offer in its place except an empty "prophetic center," which more than anything else seems to call men to abandon responsibility in the world. Mr. Webber does not *want* this, of course, but what else is he left with? He forbids us to Christianize society. Mr. Webber rightly says that the church as an institution "should seek no earthly political power" (p. 13), and he goes on to say that the church as the people of God "is in constant confrontation and engagement with the fallen powers which control all levels of the social order" (p. 14). This confrontation cannot amount to anything, however, since the evil powers are secure in their control of this world.

Mr. Webber says, "A proper view of the social order refuses to sanction any human system as biblical, recognizing that all structures, except the church, are ruled by the 'powers' of evil" (p. 31f.). He speaks of the "antithesis between the church as the redeemed society and government [*i.e.*, the state—JBJ] as part of the fallen order" (p. 52). He regards as "dangerous" any "mixture of religion and politics" (p. 124); note, he does not say "mixture of *church* and politics," but "mixture of *religion* and politics." These statements, and others like them in the book, reflect a gnostic-anabaptistic view-

point rather than a Christian one. True, no "human system" should be recognized as Biblical, but the Bible has its own system, because God is One and His thinking is unified. Moreover, it is not true that "all structures, except the church, are ruled by the 'powers' of evil." Are all *families* so ruled? Are all churches pure and safe from these "powers"? Hardly. And while it is true that the church is the "redeemed society," why should we hold that the state is always "part of the fallen order"?

The anabaptist is confronted with a problem right in the Bible itself, for there can be no question but that the civil government God set up in Israel was righteous. Through the centuries, gnostics have presented a variety of ways to explain away the political "system" found in the Old Testament. One of the earliest was that of Marcion, who simply maintained that the god of the Old Testament was evil, so that the civil order of the Old Testament was evil. Mr. Webber simply sidesteps the issue by saying that centrists regard "the Old Testament as subject to progressive revelation, which is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the fulness of God's revelation" (p. 18). This is all right as far as it goes, but Mr. Webber does nothing with the fact that the New Testament continually refers back to the Old as authoritative, and Jesus Himself called for the death penalty for children who dishonor their parents (Mark 7:10, 13—note that Jesus says those who set aside the death penalty are guilty of "invalidating the word of God by your tradition"). Any view of "progressive revelation" which winds up pitting the New Testament against the Old is Marcionite and gnostic. In orthodox Christianity, progressive revelation means that the New Testament completes the Old, not that it replaces it.

In summary, while there are some good observations to be found in Mr. Webber's book, in general there is a "hidden agenda," perhaps hidden even from the author, which makes this book essentially a gnostic rather than a Christian critique of the Moral Majority.

Appendix

Mr. Webber includes as appendices to his book four recent "centrist" confessional statements. These are *The Chicago Declaration* (1973), *The Lausanne Covenant* (1974), *The Chicago Call* (1977), and *An Evangelical Commitment to Simple Lifestyle* (1980). This reviewer would like to make a few comments on these documents.

The most striking feature of these documents is that, despite a

good deal of rhetoric about justice, there is not one word about submission to the law of God. "Justice" in these documents is left a vague slogan, into which virtually any kind of content could be poured. *The Chicago Declaration*, for instance, states "we endorse no political ideology or party"; but this is not actually the case, for the language of the document is in terms of human "rights" and not in terms of Biblical law. Biblical religion does not recognize human "rights," for sinful man has lost those *privileges* granted him by God in creation.⁸ This is not to say that men may freely oppress one another, but to say that the restraint on sin is found in God's law, not in some theory of abstract rights. *The Chicago Declaration*, despite the doubtless good intentions of many of its writers, is an expression of Enlightenment philosophy, not of Christianity.

Similarly, *The Lausanne Covenant* calls for the civil governments of the world "to guarantee freedom of thought and conscience, and freedom to practice and propagate religion in accordance with the will of God and as set forth in The Universal Declaration of Human Rights" (p. 13). Instead of calling the governments of the world to repentance and submission to the law of Christ, *The Lausanne Covenant* calls them to be faithful to the ideals of the French Revolution. Section 5, "Christian Social Responsibility," is totally empty of Biblical directives, speaking only in generalities. It is easy to see why the world yawned when *The Lausanne Covenant* was issued.

The Chicago Call is essentially a call to respect the historic roots of the Christian church, a call with which this writer has the utmost sympathy. Here again, however, the silence regarding obedience is deafening. The section on "A Call to Spirituality," while rejecting "superhuman religiosity," says not one word about practical obedience to the revealed law of God. Instead, we are given only vague banalities. It is not as if what is said is wrong, or unhelpful, but that what is so noticeably absent is so revealing. The authors of these documents evidently do not think in the categories of law, propitiation, submission, and obedience to Scripture. Here again we see an unconscious gnosticism working to vitiate the perspective of orthodox catholic Christianity.

The fourth "centrist" document, *An Evangelical Commitment to Simple Lifestyle*, is purely anabaptistic. The rejection of covenantal complexity is a retreat into the womb. Medieval and Protestant

8. On the Satanic character of modern human rights rhetoric, see T. Robert Ingram, *What's Wrong With Human Rights* (Box 35096, Houston, TX: St. Thomas Press, 1978). This study is a classic.

societies were quite complex, partly because of the desire to diffuse power among the people and in many different institutions, partly in the interest of economic specialization and efficiency, but mostly because a society is like an organism, and the more it grows, the more rich and full it becomes. Dropout sects have come along from time to time, and the authors of the *Evangelical Commitment* are but one more example of gnostic retreatism. Moreover, the document is not in the least evangelical, for it equates the Bible with other supposed sources of revelation, and denies that the Bible is the very Word of God written: "We have tried to listen to the voice of God, through the pages of the Bible, through the cries of the hungry poor, and through each other. And we believe God has spoken to us." This is heretical enthusiasm,⁹ pure and simple.

This reviewer would like to close this review by appending a confessional statement "Of the Christian Mission," provisionally adopted by the Association of Reformation Churches at its meeting in 1981.¹⁰ This is offered as an alternative to the "centrist" affirmations.

9. "Enthusiasm" is the belief that God speaks through "inspired" (enthused) sources outside the Bible, *in the same way* as He speaks in the Bible. According to the ECSL statement, God speaks "through" the Bible, and in the same way "through" the poor and "through each other." Enthusiasm in an individualistic sense is the hallmark of anabaptistic religion, and in a corporate sense ("tradition") is the hallmark of Romanism.

10. The constitution of the Association of Reformation Churches requires it to adopt any confessional statement twice before it becomes church law.

OF THE CHRISTIAN MISSION

(*Of the Christian Mission* is a confessional statement adopted at the 1981 meeting of the Association of Reformation Churches. It is offered here as an alternative to the four "centrist" confessional documents mentioned in James B. Jordan's review essay, and contained in Robert Webber's *The Moral Majority: Right or Wrong?* Before *Of the Christian Mission* can become part of the A.R.C. confession, it must be adopted a second time at the 1982 meeting.)

Of the Christian Mission

1. Just as the rebellion of man against God disrupted the whole fabric of earthly life, bringing personal death-disintegration, social conflict, and cosmic curse,¹ so the mission of God's salvation wrought by Christ entails the restoration of the whole fabric of earthly life.² To this end, Christ, having taken upon himself the form of a servant to accomplish redemption and vengeance⁴ has been enthroned by God the Father as Lord over heaven and earth.⁴ He alone is the Author and Sustainer of the Christian mission.⁵
2. In the time prior to the incarnation of Christ, God chose to accomplish His mission of redemption through the covenant of grace made with Abraham and his descendants.⁶ This covenant affects all men in that through it all nations and families of the earth were, and are, either blessed or cursed;⁷ thus, the nation of Israel was not only the mediator of revelation and the Holy Seed, but was also to be a light to the nations,⁸ that the salvation of God might encompass the

1. Gen. 2:17; 3:16-20.

2. Rom. 8:19-23; Acts 3:21; Matt. 17:11.

3. Isa. 63:4 (vv. 1-4); Matt. 3:11-12; Lk. 12:49-53.

4. Jn. 17:5; Acts 2:33-36; Phil. 2:9-11.

5. Jn. 20:21; Matt. 28:18-20; Jn. 15:16.

6. Gen. 12:1-3; Gen. 17:1-8.

7. Gen. 12:3.

8. Ex. 19:5, 6; Ps. 67; Isa. 49:6.

the earth.⁹ This mission, Israel, in the providence of God, failed to perform.¹⁰

3. Upon the resurrection and enthronement of Christ, the Holy Spirit was sent forth to usher in the "fulness of time" which had been anticipated by the faithful remnant.¹¹ The Spirit has been given to reify the Kingdom of God in all nations¹² according to God's sovereign and gracious disposition.¹³ Kingdom reification entails both the restoration and the consummation of the Garden of Eden in the universal city-garden, New Jerusalem.¹⁴ To accomplish these two ends, God has given three institutions: the Church, the State, and the Family.

4. As a ministry of worship, the mission of the church is to organize the communal praise of the saints.¹⁵ As a ministry of redemptive grace, the church has been given the mission of calling all men back into full fellowship with the Creator.¹⁶ The church proclaims the Word of God. To those outside the Kingdom, she calls for repentance and faith in Christ Jesus.¹⁷ To those within, she calls for obedience and growth in grace in every sphere of life.¹⁸ While the church must not usurp the duties of state and family, she must witness prophetically to those laboring in these institutions, calling on them in the Name of God to conform their labors to the requirements of Scripture.¹⁹

Insofar as Scripture legislates the nature of worship and the manner of the dispensing of redemptive grace, the church is not free to adopt other ways or methods.²⁰ Where Scripture is silent or allows latitude, however, the church is free to adapt herself to the culture in which she is located.²¹ Since God is the Author of cultural diversity, His Kingdom will flower in different ways in different settings.²²

9. Isa. 49:6.

10. Matt. 8:10-12; Rom. 11:5-10.

11. Acts 2:16-21; Lk. 2:29-32.

12. Matt. 12:28; Jn. 16:7-11; Eph. 1:13-14.

13. Acts 13:47, 48; II Cor. 6:1,2.

14. Ezk. 47:1-12; Rev. 21 & 22.

15. Acts 1:14; 2:42; Dt. 12:32; Acts 17:25.

16. II Cor. 5:18-20.

17. Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30, 31; II Tim. 2:25, 26.

18. I Thess. 4:1; Col. 2:6; Col. 1:10; Eph. 1:4.

19. Ezk. 34; Lk. 13:32; Matt. 14:4.

20. Lev. 10:1, 2.

21. See Westminster Confession of Faith (hereafter WCF), however, 1:6.

22. Gen. 11:1-9, cf. Rev. 5:9.

Since Christ has promised to His Kingdom a glorious future, when all nations will flow to the house of the Lord,²³ the growth of the church is usually to be expected.²⁴ This growth, however, is to be accomplished not through any means which may come to hand, but only through means which are consonant with Holy Scripture.²⁵

5. As a ministry of order, the mission of the state is to provide a peaceful environment in which the evangelical and cultural mandates may be carried out.²⁶ Because of the sin of man, order and peace require the use of force, and thus to the state has been given the sword of justice.²⁷ As the church implements Christ's work of redemption, so the state implements His work of vengeance.²⁸ The terror of the sword has been given to man as the image²⁹ and son³⁰ of God, and thus the rule of justice must proceed in terms of the law of God revealed in the whole Scripture.³¹ To the extent that the revealed law of God is not implemented, the state does not fulfill its mission and becomes a tyranny.³² Only through the full application of Divine law can the widow, the orphan, the alien, and the poor be delivered from oppression; the family and the church be freed to perform their missions; and justice and right be established in all the world.³³

6. As a ministry of nurture, the mission of the family is to be the first church and state to the child,³⁴ rearing him in terms of the grace and law of God the Father.³⁵ Where the family is broken, the church must be father to the orphan and husband to the widow.³⁶ Since the child has been committed by God to the parents for nurture, the education of the child is the mission not of the church, nor of the state, but of the family.³⁷ Where this ministry is delegated to specialists, it must be done so freely, not of coercion.

23. Isa. 2:2-4.

24. See, however, Acts 16:6, 7.

25. II Chron. 16:1-9.

26. I Tim. 2:2.

27. Rom. 13:4.

28. Rom. 13:1-4.

29. Gen. 9:6.

30. Ps. 8:2.

31. Matt. 5:17-19. See also, WCF 19:4.

32. Prov. 16:12.

33. WCF 19:4; Ps. 119:118-120, 134; Josh. 1:8; Ps. 1:1-3.

34. Gen. 18:19; Ps. 78:4; Prov. 22:6; Eph. 6:4.

35. Dt. 6:4-9; 4:9; Eph. 6:4.

36. I Tim. 5:3-26; Ja. 1:27.

37. Prov. 1:8; Dt. 6:7.

As a ministry of dominion, the family has been given the cultural mandate as its mission.³⁸ For the performance of this task, God has given the privilege of private ownership of property to the family.³⁹ As a result of the sin of man, the work of the cultural mandate not only consists of the acquisition of scientific knowledge and the aesthetic beautification of the environment, but also entails the acquisition of the basic necessities of life.⁴⁰

7. While the evangelical mandate in the full sense has been committed to ecclesiastical specialists,⁴¹ every Christian is called upon to bear witness to Christ both in his daily walk before the eyes of the world⁴² and in his speech.⁴³ Moreover, this witness must not only be to the gracious redemption wrought by Christ Jesus, but must also involve active intolerance of evil, whether in church, state, marketplace, or neighbouring families.⁴⁴

Recognizing that there are situations in which a direct verbal rebuke of evil is not in accord with Christian wisdom,⁴⁵ the Bible sets forth the lives of Joseph and Daniel as examples of godly men who, by being servants par excellence,⁴⁶ were entrusted with positions of power and thus enabled to do much good.⁴⁷

8. Since the only completely reliable foundation of justice and order is the law of God revealed in the Old and New Testaments, we reject the grievous errors of those who negate the standards of general equity and justice found in the Old Testament.⁴⁸

9. Since the privilege of private ownership or stewardship of property is essential to the fulfillment of the cultural mandate,⁴⁹ we reject the grievous errors of those who deny the privilege of private ownership of property to the family.⁵⁰

10. Since every man is to fulfill the cultural mandate, and since the acquisition of familial capital is integral to that end, we denounce and

38. Gen. 1:28.

39. Lev. 25:13; Prov. 13:22.

40. Gen. 3:19.

41. Acts 13:2; Tit. 1:5; Acts 20:27.

42. Phil. 3:15.

43. I Pet. 3:15; Matt. 5:16.

44. Gal. 2:11; Matt. 5:40, 41.

45. Prov. 15:1; Matt. 5:41; Prov. 20:2; 25:15.

46. Prov. 25:15.

47. Matt. 25:21, 23; Prov. 16:7.

48. WCF 19:4.

49. Lev. 25:13; Prov. 13:22.

50. Ex. 20:15.

warn of damnation all those who use the power of the state to deny to the poor or to anyone else the possibility of capital advancement.⁵¹

51. I Ki. 21:1-24.

MEDIA THEO-POP

A Review by Michael R. Gilstrap

By What Authority: The Rise of Personality Cults in American Christianity. Richard Quebedeaux. Harper & Row, 1982. 204 pp., indexed, cloth-bound. \$11.95.

THIS particular book was sent to me by accident. I did not order it, nor did I particularly want to read it. It was placed on my shelf for several weeks and forgotten. Then one day, for some reason, I picked it up and casually began to scan through it. The subtitle interested me, and the table of contents looked promising, but I knew that I did not have time to waste in finding the needle that is always promised in the haystack of the typical, modern, evangelical book. Evangelicalism is always long on promises, but short on delivery. Not this time. Richard Quebedeaux has written a very important, first-rate and penetrating analysis of the roots and fruits of the religion of mass culture. Many of the leaders of popular religion in America have become "stars" with celebrity status by virtue of their visibility in the mass media (TV, radio, films, newspapers, magazines, etc.). Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, Oral Roberts, Robert H. Schuller, and their kin in the leadership of the "electronic church" are part of an industry that brings in over \$1 billion annually in donations alone, and that doesn't include their huge advertising and sponsorship revenues. Each of these men has become the center of a "personality cult," and has become just as popular as "secular" TV personalities. Because of the position that they hold in American Christianity, they exercise an influence and wield an authority that must be reckoned with. Quebedeaux's *By What Authority* examines both the nature and the impact of popular religion, and the influence of its celebrity leaders.

The book is divided into three sections. The first discusses popular religion in general with a particular emphasis on the social impact of the mass media and technological advance on modern American religion. The rise of the religious personality cult occupies the second major section. The history of celebrity leaders from 1865 to the present establishes a tradition of personality-centered religion which began during the nineteenth century with the rise of the

"pulpiteers" and the revival meeting. Finally, Quebedeaux attempts to define the nature of modern religious authority as exercised in popular religion through the mass media, its problems, and some suggested cures for its weaknesses.

In the 1976 global survey of religious attitudes by the Gallup organization, the United States was shown to stand at the top of industrial societies in the importance religion plays in the lives of its citizens. "The high incidence of Americans," writes Quebedeaux, "who profess a belief in God and in life after death, who attend church or synagogue regularly, and who affirm confidence in organized religion can surely be taken as one kind of evidence that religion is important—and popular—in American life" (p.2). He goes on to say that popular religion as a concept can no longer be identified with the institutional church, its faith, teaching, or work. Nor can it be completely explained in terms of the high percentage of believers in God and in immortality. Popular religion is that dominant brand of religion that is carried and shaped by the mass media. It is always an integral part of mass or popular culture as a whole. Indeed, the institutional church and the beliefs of its members are themselves affected by popular religion as transmitted to them by the mass media, because popular religion merely confirms and strengthens the values the viewing, listening, and reading public already hold dear.

Now, in order to understand popular religion, Quebedeaux believes that one must first come to grips with the modern phenomenon of mass, media-oriented culture. In the 20th century, the rise of modern technology has given birth to an entirely new market: the leisure time of the masses. Modern life falls into two very distinct categories: work (the means) and play (the end). The primary function of mass culture is to relieve the boredom inherent in affluence and surplus leisure time. Because of this, popular culture is manufactured by a group (Hollywood or Madison Avenue) for sale to an anonymous mass market. It is their job to supply this new mass market with products and entertainment suited to its desires. The products offered must be bland enough to satisfy the "average taste," easily accessible, and inexpensive. Despite what some fundamentalists may believe, the creators of popular culture, and of popular religion for that matter, are not some conspiratorial group of atheistic socialists cramming "their" morality down the throats of unsuspecting consumers. Their business is retailing products and entertainment with sales in mind. In other words, they give the people what they want.

As Quebedeaux remarks, popular culture developed somewhat differently from other cultures in the past. "If the rise of traditional culture—of civilization itself—was a gradual, progressive, orderly process, then popular culture is its opposite" (p. 4). Effortless and immediate results are promised by mass culture, and that is precisely what makes it so tantalizing to the modern American. In fact, writes Quebedeaux, "Success, the highest god of the American pantheon, can—just like the rest of the 'good things in life'—be achieved merely by passive absorption" (p. 4).

Popular culture is supplied by newspapers, magazines, records and tapes, radio, and primarily by television. Its prominent themes range widely over love and crime, the activities of cowboys, detectives, oil barons, housewives, science, and religion. It must be distinguished from the "high culture" of special groups with a heritage of taste and learning, and from the "folk culture" that has emerged at various times during our nation's history more or less spontaneously. It is primarily because of the absence of strong, native-grown high and folk traditions in preindustrial America, along with the mass influx and absorption of immigrants with heterogeneous traditions into American life, that popular culture has become so strong in America. Quebedeaux's comments are particularly telling at this point,

If high culture elites—with more than average prestige, power, and income—once dominated the pre-industrial world in politics, religion, and society in general, and determined what was to be produced, culturally and otherwise, they do so no longer. With the development of industry, it is the great mass of consumers who now determine what is to be produced. Elite status, leadership in any form, is achieved and maintained today by catering to the masses, by giving them what they want. Thus industrialists become multimillionaires by selling to farmers, for instance, and their business is helped by giving their customers, via television, the entertainment they desire. As society becomes fully industrialized, popular culture becomes the norm and colors almost all aspects of private and social life. (p. 5)

Quebedeaux goes on to say that because the media that carries popular religion to the consumers are a mere part of the vast flow of mass culture, then popular religion itself must be located within that flow. Religion produced by the mass media for consumption is "popular" because "it is fashioned for everyday people with the aim of helping them meet everyday problems. It uses plain language that is understandable and meaningful to the masses" (p. 5). Popular

religion, in other words, does not require any kind of effort on the part of its adherents. It is not only easily absorbed, but also easy to live.

The second major section of the book traces a history of celebrity leaders of American Christianity from 1865 to the present. Because this period of time generally corresponds to the Industrial Revolution, Quebedeaux rightly notes, "In times of rapid social change, when traditional values and institutions and the authority of the 'established' leaders of those institutions are increasingly called into question, a society seeks new, 'extraordinary' leaders from outside the staid establishment" (p. 45). The media's function in this process is to identify these new "extraordinary" leaders, and to give them status by popularizing them through the visibility gained by exposure in the mass media.

As was noted earlier, personality-centered religion is nothing new in Protestantism. Because of the traditional emphasis on preaching the Word, and combined with the absence of an "established" church, the right conditions were present as a whole for a major focus on the sermon and the personality of the preacher. Quebedeaux examines every major "light" in American Protestantism from Charles G. Finney to Jerry Falwell. Although the advertising procedures, stylized and "folksy" services, and methods to insure a record number of conversions have progressively become more and more sophisticated, the basic characteristics and functions of these celebrity leaders remains the same. In each case there is a focus upon one personality who will "save the day." All of these media prophets emphasize results, regardless of the techniques used to obtain those results. In the words of Dwight L. Moody, "It doesn't matter how you get a man to God, provided that you get him there." The end justified the means. Because the thrust of each movement is on the personalities themselves, very little knowledge, if any, is conveyed to the listeners. The focus, for instance, is on how *Charles Colson*, the infamous Watergate personality, was "born again," or how *Graham Kerr* galloped his way to Christ. Especially if we look closely at the modern "electronic churchmen," we find that God is presented as the divine "Santa Claus." The evangelists preach and teach the gospel of a good God who is able to save everyone and everything from poverty, ill-health, and most of all from boredom. Jesus is seen as the Answer for all the personal and individual needs of a new day and a new culture.

New "christian" values have also been introduced as part of the religion of mass culture. According to Quebedeaux, there are three

principal new values: accommodation, success, and immediate results. Because popular religion, by definition, must be broad enough to appeal to the masses, *accommodation* is the most important value behind the message of popular religion. "Pluralism and the principle of voluntary association," writes Quebedeaux, "both traditional characteristics of American society, have together been a contributing factor in the ascendancy of accommodation as the prime value behind the content of popular religion . . ." (p. 83). He goes on to say that "the leaders of the religion of mass culture know that success and influence among the public is determined by large numbers of fans and by big budgets more than by theological agreement" (p. 83).

In addition to pluralism, voluntary association has contributed to the primacy of accommodation as a value in popular religion. The leaders rarely demand exclusive loyalty from their adherents. "With more money and leisure time available," notes Quebedeaux, "and in the context of the church as a voluntary association, the practitioners of popular religion are not only free to pick and choose one offering out of the many, they are also free to select—and embrace—more than one at the same time" (p. 84). The reason for this is that, as we mentioned earlier, there is very little content in each of the different evangelists' messages. So, in reality, an individual who follows closely two or more different evangelists is not called upon to embrace differing theological systems, but simply to follow the individual personalities. For example, an active Presbyterian laywoman may also be a regular viewer of (and contributor to) Robert H. Schuller's *Hour of Power*. Likewise a wealthy Baptist businessman may be not only a deacon in his local church, but also a faithful viewer of the *700 Club*, a regular participant in a Catholic charismatic prayer group, as well as a graduate of the Human Potential Movement's *EST* (Erhard Seminar Training).

According to Quebedeaux, the major "events" in the process of accommodation began in the early 1940's. Young evangelical theologians, with their new doctorates from prestigious secular universities, began challenging the "other-worldly" stance of modern revivalism and its less highly educated fundamentalist theologians. This critique was epitomized when, in 1947, Carl F. H. Henry published his ground-breaking work, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*. In this book Henry condemned the lack of social conscience in the entire movement. The second step occurred in the 1950's when Billy Graham launched his ecumenical evangelism. Graham reacted against the fundamentalist notion that

doctrinal agreement was the *sine qua non* for interdenominational cooperation during revival campaigns. Liberal church leaders like Episcopal Bishop James Pike and United Methodist Bishop Gerald Kennedy were invited to take prominent roles in his crusades, thus scandalizing the fundamentalists.

The Jesus People movement of young, college educated, born-again believers was the third step in the process of accommodation. Because these young people had picked up new values in the secular counterculture, they sought to Christianize some of these values in their movement. Hence the expression was born, "getting high on Jesus." When these "Jesus People" grew up, shaved, and cut their hair, they gradually took their place among the leaders of the liberal establishment in America. This new class of leftward leaning young evangelical and charismatic writers, thinkers, and activists espoused all the causes traditional revivalism had called "un-American," "pro-communist," and "humanistic." This very important fourth step in the evangelical accommodation process has now been overshadowed by the much larger and more visible constituency of New Right evangelicals and fundamentalists (e.g., the Moral Majority), but as Quebedeaux observes, "Their importance today is still more than meets the eye" (p. 87).

The final step in the accommodation process was the Charismatic Renewal that occurred among Pentecostals, Roman Catholics, and Protestants in the late 60's and early 70's. An instrumentalized and undogmatic message was combined with the same kind of popular psychology fashionable in the wider society to join these three primary branches of American Christianity. All of these factors contributed to the effective accommodation of conversion and salvation to the broad, ecumenical themes of popular religion. Thus in a matter of a few decades, the dogmatic exclusivism of the revivalists was replaced by accommodation—compromise. Why? The biggest reason is that while Christianity was once given away freely, it is now artfully and persuasively sold over the airwaves every year to the tune of \$1 billion annually.

Because of the scarcity of the dollar, and the demand of the consumer that modern religion satisfy the needs, wants, and desires of the affluent, bored, impatient, and anxiety-ridden society that he is a part of, *success*, second, is a very important value that has been added to modern religion. In order to accomplish it, modern religion has had to modify the Protestant work ethic. Instead of diligent, systematic work for the glory of God, popular religion has "mentalized" the work ethic that made America one of the

most productive countries in the world. The core values of religion, "good" and "bad," "sinful" and "wicked," have been redefined to refer merely to psychic states or processes. Quebedeaux sees Robert H. Schuller as the epitome of the modern-day evangelists of success. God exists because He is useful, and God helps those who help themselves. For Schuller "theology is not primarily conceptual, it is functional and relational." Faith, and even God Himself, have been "instrumentalized." A "technology of salvation" has been developed. Salvation has become a mental technique in the "theology" of positive thinkers like Schuller and Norman Vincent Peale. Christ Himself is seen as the "world's greatest possibility thinker." "Living with Jesus" is seen as the source of "health, friendship, and moral support." It is an "experience for born-again Christians that motivates them to persist with the positive thinking method" (p. 90). But more than anything else, Quebedeaux goes on to say, positive-thinking as an expression of the religion of mass culture, is "a popular reassertion of personal self-worth in a technological society marked by the demise of honor, widespread anonymity, and the common feeling that 'I don't count any more' " (p.90). Human beings are no longer "sinners in the hands of an angry God," to quote Jonathan Edwards, but rather are viewed as persons with an infinite value, fully capable of achieving personal and social well-being through a willful change of consciousness. To quote Schuller, "Jesus never called anyone a sinner" (p. 91).

The third new value that has been introduced as an indispensable part of popular religion is *immediate results*. In traditional American culture, the original Protestant work ethic promised that by thrift and industry both material success and spiritual fulfillment were within the reach of every man. As a result, great stress was placed on individual initiative. The traditional American hero, the self-made man, who owed his success to God, sobriety, moderation, self-discipline, and the avoidance of debt has been replaced with the "Buy now, pay later" generation. Results are promised—immediately. This general attitude behind mass culture as a whole has quite naturally made its way into popular religion as well. "In its rational mental technology of salvation," writes Quebedeaux, "we can not only be saved in a matter of minutes, we can also achieve the fulness of 'sanctification,' of Christian maturity, in 'ten easy steps' " (p. 95). This relatively easy method for abundant living in the here and now, as well as the hereafter, has led a large "clientele" of consumers to find what they believe to be a sense of meaning in the midst of the mundane, modern, workaday world drained of meaning.

In the third section of his book, Quebedeaux discusses religious authority, particularly modern religious authority. Traditional religious authority, the authority of Christ's Church and His office bearers, has almost become extinct in popular religion. The reason for this, Quebedeaux points out, is two-fold. "When the church, the clergy, and theology itself—once the queen of the sciences—lost their high status in modern culture as a whole, they also lost a large measure of their authority within the institutions and movements of religion themselves. The erosion of clerical status and the authority once inherent in it was the direct result of the rise of advanced scientific discovery and the ever expanding growth of pluralism over the same period of time, in both Europe and America" (p. 103).

As a result of this decline in traditional authority, the very concept of authority has been redefined to meet the peculiar needs of modern America. Authority and power have come to be identified with influence rather than with the legal right to command and cause others to act upon those commands. "In this kind of pluralistic and egalitarian society, shaped by rationality and scientific analysis, the ideal of leadership has been democratized to such a degree that 'extraordinary' qualities, however much needed, are not normally reckoned with in the framework of social planning. Authority itself is questioned, and its scope severely limited, while power, expressed in 'influence' is gained more often than not by indirect and unstructured means. Thus all authority in modern America—including religious authority—must be evaluated in this context" (p. 110).

Quebedeaux goes on to describe the way that this modern religious authority works itself out in the various "ministries." *First* of all, the influence is strictly tied to the effectiveness of the organizational structure (e.g., The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association). Directly proportional to the number of followers or fans that an evangelist has, is the complexity and size of the organization that he must also have to transmit the message. This has created a tension within some organizations between the "visionary leader" and his down-to-earth bureaucrats. The organization must do more than carry on the will of its founder. It must also perpetuate itself, and does so by controlling the public image of its head. Eccentricities that are common in the early careers of many leaders (e.g., Oral Robert's miracle healings) are carefully culled to present the "spit and polish" image that is necessary to make it to the big-time.

The *second* variable in the amount of influence that a particular leader or group has is the form of communication that they and their

organizations use to communicate the message. The method must be both personal and visible. For example, Jerry Falwell comes right into the living room of millions of homes each week on his "Old Time Gospel Hour." He speaks directly to his audience in a visible way. In addition, the evangelist sends out millions of "personal" letters each year. On the other hand, the head of the mainline Protestant ecumenical agency, the National Council of Churches, communicates primarily through the very formal and bureaucratized structure with memos and dictums. In this case, authority is not only invisible and anonymous, but it is also very impersonal.

Thirdly, "the influence of religious leaders is a function of their particular constituency or audience, the people they communicate with" (p. 111). To use our previous example, the general secretary of the National Council of Churches influences her staff, who in turn influence their staff, and so on. The further the influence goes down the line, the more it wanes, until at the lowest level, the local church member, the influence is nil. On the other hand, Jerry Falwell communicates directly with the masses. As a result, his influence is very powerful on the popular level.

Fourthly, the modern religious leader is influential by virtue of his status in the media. The more visible a leader is, the more influence he has. In other words, it is not the message that is important with the public, but the "star status" of the average "TV preacher."

Criticisms

Now that we have looked at Quebedeaux's excellent analysis of the religion of mass culture, let us turn to the last section of the book where he criticizes popular religion. Quebedeaux's criticism revolves around two main lines of thought: the superficiality of popular religion, and the inadequate view of the authority of the Bible that characterizes much of evangelicalism. In Quebedeaux's mind, superficiality is the root problem (the cause), with the view of Scripture being a distant second (the effect).

Quebedeaux rightly sees that the present *formulations* of the various aspects of the doctrine of Scripture (inerrancy, infallibility, inspiration, etc.) by the evangelicals are not that much different from the naturalistic and philosophical systems that they are opposing. Because the doctrine of biblical inerrancy, as we have it presented today in popular religion, was formulated and systematized by late 19th and early 20th century Presbyterian and Baptist theologians, Quebedeaux accurately assesses the fact that those

formulations were the product of the same scientific method that the Fundamentalists were trying to counter. "In its systematic form," writes Quebedeaux, "the doctrine of inerrancy is a highly rational apologetic device, reminiscent, in its application, to the 'inductive method' of philosophical and scientific inquiry invented by Francis Bacon (1561-1626), the father of the notion of science as a systematic study" (p. 120). In other words, as Van Til has pointed out, the Christian has been dipping his paint brush into the same bucket as the pagan!

On the basis of these "evidences" presented by the fundamentalist, the followers assume a "God said it, I believe it, and that settles it" attitude with the emphasis on the "I believe it." This has resulted in goodness, or morality, being equated with right belief alone. Consequently, there is a de-emphasis on law-keeping and objective standards. Falwell and other like-minded born-again colleagues insist "that an uncompromising commitment to the doctrine of biblical inerrancy is the mark of the true Christian" (p. 122). Quebedeaux goes on to say that this places the Moral Majority evangelist along with the rest of popular religion right in line with the mainstream of classical (Aristotelian) Western philosophy and theology. One is expected to find ultimate truth in right thought. The major emphasis, therefore, is on thought itself, and not on obedience. "Believing in God" has become the chief aim of a religious attitude. "For popular religionists in America, truth is something one believes much more than something one does" (p. 123). The result has been, of course, that evangelicals have been the most ineffective group in America.

The result of a defective defense of the Bible and its truth is a superficial religion, which is precisely what has happened today. As we have already mentioned, morality is losing its influence in American Christianity. Quebedeaux observes that although the United States is becoming more "outwardly religious", there is abundant evidence that religion is not greatly affecting lives. "The United States has one of the worst records in the world in terms of criminal victimization. We live in a 'ripoff society' marked by consumer fraud, political corruption, tax cheating, bribery, and payoffs, to name just a few of the contemporary problems in America that are inconsistent with religious values" (p. 146).

Quebedeaux's most penetrating criticism, however, comes when he discusses the dearth of objective Bible knowledge and its transmission in popular religion. Popular religion has a decided anti-intellectual posture which has resulted in an overemphasis on

various religious experiences and the methods used to obtain them. There has been a shift from objective theological knowledge and objectives to the pragmatic application of a mental method which promises to give the practitioner all the good things in life. The stress is on the person as the measure of the truth. If it makes you happy, then it is true; if it does not, then it cannot be true. The cross is seen as a "plus" sign, not the symbol of life through death. Sin is meaningless; all that matters is the self and its desires, regardless of the consequences to others. Modern religion does not care anything *for* God, it only wants to use Him. As Quebedeaux sadly writes, "Thus there are no prophets on TV—only profits" (p. 152).

The superficiality that is characteristic not only of popular religion, but also of the entire culture, is the result of "the fact that most individuals view religion primarily as a therapeutic means to get relief from boredom through entertainment" (p. 154). The celebrity leaders are in reality mere entertainers who have fans, not followers. "And because celebrities merely entertain and do not offer deep teaching, they can hardly impose a discipline on others to incorporate in their daily lives" (p. 154). As a result of this unique relationship, it can be asked whether or not the celebrity leaders are really "leaders" at all. Once again, "leadership" has been redefined to include the "stars" of that vast, multi-media oriented, invisible religion of popular culture. This type of leadership represents the ultimate in relational superficiality. The only contact the "leader" has with his "followers" is through the TV, on the printed page, or through the mass-produced "personal" computer letter. "Such relationships," writes Quebedeaux, "are not real at all" (p. 154).

Summary

The strengths of this book lie in its penetrating analysis of popular culture and its religion. Quebedeaux is an excellent reporter and has done his homework. His book is tempered with both insight and an acute grasp of the movement as a whole. He not only describes the current situation, but gives an excellent overview of the last 150 years of American religious history that form the backdrop for the situation that we find ourselves in today.

The glaring weakness of the book is found in the solutions that he offers. Quebedeaux sees the main problem as a "lack of love" among the nebulous quagmire of religious leaders. I, for one, don't understand how more "love" will solve the mammoth problems that confront the "electronic church." The "electronic church" is built on

a faulty foundation. God did not provide a centralized, impersonal medium to meet the personal and spiritual needs that are normally met by an ecclesiastical organization. Christians are not to rally around the TV set, or even a particular personality. The Lord has commanded us to rally around Him. In particular, He has commanded us to rally around the Word of God which is manifested in this world through the special worship of His church on the Sabbath day through the preaching of the Word and participation in the Sacraments. Man is a sinful being and no amount of "right thinking" can remedy that fact. He must be objectively justified by Another's righteousness. Nothing else can meet the need. It is only in the Church that modern man can find the community life and deep personal relations that he longs for. The Church, as the extended family of God, has been ordained to meet just that need, among others.

In closing, this is an excellent book for the student of, or participant in, modern religion. The only problem that I had with the book itself was that although it is cloth-bound, it is not sewn. As a result, its binding broke, and my copy is now falling apart. If you shell out the \$12 to read the book, treat it with care.

BAPTISM, REDEMPTIVE HISTORY, AND ESCHATOLOGY: THE PARAMETERS OF DEBATE

P. Richard Flinn

Introduction

FROM the time of the Reformation the debate between the paedobaptists and the baptists has been incessantly conducted. Empirically it would seem that the paedobaptists have been losing ground. This is not because the exegesis buttressing the paedobaptist case is weak. On the contrary, it is far stronger and more compelling than baptist exegesis. Yet the baptists win the day. Why is this so?

We believe the reason lies in the presuppositions, the ground motifs, the assumptions that are brought into the debate. Exegesis will not carry the day when implicit assumptions eviscerate its force, blinding the reader. When the assumptions are identified and studied in the light of Scripture, however, the baptist case fades away and loses all vestige of authenticity, while the paedobaptist case is strengthened immeasurably. (The reader will understand that I am writing as a protagonist of the paedobaptist position. Nevertheless, I have striven throughout to deal with the baptist case judiciously and faithfully. Let the reader judge.) It turns out that baptist assumptions, although foreign to the Scriptures, are native to the fallen human heart. Therein, we believe, lies their power. Since the Church and society of our age are not characterized by genuine reformation and sound, deep biblical knowledge, those assumptions which most accord with our natural patterns of thought will make the most impact.

This essay, then, approaches the debate through the door of assumptions. We begin with the Reformers' understanding of baptism and then consider it in the light of biblical theology or eschatology. Baptism is the sign of initiation into the New Aeon inaugurated by Christ. While some modern baptist and paedobaptist theologians have attempted to do justice to this, some have ended up obscuring the primacy the Bible places upon grace in the New Cove-

nant. So we take up the discussion in a comparison of the work of Meredith Kline and John Murray on the subject. This will lead to what we believe is a more precise and adequate formulation of the meaning of baptism as administered to adults and infants.

Now the battle can be joined, and we take up the differences between the Reformed view of the New Aeon inaugurated by the New Covenant and the baptist view. This will provide us with the differences brought to the debate at the level of fundamental assumptions. The final sections will take up both paedobaptist and baptist constructions of the Old and New Covenants, to show clearly, we trust, the biblical foundation of the former, and the pagan roots of the latter.

The Reformers and the Meaning of Baptism

We begin our discussion by investigating the meaning of baptism as understood by the Reformers. The commonly accepted definition of baptism amongst the Reformed is that it is the "sign and seal of the covenant of grace."¹ The meaning of baptism, then, is tied inevitably to the covenant of which it is both a sign and seal. The understanding of the meaning of the covenant of grace has broadened and deepened since the time of the Reformation; it has undergone considerable theological development. To establish the meaning of baptism we will have to account for this theological development in our construction.

The seventeenth century Reformed theologians' definitions of the covenant of grace are virtually monolithic: they "perfectly coincide."² We may cite Heidegger as representative of this consensus:

The covenant of grace is a gratuitous agreement between an offended God and certain offending men, in which of his grace and sheer good pleasure and to the same sobered believers God has assigned righteousness and life in the same Christ the Mediator, and these in turn, by promising to produce faith and sobriety to God through the grace of Christ, obtain from him

1. See, for example, *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (28:1) "Baptism is . . . a sign and seal of the covenant of grace. . . ." The *Belgic Confession* (Article 34) has ". . . the infants of believers, who, we believe ought to be baptized and sealed with the sign of the covenant, . . ." Compare this with Polan: ". . . so that it may be signified and sealed to those who are baptized, that they have been taken up into the communion of the covenant of grace." (Cited in H. Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. E. Bizer, tr. G. T. Thomson [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978], p. 611).

2. Heppe, p. 382.

righteousness and the right to expect life.³

Clearly the emphasis here is upon forensic righteousness. The definition is also dominated by the content of the covenantal contract—the actual obligations and promises both parties make to one another. We may add Cocceius's definition to support these observations:

The covenant of grace is an agreement between God and sinful man, God declaring His free good pleasure to give righteousness and an inheritance to a fixed seed in the Mediator by faith for the glory of His grace and through the promise of righteousness to be given to those that believe in Him who invites, man agreeing by faith of heart with what was contracted for peace and friendship and the right to expect an inheritance and good conscience.⁴

Again the emphasis is upon the *terms* of the covenant and the *mutual contractual obligations*. Moreover, the field of attention is the salvation of souls. What is not in view is the dawning of a new eschatological age, the ushering in of the last days and the beginning of the creation of the New Heavens and the New Earth. These developments came later of course. Suffice it to say that the perspective of historical unfolding and historical realization are absent.

These preoccupations in classical Reformed dogmatics naturally govern the meaning of baptism, since baptism is the sign and seal of the covenant. We find when Heidegger, for example, comes to elucidate the meaning of baptism his emphasis is upon regeneration and cleansing, the ethical-soteric significance of the sign; he does not include the historical redemptive aspects. He writes:

Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration, in which by sprinkling and dipping in water inward ablution from sins through the blood and Spirit of Christ is declared and sealed to one and all of God's covenanted.⁵

The meaning of baptism is essentially and primarily soteric—the symbol and seal of regeneration, of ablution for sin, of renewal by the Holy Ghost.

When these aspects of the meaning of baptism are emphasized to the exclusion of others, it is only a matter of time before some qualification is required. If the sacrament is a sign and seal of the covenant of grace and if the covenant is to be understood as essen-

3. *Idem.*

4. *Idem.*

5. *Ibid.*, p. 611.

tially and primarily soteric, then the spectre of *ex opere operato* is raised. What, after all, is the efficacy of baptism? How is the thing signified (regeneration and cleansing) to be related to the sign? Should we not conclude that the very elements are made efficacious through the Holy Spirit? This was the opinion of some Lutherans and of the Papists. The reformed rejected this, arguing there was a distinction between the sign and what was signified. The sign of baptism signified the covenant promise, and the reality of the promise was made operative only through faith. According to Heidegger, baptism

seals and exhibits to those baptized the things pertaining to them in terms of the covenant of grace. Not however as *efficient by an inherent cause*, or *present power*, but as a seal, earnest and most sure pledge, *creating faith in the things received or to be received*.⁶

Baptism, then, is a kind of visible sermon signifying certain central aspects of the Gospel. As such it could be used to bring or seal faith, if blessed by the Holy Ghost, but in all cases the faith would be in the Word and the promises, not in the (baptismal) signs and seals of the promises.

The Leiden Synopsis put it most clearly when it taught:

This union of sacramental sign and thing signified is not a real and subjective conjunction . . . but *relativa*, consisting in the mutual respect in which sign places and seals the thing signified for the believer *before his eyes* and the thing signified is supplied and offered by the principal cause on condition of faith and repentance. . . . [And] our faith is both more strongly roused and rendered active.⁷

Thus the efficacy lies not in the elements of baptism, but in the *Word* they illustrate.⁸ Under the Holy Spirit, baptism can be a powerful means of conversion and faith.

An additional problematic is added, however, in the case of the baptism of infants. If the sign is a revelation of the Word, its potential efficacy is lost or virtually nugatory for the infant, who is unconscious of this Word visually displayed in the sacrament. It can hardly call to faith. This has led to an ambivalence in classic Reformed theology. On the one hand the sacrament is essentially and primarily a sign of regeneration, while on the other its efficacy is

6. *Ibid.*, p. 617. Emphasis mine.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 618. Emphasis mine.

8. See G. Berkouwer's discussion of Calvin's doctrine of the Sacraments in his *The Sacraments*, Studies in Dogmatics, tr. Hugo Bekker, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1969), pp. 76, 77.

operative only through faith. The very *power* of the sacrament lies in its vivid declaration of the Gospel and the promises of God in the covenant of grace. But the infant is oblivious to this sacrament-sermon, and therefore beyond its efficacy—the powerful, pointed proclamation of the Gospel and the promises of grace. Its efficacy can only be proleptic at best.

This makes the sacrament rather dry and barren for the infant, which it should not be. Worse, it makes it somewhat formal and devoid of meaning for the church, which it should not be. After all, the sacraments of the church should be of the deepest, most trenchant religious significance. Unfortunately, in the minds of many the sacrament has become a sort of “dry run” in hopes that the real thing will transpire later. In an attempt to retrieve the power and significance of the sacrament administered to infants, at times the Reformed have slid toward the Lutheran *ex opere operato* position. Hence we find Waleaus, writing in 1640, contrasting the Reformed with the Lutheran position as follows:

So they lay it down that baptism is both the ordinary means of regeneration for children and accordingly necessary in the same way. We too admit that the Holy Spirit ordinarily effects by baptism the things sealed in baptism. Yet we deny that the action of the Holy Spirit is always tied to the act of baptism, in a way in which the virtue of the word is not always tied to the word of preaching.⁹

In the context Waleaus is speaking of children. While the Lutherans place the efficacy in the elements—the Holy Spirit always uses them to work faith—Waleaus insists upon the sovereign work of the Spirit, both are alike in that faith is virtually irrelevant. This is a significant Reformed concession.

So there has been a long history of ambivalence and confusion amongst the Reformed on the meaning of the sacrament. Many, for example, have been uncomfortable with Calvin's formulation:

I ask, what the danger is if infants be said to receive now some part of that grace which in a little while they shall enjoy to the full? For if fullness of life consists in the perfect knowledge of God, when some of them, whom death snatches away in their very first infancy, pass over into eternal life, they are surely received to the contemplation of God in his very presence. Therefore, if it please him, why may the Lord not shine with a tiny spark at the present time on those whom he will illumine in the future with the full

9. Cited in Heppe, p. 618.

splendor of his light—especially if he has not removed their ignorance before taking them from the prison of the flesh?¹⁰

The Reformed Baptist theologians have generally been aware of this ambivalence and have chided the paedobaptists accordingly. They have argued that the traditional paedobaptist position is neither fish nor fowl. Both parties agree that the sacrament primarily signifies regeneration evidenced by faith. Both agree that the elements stir up and strengthen faith. Then when the paedobaptist wants to baptize children of believers, the baptist charges him with inconsistency and special pleading and of hanging on to a vestige of sacramentalism. And the Reformed, for their part, have often been somewhat confused in trying to explain the power and efficacy of baptism and the precise meaning of the sacrament when administered to infants, since they have already conceded it to be efficacious only through faith.¹¹

In summary, we suggest that classical Reformed theology, by emphasizing the soteric and forensic aspects, overlooked others. In particular the redemptive-historical-eschatological aspects were underdeveloped.¹² This in turn resulted in the meaning of baptism being seen exclusively in soteric categories, and then in the category of the soteriology of the individual to whom it was applied. It indicated forgiveness and ablution. It indicated the regeneration of an individual soul. Yet the forgiveness of the sinner was effected only through faith; there was no instrumental power in the sacrament, inherent in either the elements or the institution. There was no *objective* significance of efficacy in the sacrament itself. The significance and power of the sacrament was effected only through faith.

In the case of infants this has *seemed* to eviscerate the sacrament of objective significance and power.¹³ The Reformed have always denied this of course, arguing correctly that the ground of the sacrament lies not in its perceived power but in the God who commands it

10. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4:16:19.

11. Consider, for example, the various options proposed by Reformed theologians to describe the significance of the *faith* signified in the sacrament: vicarious faith, infant faith, proleptic faith, objective faith, etc.

12. Note we say "underdeveloped." Calvin appears to have come closest to the redemptive-historical perspective by insisting that baptism indicated ingrafting into Christ (*Institutes* 4:15:1-6). But even here the more "objective" eschatological elements of the dawning of the new age, the Messianic reign of the Lord, and judgment upon wickedness are not developed.

13. Over and over one finds that the weight of the Baptist case is found in the assertion that the Baptist practice seems to protect the *meaning, significance, and power* of the sacrament.

to be administered to children. Nevertheless it has led to all sorts of dialectical convolutions. Berkouwer, for example, argues that the promises sealed in baptism must be neither subjective nor objective, but "*directed toward faith and can never be understood apart from faith.*"¹⁴ It is very difficult to make sense of this assertion. Meanwhile, many in the Reformed confession are left wondering what the church really *means* when she baptizes infants. And if we cannot delineate the meaning of baptism and establish its significance and meaning objectively and unconditionally, to the child, it will ever remain difficult to persuade others of the religious force for so administering the sacrament.¹⁵

Baptism and Modern Theological Development

The discipline of biblical theology has shed new light upon the meaning of the covenant of grace, and, indirectly, upon baptism.¹⁶ Geerhardus Vos was to argue that biblical theology was "at home" within the Reformed tradition for it

has from the beginning shown itself possessed of a true historic sense in the apprehension of the progressive character of the deliverance of truth. Its doctrine of the *covenants on its historical side* represents the first attempt at constructing a history of revelation.¹⁷

This discipline took redemption out of the realm of (timeless) formal theological constructs and placed it firmly in history.¹⁸ The

14. Berkouwer, p. 185.

15. So Calvin, although after a forceful and terse argument against those who cannot see the "sense" in baptizing infants, demonstrating that the argument in this case is really against God who commanded the circumcision of infants under the Old Covenant, concedes that "as in all God's acts, so in this very act also there shines enough wisdom and righteousness to repel the detractions of the impious" (*Institutes*, 4:16:20) and so goes on to demonstrate the reasonableness of infant baptism. Since we are moral creatures we must ever seek to move God's people to action upon the ground of reason.

16. For this we are indebted to Geerhardus Vos. Richard Gaffin writes of Vos: ". . . in his inaugural address given in May, 1894, he provides a clear, fully developed discussion of the idea of biblical theology. . . . The apparent conclusion is that Vos's work in biblical theology is largely without direct antecedents." (Richard Gaffin, "Introduction," *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. R. Gaffin [Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980], p. xii.)

17. Geerhardus Vos, "Hebrews, the Epistle of the Diatheke," *Redemptive History*, p. 232. Emphasis mine.

18. This is not to say, however, that the timeless logical constructions of the

covenant of grace was studied seriously and systematically from its *own* inscripturated perspective, that of history and the historical unfolding of redemption.

This additional perspective on the covenant of grace is illustrated in the work of Herman Ridderbos. The seventeenth century divines had emphasized the forensic aspects in their theology of the covenant, giving attention to regeneration, faith, and justification. Ridderbos argues that Reformation theology viewed the Pauline kerygma, for example, through these glasses: justification by faith was seen as the actual content of Paul's Gospel.¹⁹ Naturally, justification by faith is at the heart of the Gospel, but Paul must not be understood "*exclusively from the standpoint of justification by faith*,"²⁰ for there is a danger, then, of removing Paul's preaching and the Gospel from its *historical dynamic*. Justification, regeneration, faith are all aspects of the great redemptive event of which Paul was a herald. But "before everything else (Paul) was the *proclaimer of a new time*, the great turning point in the history of redemption, the intrusion of a *new world aeon*."²¹ This, declares Ridderbos, is the

dominating perspective and foundation of Paul's entire preaching. It alone can illuminate the many facets and interrelations of his preaching, e.g., justification, being-in-Christ, suffering, dying, and rising again with Christ, the conflict between the Spirit and the flesh, the cosmic drama, etc.²²

This New Age is of course the Age of the New Covenant as the Book of Hebrews so roundly attests.

The New Covenant, and the aeon of the New Covenant, is the goal of history, under the eternal decree of God, being realized. It is the Omega point toward which the creation pointed. According to Hebrews 2 this involves the subjection of the entire economy to mankind, first realized through Christ, the firstborn of the creation.²³

Baptism is the sign and seal of this New Covenant, and therefore

seventeenth century divines were wrong. Far too much has been made of this in recent times. Rather, we judge their formulations to be inadequate—they did not include the historical-eschatological aspects of redemption, and consequently overlooked data of tremendous significance on the covenant of grace.

19. H. Ridderbos, *Paul and Jesus*, tr. David Freeman (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1957), p. 63.

20. *Idem*.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 64. Emphasis mine.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

23. G. Vos, "Hebrews," p. 195.

signifies the whole sweep of the new aeon with all its implications. The significance of baptism, then, is far broader than normally conceived by the Reformed divines. It means primarily and essentially that one is incorporated into the New Age through the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ.²⁴ This incorporation has both positive and negative elements: these are inextricable, the two sides of the one coin. Baptism seals the recipient into both sides of the covenant coin, as it were. As the sign and seal of the covenant (Gen. 17:11)²⁵ baptism signifies and seals all that the covenant signifies and seals. Included here are the following ten essential elements that belong to the new age of the covenant.

1. Baptism signifies communion with God through Christ the Mediator.

2. Membership amongst the covenant people of God. Through baptism we are signified and sealed as being related to Christ's life, death, and resurrection (Rom. 6:1-6).

3. Redemption from slavery and being set apart as a slave of God.

4. It signifies being part of the new eschatological order of the New Covenant, including the redemption of the whole cosmos, where all is subsumed under the headship of Christ (Eph. 1:7-12; Phil. 2:9-11; Heb. 2:5-8).

5. The washing away of sin, cleansing (Titus 3:5; I Pet. 3:21).

These are the "positive" aspects of the covenant. But equally a part of the covenant are the "negative" aspects which baptism also seals and signifies.

6. God's intense wrath upon sin and sinners²⁶ removing all that would mar communion with his chosen people.

24. Compare with H. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1975), pp. 395 ff.

25. We assume here that the reader accepts the correspondence of circumcision with baptism. This assumption is deliberately made, not because there is insufficient biblical evidence for it, but because it is generally accepted by Baptists. Jewett, for example, after discussing the biblical evidence for the correspondence of the signs, concludes: "Thus circumcision may fairly be said to be the Old Testament counterpart of Christian baptism. So far the Reformed argument, in our judgment is biblical. In this sense 'baptism' to quote the *Heidelberg Catechism* 'occupies the place of circumcision in the New Testament.'" (*Infant Baptism and the Covenant of Grace* [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1978]), p. 89.

26. The ministry of John the Baptist is significant here. Being the last of the Old Testament prophets he adopted their perspective on the Day of the Lord. He stood outside the normal processes of history (hence his dress and ministry outside of Israel and its processes, in strong contrast to the Son of Man, Matt. 11:17-19) and

7. The sealing of the Day of Judgment through the Resurrection. Paul applies this "negative" aspect to the covenant of the resurrection when preaching to the Athenians (Acts 17:31).

8. The subjugation of all of Christ's enemies (I Pet. 3:22).

9. The triumph of the Gospel (Matthew 28:18-20).

10. The final judgment of the heavens and the earth, all iniquity being burnt up.²⁷

The meaning of baptism, then, has broadened and developed into its full biblical-historical-redemptive context. It signifies individual regeneration and justification and cleansing from sin, to be sure, but much more than these. It is a sign and seal of the broader realities of the covenant also: of the last judgment realized in human history through the Cross, of the pouring forth of the Spirit of God, of the subjugation of all human and heavenly enemies of Christ.

When baptism is administered to the repentant sinner and his children, both adults and children are sealed into the covenant of grace. Their membership in the covenant is unconditional. The elements of baptism are not dependent upon faith for their efficacy.²⁸ Baptism is a solemn religious oath and is of deep significance and eternal power. Biblical theology and the redemptive eschatological perspective insists upon the objective significance of the sacrament: *objective* in the sense of having meaning and significance apart from the response and heart condition of the recipient. It is deeply meaningful to the church and to the King of the Church, and it is inevitably of eternal significance to the one who receives the sign.

Baptism can never, therefore, be understood as a mere "dry

preached the aeon of the New Covenant in overview. He was a forerunner of the Son of Man, preparing his way. Part of his way was the administration of divine vengeance. John's baptism of repentance was also a sign of the "wrath to come," of the "axe already laid at the root of the trees" (Luke 3:7, 9). Viewing the aeon of Christ with the first and second comings telescoped together, he underscores the wrath and judgment of God upon sin executed by the Son of Man in this Age. "And his winnowing fork is in His hand, to clean out his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into His barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Luke 3:17, cf. Isa. 63:1-6). Compare this with the presentation of the Cross: "Now is judgment upon this world; now the ruler of this world shall be cast out" (John 12:31).

27. Peter compares baptism with the flood. The family of Noah was brought safely through the waters, and this corresponds to our baptism (I Peter 3:20, 21). The flood, and by parallel, baptism, point to the final destruction of the wicked (II Peter 3:5-13).

28. We speak metonymically, of course. The elements have no inherent power, but the truths dignified by the elements, because they are the very Word of God, do have inherent power.

run." We must demur before the Reformers and hold that baptism is both efficacious and powerful apart from the faith of the recipient. But, we hasten to add, baptism is efficacious for *salvation* only through faith in the promises proclaimed in baptism.

For the unrepentant, reprobate covenant child who has been given the sign and seal of the covenant, or for the adult who has later apostatized, baptism remains extremely powerful and significant. Over each reprobate head baptism seals and signifies the covenant of grace. But it is the negative aspects of the covenant with which the sinner has to do. These are powerfully sworn unto the individual as curses. His baptism testifies against him in the covenant lawsuit. He is sealed into Christ's death in a negative sense. Christ's death is not merely of no saving significance: it utterly condemns him and heaps upon him divine vengeance, for he has profaned the death of Christ before God the Father. If God punished sin in his beloved Son, how much more surely and powerfully will he punish it in the life of one who has been sworn into that death and has mocked and treated it with derision by continuing to live in sin and unbelief.²⁹

29. The Book of Hebrews reflects this warning. Written to second generation Christians, covenant children, the author warns them of the divine curse hanging over them if they, having "tasted of the good Word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put him to open shame. For ground that drinks the rain which often falls upon it . . . but . . . yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned" (Heb. 6:4ff). The writer is speaking not of regenerate people, but to those who have been privileged to be with God's covenant people, tasting the Word of God, and experiencing some of the powers of the age to come—the fear of God manifested among his people, the joy of forgiveness seen in the saints, the humility and holiness of life. These had been experienced within the covenant community, but inwardly (and now outwardly) they had profaned them. The Cross of Christ, into which they were sealed, now comes to curse them.

The same argument appears in Hebrews 12:18ff. The people of God, those with the covenant sign, have come to "Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, and to the general assembly and church of the first born . . . and to God the Judge of all. . . ." This is not speaking of an eternal reality, but a present reality. The Old Testament analogue is Mt. Sinai, not life after death. We have been brought *now* to this heavenly city; therefore, "see to it that you do not refuse him who is speaking. . . ." We are in the heavenly city now; God is speaking to us from the heavenly city now. Let us hear lest we be cursed forever as those of old. The writer warns them of the negative, retributive aspects of the covenant into which they have been sealed. "Our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29). Compare this with the even more explicit warning of Hebrews 10:26-31—for the one who neither repents and believes a severer punishment is reserved, for he has trampled under foot the Son of God. The text is addressed to people in the church! "Let us hold fast the confession of *our* hope without wavering" (10:23).

A similar argument holds equally true for the resurrection into which he was sworn. The resurrection is powerful, but to condemn and execute judgment. Christ's rising to life secures inevitable judgment on all who do not repent (Acts 17:30, 31). The reprobate will be powerfully subjugated as an enemy of Christ, for Christ has already subjugated the last enemy—death. Having been formally sealed into the New Age of the destruction of Christ's enemies, he himself will be most surely destroyed for he remains an enemy. In this his baptism powerfully testifies against him. God justly condemns him. Or, further, having been sealed into the new heavens and the new earth, baptism is powerful and efficacious over the one baptized, for the unrepentant becomes part of the dross burnt away by the refining fire of the redeemer.

In all of these ways baptism is powerful and efficacious, yet without the faith of the recipient. It is objectively significant to all to whom it is administered. It is significant unto *salvation*, however, to those who believe.³⁰

Baptism and Two Modern Reformed Theologians

As with the covenant of grace itself there is a *double sidedness* to baptism. It seals a child either for blessing or curse. Its power for judgment is not conditional upon faith; its power for salvation is dependent upon faith. Having defended the objective significance of the sacrament, we observe its meaning can be attacked from another direction—the church can administer the sacrament with no real

Paul employs a similar argument in I Cor. 10, warning of the curse of the covenant that fell upon Israel in the desert. Watch lest you fall! is the exhortation, for we are the people "upon whom the *ends of the ages* have come" (I Cor. 10:12).

30. An Old Testament indication of this is provided by Ishmael. By direct divine revelation Abraham was told that Ishmael would live under the curse of the covenant. Antagonistic to all, he would live away from his brethren (Gen. 16:12). This is an indication of divine curse—that restless brooding spirit of rebellion unable to live with the people of God. Cain had the same characteristic. Yet God directed that Ishmael receive the sign of the covenant. And that sign was efficacious and powerful. The cutting off of his foreskin signified and sealed his being cut off from the people of God.

Note that Jewett tries to use Ishmael to prove that circumcision had a mere carnal, profane reference. Ishmael was circumcised because circumcision had this profane reference (see below) of indicating only that he belonged to Abraham's household. Yet God had already told Abraham that Ishmael would not belong to his household. Such distortions come because the *religious* significance of circumcision and baptism is restricted to salvific grace. All else is regarded as fleshly or profane. For the Reformed Baptist argument, see Jewett, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

priority of meaning upon *grace*. Instead of the baptised being sealed into the covenant of *grace*, they are sealed into the covenant of *the age to come*. Any such general designation must surely denigrate and obscure the priority placed upon grace, mercy, forgiveness, and salvation in the eschatological aeon in which we now live.

A discussion of the work on baptism of two contemporary Reformed theologians will highlight this dilemma. John Murray represents the traditional Reformed perspective, and in his theology of baptism, we will argue, obscures the redemptive-historical context of these days. Meredith Kline, on the other hand, struggles mightily to incorporate these biblical theological insights, but ends up removing the salvific, gracious emphasis in the New Covenant. A resolution between these two positions is required.

Both Murray and Kline employ a similar methodology to determine the theological significance of the covenant. Both take one historical covenant and make its form and emphasis paradigmatic for all other covenants. Murray takes his paradigm from the post-diluvian Noahic covenant. After discussing the attributes and features of this covenant, Murray concludes: "Here we have covenant in the purity of its conception, as a dispensation of grace to men, wholly divine in its origin, fulfillment, and confirmation."³¹ The two essential features of this covenant are that it is monergistic and gracious. Even the conditions and stipulations which are added are not conditions in the strict sense of the word, but "are simply extension, applications, expressions of the grace intimated in the Covenant."³² We must understand all of the covenantal form and structure and intent, then, to be subsumed under the rubric of sovereign grace.

Murray picks up these themes in his discussion of the Abrahamic covenant, the covenant of circumcision. He has already established the paradigm of the covenant: now he proceeds to identify this paradigm in Genesis 17. What, then, will be the significance of circumcision? There are two distinctive features in the Abrahamic covenant, according to Murray. These are the self-maledictory oath taken by God (Gen. 15:8-18), and the reference to keeping or breaking the covenant (Gen. 17:9, 10, 14). The fact that God takes the self-maledictory oath himself in Genesis 15 underscores the gracious and sovereign character of the divine covenant. With respect to the warnings concerning the breaking of the

31. J. Murray, *The Covenant of Grace* (London: The Tyndale Press, 1953), p. 15.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

covenant, Murray again interprets this through the paradigm of sovereign grace. The greater the grace bestowed, the higher the response demanded. So it was with Abraham. He writes, "the necessity of keeping (the covenant) is but the expression of the magnitude of the grace bestowed and the spirituality of the relation constituted."³³

What, then does Murray make of these "conditional" elements in the Abrahamic covenant? He argues that, "the continued enjoyment of this grace and of the relationship established is contingent upon the fulfillment of certain conditions. For apart from the fulfillment of these conditions the grace bestowed and the relation established are meaningless."³⁴ Thus, Murray wishes to defend the priority of grace sovereignly bestowed. Obedience to the conditions of the covenant is not the *ground* on which the covenant is established. *Grace alone* establishes the covenant relationship; obedience is the ground of continued enjoyment of the covenant. He concludes, therefore, that "by breaking the covenant what is broken is not the condition of bestowal, but the condition of consummated fruition."³⁵

It follows from the above considerations that circumcision had as its "primary and essential significance" that which was the sign and seal of the "highest and richest blessing which God bestows upon men"—namely, union and communion with himself.³⁶ It signifies and seals the gracious relationship sovereignly established between God and his people.

Before moving on to consider Kline's position we must make a few observations about Murray's treatment. Murray correctly argues that the primary and essential significance of circumcision was religious and spiritual and it pointed to union and communion with God—the "highest level" of religious relationship.³⁷ But the intended significance of the formal seal does not necessarily correspond with the actual outworking or response. Murray of course is aware of this distinction. He acknowledges that there are both external and internal blessings in the covenant. "The covenant embraces external blessings, but it does so only insofar as the internal blessing

33. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

35. *Idem.*

36. J. Murray, *Christian Baptism* (Nutley, N. J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1977), p. 49.

37. *Covenant*, p. 17.

results in external manifestation," he writes.³⁸ But he does want to maintain that circumcision does not indicate anything *less* than the internal blessings of the covenant.

This being so, and we believe Murray is correct in this, there is some problem remaining in his discussion of the conditional element of the covenant of grace. We fear that Murray has not been careful in his language and terminology: he has not maintained the *intended-actual* distinction spoken of above. He argues that the covenant is a dispensation of God's grace. Circumcision is administered because the covenant is *already in force*. That is, God's grace has been sovereignly disposed and a religious relationship has been established—the highest religious relationship—that of union and communion with God. Now argues Murray, if we are to continue to enjoy God's grace and the maintenance of that relationship we must respond in faith, love, and obedience. If we do not respond we are unfaithful to a relationship already constituted and grace already dispensed.³⁹

It would seem that Murray has equivocated on the word *grace* as well as on the word *relationship*. Both can be understood in a broader and a narrower sense. These senses correspond to the *internal-external* distinction noted above. Now, according to Murray, circumcision points to *grace* and *relationship* in the narrower sense. In other words, *grace* is taken to mean salvific regeneration. But if this is so, then continued enjoyment of it cannot be based upon fulfillment of conditions. Such grace is irresistible and completely unconditional. We do not cease to enjoy such grace, neither is the relationship established by grace destroyed or lost, for this grace is truly sovereign and irresistible. If, on the other hand, *grace* is employed in the broader sense—namely any general unmerited favour of God (which is not necessarily salvific) then his statement can hold true as it stands. We must maintain the distinction, then, between circumcision's *intent* and its *actual effect*. When one enters the covenant, either as an adult upon profession of faith or as a babe of covenantal parents, the sign and seal of the covenant is administered to ratify that a gracious relationship with Christ has been established. It is intended to signify a gracious relationship in the narrower sense: that the candidate has received salvific grace and enjoys a relationship of union and communion with God. It is administered with the *intention* that this relationship is a reality. But in *actuality* this relation-

38. *Baptism*, p. 50

39. *Covenant*, p. 19.

ship may not be present. One may be in the covenantal bond and enjoy some of the "outward" blessings⁴⁰ of the covenant only. The inability of one to fulfill the conditions of the covenant may make this actual situation manifest; one then becomes an object of discipline, administered by the covenant community. This is, in part, the curse of the covenant.

We suspect that Murray's preoccupation with sovereign grace as the controlling framework of the covenant has led him to obscure this distinction. Kline's position is stronger at this point, but he ends up obscuring the distinction in another way. It is to Kline that we now turn.

Kline also employs the methodology of taking one historical covenant and making it paradigmatic for all. He begins by seeking to establish that there are two kinds of biblical covenants—a law covenant and a covenant of promise.⁴¹ When the record shows that man takes the self-maledictory oath, it is a covenant of law; when God takes the oath, it is one of promise.⁴² He then argues that the law-covenant is primary and that all promise covenants actually presuppose this law order.⁴³ He suggests that the concept of law covenant is so broad that it includes both promise and conditional elements. He writes:

For law covenant with its duality of sanctions, curse threat as well as offer of blessing, will be formally comprehensive enough to accommodate promise covenant within its general framework.⁴⁴

He then proceeds to draw a very important distinction. He points out that there is a final purpose and an immediate purpose in the covenant of redemption. There is the proper purpose of the

40. We are somewhat uncomfortable with the *inward-outward* terminology, because it is ambiguous. A distinction such as *salvific-non salvific* is more clumsy, but more accurate. Consider a child brought up in the covenant but not part of the elect. There is a sense in which many of the blessings which he might experience are internal to his personality. He might be taught the covenant virtues of honesty, faithfulness, generosity, for example. These will provide a measure of blessing to his marriage, family, personal relationships, etc. These should be understood as the non-salvific blessings of the covenant and are part of the gracious nature of the covenant broadly considered.

41. Meredith Kline, *By Oath Consigned* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1968), p. 16.

42. We believe Kline fails to prove his case here. The covenants he identifies as being covenants of promise include those elements which he identifies as features of law covenants, and vice-versa.

43. *Oath*, p. 29.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

covenant, or the final purpose, which is the salvation of the elect; and there is an intermediate or instrumental purpose which is broader. This includes not only the salvation of the elect, but the destruction of all the works of the devil.⁴⁵ Covenant theology, he observes, has exhibited a strong tendency to reduce the covenant to election. If we do this, he concludes, there is no way that covenant theology can incorporate the aspect of divine vengeance and wrath within the covenantal framework. These aspects of the messianic, mediatorial work of Christ (I Jn. 3:8 & Jn. 3:18) must be seen as extra-covenantal—an unfortunate and weak position for covenant theologians who wish to see God *always* dealing with his creation covenantally. Rather, we must understand that the covenant contains both curse and blessing. God is king over all creation; those who submit to his Lordship become objects of His favour; those who do not become objects of his curse.

If the covenant has these dual aspects of curse and blessing, while the final purpose is the blessing of the elect, what then is the purpose and meaning of circumcision or baptism? Kline argues that circumcision is the self-maledictory oath of the covenant: the references in Gen. 17:9-14 to cutting the covenant, cutting the foreskin, and cutting off the recalcitrant member are all interrelated: all point to the fact that circumcision was the sign of the oath-curse of covenant ratification.⁴⁶ He concludes: "In this light circumcision is found to be an oath-rite and, as such, a pledge of consecration and a symbol of malediction. That is its primary, symbolic significance."⁴⁷ When a man was circumcised he simply "confessed himself to be under the juridical authority of Yahweh and consigned himself to the ordeal of his Lord's judgment for the final verdict on his life"⁴⁸

It follows that the meaning of baptism is similar. We read:

Now if the covenant is first and last a declaration of Christ's lordship, then the baptismal sign of entrance into it will before all other things be a sign of coming under the jurisdiction of the covenant and particularly under the covenantal dominion of the Lord.⁴⁹

From this, Kline draws the conclusion that the actual import of the sign remains general and it is neutral in its signification toward

45. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

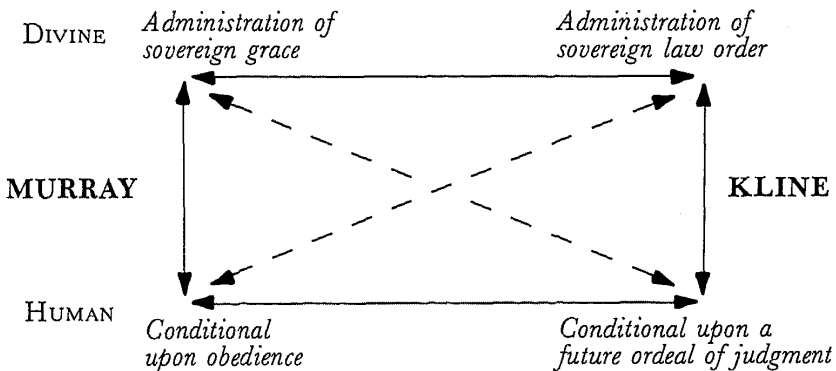
49. *Idem.*

curse or blessing. There remains the potential of both condemnation or justification and the sacrament signifies neither one nor the other. It simply signifies coming under the juridical sphere of Christ's Lordship. He writes:

. . . covenant is no longer identified with election and guaranteed blessing, and especially when the baptismal sign of incorporation into the covenant is understood as pointing *without prejudice* to a judgment ordeal with the potential of both curse and blessing. . . .⁵⁰

Kline's final and concluding definition is that "baptism is a sign of incorporation within the judicial sphere of Christ's covenant lordship for a final verdict of blessing or curse."⁵¹

What, then, can be said as we consider these two contrasting views? The differences appear manifest and not inconsiderable. For Murray, the covenant is a bond of sovereign grace; for Kline it is incorporation into a legal, judicial sphere. For Murray its intent is salvific and gracious; for Kline its final intent is gracious, but its mediate intent is much broader including elements of judgment and curse. For Murray the sign of the covenant is a seal and authentication of a gracious relationship between God and his people already established at the highest religious level; for Kline it is a self-maledictory oath indicating a neutral potential of either curse or blessing. At a formal level the differences are quite stark as a square of opposition shows:



50. *Ibid.*, p. 90. Emphasis mine.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 102.

We see that both theologians have points of internal tension in their formulations, and that between them they oppose each other at every point. But it is the contention of this article that these differences are more formal than substantial, and the contradictions are more verbal than real.

In the first place, both Murray and Kline begin their study of the covenants by employing a faulty methodology. They both select one historical covenant and make this covenant paradigmatic for all other covenants. This results in an impoverished or truncated view of the covenant. For Murray it obscures the concept of curse and wrath; for Kline, it makes being in the covenant an uncertain and neutral affair with no priority being given to grace as the sign of the covenant is applied to the candidate.

In the second place, both Murray and Kline fail to make adequate distinctions in their respective theologies of the covenant. We have already noted this in Murray in a preliminary fashion. We spoke of the difference between the *intended* and *actual* significance of circumcision. Developing this somewhat further we would introduce two technical terms. In any meaningful action we must distinguish between the *illocution* and the *perlocution* of an act. The linguistic analyst, J. L. Austin, first introduced this helpful nomenclature for the distinction now being made. Referring primarily to verbal acts, he pointed out that there was a difference between the *intended effect* of an act, and the *actual effect* which that act produced. In any meaningful communication or action there is an effect intended by the actor; there is also an actual effect which may be different. For example, if I ask, "Do you think the banks will collapse tomorrow?" the illocution may well be to acquire otherwise innocent information. But it may have the effect of creating panic in my hearers' ears. The intended effect of an act is termed the illocution, the actual effect is termed the perlocution.

As we have seen Murray rightly recognizes that the illocution of the covenant, and hence baptism, is to seal and signify salvific grace and goodness. That the covenant is intended to be gracious is evident from Gen. 12:1-3. But, as we have seen, the actual effect, the perlocution, of the covenant may be something quite different. It may well become a vehicle of intensified curse for the one admitted to the covenant, but who refuses to bow to its stipulations, indicating an unrepentant heart. Kline properly understands this dual aspect of the covenant—that it is a bond in which one experiences either curse or blessing. His theology of the covenant gives proper recognition to the aspect of self-maledictory oath; this

is precisely what circumcision-baptism entails. But from these considerations Kline draws the unwarranted conclusion that the meaning of circumcision is merely to ratify entrance into a law-order, with no recognition of a predisposition for grace or blessing. This is a lamentable watering down of the significance of circumcision or baptism in our opinion. The argumentation and evidences adduced do not justify the conclusion Kline draws.

In the first place it is misleading to suggest that the self-maledictory oath in a covenant was taken or was administered neutrally, and that it simply and only signified entrance into a law order. It was administered with the *intention* that the covenant be kept and the proper blessing result. It was intended for blessing, then. The self-maledictory oath was designed to ensure that grace and favour resulted. So with God's covenant. Circumcision and baptism point to and seal salvific grace and they are intended to ratify the same.

Secondly, Kline allows the perlocution of the covenant, the actual effect, to govern the intent of the sacrament. This is a common confusion in certain theological circles, as witness those who deny that the Gospel offer can be well meant because it is a savour of death to the non-elect. Another example comes from those who deny that common grace exists because it results in greater condemnation upon those who receive its benefits but do not glorify God. These errors come from predicating the meaning of theological constructions upon the perlocution of God's revelation, not upon the illocution. Because the covenant bond does actually result in curse for some is not to say that the curse was the illocution of the covenant: the one does not follow from the other. Thus, we would argue that Murray has allowed the illocution of the covenant (and sacrament) to obscure the perlocution. Kline has allowed the perlocution to obviate the illocution. Neither position is acceptable.

If the distinction between the illocution and perlocution of the sacrament is maintained, the differences between Murray and Kline are removed. When one enters the covenant one enters a law-order sovereignly administered by Christ. The act of entrance, and the sacrament signifying the same, whether the subject is an adult or an infant, is intended to be a gracious act. It presupposes or presumes the relationship of grace and union and communion with God. But because of the sinfulness of men's hearts as an immediate cause, and the secret decree of God as a final cause, some in the covenant may never be regenerated. The actual effect of that gracious bond, then, becomes a curse for them. This actual effect, however, does not

determine the intended meaning of the sacrament when it was first administered.

We must insist upon the illocution of baptism being salvific grace and blessing. This remains its primary meaning for the church, not entrance into a neutral law-order. At the same time we must take cognizance of the perlocution of baptism. This, in turn, does not obscure the primacy of *faith*, for by faith alone do the illocution and the perlocution of the covenant come to coincide.

In summary, if we maintain the distinctions introduced above, then the following propositions can be held with respect to baptism:

1. It signifies and seals entrance into the new eschatological age of the Covenant of Grace.

2. It is intended to signify regeneration, grace, and blessing to the recipient.

3. It is a powerful oath, and will exercise great significance irrespective of the response of the recipient.

4. The promises and grace indicated in the covenant will be realized only through faith.

5. God's righteous vengeance, prefigured in the Cross and the destruction of apostate Jerusalem, will be exercised toward the unrepenting recipient of baptism.

Baptist Eschatology: Setting The Scene

One of the most powerful and cogent arguments for paedobaptism and against believer's baptism remains that framed by Calvin:

God's command concerning circumcision of infants was either lawful and not to be trifled with, or it was deserving of censure. If there was in it nothing incongruous or absurd, neither can anything absurd be found in the observance of infant baptism.⁵²

Ironically the baptist counter to this argument appeals to redemptive-historical eschatology. Karl Barth revived this aspect of the debate, arguing that the Kingdom of God inaugurated by Christ was a universal kingdom, not restricted to geography or national line. The seed concept of the Old covenant has no counter reference under the New, for the universality of the Kingdom is built upon faith. The "natural seed" becomes the "spiritual seed"—those who believe in Christ. Berkouwer astutely presents Barth's argument as follows:

52. *Institutes*, 4:16:20.

To be sure, the line of the succession of generations is continued, and marriage is seen as a gift from God, but this *structure* belongs nonetheless to the nature of the era that lies in the past, so that it *cannot have constitutive significance for the Kingdom of God*. It is really so that the coming of the Kingdom of God abruptly ends the old history. Grace comes to stand over against the structures of a bygone age. Barth's argument against infant baptism, then, turns out to be fundamentally eschatological.⁵³

Calvin's argument can be rejected because another premise is operative. Between the Old and New Covenants a new order has arrived, an order which shakes off the old structures and categories. This realized eschaton has essentially nothing to do with marriage, the family, generation, nationhood. It is above and beyond these, and the member in the New Order, entering the eschaton by faith, departs from these carnal and worldly structures. They, like clothes, can be shed leaving the body complete and whole.

The baptist argument, then, is predicated upon eschatology, and eschatology of a particular sort. We find, for example, Jewett charging the Reformed with ignoring biblical theology in their doctrine, asserting that since paedobaptists have made baptism identical to circumcision, they end up with a scheme where "Israel becomes the church and the church Israel, in an uncritical, undifferentiated way that ossifies the movement of redemptive history."⁵⁴ They have frozen "the movement of redemptive history at the Old Testament level of the earthly, temporal and typical."⁵⁵

Since Reformed theologians have been at the forefront of biblical theology, insisting that all exegesis be sensitive to the flow of redemptive history and eschatology, it may well be appropriate to ask what *conception* of eschatology and redemptive history is being spoken of by the baptists. When we do, it will turn out that Jewett's charge is half accurate—paedobaptists are not *insensitive* to the flow of redemptive history as understood by baptists. Rather, paedobaptists *reject* the baptist construction of redemptive history because they consider it unbiblical. It is the particular eschatology, the particular view of the eschaton inaugurated by Christ, and the particular view of biblical theology that is rejected by paedobaptists as they reject baptist theology.⁵⁶

53. Berkouwer, *loc. cit.* Emphasis mine.

54. Jewett, p. 105. Emphasis mine.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 139.

56. The debate between baptist and paedobaptists is centuries old; it has not been resolved, and, we believe, will not be resolved until a biblical eschatology is settled.

The following representative statements by baptists reveal the biblical-theological constructs underlying their theology.

Walter J. Chantry:

But the New Testament Church is come of age. It is by way of contrast, inward, spiritual, and personal.⁵⁷

Old Testament Israelites had expectations which were territorial and special. Conquering of the promised land to expel oppressive Gentiles was a firm hope. Though Jesus twice drove money-changers from the temple, he did not really cleanse that building of its corruptions. . . . By way of contrast Christ's kingdom is inward. It comes mightily but secretly in the hearts of men.⁵⁸

Some recent post-millennialists have fallen into future expectations similar to those of dispensational pre-millennialists. . . . This kingdom is identified in their thinking with external, visible, temporal blessings. It is even supposed by some to be identified with world-wide governmental allegiance to Mosaic laws. . . . Such anticipations cannot survive the scrutiny of Jesus' kingdom teaching. A gradual, spiritual, inward advancement of the kingdom continues until the end of the world.⁵⁹

David Kingdon:

According to Jer. 32:33, God will write his law on the hearts of his people. The emphasis has shifted from the external ceremonies and institutions of the Old Covenant to the possession of inward spiritual life.⁶⁰

[Paedobaptists] are dwelling in the sphere of the theocracy of Israel rather than in the realm of the redeemed community, the church.⁶¹

Paul K. Jewett:

With the advent of the Messiah — the promised seed *par excellence*

A growing number of theologians opine that eschatology is probably the most important area of theological debate today. On its resolution hang a number of critical questions, baptism being one. The paedobaptist-baptist debate will not be settled by exegesis and counter-exegesis of texts immediately connected to the issue. It will be settled in the courts of eschatology and the redemptive-historical context in which these texts are understood.

57. "Baptism and Covenant Theology," *Baptist Reformation Review*, II:1.

58. *God's Righteous Kingdom: The Law's Connection with the Gospel* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1980), p. 51.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

60. *Children of Abraham* (Haywards Heath: Carey Publications, 1978), p. 34.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

—and the Pentecostal effusion of the Spirit, the salvation contained in the promise to Israel was brought nigh. No longer was it a hope on the distant horizon but rather an accomplished fact in history. Then—and for our discussion, this THEN is of capital significance—the temporal, earthly, typical elements of the old dispensation were dropped from the great house of salvation as scaffolding from the finished edifice.⁶²

In all of these statements there is a distinct movement in redemptive history postulated. The Kingdom of God progresses from the external to the internal, from the temporal to the eternal, from the fleshly to the spiritual, from the earthly to the heavenly, from the visible to the invisible, from the objective to the subjective, from the corporate to the individual.⁶³

This is baptist eschatology in a nutshell. It is not a new development in the history of theology. The only theological ground on which the Anabaptists could defend themselves against the Reformed was to posit a similar “development” in redemptive history. They began with a contrast between nature and grace, the revived platonism made popular by the Schoolmen. As redemption unfolded it became more and more “spiritual” and less and less “natural.” The Reformers started from the different position. Rejecting the dichotomy between nature and grace, they insisted on the contrast being between sin and righteousness. So Berkouwer: “The Reformers, however, always maintained that the contrast was not between nature and grace, but between flesh and spirit, sin and grace. . . .”⁶⁴

No baptist would be crass enough to argue that under the New Covenant we do not have to do with “externals”—marriage, children, families, economics, justice, governments, and education. But the baptist wishes to argue that these *pass away* from the purview of redemption. Thus we can conclude judiciously that the whole baptist case hangs on this view of redemptive history. If this view cannot be substantiated exegetically, then Calvin’s argument is simply irrefutable. If the baptist view of the eschaton is to be established, then at least the following must be proven: that the New Covenant, the covenant of Redemption, has no earthly, temporal, corporate, terrestrial, or national reference. Only then can the baptist case be established biblically, since the failure to baptize infants is predicated upon this proposition.

62. *Infant Baptism*, p. 91.

63. Compare Jewett, *ibid.*, p. 139.

64. Berkouwer, p. 175.

It is not sufficient to establish that the Old Covenant embraced this earthly reality. This is acknowledged by all concerned. Nor is it sufficient to prove that baptism is a sign and seal of personal faith and regeneration. Both camps acknowledge this, also. Rather baptists have to prove that *baptism* signifies personal faith and regeneration *only*. Moreover, baptists must establish that the New Covenant itself, of which baptism is the sign and seal, is no broader than the individual.⁶⁵ Or, to put it another way, the baptist must prove exegetically that families, work, economics, politics, etc. are not under the aegis of God's covenantal dealings with mankind.

Baptist Eschatology Tested

We have seen that baptist sacramentology predicates a change from paedo-circumcision to believer's baptism upon a peculiar unfolding of redemptive history. As noted above, baptist theologians have given at least seven axes to describe this development. Consequently, our examination of this eschatology has two engines. We must see, in the first place, whether realities internal, eternal, spiritual, heavenly, invisible, subjective, and individual are found under the Old Covenant. If these are found to be present, then the baptist case is severely weakened, or at best it needs to be radically qualified. The change in the administration of the sacrament would begin to look far less substantial. Calvin's argument for the continuity of infant candidacy would be heard sharpening on the whetstone.

Our second concern must be to ascertain whether realities external, temporal, fleshly, earthly, visible, objective, and corporate are

65. The contours of argument outlined here parallel, interestingly enough, that found amongst those denying the deity of Christ. We do not suggest, of course, that there is any connection theologically between the Arians and the baptists. Rather, we seek to illustrate the contours of argument by making reference to another case. Arians will "prove" their position by citing texts indicating the humanity of Christ, or the distinction of personality between God the Father and the Son. These texts are good in and of themselves but the problem is that they *do not take account* of other passages which predicate consubstantiality with the Father, and the Deity of the person of the Son. They assume a dichotomy that is patently false.

In the baptist dispute, it is not sufficient to cite passages which prove inwardness, for these are eagerly embraced by paedobaptists. Nor is it sufficient to assume a (false) dichotomy, that because internality is spoken of, externality is "shed like a scaffold." What the baptist must do is *prove* that externality is shed. It is not the texts that baptists point to that constitute the deficiency of their case, but the texts of which they do not take account.

found under the New Covenant. If this can be established then baptist sacramentology can no longer be credited with any biblical authority. The premise introduced to justify administering baptism to believers only would be exposed as untrue, not faithful to the Scriptures. This will be our method of procedure.

1. *Internal, Spiritual Realities under the Old Covenant.*

In the baptist conceptions of the Old Covenant the concern is to highlight and emphasize the substantial differences between the Old and New Covenants to justify in turn the radical departure from paedocircumcision to believer's baptism. This concern tends to obscure the *internal*⁶⁶ aspects of the Old Covenant. The more external aspects are emphasized, and the internal, subjective aspects obscured so that the distinctiveness of the New Covenant can appear in bolder relief.

We see this tendency in Paul Jewett's exposition of the meaning of circumcision. Jewett acknowledges that circumcision was spiritual and ethical, a symbol of renewal and cleansing of the heart. In the Old Testament, true spirituality is spoken of as circumcision of heart; fleshliness or ungodliness is termed uncircumcision (Lev. 26:41; Dt. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4; 9:25, 26; Josh. 5:9; Ezk. 44:7; compare with Rom. 2:25-29). Thus circumcision, applied to both adult and child, pointed to and sealed inward, spiritual, ethical realities and therefore subjective, individual realities, and that toward God. John Murray is perfectly correct in declaring that circumcision indicated a religious and spiritual relationship on the highest level—union and communion with God.

But Jewett animadverts upon this as follows: "Hence even in the Old Testament we see that circumcision, the mark of citizenship in the Jewish nation, had *not only a socio-political but also an ethico-theological meaning.*"⁶⁷ Note the mode of expression here: circumcision has become primarily a mark of citizenship, and the ethico-theological meaning of circumcision (the *internal* aspect) is a *but also*, an addition to this mark of citizenship.

Jewett and others argue that the ethico-religious aspect was encrusted over by earthly, fleshly elements. Under the New Covenant the earthly passed away, leaving the internal in its pristine purity, as it were. This is referred to as the new heavenly reality. The adjective *heavenly* is not used by Jewett and others in its ethical

66. The terminology *external-internal* should be understood as having a relative reference only. It does not indicate an essential dichotomy within human nature.

67. Jewett, p. 86. Emphasis mine.

sense (as in Hebrews 11:16; 12:22; Gal. 4:21-31; *cf.* Col. 3:1-11), but in its *metaphysical* sense, to refer to a nonmaterial sphere of reality. The progression from the Old to the New Covenant is not seen as an historical-redemptive progression but as a *metaphysical*-redemptive progression, as God's grace and redemption concentrated upon the non-material aspects of man's being.

Clearly the Old Covenant, however, was just as much concerned with inward realities of man's being. The Covenant called for man to walk before God and be blameless (Gen. 17:1, Dt. 18:13); man had to worship God in spirit and in truth (Ex. 20:1-11) so that he loved God with all his heart, soul, strength, and mind (Dt. 6:5; 10:12); he had to fear God, serving him in love (Dt. 10:12; 6:13); he had to seek for the Lord his God, searching for him with all his heart and soul (Dt. 4:29); his heart had to be circumcised so that he would love the Lord his God with all his heart and with all his soul (Dt. 30:6). Moreover, God gave his covenant law, not merely as an earthly reality serving as a typical foreshadowing of eternal life, but to teach men to love their neighbours as they loved themselves (Lev. 19:18), to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with their God (Micah 6:8). Thus the law was holy, just, and good, and therefore spiritual (Rom. 7:12, 14), provided it was used lawfully—that is, as God intended it to be used (I Tim. 1:8).

Thus the Law's exposition of the Old Covenant. Now consider the Psalms. It escapes me how anyone could read the Psalms and conclude that the Old Covenant did not live and breath spiritual, eternal, internal realities. Remember that many of these Psalms were written by David, the theocratic King, king of a very earthly, temporal, fleshly, external, visible, objective, and corporate entity, yet at the same time, theocratic King over an internal, eternal, spiritual, heavenly, invisible, subjective, and individual entity. Space does not permit an exhaustive citation, but consider that the righteous man delights in the law of the Lord and in this law he meditates day and night (Ps. 1:2; 19:7-11; 119) he *cries* to the Lord (Ps. 3:4); he knows the *gracious deliverance* of God (4:1). Note the *personal* emphasis: "Answer me when *I* call, O God of my righteousness," yet this is Psalm for the choir director, meaning that it was intended to be used in corporate, public worship. There is no dichotomy between the individual and the corporate. The one and the many are equally ultimate; both are under the purview of redemption in the Old Covenant.

The singer longs to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life to behold the beauty of the Lord (Ps. 27:4). He confesses his

sin (Ps. 37:1-7; Ps. 51)—no more poignant expression of repentance and confession can be found in the whole Bible. Even the Hymns of Ascent, which were sung on the way to public corporate worship, can be intensely personal. In Ps. 121:1 we read: "I was glad when they said unto me. . . ." We would be hard pressed to find a more intensely personal expression of religion and faith than Ps. 139: "O Lord, thou has searched me and known me. . . ." (v.1).

Further, without any sense of dichotomy, the Psalmist is able to combine the corporate and the individual realities of life without deprecating either. The singer lifts up his *own* eyes to the keeper of *Israel* (Ps. 121:1-4). The captives sing as a corporate group in Babylon (Ps. 127:1-4), using the first person plural; then without contradiction the individual composer says, "If *I* forget you, O Jerusalem, may *my* right hand forget her skill" (Ps. 127:5). The corporate, objective, historical, temporal aspects of salvation are the subject in Ps. 106. Israel's history of the Exodus is recited and the Psalm ends with a call to the whole nation as a nation to worship the Lord (Ps. 106:47, 48). Yet this same Psalm begins with a plea for *individual* blessing *in and through* corporate solidarity: "Remember me, O Lord in thy favour toward Thy people; Visit me with Thy salvation, That I may see the prosperity of Thy chosen ones, That I may rejoice in the gladness of Thy nation, That I may glory with Thine inheritance" (Ps. 106:4, 5).

In the Psalms, then, religion is both intensely corporate and intensely individual at the same time. Any suggestion that the former receives greater emphasis than the latter, or that the individual internal aspects of religion are underdeveloped, cannot be sustained unless one forces upon the Psalms a hermeneutical dichotomy from the outside. But such schematization inevitably compromises the authority of the Bible itself so that the Word of God no longer stands as the fundamental, presuppositional authority. It is replaced by a speculative philosophic schema foreign to it, and, therefore, we would argue, antagonistic to it. The baptist schema of eschatology finds no support in the Psalms.

We may then turn to the Wisdom literature in general. In Job we clearly have an emphasis upon outward, temporal, earthly, corporate religion. This seems like good baptist material. Job enjoyed many temporal blessings (Job 1:1-3), which were restored to him after his trials (Job 42:12-17). Moreover, his religion had corporate aspects since he was able to consecrate *his children* (Job 1:5); this aspect of religion was clearly present also after his restoration (42:8-10). But the body of the book contains an intensely personal,

inward struggle, that still to this day comforts every suffering New Covenant Christian who is wise enough to turn to it. The depth and pathos of human subjectivity, the mood and emotion contained therein, is breathtaking. Our shallow generation can hardly appreciate it.

As in the Psalms, so here we find the harmonious integration of earthly and heavenly aspects of religion. No greater example is found than in 19:23-24. Job's flesh is rotting away, and yet he believes in eternal life. His Redeemer lives and will take his stand upon the earth. He will see God without his flesh. At first sight this would seem to support the baptist conception of the Kingdom's being an eternal, non-material realm. Yet Job goes on, cryptically foreshadowing the resurrection when he says, "Yet without my flesh I shall see God . . . whom *my eyes* shall see and not another." His religion, intensely personal, even when his Redeemer stands upon the *earth* ever remains physical and fleshly.

We move on to the Proverbs, often described as worldly, concerned with everyday affairs rather than with religious devotion. Yet references to the *heart* of man abound. (Prov. 4:4—"Let your heart hold fast to my words." 4:23—"Watch over your heart with all diligence.") Moreover the book is replete with appeals and exhortations to ethical righteousness. Consider, for example, the warnings against adultery (Prov. 5 & 7), pride (6:17; 11:2 and throughout), lies and deceit (6:17-19), laziness (26:13-16), slander (18:8), theft (20:10). Over and over the father instructs his son to fear the Lord (1:29, 2:5, 1:7, 9:10, 15:33, 23:17, etc.). Again the Bible forces us to conclude that the baptist conception of the Old Covenant cannot be sustained by reference to the Law or the Wisdom writings.

The Prophets remain to be considered. Here again the Bible does not support the baptist schema for we find an emphasis on all aspects of true religion, both external and internal. For example, Samuel taught obedience was better than sacrifice (I Sam. 15:22). In Isa. 1:10-20 we hear that God is weary of Jerusalem's endless sacrifices and unclean lives. The emphasis is not upon outward, formally correct religion, but on spiritual religion that was a permeation of all of life and existence with God's Spirit. Jeremiah declares that sacrifices without a clean and holy life are an abomination (Jer. 7:1-11). So Micah tells us that sacrifices are nothing without a heart walking humbly with God (Micah 6:6-8). Humble trembling before the Word of God is the requirement (Isa. 66:2).

If the baptist protagonists insist that the Old Covenant be understood as placing priority upon the outward aspects of religion, we

must reply that this is quite incorrect, for the Old Covenant places the emphasis upon the heart and the inward aspects throughout, even as it did from the beginning (Gen. 17:1).

We are at a loss, then, to understand how Walter Chantry can write: "But the New Testament church is come of age. It is by way of contrast, inward, spiritual, and personal."⁶⁸ It is true that the New Covenant is presented as a fulfillment or completion of the Old. In this sense we can understand the language "*come of age*." (See, for example, I Cor. 10:11; Gal. 4:4; Heb. 7:22; 8:6-13; I Pet. 1:10-12). But what bemuses us is where Chantry himself draws the contrast. The New Covenant *by contrast* is inward, spiritual, and personal. Thus he must understand the Old Covenant not to have been inward, spiritual, or personal, but to have been outward, carnal, and corporate.

But how can this be maintained in the face of the evidence reviewed above, albeit in a scanty fashion? To be sure, the Old Covenant dealt with outward realities, carnal (that is fleshly, bodily, physical) realities, and corporate realities. But it also addressed inward, spiritual, and personal realities, and that extensively.

We imagine, however, that what Chantry really means to say, with Jewett, is that while inward realities were clearly present in the Old Covenant, the *emphasis* is on the outward realities, and it is the emphasis that is reversed in the New Covenant. What should we say to this? Leaving aside, for the moment, the fact that arguments about emphasis and priority are like the rainbow—disarmingly ephemeral and deceptive, since emphasis changes drastically according to the situation in hand, the issues involved, whether we are addressing corporate entities or individuals, means or ends, etc.—and assuming that we can make an argument for the religious emphasis of the Old Covenant, an extremely strong case can be made for the predominant emphasis under the Old Covenant being the internal heart of man and the subjective aspects of religion. Clearly the Old Covenant itself places the priority right there.

Some will object by reminding us that whole chapters are given over to the establishment of ceremonial, formal worship. Surely this reflects an emphasis upon outward formality. But, we reply, the establishment of a system is one thing, its correct usage another. When the Bible touches upon the correct use of ceremonial law, the emphasis is upon the heart and the spiritual reality communicated therein, as we have seen in the prophets.

68. Walter Chantry, "Baptism and Covenant Theology," *loc. cit.*

We believe that baptist theologians, in their conception of the Old Covenant religion, have read into the Scriptures precisely what they must prove. They have claimed that physical generation apart from spiritual birth constituted membership in the Old Covenant, so religion had to be grounded in externals.

But let us examine this briefly. David Kingdon puts the question this way: "The crux of the matter is whether or not participation in the temporal earthly blessings of the covenant was sufficient in the Old Testament period to give a right to circumcision."⁶⁹ He points out that one could apparently enjoy life under the godly, equitable judicial system of the theocracy, one could enjoy the privileges of gleaning and other social welfare provisions and so on, without ever being regenerate. Participation in these blessings was enough to grant the right to circumcision.

But we must counter by observing that Kingdon's rhetorical question by its very form prejudices the case. It begs the question of whether one has to participate in blessing before having the sacrament administered. Yet this is the very point at issue. We may reply with another question: Which came first, the promise unto Abraham and his children followed by the command to circumcise the children, or did the children enjoy the temporal blessings first? Obviously the former. So the Reformed have always argued that the right to baptism/circumsision comes from the promise and command of God, not from the prior possession of certain blessings.⁷⁰ To be sure, the circumcised enjoyed blessings, but these were enjoyed *because* he was a covenant member; he was not admitted to the covenant *because he enjoyed them*. Thus the argument of Kingdon and others fails because it does not prove enough. It does not prove that one has to participate in blessings before one is admitted to the covenant.

On the other hand, Kingdon's argument proves too much. Many *uncircumcised* participated in the temporal earthly blessings without being granted circumcision. This being so, we may conclude that participation in temporal blessings had nothing to do with whether one was circumcised. Consider, for proof, the case of the resident alien. The resident alien (*ger*) was "essentially a foreigner who lives more or less permanently in the midst of another community."⁷¹

69. Kingdon, *Children*, p. 42; cf. Jewett, p. 97.

70. Thus Berkouwer, p. 184. The administration of baptism, he asserts, rests upon God.

71. Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 2 vols. (New York: McGraw Hill, 1965), 1:74.

These resident aliens were free men. They could hire out their services (Dt. 24:14). They were especially commended to the Israelites for charity and compassion (Ex. 22:20; 23:9); they could glean with the rest of the poor in Israel (Lev. 19:10; 23:22); they were under the protection of God (Dt. 10:18). Israelites were charged to love aliens as they loved themselves (Lev. 19:34). The aliens could share in the poor tithe (Dt. 14:29), and in the Sabbatical year (Lev. 25:6). They were entitled to the protection of the cities of refuge (Num. 35:15). They were entitled to the same legal rights in the courts as Israelites (Dt. 1:16). De Vaux concludes that "in everyday life there was no barrier between *gerim* and Israelites."⁷² Thus, these uncircumcised ones clearly partook of the blessings of the covenant. But, they were *not* to partake of the *Passover* unless they had been circumcised (Ex. 12:48, 49). This singular fact serves to underscore the *religious, spiritual* significance of circumcision. The case of the resident alien, however, does show that the right of partaking in general covenant privileges was not given by circumcision. Residence in the land established that right.

But if all these advantages were enjoyed by the uncircumcised as well as the circumcised, except for the passover, we are justified in concluding that these external, temporal blessings and privileges were not the heart of the Old Covenant. The essence of the Covenant remains ethical and religious. If any baptist disputes this and asks, Why, then, were infants circumcised? the answer is clear—because God commanded it so. Infants were circumcised as they are baptized today: because Yahweh, the all-sovereign Lord of the Covenant, exercised His divine prerogatives and declared "My covenant is with you *and your descendants after you* . . . to be a God to you and to *your descendants after you*" (Gen. 17:7). Because the Lord has so declared in covenant, we must obey with thankful, grateful hearts.

In conclusion, we regard the baptist insistence that circumcision had a two-fold reference—an external and an internal reference—and that participation in the former equally qualified one for circumcision, as a schematization foreign to the Bible.⁷³ It is a reading into the Bible what one hopes to find there. Jewett concedes as much when he writes: "While it is true that no Scripture passage speaks of

72. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

73. Jewett, for example, arguing from Barth, writes: ". . . all Israelites had a right to the sign of circumcision by virtue of their participation in the earthly blessings of the covenant community: they were citizens of the nation of Israel by birth.

an external participation in the covenant in just these words, there is no other interpretation *that can be reasonably imposed on the data.*"⁷⁴ This is an honest, if damning admission. We may add a more accurate gloss: there is no other reasonable interpretation on neoplatonic assumptions and with neoplatonic eschatology, but since this is not found in the Bible, it must indeed be *imposed on* the data contained therein.

Natural birth never gave one the automatic right to be part of the people of God, just as it did not give a right to circumcision. The command of God established the right to circumcision. This was administered with the illocution of the child's being a child of God in truth. Faith caused the perlocution to coincide with the illocution.

The prophets constantly criticized the notion that mere external descent entitled one to the sign and seal of the covenant without spiritual rebirth and conversion. So also Christ, who declared that without spiritual rebirth and conversion natural descent meant that one was a child of the devil (John 8:33ff). Accordingly, the new birth was apparently well known under the Old Covenant, or would have been had not Israel been so blinded in Christ's day. How else can we understand Jesus' rebuke to Nicodemus to the effect that a teacher in Israel should understand these things (John 3:10)?

The baptist construction of the Old Covenant actually turns out to be a reconstruction along neoplatonic lines. The Old Covenant clearly embraced internal, eternal, spiritual, heavenly, invisible, subjective, and individual realities.

2. *External Realities Under the Old Covenant.*

We believe the *coup de grace* against the baptist position is found in a consideration of the New Covenant. Here we shall see that the very realities that baptists claim have passed away from the purview of redemption are very much alive and well, as it were, in the New Covenant.

We have seen that both paedobaptists and baptists agree that the New Covenant heralds the entrance into a new eschatological order. The one baptized is understood to have entered the "ends of the age." But what is this New Age like? More specifically what aspects of human reality are included in this realized eschaton? What

Since, however, this outward form of the covenant was done away with in Christ, to baptize indiscriminately in the New Testament age is either to cause discipline in administering the rite or to be guilty of hypocrisy in receiving it." *Infant Baptism*, p. 102.

74. *Ibid.*, p. 102f.

"pieces" of reality are included under the redemptive cross of Christ? We may frame the question in another fashion: is the New Age "across" earthly history, or "along" earthly history? Edwyn Bevan aptly summarizes the *across history* alternative when he writes:

the passage of humanity appears not as a passage along the line of earthly history, to an ultimate goal on earth, but as a passage *across* the line of earthly history, the earth being only a platform which each generation crosses obliquely from birth to its entrance, individual by individual, into the unseen world, the world always there beside the visible one. The formation of the Divine Community in that unseen world is the supreme hope, in comparison with which everything which happens on this temporal platform, now or in the future, is of minor importance.⁷⁵

John Baillie, by contrast, presents and argues for the *along history* alternative. He acknowledges a measure of truth in the "across" view. It is present in the Bible. Yet, he goes on,

it may be suspected that the elevation of this picture into a position of primacy is more characteristic of a certain strain in later thought than of the New Testament itself. Surely the dominating picture throughout the New Testament is rather of the earth as a platform *along* which men walk, and on which one generation succeeds another, enjoying even now the blessings of a life hid with Christ in God, and waiting in hope for a fullness of glory which will supervene upon the close, not of each individual biography, but of earthly history itself, when the platform will finally be swept away to make room for a new heavens and a new earth.⁷⁶

These are the questions which must be solved.

To begin with, the New Covenant and the New Age it brings include temporal, fleshly, earthly, and visible realities because the Mediator of the New Covenant became and remains in temporal realms; He was fleshly, earthly, and visible. He is today fleshly, earthly, temporal, although our eyes behold him not. This is the meaning of the Incarnation. The Docetists, embarrassed with the corporeality of the Gospel, attempted to construct a non-material Saviour; later Gnostics argued that only the spiritual (by which they meant the inward, immortal, eternal) aspects of Christ's nature were of saving efficacy.

The early church stoutly rejected this heresy. They defended the

75. Edwyn Bevan, *The Kingdom of God and History* (Oxford Conference Series, 1938), p. 56f. Cited in John Baillie, *The Belief in Progress* (London: Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford University Press, 1950), p. 197.

76. John Baillie, *Progress*, p. 200.

fleshly, earthly, and visible aspects of the Messiah. Man beheld his glory (I John 1:4); he was *heard* with human ears and *touched* with human hands (I John 1:1). To be a genuine Christian it was necessary to confess the Messiah had come in the flesh (I John 4:2). Hence the redeeming work of Christ on our behalf took place in his true body and his reasonable soul.

It would compromise the Gospel unto death to suggest that Christ's saving work existed in the "spiritual" realm only — that is, in some realm divorced from the body. His work in our behalf was thoroughly spiritual, but in the realm of both body and soul. Sins in the body had to be atoned for as well as sins in the mind. Thus, he bore our sins in his *body* (I Peter 2:24). His physical suffering, or the suffering he endured in his body, was just as spiritual as the suffering he endured in his soul, for we are healed by his (physical) *stripes* (Isa. 53:4, 5).

This same truth can be seen from another perspective. Hell is the place where God punishes sin in the soul and the body (Matthew 10:28). It follows, therefore, that Christ, laying down his life for his people, was destroyed in both body and soul. This is why orthodox religion has ever defended the historicity of the Cross with its temporal-spatial referent. The sufferings of Christ were not timeless, or eternal. They were indeed subjective, invisible, internal; but at the same time they were external, temporal, fleshly, visible, objective, and corporate. In all aspects they were thoroughly spiritual.

So also the resurrection. The Bible insists upon the bodily resurrection of Christ from the dead. Paul tells us that if Christ did not rise *bodily* from the dead we are still in our sins (I Cor. 15:17). This suggests that the resurrection establishes not only Christ's eternity, his deity, his powerful kingdom, and his victory over sin, but also that our sins are *bodily* sins and that if Christ did not rise bodily, redeeming even human flesh from sin, then we are still in our sins. His redemption is incomplete and ineffectual. This explains why Paul goes from this to argue for our own bodily resurrection (I Cor. 15:35ff).

So we have a fleshly (bodily), visible, temporal Saviour; we have a fleshly (bodily), visible, temporal substitutionary atonement for sin; we have a fleshly (bodily), visible, temporal resurrection from the dead. The data forces the conclusion that the New Covenant embraces and includes fleshly, visible, temporal reality. Unless our construction of the New Age includes these realities within its formulation, then we have denied the teaching of Scripture and forced a Gnostic, platonic metaphysic upon the Bible. It does not hold

water in the Old Testament; it is just as perforated in the New.

We do not imagine that many baptists, however, would be troubled by the observations given above. Baptist soteriology always, in the final analysis, focuses on the individual to the exclusion of all else. Moreover, most baptists would acknowledge that the body of man is indeed embraced within the redemption of Christ. They would argue that the individual body and soul passes across human history to the real (unseen) world. Nevertheless, we believe that our description of the New Age must begin here, for it is the *baptist* apologetes who have described the contrast between the Covenants in material-immaterial terms. It is they who argue, as we have noted, that the Old Covenant was external whereas the New is internal, that the Old was visible, whereas the New is invisible, and so forth. Thus, in the light of the data above, their animadversions immediately stand in need of qualification.

But we continue on to other aspects of New Covenant reality. We note that all Old Testament law has an equity that continues under the New Covenant (Matt. 5:17-20). The ceremonial law was a typical institution that prefigured Christ. At the same time, the ceremonial law held forth "divers instructions of moral duties."⁷⁷ These moral instructions, being applications of the moral law to individual and corporate church life, continue under the New Covenant (I Cor. 5:7; II Cor. 6:17; Jude 23). The pre-figuring aspects are consummated in the Christ they foreshadowed, who is now revealed to the world. In their true sense, that is, their Christocentric sense, they continue also.

But the Old Testament law also contained God's requirements for the corporate body, the body politic, for society and state. The general equity of these laws still binds today in both society and state.⁷⁸ This means that the judicial laws, relating to these spheres, are under the aegis of the New Covenant. So, in the New Age, the civil magistrate is a minister of God (Rom. 13:1-7; I Peter 2:13, 14). The civil magistracy, as an institution comes under the redemptive blood of Christ.

Secondly, clearly the New Covenant embraces society, that realm of corporate and social life beyond the state. Countless instructions are given to control and govern, to redeem, our relations with those in the church. Similarly relations with those outside the church are to come under the redeeming, reconciling blood of

77. *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 19:3.

78. *Ibid.*, 19:4.

Christ (Rom. 12:19-21) though not necessarily to salvific efficacy. The New Covenant redeems and reconstructs the family. It gives many material blessings (Mark 10:29, 30). It gives a wealth of instruction to fathers, mothers, husbands, wives, and children. This indicates that the blood of Christ covers and includes these earthly corporate realities (Eph. 5:22-6:4; Col. 3:18-21). The divine institutions of parenthood and of marriage are to be reconstructed, reformed around the the holy Triune God until they achieve the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. While it may seem obvious to some, yet it is worth stressing since many seem to have overlooked it—all of these institutions presuppose corporate, social reality. The one necessarily requires the other. If motherhood is to be redeemed, then both mothers and children must be included under the Covenant of Redemption. In administering the sacrament of baptism, the church intends not only that the individual soul, who is a mother, and the individual soul, who is a child, will be saved eternally, but that the mother *as a mother* will be redeemed, and that the child *as a child* will be redeemed as both walk in the newness of resurrection life *along* human history. Hence, children are instructed to obey their parents *in the Lord* (Eph. 6:1).

Two objections may be addressed here. First, some may rehearse the apparent silence of the New Testament Scriptures on socio-political realities. Much more attention is given to these under the Old Covenant, it is true, although we believe the “silence” of the New Testament Scriptures is more a product of platonic mental conditioning than actual silence. Nevertheless, this has given a superficial authentication to the baptist thesis that the New Covenant is more inward than the Old. If this continues to perplex some, consider the historical situation of the early church. The New Testament Scriptures were not written to people in a vacuum, but to (often isolated) pockets of believers fighting to establish the faith over against Judaism and Roman paganism. The content of the New Testament reflects this historical reality. So Baillie:

The deepest reason why the early Christians had less to say about the future of earthly society than had the prophets of Israel was . . . the fact that they had no present voice or vote in the general affairs of that society. St. Paul addressed his epistles to little groups of men and women who were endeavouring to live the true Christian life in the midst of a vast and powerful, but wholly alien and pagan, society and suited what he had to say to their current needs and problems. It is therefore unfair to expect from these epistles a direct answer to the further questions which

inevitably suggest themselves to the mind, because they arise out of the circumstances, of those who like ourselves possess both voice and vote and have accordingly as much responsibility as anybody else for the human direction of the affairs of the *respublica terrena*.⁷⁹

Of course, when Christians did achieve positions of influence and responsibility, God had provided for them clear and sufficient revelation to answer the questions that inevitably suggested themselves to the mind. He had already given the law of God which was to be "your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people' " (Deut. 4:6). When the context, then, of the New Covenant Scriptures is borne in mind, the number of references to the breadth of the New Covenant within the New Testament is striking indeed.

A second objection may be that Christ's blood must save human souls only, for only human souls sin. This is correct, *if* we keep in mind that 'soul' in the Bible, means 'person,' not some invisible eternal "section" of a person. But human souls sin in a veritable complexity of forms and fashions. Sin has infected the totality of the creation. Christ's redeeming blood extends to man in the totality of his being, to the limits of his fleshly and temporal reality. All human institutions are thus under the blood of Christ. Even eating and drinking (startlingly fleshly realities) must be done to his glory. All that God has created must be sanctified by the Word and prayer (I Tim. 4:5). This is the message of John 3:16; God so loved *the world* that he sent his son into the world to save the world. The Greek word, *cosmos*, indicates not the aggregate of men as isolated individuals, but man in his entire cultural complexity.

Accordingly, the Scriptures can speak of Christ as the head of a new humanity, the Second Adam (I Cor. 15:45; *cf.* Eph. 4:23, 24). Through him *all things* will be subjected — all things that are the work of God's hands (Heb. 2:5-10). This will culminate in the redemption of the whole creation which has been subjected to curse for man's sake (Rom. 8:18-23). In this sense, salvation is called a new creation (II Cor. 5:17; Gal. 5:15; Eph. 2:15). Elsewhere Paul describes the extent of redemption in the New Covenant: it is an administration suitable to the fullness of the times — the summing up (reconstituting around the headship) of *all things* in Christ; things which are in *the heavens* and things upon *the earth* (Eph. 1:10; *cf.* Col. 1:16, 20; Eph. 3:10, 15; Phil. 2:9-11).

79. Baillie, p. 199.

It is perfectly faithful to the Scriptures to assert that the New Covenant is as broad as the creation. The whole creation is under the aegis of redemption through the eschatological Son of Man, the perfect fulfillment of Psalm 8. We have to say firmly and unequivocally, because Scripture demands it of us, that the baptist conception of redemptive history is unfaithful to God and His Christ. We would even say it is *thoroughly* unfaithful because Christianity and paganism cannot be mixed. Baptist eschatology stresses that the New Covenant deals with individual, subjective, invisible, heavenly, spiritual, eternal, and internal realities. It surely does. But just as clearly it embraces external, temporal, fleshly, earthly, visible, objective, and corporate realities. Moreover because these realms can never be bifurcated by the creature, emphasis upon one at the expense of the other brings unbiblical distortion. The relinquishment of the least aspect of the creation to another power, putting it beyond the redemption of Christ, is a doctrine of demons, according to the apostle Paul (I Tim. 4:1-5). Even hell, as we have seen earlier, is under the power of the cross; the damnation and punishment is increased thereby.

The sacrament of initiation into the New Covenant must be administered in such a way that it reflects the totality of the administration that belongs to this Age: by bringing the family unit under covenantal solidarity, the whole of human society and endeavour is sacramentally embraced.

This leads us to one final consideration. Baptist protagonists usually make great play for the national-international, or the particular-universal development of redemptive history. Israel, they argue, was a theocracy—the whole nation as a nation was under God. This national entity under God was signalled by circumcision, which, incorporating the family unit under covenant solidarity, principally included nationhood. Since, the argument runs, the New Covenant does not embrace nations, entities such as theocracies no longer exist. We must not cling to that last vestige of theocracy—paedobaptism.⁸⁰

Regrettably, many paedobaptists have compromised their case by conceding here. Let us not forget that the (paedobaptist) Reformers insisted upon the realization of Christ's redemptive blood in national structures and entities, so that judicial structures,

80. See Jewett's perceptive observations, pp. 105ff. He of course draws pejorative conclusions from this, but he shows clearly that the Reformers connected paedobaptism with theocracy.

magistrates, governors, and princes would come under the law of God. They were theocratic: church and state were separate, but both were explicitly Christian. It was the baptist forefathers who gave to the Church a new version of the doctrine of separation of church and state, by which they meant the state was not to be under the covenantal authority of King Jesus (in other words, separation of *religion* and the state). Christ's kingdom was other-worldly, obliquely across and beyond human history. The baptist version of the separation of church and state required that the church put a gloss on Scripture: all things in heaven and on earth *except the civil state* are to be reconstituted around Christ's headship.

It turns out, however, that the baptist theologians have again read into the New Covenant precisely what their predilections directed them to find. On a *prima facie* reading of the New Covenant documents it is apparent that nations *as nations* are to be redeemed. When a nation as a nation comes under Christ's redeeming blood and his covenant law, so that the institutions of that nation acknowledge Christ as their Head, then we have genuine New Covenant theocracy (or Christocracy.)

Evidences such as Christ's insistence on the continuity of the Mosaic law in jot and tittle (Matt. 5:17-20), the identification of the civil magistrate as a minister of God (Rom. 13), and the truth that all powers in heaven and on earth are to be subjugated to Christ, require that we hold to the rectitude and realization of theocracy under the New Covenant. The clearest indication of theocratic government, however, is found in the terms of the Great Commission. Christ commands that the Church disciple the nations of the earth (Matt. 28:18-20). "Nations" are always socio-political entities, not aggregates of individuals. Socio-political entities are to be subdued to the law-word of King Jesus at his command.

We respectfully urge many paedobaptist brethren to remove what are, in our opinion, humanistic glasses (courtesy of the French Revolution), and submit themselves again to the glory of Christ's great Kingdom. The biggest barriers to the Church's working for theocracy today are emotional prejudice, ignorance,⁸¹ and incipient neoplatonism. Paedobaptists will not defend the baptism of infants with power until they calmly lay aside these stumbling blocks and return to the biblical conception of the New Covenant.

81. Theocracy is often confused with caesaropapism or hierocracy, which it is neither. See Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn, "The Portland Declaration," *National Review* 33:20 (October 16, 1981): 1193.

Conclusion

We have seen that baptism is the sign and seal of an entrance into a new eschatological aeon. The ground of the dispute between baptists and paedobaptists lies in their differing conceptions of this aeon. Baptist theologians argue for the administration of the sacrament to believers only on the ground that many human institutions are no longer under the purview of redemption, so that the New Aeon is radically and essentially an immaterial realm. Administration of baptism to children on the other hand can only be predicated upon a view of the eschaton grounded in the continuity of the creation itself.

The Bible does not support baptist conceptions of redemptive-history or eschatology. We have shown that the Old Covenant embraced both internal and external realities, as does the New. The New Covenant differs from the Old in that it is the Age of Realization, where redemption is powerfully accomplished both in internal and external realms. If no objection could be adduced against circumcising children under the Old Covenant, far less can be adduced against baptizing infants in the New Covenant, since that Covenant redeems all aspects of creation in prepotent intensity.

Can we now retreat back into our ecclesiastical ghettos after this debate? Are these issues important? We must insist that they are. Not to baptize infants breaks covenant with God, for it implicitly surrenders much of the creation to the Devil. The Church fails to believe in the saving work of Christ in all its power and extensive glorious reality. The church compromises the work of her Head, being unfaithful to her Saviour. She is unfaithful in his household. She denies, and in that sense, profanes his redemption. And for this, the Lord will require an accounting from his servants.

THE BAPTIST FAILURE

Ray R. Sutton

THE historical effect of the largest "protestant" movement might be illustrated by Francisco Goya's famous painting "Executions of the Third of May, 1808."¹ At a time when Napoleon was marching triumphantly across Europe, Goya sought to portray another side of his victory. The picture views several French soldiers shooting some Spaniards against a wall as well as several other victims dead on the ground. His purpose—to show what Napoleon was really doing to the people of Europe. In the same way, Baptist history, theology, and sociology must be presented. Its underlying presuppositions are devastating to civilization. They break down every sphere of society. Aristotle said that to be human is to participate in the ordering of one's society. Improving on what he said, to contribute to the dissipation of civilization is not only inhuman but diabolical. This strong charge against the baptist schema can only be born out by first understanding its historical roots, which flow back to the Anabaptist movement of the sixteenth century.

History of the Anabaptists

After the Reformation, Anabaptism emerged as a distinct social structure. Its characteristics were life apart from the "world," a voluntary basis of membership, re-baptism (ana-baptism) of adults, the rejection of infant baptism, and a "pure" church consisting of the "truly" converted who desire a "holy community" separated from the world.² With these distinctives they faced the frightening task of being called upon to create new worlds.³ In their case, how-

1. William Fleming, *Arts & Ideas* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974), p. 301.

2. Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, tr. by Olive Wyon (New York: Harper & Row [in two volumes], [1911] 1960), p. 695.

3. Max L. Stackhouse, *Ethics and the Urban Ethos* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), p. 2.

ever, the "worlds" were always to be held in separation from *the* world. Up to this point in history, their worlds had been mostly inside the Roman Church. Now they stood outside in other institutions, making it easier to evaluate their theology and sociology. One of their contemporaries and progenitors,⁴ Ulrich Zwingli, was one of the first to analyze the Anabaptist movement.

First, according to Zwingli, "they had attempted a division and partition of the church, and this was just as hypocritical as the superstition of the monks." Second, "while debate had been going on generally regarding the validity of infant baptism, the Grebel group eventually went further than just a denial of infant baptism and had established 'rebaptism', on their own." Third, "they had prophesied in the marketplaces and squares against established clergy." Fourth, "they rejected the Old Testament as equal with the New Testament as a basis for faith and practice."⁵ Therefore, he concluded that Anabaptist theology *separated* church, society, and Scripture. It meant in the opinion of the Reformers that this separational theology would lead to the failure of the Baptist theological and sociological paradigm.

Anabaptist theology did fail. It was not successful in accomplishing its own ideals nor did it replace Roman Catholicism with a purified church. Their Baptist successors around the world have fallen prey to the same corruptions that have eroded the rest of the church. Indeed, Baptist denominations of the modern world do not seem to have fared any better in the fight against apostasy.

Moreover, Anabaptist movements of the 1500s pushed the church even further from its mandate-commission (Genesis 1:26ff; Matthew 28:19-20). They unleashed what the church of the Middle Ages had been restraining. "The church feared independent spiritual movements and prevented these from developing outside of the authority of Christ partly because the 'Christian civilization' was only precariously covering a deeply rooted paganism. The chief protectorate and bearer of that civilization could not let doctrine develop that would legitimate any movements, that would break its tenuous grip and unleash either the polytheisms of tribal and national loyalties that it had only so recently subdued, the

4. In part Zwingli was a progenitor of Anabaptism, though not exclusively. He tended to have a "New Testament only" hermeneutic, which shows up in his view of worship music. Thus, it is easy to see that some of his students would press him for consistency.

5. Kenneth Ronald Davis, *Anabaptism and Asceticism* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1974), p. 72.

It has been called the external principle.²³ Man is not saved by conjuring effort from within. He *can not*. His help comes from the Lord who is external to him. Salvation is therefore objective, because the righteousness of Christ which saves is outside of man. This objective emphasis extends throughout the Augustinian approach to the major issues of Christianity. Ethics, for example, centers on the objective standard of God's Law. God's Kingdom is visibly manifested on earth. The church originates from God, not from the "gathering" of the saints, as Baptist thought has advocated. All of these issues and many others are viewed from this external principle. Subjective theology looks at them from an internal principle.

It must be stated that Augustinians do not neglect the internal. It is a question of how the internal needs of man are handled. The Bible says to look to the external, Jesus Christ's righteousness, for internal needs. Subjective theology always approaches the issue the opposite way. Pelagius, for example, would have man find salvation by looking within to alter his will, which is only effected, not dominated, by sin. Hubmaier, one of the early Anabaptist leaders, articulated the Pelagian understanding of salvation when he repeated the medieval maxim, "Man, help yourself, and then I will help you."¹⁴ His statement indicates the movement of subjectivism. It moves from the internal to the external. Not avoiding the internal, the Augustinians see that God moves from the external to the internal. Once this basic difference is understood, the nature of subjectivism becomes clear. It is the difference expressed in the way two key men in the history of the church, Augustine and Pelagius, comprehended the Bible's teaching on the movement of God and the emphasis man should have. Therefore, subjectivism is a central concept which links Anabaptistic thought back to Pelagius and forward to Schleiermacher.

Baptist historians generally try to deny these connections, but Davis admits, "Thus, in contrast to Luther's *Bondage of the Will*, and to almost all the early Magisterial Reformers, every major Anabaptist leader explicitly or implicitly espoused the principle of some human free will. . . . In particular, early in the movement's history, 1526-7, following the Erasmus-Luther controversy on the subject, two influential leaders, Hubmaier and Denck, wrote booklets explicitly outlining their theological and moral opposition to Luther's

13. Auguste Lecerf, *An Introduction to Reformed Dogmatics*, tr. by A. Schlemmer (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1949] 1981), pp. 302ff.

14. Davis, p. 151.

advocacy of unconditional election.”¹⁵ On the other hand, Davis states that although Anabaptist theology is synergistic, there are various degrees of synergism, so that “it is questionable whether all can be lumped together as Pelagianism.”¹⁶ Clearly, Davis here exemplifies the effort of most Baptists to distance themselves from Pelagius.

Implicit problems, however, with the Anabaptist view of the covenant have consistently taken Baptist thought into Pelagianism. Anabaptist theology individualizes the covenant. Consequently the covenant becomes subject oriented. Once that happens, the problems involved with subjectivism, mentioned earlier, cannot be prevented. The various interpretations of the Anabaptist doctrine of freedom illustrate this failure.

“Explicitly, at least three theories were formulated among early Anabaptists to account for this initial, limited ability to choose. In Hubmaier, for example, the depravity of man resulting from the fall is not quite total. Some vestige of the image of God remains in all, through an imprisoned and powerless but unfallen spirit. This vestige is enough to enable the initial, limited choice, the cry for grace, but never enough to earn or effect salvation. In Denck and Marpeck, only slightly different from Hubmaier, the initial freedom is due to some kind of common or prevenient grace by God—a kind of dim light of conscience or divine, inner Word or Spirit, or an immanence, or even a natural law, common to man since the fall, but expanded by Christ and the gospel. Melchior Hoffman suggests a liberating grace, common to all, resulting directly from the universal and immediate effect of the atonement of Christ.”¹⁷

Note the denial of total depravity over the attempt to preserve man’s autonomy. Pelagius attempted the same thing in his axiom that ability limits responsibility. In other words, God cannot hold men accountable if they are not able to respond. Augustine countered by saying God is God. “Who are we to answer back to God” (Romans 9:20). Man is accountable to obey regardless, but that is the point of salvation by grace. God does what man cannot do. Of course, if man is not totally depraved he really does not need to be saved. He already is, according to the suggestion of Hoffman that the atonement is universal.

The “payment” theology of Hubmaier further illustrates the

15. *Ibid.*, p. 145.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 149.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 147.

inescapable Pelagianism of Anabaptist/Baptist thought. In one of his tracts he concluded, "In summary, God is merciful but He wants no less than, if the man has committed sin, that he through remorse, regret, and contrition according to the condition of his sin make a *payment* to His godly and offended righteousness."¹⁸ Once the covenant is individualized the focus is the subject—man. Autosoterism (self-salvation-ism) is bound up in it.

Calvinistic Baptists on the other hand object to these implicit conclusions about their Anabaptist history. In response to their objections, they must be reminded of several historical and theological facts. First, in a telling way history confirms that the original Anabaptists were semi-pelagian at best. Second, the General Baptists of England, where Calvinistic Baptists flourished, rejected predestination. In fact, the General Baptists sadly illustrate the inevitable direction of any church which individualizes the covenant. "At first the basis was Puritan and Calvinistic; but while Browne and Robinson developed their Congregationalism on very similar lines to the Independency of the Baptists, without accepting the specific Baptist doctrines, Smyth, who took his congregation to Amsterdam, and settled there as a Refugee Church, was drawn farther and farther into the Baptist way of thinking. Finally he acknowledged Believers' Baptism as the logical result of Separatism and the 'holy community.' He baptized himself, and then the members of his church, and thus reestablished the church as a Baptist congregation. Then he openly declared his connection with the Baptists and the Mennonites, and joined that body. One section of his congregation, in spite of a fraternal relationship with the Mennonites, did not agree to the fusion of the two elements and, under the guidance of Helwys and Murton, its members returned to England in 1611. It was there that their church became the mother of the great Church of the General Baptists . . . which rejects the doctrine of predestination."²⁰

Third, therefore, Calvinistic Baptists must realize that their only success has been in the context of the Presbyterian and Reformed tradition. In Zurich, the land of "pure" Anabaptism, they lived in the shade of Zwingli and Calvin. In England, the Baptists floundered until they took over the Westminster Confession of Faith from the Presbyterians. The tendency of Baptist groups to move

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 154, 181.

19. Troeltsch, p. 702.

20. *Idem.*

away from Calvinism is explained by their theology of individualism. Covenantal theology has maintained that the basic unit of every sphere of society is the family, while Baptist theology sees the individual, usually very atomistically, as the foundation. There is no room in Baptist thought for seeing God claiming the child apart from the child's decision, so that decisionism is always the tendency of Baptist thought. Except where the Reformed structures of thought have restrained the outworkings of Anabaptism, it has failed.

Subjective theology has not only failed, it has led to the worst theological expressions. With its implicit man-centeredness, subjectivism brought problems within and without the Pelagian and Franciscan/Anabaptist movement. In most historical discussions by Baptists these developments are said to be foreign to pure Anabaptism, but the subjective character of Baptist theology will not allow such an opinion. An analysis of its theology further substantiates this.

I. Theology of Anabaptism and Monasticism

The Pelagian-Franciscan-Anabaptist movement has been characterized by monasticism. On the one hand it is passive and individualistic. The anchorite group which gathered around Anthony in A.D. 356 illustrates the origins of this theology. "The nature of the life which this elite sought is described as 'holiness' and its chief characteristics included total love for Christ, other-worldiness, spiritual courage, tranquility and inner joyfulness and composure, purity of soul and mind, humility and prayerfulness, and gentleness and courtesy. . . . The Antonian anchorites considered worldly influences, fleshly appetites, and demoniac temptations to be the chief obstacles in the way of the attainment of their ideal. Such an attitude could and did lead at times to vigorous austerities and severe forms of physical renunciation . . . deprivations which caused their own death. Their associates looked upon this kind of death as martyrdom. In addition to the fundamental renunciation of the world and its temptations (expressed by their solitude, chastity, and poverty), there were several other more positive means used by the Antonian hermit-ascetics to attain their goal of perfection or holiness. Of great importance was a life of prayer and the study of Scripture. The memorization and recitation to oneself of Scripture also provided the means to maintain an unbroken communion with God. . . . The Antonian ascetics emphasized a life of penitence, usually involving constant examination of conscience and coupled with a moderately austere physical

mortification. . . . A life of spiritual liberty, in the sense of not being bound to obedience to any other person, such as a superior, nor to any one place was also typical. For them the pursuit of holiness meant involvement in a spiritual warfare, not only against one's passions and fleshly temptations (especially regarding chastity), and against melancholy and depression, but actually against 'demonic' powers."²¹

On the other hand the Anabaptist movement entered into a Superior-General type of monastic structure. The Pachomian communities illustrate the point. Contrasting Anthony, "in the Pachomian revision, chastity and poverty remain essential, but solitude is temporarily mitigated. Instead, at the basis of the new communal life, obedience becomes the new mode of self-renunciation. The monk voluntarily renounces his own will in order to do that of the superior. Consequently, the community becomes hierarchically organized with the Superior-General at the top."²²

Why the extreme divergence? Only subjective theology can explain it. The covenant is defined in terms of the individual. When the focus of attention becomes such, the traits of an *individualized* theology appear. With the Antonians their subjective-individual theology turns them to the inner and contemplative. If the movement of God is from the internal to the external, why not? By dwelling on the subject and subjective, the Antonians tried to produce holiness. Furthermore, their emphasis made them extremely independent. If the basic unit of the covenant is singular, then plurality becomes restrictive.

Ironically, this individuality feature explains the tyranny of the Pachomians. The surrender of one's will to an *individual* is a simple logical extension of a theology which is constructed around the individual. Historically speaking this has been the case. These examples that have been cited are extreme, but they serve the purpose of most extremities: They point out the latent problems of a theological system that has vacillated between the polar opposites of anarchy and tyranny. These macrocosmic examples also point out some interesting trends in modern evangelicalism.

One: evangelicalism, like the Antonians, views subjective aspects such as meditation on Scripture, prayer, and renunciation as the *end* of holiness. These things are not to be disparged, but they are the *means* to another end, objective obedience. Jesus told His disciples

21. Davis, pp. 42-43.

22. *Idem.*

that they were to "keep My commandments" as a demonstration of their love for Him. Such a statement defines holiness in objective terms, contrary to many of the "discipleship" programs of today, which lead one to think he is holy if he prays and reads the Bible often. Carried to its logical conclusion, *really* holy people would do this all the time. Moreover, they would live in monasteries and convents. As a matter of fact, many cults and pagan religions meditate on the Bible (even memorize whole portions of it), and pray. They are just as subjective in their spirituality as the modern day evangelical who thinks of holiness as *only* these things. Jesus rejected subjective spirituality. "Love" or devotion outside of obedience to God's commandments is a lie (John 15:10; I John 2:3-5), and such deception has been personified in Antonian/Baptist movements throughout history. Subjective spirituality is deceptive because it gives the *illusion* of holiness without the reality. Two contemporary views of spirituality illustrate the illusion involved in subjective holiness.

Suffering Spirituality: This has almost always been a characteristic of the Anabaptist movement, and is a major feature of Christendom today. By way of definition, the Anabaptists, together with their monastic predecessors, glorified suffering. It was a way of drawing closer to God by flagellating the subject, man. Pelagianism necessarily involves such theological practice because it attempts to alter man's will, which is neutral. Any subjective theology will therefore have the same emphasis. It strives to reach God via the individual or subject. Of course this is often denied, but Anabaptists, modern evangelical Baptists included, often manifest similar tendencies. Denial of one's self and suffering become a mark of true spirituality. Recently, an Anabaptist dragged a cross from one end of the country to the other. A rather extreme example; but it points up the direction that evangelicalism leans. People in the church believe that the one who suffers more is bound to be more holy. Scripture on the other hand says that suffering "for righteousness sake" is a mark of spirituality (I Peter 3:14). Too often the "for righteousness sake" is left out. Why?

First, the church today is enamored with failure. It wants to fail because it thinks the suffering which accompanies failure is a sign of righteousness. Second, the opposition of subjective to objective theology has led in this direction. Objective righteousness means an objective standard of righteousness, the Law. But evangelicals do not recognize it because they have for the most part been instructed that they are not responsible to keep the Law. Thus they inescapably

perfectionism. Zwingli criticized the Anabaptist, Felix Manz, for being a perfectionist. He recorded a conversation that he had with Manz and reported that Manz said no one could be in the church who was not without sin.²⁷ Manz confirms Zwingli's statement in his last letter to the brethren before he was executed. He said that a true Christian "becomes perfect in God" in this life.²⁸ Davis, recognizing the inherent problem of perfectionism in Anabaptist thought, tries to qualify it away. He says, "the Evangelical Anabaptist conceived of the goal of holiness, or godliness, as a limited kind of 'divinization' (participation in the divine nature) of man by a restoration through a regenerative and healing process in conjunction with one's conscious, voluntary emulation of Christ. It is a restoration to true humanity . . . a creaturely divinization or holiness."²⁹ He also says, "true christians are relatively sinless in terms of desire."³⁰

Such statements only confirm that there really is an inherent problem of perfectionism. Moreover, Davis's "limited divinization" view makes the careful theological student even more suspect. Man cannot become divine in any sense. Even the true sinless humanity of Jesus Christ stands in contrast to sinful man. Any refusal to acknowledge the creature/Creator discontinuity conjures the ancient heresies of Monophysitism and Nestorianism. It constructs a continuity of being between God and man.

The standard views in modern evangelism regarding the knowledge of God's will invariably repeat the same heresies. By doing certain things such as pray, read the Bible, witness, and whatever else might be added, it is maintained that God's secret will can be known. But the divine decree from eternity past is not something that can be manipulated or penetrated. To think that it can be is perfectionism, and implies that our minds can take on deity. Although most evangelical teachers are not conscious of the ancient heresy they are teaching when they speak on the subject, "How to know God's will," they are fostering the same kind of perfectionism that accompanied the old aberrations.

The old heresies are also apparent in the views of maintaining and sustaining fellowship with God. Perhaps the most influential work in this area is *He That is Spiritual* by Lewis S. Chafer, founder of Dallas Theological Seminary. Chafer embodied an interesting

27. Davis, p. 70.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 137.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 190.

eclecticism of theology. He graduated from the perfectionistic school, Oberlin College, but he remained a Presbyterian. At least, he held to elder rule and infant baptism, but he was clearly an Anabaptist considering his other points of view. One of those is demonstrated in perhaps his most famous book, *He That is Spiritual*. The book is important because it has become *the* text on spirituality. It is, however, perfectionistic through and through. B. B. Warfield was quick to take note of this in a book review which he wrote on it shortly before his death. Warfield primarily objected to the momentary sinlessness which Chafer advocated. Chafer held that confession of all known sin momentarily places man in "perfect" fellowship with God by erasing barriers between man and his Maker. Furthermore, it was at this time that one could truly know God's will.

In criticism of this, we must hold that indwelling sin remains and cannot be eradicated until the resurrection. Only the penalty of sin has been removed, and no matter what one does, he cannot reach a sinless state of pure fellowship. Whether he perceives it or not, sin is always present. Confession is important, but it is not *magical*. Certainly God wants man to confess his sin, but not to manipulate or penetrate the secret will of God. To think that confession can accomplish such things implies perfectionism.

Today, Chafer's book has tremendous influence in evangelicalism. Campus Crusade for Christ has popularized what Chafer taught in its Holy Spirit booklet, calling it "spiritual breathing." Many other groups show the effect of this book in their emphasis on introspection. If confession of sin is emphasized apart from the objective worship of the people of God, it is individualized and internalized. Historically, the Christian Church has practiced objective and *corporate* confession of sin. It helps to prevent that kind of subjective introspection. It should not be overlooked, however, that Chafer's theology is essentially Anabaptistic and has extended Anabaptist thought. It separates the objective from the subject in the same way Platonic thought did, and is in the final analysis an internalized subjective theology.

Any retreat into the inner, personal, and subjective world of man takes him away from God's righteous objective law. Even the scripture memory of the Pharisees and the Antonians obscured the Scripture itself because it was performed in the context of bad theology and practice. A subjective emphasis carries one away from objectivity. Once this happens, man begins to see his sin in terms of himself. As a result his sin disappears because of his own self deception. In other words, he thinks he is perfect, when he may in fact be

in deep sin. Putting it another way, break the mirror and the shame disappears. The knowledge of sin comes via the law. All of the perfectionistic movements of history have rejected both a knowledge of the law and the knowledge of sin.³¹ Interestingly, these groups have produced attendant political theories which are usually communistic. An example is Oberlin College, which was unquestionably perfectionistic from its inception. The *Oberlin Covenant* reads, "we will hold and manage our estates personally, but pledge as *perfect* a community of interest as though we held a community of *property*." Thus perfectionism and communism are inseparably linked by Pelagius's faulty interpretation of original sin.³² Only an objective standard found in God's special revelation, the Bible, exposes it.

III. *Theology of Anabaptism and Ethics*

Because Anabaptists have not looked to an external standard, their ethics has been subjectively based. At times they have even depended on natural law more than the Scripture. Some historians try to preserve some objective standard by pointing out that the Anabaptist tradition has lived by the Sermon on the Mount and the New Testament. Even so, they have fallen into subjective ethics. First, once the Revelation of God is divided and it becomes a matter of pick and choose, man becomes the determinor of Scripture. Modern evangelicalism illustrates this: They struggle over inerrancy while pitting Old Testament ethics against new. Is it any wonder that the liberals do not take them seriously? Second, their view of the Sermon on the Mount is subjective. The Sermon on the Mount says that it is not intended to do away with the Old Testament Law (Matthew 5:17ff.). Baptists, however, have historically persisted in their emphasis on a "New Testament" hermeneutic.³⁴ For these reasons hermeneutical extremes have not been avoided.

The Dutch Humanist and politician Coornheert exemplifies these tendencies. "At the time when he lived and worked, ecclesiastical conditions in the Netherlands were still unsettled. This was the period when the Baptist communities, which have been mentioned, were being reorganized. Coornheert urged on his contemporaries

31. Benjamin B. Warfield, *Perfectionism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1958), pp. 400-454.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

34. Davis, p. 24.

the need for a Christianity of the 'Inner word,' which would reveal its reality in practical life . . . his one desire was to make way for the free inward dominion of the Spirit, who alone opens men's minds to understand the Scriptures, and who witnesses to His presence within the hearts of men by the fruits of tranquility, self-sacrifice, and brotherly love."³⁵ Even though many of the Baptists of his day pressed for a "literalist" hermeneutic, the deficiencies of their own approach to the Bible could not resist the "Inner Word" effect on the Bible. Their subjective theology was brought to consistency. After all, if man can stand in judgment of Scripture and determine that four-fifths of it is no longer valid for faith and practice, he cannot be prevented from other subjective liberties.

In Schleiermacher's *Discourses*, for example, the inner authority of the Spirit is connected with a universal religious feeling. "The 'spirit' is not tied to the historic Christian community, but, reaching out beyond its borders, it can allow religious feeling, which is in itself everywhere the same. . . . The prophets and seers, Christ Himself included, are merely those who arouse and enkindle that spark of direct religious life which is the possession of every human being."³⁶ Schleiermacher, under the influence of the Moravians, who manifested many Anabaptistic tendencies,³⁷ extended subjective theology. By universalizing subjective religious feelings he equated the leading of the Spirit with feeling. It was an historic leap and destructive to the faith. Man has many kinds of feelings which are often difficult to distinguish. For example, how does one distinguish an ecstatic religious feeling from a sexual one? Once the leading of the Spirit and feeling are coalesced, that becomes a difficult question to answer. In fact, the Moravians who instructed Schleiermacher struggled to answer it. Promiscuity had sometimes become part of their worship because they could not discriminate among these subjective feelings. Therefore, the subjective standard of the Anabaptists resulted in a nondistinguishable subjective feeling-ethics, and contained in embryonic form the ethics which led to the abuses of Schleiermacher.

They would often go beyond the Bible in their assessment of the sins of the day. Manz, for example, once began a long list of denouncements in one of his sermons with what he called the sin of

35. Troeltsch, p. 764.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 793.

37. *Idem.*

38. Rousas J. Rushdoony, *Revolt Against Maturity* (Fairfax: Thoburn Press, 1977), pp. 46-47.

drinking. He ended with the sins of adultery and murder.³⁹ Knowing where some of the Moravians and Schleiermacher would take Anabaptistic thought, Manz should have begun with the sin of adultery. Better yet, he should have stayed within the ethical standard of Scripture. It does not say that drinking is sin, but a life of drunkenness. By declaring something sin which the Bible does not, he established a subjective principle for evaluating ethics, namely his *personal* conviction. This kind of ethical methodology appears before and after the Anabaptist movement. It can be seen in the Antonians referred to earlier, and in the temperance movement of Billy Sunday in the early part of this century. The problem in each case is a departure from the objective standard, the Word of God, and a retreat into the same sort of subjective theology. There is nothing wrong with abstaining from alcohol. To equate it with sin, however, such as adultery, is wrong.

Historically, Biblical law has neutralized subjective ethics. Wyclif reversed the direction of English history by teaching that God's law should be the law of the land. His endeavor to set up the Bible as the sole authority, and the source of Divine Law, meant the assertion of the absolute and pure law against the relative Natural Law of the accepted order of Society and the compromises of the Church. "Only gradually there developed out of this ideal of the Bible as the sole authority a dogmatic criticism of purely theological doctrines as well; this is an important distinction between this doctrine and the teaching of Luther."⁴⁰ Lutheranism and Catholicism were never able to arrest the mystical developments of Anabaptism in Southern Germany.⁴¹ In light of these developments and the absence of the implementation of Biblical law in Germany, its history contrasts that of England and America.

Jesus' dealings with the Pharisees supremely demonstrate the effect of Biblical Law. He consistently attacked their teaching by countering with the teaching of the Law, especially in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:20ff.). Ironically, it brought Him into greater popularity with the people. He stripped away the subjective ethics of the Pharisees while they used their "beyond the Word of God" ethics as a club to manipulate the people. In addition, the

39. Davis, p. 122. Speaking of the Reformers, Manz said they "claim to be good Christians and Evangelical . . . [but] nothing can be seen except drinking, reveling, blasphemy, usury, lying, deceit . . . adultery, rape, tyranny, assaults, murder."

40. Troeltsch, p. 437.

41. Werner O. Packull, *Mysticism and the Early South German-Austrian Anabaptist Movement 1525-1531* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1977).

the Pharisees had become an exclusive group who thought that they alone possessed righteousness and salvation. They had constructed a separate system of ethics and self-righteously inflicted it on the people. When the people would not comply, they were alienated from their religious leaders (Matthew 5:19ff.). This introduces another problem attached to subjectivism.

IV. *Theology of Anabaptism and Exclusivism*

Subjective ethics produces exclusivistic doctrine and practice. When Menno Simons gathered the Anabaptists into a peaceful community they were encouraged to separate from the world. In fact, there was not to be "the taking of oaths, participation in war and in the administration of justice. . . . Great stress was laid on separation from all non-Baptist Christians; this went so far as to demand that a marriage should be dissolved in which the husband or wife had been either excommunicated or convicted of unbelief (in anabaptism)."⁴² With that pattern established, Baptists have usually been exclusivists. They have separated from everything and everyone that counters their doctrines. Why? Because they individualize the faith. If the covenant is defined around oneself and one's personal belief, then he must isolate to grow in faith. On the other hand, if the covenant incorporates both the singular and the plural, such as the family and the historic church, isolation is avoided. Since this has not been the case, the intrinsically subjective definition of the covenant of God has led to separation. Thus, "those who break entirely with the world and with sin have the task of placing a new order alongside of it, which is not erected upon the Family and the State, upon property and dominion, but upon . . . ideas of the equality of all possessions and social relations."⁴³

Such efforts have failed. The theology endemic to Anabaptism, mentioned in these four criticisms, serves as an introductory analysis of their failure. Recapping what has been said thus far—Franciscan/Anabaptist thought can be summarized as *subjective* theology. The outworking of this theology has led to the presence of four major errors within Anabaptist groups and those influenced by them: (1) monastic theology; (2) perfectionism; (3) a subjective standard of faith and practice; (4) exclusivism. The social out-

42. Troeltsch, p. 705.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 365.

workings have been disastrous. In each sphere—state, church, and family—the impracticality of Anabaptist theology arises. Therefore, attention must be turned to the social side of Baptist theology.

The State

"After the fall of Robespierre . . . those who sought to keep alive the high hopes of the early revolutionary era no longer focused their faith on the ongoing process on innovation in society as a whole, but instead *retreated* to the secure nucleus of a secret society where intense conviction need not be compromised by the diffuse demands of practical politics."⁴⁴ After the Reformation, the Anabaptists acted similarly, for the same characteristics of the underground revolutionary era are found in them. They too, pulled away from society, and their underlying presuppositions became more manifest.

The first premise of Anabaptist theology regarding the *state*, is that Christianity can *not* Christianize it. "The idea of a radical social reform, which regards the existing order of Society and property as *radically incapable* of developing Christian personality and Christian love in any comprehensive way, was held *only* by the sects, and by them only in the measure in which they passed from patient endurance of persecution, under the influence of the eschatological idea of the Kingdom of God and in the expectation of its speedy realization, into the attitude of a thoroughgoing reform according to the ideal of the Kingdom of God and of primitive Reason. Further, the more the idea of the Natural Law of the Stoics agreed with these hopes, the more this reform became democratic and communistic. These were the sole supporters of a Christian social ethic which was radical, allowed no compromise, and did not accept the existing social order."⁴⁵

In a telling way Troeltsch captures the features of the *failure* presupposition of the Anabaptists. With inward theology, the hope of the conquest of God over the State is lost. The loss of that hope surfaced in the forms of passivity and radicalism. Interestingly—as will be developed later—many of the Anabaptists reacted out of that hopelessness, and precipitously tried to bring their ideals into reality by anarchy. But most avoided the world.

44. James H. Billington, *Fire in the Minds of Men* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1980), p. 86. Italics mine.

45. Troeltsch, p. 804.

The majority of the Anabaptists stayed away from the world because they held that separation was their *calling*. This second premise should not be confused with the Reformed doctrine of calling. Under Calvinism, calling was understood in a covenantal way. If God predestinates everything, then everyone is called to a certain occupation. This is the motivation for the Calvinistic Christian to strive harder on his job. In other words, he has a sense of destiny. The Anabaptists on the other hand saw their calling in an opposite way. Their main efforts were spent fleeing the world. From the previous discussion of the "separational" theology of the Franciscan/Anabaptist/Baptist movement in history, separational *sociology* can be seen to be the logical outcome.

Ironically, the contemporary Moral Majority Baptists are different. Why? They live on the borrowed capital of the Calvinistic Reformed/Presbyterian/Episcopalian heritage in America. Furthermore, many of the leaders of this movement have Calvinists around them. Jerry Falwell, for example, has a Calvinistic faculty member at his college who has been quite influential. Also, many of these Baptists have been reading the writings of R. J. Rushdoony and acting without understanding the theological dynamic behind them. In fact, some of these Baptist leaders will not quote the Reformed "brain pool" for this reason. The covenantal influence, however, is obvious. Should that influence disappear, the Moral Majority doubtless will trail off into some of the characteristic aberrations of Anabaptist history. Presuppositions are not idle. They lead to practice.

First, Anabaptist sociology has been anarchistic. Usually, that anarchism has been closely associated with a premillennial eschatology. The Hussites, for example, found it "difficult to achieve a Christian universalism. The only universalism it knew was the Chiliastic (premillennial) form, which holds that those who have been oppressed in this world will come into their own at the Final Judgment. Whenever this movement tries to exert the universalistic impulse within present conditions, there always arises alongside of that passive form of Christian piety, with its hope in the future life, the more aggressive kind, which believes that the end of the World has already come, and that therefore it is justified in having recourse to violence, which wages the Holy War of the Last Days with the authority of the Scriptural Apocalypse, or encourages revolution, which it justifies."⁴⁶ This group in particular, the

46. *Ibid.*, p. 369.

Taborites, was an offshoot of the Hussites. They had violent tendencies precipitated by faulty eschatology, like the later Anabaptistic groups. But it was more than eschatology that brought about revolution.

Their separational theology which made them hyper-individualistic, more than anything, contributed to anarchical tendencies. "To the Baptists, with their principle of small voluntary communities, separate from the world, this attitude seemed quite natural, for it was only possible to combine the idea of the worldwide dominion of Christ with the breakup of Christendom into small groups . . . whose deep inward opposition to the ecclesiastical idea of the Reformers is also quite evident."⁴⁷ The Reformers strongly emphasized magisterial not individualistic reformation of civilization. Since they believed in federal or covenantal theology, they believed in responding to representatives, not acting as individuals. Seeing God's representational dealings in the Bible through Adam, Christ, elders, magistrates, and fathers, to act contrary would be revolution or chaos-religion. For this reason the Reformers attempted to call the magistrates to Christ, and if the king refused to repent, they attempted to persuade the people to wait for God to raise up the lesser magistrates to reform the land.

One example where the Reformed and Baptist approaches contrastingly stand out is the Civil War of England in the mid-seventeenth century. Cromwell, the famous general of the "Roundheads," was submitting to the lesser magistrates of the land, parliament. He was not acting as an individual, raising up an army of his own. He loathed individualistic theology and wanted to save his land Biblically. The Baptists among his ranks, however, were a constant source of trouble. They "wanted to set aside all law and all courts of law, in order to prepare a people, freed from all secular ties [separational theology], for the Advent of Christ; indeed, many of them attacked the idea of private property, and they wished to break up the Church organization altogether by abolishing its financial foundation—the tithing system; all earthly authority was to be destroyed in order to make room for the Heavenly King and the coming Kingdom of God. . . . This radical sectarianism finally made it impossible for the work of Parliament to continue."⁴⁸ It was not until this confrontation was resolved that the work of reform could continue. But it would have failed if the anarchical Baptists

47. *Ibid.*, p. 699.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 708.

inside Cromwell's ranks had obtained the upper hand. Ironically, this confrontation would occur again in English history. At that point, however, Anabaptist sociology would appear in the inverted form of anarchy, socialism.

The second major sociological trend in Anabaptistic thought, then, has been communalism, or communism. As the Chiliast idea sprang up when there was a clash between universal hope and actual failure,⁴⁹ socialism resulted from the tension between "mine and thine"⁵⁰ in these groups. In London, for example, in the year 1659, "appeared two pamphlets by a Dutchman, Peter Cornelius Plockboy, who belonged to the moderate Baptist movement. Stimulated by the Moravian Baptists, and perhaps also by the Labadists, he drew up a programme for a co-operative society on Christian principles, organized in the grand style; in this he hoped to force the bourgeois element to imitate him. . . . He in turn influenced Richard Owen."⁵¹ Owen popularized socialism in England and decisively effected the flow of English history in that direction. Again, the explanation for the relationship between Baptist thought and communism is a theology which overly emphasizes the individual. To do so brings a concomitant equalization of the individuals. After all, if the individual is central, no other individual may be elevated above him. This *equalization* of individuals necessarily leads to all areas—from authority to possessions. On one side of the coin individualism is equality of authority—anarchy. On the other side it is equality of possessions—socialism.

That leads to a third civil sociological error of Anabaptistic thought, the accentuation of poverty. Combine the socialistic tendencies with theology and calling of separation, and the drift is certain. Poverty meant renunciation of the world. Thus, the less one had, the greater one's opportunity, at least, for spirituality. In fact, "the poor and suffering were in a more advantageous position than others, since they feel more warmly and humbly towards God." "The Ancient Church absorbed the world into its own life. . . . The mediaeval period produced a relative harmony between the actual situation and the Christian ideal."⁵² But the Franciscan/Anabaptist movement of history ran from the world by retreating from its

49. *Ibid.*, p. 758.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 365.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 712.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 803.

53. *Idem.*

money. Today this same notion finds its apostles in persons such as Ron Sider.⁵⁴ Sider, of course, is a Baptist. Unfortunately, he even influences well known Presbyterian ministers.⁵⁵ Those who listen to him will fail, as did previous communities that implemented Baptist sociology.

The "Holy Experiment" was an example of the kind of community which Sider advocates. "In the person of William Penn, the greatest of all the Quakers, who expressed their ideals in their purest form, the Society of Friends had the opportunity of forming a State and a society upon the virgin soil of America, with the aid of this most severe, and in many respects most logical conception of a true [Anabaptist] Christian ethic. The Quaker State of Pennsylvania was the 'Holy Experiment,' the creation of a real Christian [Anabaptist] State upon the joint basis of the freedom of the Spirit and a strict ethic."⁵⁶ It was a State without compulsion. At first their method went smoothly. When it did not succeed, however, they had to inject some form of force. They had discovered that people do not always willingly obey the law, even in the name of the leading of the Spirit. "Finally, after an existence of seventy years, this [Anabaptist] Christian State went to pieces over the problems of war and of religious toleration."⁵⁷ The brackets have been added because Quakerism is at its essence Anabaptistic—theology and practice being basically the same with secondary differences. It is a theology of subjectivism and individualism which leads to a separated society of "friends" built around a false conception of equality that equalizes authority and possessions.

Scripture criticizes such a view. First, the Bible teaches that men should be equal *before the Law of God* (Romans 2:10-11), but they are not and cannot be equal in their essence. Men have differing gifts, abilities, backgrounds, and callings. Some will be rich, while "the poor you will have with you always" (Matthew 11:5). Therefore, a society of friends is Biblically impossible. Second, Christian government should be analogical to the life of the

54. Ron Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979). For an insightful refutation of Sider's position, see David Chilton, *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1981).

55. When Richard Halverson, Chaplain of the U.S. Senate, was pastor of Fourth Presbyterian, he had his session of Elders read Sider's book. He recommended it as one of the best books on the subject.

56. Troeltsch, p. 782.

57. *Idem*.

Triune God. God the Father gave His only begotten Son to be the Church's *representative* in salvation. Thus, analogically, men should elect representatives to rule over them (Acts 6:1ff.). Representative rule has been expressed only where Christianity has been established. Its essential government around the Trinitarian model is the explanation. Furthermore, the Trinity rules with plurality. The "plurality principle" has thus been part of Christian civilization as well. Anabaptist sociology, except where influenced by Calvinistic and Reformed thought, conspicuously lacks this Trinitarian feature. How can it express a plurality principle of leadership when everything is defined around the individual who is separated from the world?

Third, the Bible criticizes the *separational* aspect of the sociology of Anabaptists. Again the refutation is found in the Trinity. God the Holy Spirit *proceeds* from the Father and the Son (John 15:26; 16:7). The Spirit regenerates (John 1:13-14) and sanctifies (I Thessalonians 5:23) the church as part of that procession. Thus the church is processional, *expansive*. Separational theology leads to a *recessional* church. The positive leaven of the New Covenant is thereby mitigated. The Scriptures do not teach separation from the state. They say that the *nations*, which involves the state, are to be made disciples (Matthew 28:18-20). Thus, the Anabaptists have failed because they seek to be holier than God by operating contrary to the Trinitarian model. God operates in plurality, but they have constructed a society around singularity, individuality. Because this error concerns the governmental structure of Anabaptist sociology it can be seen in the other spheres of society.

The Church

The "social contract" government of the Anabaptists is the first problem with their *ecclesiology*.⁵⁸ Like Rousseau in the political realm, they maintain that the church is created by the "gathering" of the people. As they come together, a mutual agreement is made to form a "voice of the people—voice of God"⁵⁹ type of church/society. Consequently, it is ruled by the people or congregation. In Baptist churches the people vote on everything, and when discipline is to be carried out, they collectively decide. Contrary to the congregational

58. James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974) I:423.

59. *Idem*.

rule of the Baptists, the Bible teaches a different government.

Ordination: It is a government established by God, not by the people. The ordination of God, not the gathering of the people, makes a church. The congregation chooses whom they would have to rule over them (Acts 6:3), but other *elders* ordain their candidates (I Timothy 4:14). The people may not ordain, symbolic of the fact that God's structures come from above, not below. Thus, these men become the God-ordained representatives. Where Baptist theology has gone, representative or elder rule has disappeared. The Baptists of Friesland and Waterland in the Netherlands pointed this out. They "were inclined to assert the independence of the individual congregation; they also laid a good deal of emphasis upon individual freedom in general. This attitude was opposed to the spirit of those groups which were administratively centralized, and which exercised a strict Church discipline. From this centre the spirit of independence spread through the whole Baptist movement, till at last it either did away altogether with the system of Church government by a supreme Board of Elders, or at least, it limited their powers to such an extent that, in the end, they became merely nominal."⁶⁰

Creed: Biblical government rules objectively. As suspected, the adjudication processes of the Anabaptists have historically been subjective. For one, they most often operated without creeds, at least in the designated form. R. L. Dabney, the great Southern Presbyterian theologian of the nineteenth century, pointed out the inescapability of creeds. He said that many documents of a church become and function as a creed, such as translations of the Bible (which are always in part interpretations), hymns, Sunday school materials, and Bible notes. All express doctrinal positions.⁶¹ Baptists, however, have generally not recognized the creedal nature of these documents. As a result they function without any designated creed. This situation leads to a subjective approach to church discipline in the area of doctrine. The following scenario often takes place. Someone in the church, through study or influence from some other place, begins to believe and promote a doctrine which is not acceptable to the church, like predestination. Suddenly the pastor and board of deacons meet with the individual to tell him that Baptists do not believe in such a doctrine. A creedal statement is not

60. Troeltsch, p. 706.

61. Robert L. Dabney, "The Necessity and Value of Creeds," *Memorial Volume of the Westminster Assembly* (Richmond: The Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1897).

produced to substantiate their notion, but the new Calvinist is pushed out of the church or teaching position for believing contrary to the unwritten creed. Biblical government, however, will seek to *constitutionalize* its beliefs and write them down in the form of a creed. It is not equal to the Bible, but interpretative of it.

Membership: Another aspect of objective government is church membership. Baptist groups have tended toward two extremes. The early Anabaptists implemented a *probationary period* with church membership. It was a period of testing and instruction before a person became an actual member.⁶² This practice can only be understood in terms of the general subjective approach to salvation which these groups took. One, they believed in a church of the "truly" converted. To determine whether a person was "truly" converted they had to examine the "subject." Their close observation, as with any subject oriented approach, led to subjective evaluations. For example, how much piety does a person have to possess before one is admitted? That kind of question exposes the difficulty with subjective theology. Two, their doctrine of believer's baptism encouraged their approach to membership. It is maintained by Baptists that they only baptize believers. But almost every Baptist minister will admit to having baptized an unbeliever at some time or other. Thus, the doctrine of believer's baptism is a misnomer. It should be called *professor's baptism*. One can see, however, how the Anabaptists eventually rejected infant baptism. Since an infant could not be examined, he could not be a member of the church. Only when a person bore the marks of "ascetic conversion"⁶³ could he be considered converted. All of this conflicts with a Scriptural view of faith and its profession.

First, faith is not defined in the Bible only in terms of the rational (understanding) and the irrational (experience). It is defined in terms of *discipleship*, which is moral and governmental. Understanding and experience are somewhat relative and come in varying degrees. Discipleship, however, means to be under the *discipline* of the Lord. One expresses his faith by submitting to Christ's rule over him and living according to His way, not man's. Certainly understanding and experience are involved. But they are subservient to the objective, and grow in proportion to one's obedience and submission to God's law. God does not, in other words, call men to understand and experience first, but He says to obey and

62. Davis, p. 206.

63. *Idem*.

then understanding will follow. Second, baptism is a profession of faith. It is the sign which God has ordained to picture the exercise of discipleship-faith. Although it may be eventually revealed that the profession was false, nevertheless, it was a profession of faith. Only objective disobedience will expose false faith. Therefore, the correct approach to objective baptism and membership is clear.

Furthermore, it is even more obvious why God ordained the inclusion of infants in His objective covenant. One, since their baptism is a profession of faith, it is made for them and they are obligated to keep God's covenant by the baptism, not by the adult. The same thing happens when an adult is baptized. The baptism is the profession. Two, faith is imputed to them. This seems strange, but consider Hebrews 7:4-10, which teaches that Levi was counted as in Abram when Abram paid tithes to Melchizedek. Similarly, in baptism the faith of the child's covenant representative is imputed to him. (Cf. also I Cor. 7:14.) Third, the child of the believer is to be raised up *in*, not outside, the discipleship-discipline of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). That process is begun by baptism. He exercises faith by following God and keeping His commandments. To define faith in terms of knowledge or experience results in a gnostic or enthusiastic salvation. Defined in terms of verbal acknowledgment it is decisional salvation.

The second approach to church membership by the Anabaptists, after probationism, is the later — *salvation by decision*. It is the popular approach today among most Baptists and is just as subjective as the former. Salvation by oral decision is empty. James defined faith in terms of thought, word, *and* deed (James 1:25). Paul's comments regarding "confession with the mouth" (Romans 10:9-10), must be held in context with the rest of Scripture. One is not a Christian *just* because he says so. He is officially viewed as a believer when he governmentally and morally follows Christ. The Baptist wants to measure real faith by inward and individual observation. Man does not have this capacity. The man who thinks he can presents the real problem with the Anabaptist view of membership and government.

It invests someone with the responsibility of making a subjective evaluation of another man's heart condition. But only God can penetrate a man's heart. Thus, Baptist leadership begins to take on a "vicar" position which is not much different from the position of the pope of Rome. Calvin and the Reformers taught that Christ is the head of the church. The elders are to rule in *plurality*, according to God's objective standard. In the Baptist church, the pastor is the

only elder and sits at the top of a pyramid structure of organization.

Worship: Nowhere is the deification of the pastor more obvious than in the *worship* of Baptist churches. Thus, the man-centered, preacher-oriented worship of the Anabaptist/Baptist movement is the second major criticism of its ecclesiology. Worship is a telling indicator of one's theology. Objective theology will be Word-of-God-oriented. Such objective worship develops out of the Biblical use of the Greek word *leitourgia*,⁶⁴ liturgy. Liturgy is inescapable. It is simply one's order of worship. Thus every church has a liturgy, whether it is called that or not. Since the Bible teaches that its liturgy is built around the Word of God, the historic Christian churches have carefully structured their worship to be objective, Word-of-God-oriented.

In contrast, the ancient Greeks used the same Greek word in reference to their theater, which was essentially religious in nature. Their understanding of the word, however, was that the persons on the stage entertained and served the collective *one*.⁶⁵ The political manifestation of this view of worship is taught in *The Republic*.⁶⁶ The state does everything for the people. The audience is passive in both cases and expects the stage and government to entertain them. Pagan religion and worship leads to passivity and manipulation.

Worship in the Roman church had become pagan by the sixteenth century. The Reformers resurrected the objective worship of the early and Old Catholic Church. They brought back such features as an emphasis on the preaching of the Word of God, responsive readings (antiphonal), ministerial garments (not as mediatorial vestments, but as an objective sign of functional diversity), and weekly observance of the Word of God made visible in the Eucharist. The final aspect was important to Calvin because he believed that it would block the platonic tendencies of Rome to separate (separational theology) the verbal, the Word preached, from the visible. Above all, worship was thought to be active and participatory. The pagan notions of worship by entertainment were self-consciously avoided.

The American church, Baptist and for the most part Presbyterian, is little but entertainment centered around the preacher. A churchman goes to church to be made to feel good or be "lifted."

64. Richard Paquier, *Dynamics of Worship*, tr. by Donald Macleod (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), pp. 48-50. The word *leitourgia* and its cognates are used often in the New Testament (15 times, e.g. Acts 13:2), so the English term should not be avoided.

65. *Idem*.

66. Plato, *The Republic*, Book VI.

This inspiration motive is wrong. The Reformers were right. Man is the creature. He should come to worship God by being a contributor, not a spectator.

The passive spectator approach usually involves another aspect of Anabaptist/Baptist worship. Since the preacher is the only one who is active it puts him in a powerful position, and this sometimes results in the mistreatment of God's people. Once again, the *effect* of a subjective theology causes the preacher to approach the people with *scepticism*. When he preaches, it is as though the people are not Christians. He scathes and lashes at them, continually reminding them that they might not be truly saved. A Baptist minister once said that he preached as though no one in the congregation were saved. Why would he take such a view? It goes back to the highly individualized theology of this movement. The Baptist approach to salvation looks for "real" faith and that means someone must make that kind of evaluation, on the basis of *his* own personal-individual faith. Usually it is the preacher, and he uses his own personal-individual experience as a gauge, and his preaching as a club to flog out the truly saved.

Ironically, the sceptical approach to preaching is contradictory to a Believer's Baptism doctrine. If only true believers have been baptized, then why should the congregation be approached as unbelievers? Because, there is no infallible way of knowing whether one is truly converted. The basis for assurance is an objective witness (Hebrews 6:13-18). Some subjective experience must of necessity become the basis, however, in the Baptist system. Therefore, due to the variability of personal experience, one will not trust the salvation of another with a different experience. The classic example of a personal experience which Baptists look for is the *time of conversion*. In fact the person is usually not baptized until it can be produced. This type of error results from an over-emphasis on the subject-individual. In the hands of an individual preacher with individualistic theology, worship can be a brutal experience.

The overall worship of the Anabaptist system is man-centered. It cannot be avoided in the movement of theology under analysis. Worship, however, begins in the home. The errors therein will show up in corporate worship. Thus Anabaptist practices in the home must be examined.

The Home

In general, Anabaptist theology had an atomizing effect on the

family. Its theology produced the same effects as seen in the state and church. An equalization took place that broke down the family. "The sectarian demand for the separation of religion from state control accelerated the process by which the divine sanctions for the social hierarchy were undermined. Once they were gone, the way was open, first for a contract theory of the state, and then, by logical extension, for a contract theory of the family."⁶⁷ That sectarian spirit is summarized under the heading of Anabaptistic thought. It begins on one level and spreads to the others. The "social contract" state leads to the same view regarding marriage.

A social contract marriage views all parties concerned as equal. Each member lives according to a mutually agreed upon contract which can be broken at anytime. That form of marriage is becoming more popular in America.⁶⁸ Its roots, however, are found in the early feminists of America who became Anabaptistic in their thinking.

The indomitable Anne Hutchinson was the first feminist in America. She attempted to break the bonds of patriarchy.⁶⁹ "John Winthrop lamented that thanks to Anne Hutchinson, 'All things are turned upside down.'"⁷⁰ She successfully gathered a following around herself and attempted to change the structure of the home life of Puritan America. She wanted division between husband and wife. This change in structure should be familiar by now. It is an *equalization of authority* which can only grow out of an *individualized view of the covenant*. As a matter of fact, Anne Hutchinson fled to the Baptist state of Rhode Island when she was exiled from Massachusetts. She may have been raised in a Puritan environment, but she ended up as a Baptist with a subjective view of the covenant. Most Baptists would not claim her today, yet she possessed the same theology in embryonic form.

Anne Hutchinson was important to the growth of subjective theology for another reason. Her theology contributed to a shift in the nature of marriage. She believed in subjective revelation. Applied in marriage, the center becomes the individual. For this reason she is generally recognized as responsible for turning marriage to a *companionate* form. Companionate marriage is *based* on the

67. Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 340.

68. Candace E. Trunzo, "Cohabitation Contracts," *Families* (November, 1981), p. 28.

69. Stone, p. 337.

70. *Idem.*

innate characteristics of the individuals. Therefore, it is at a point in history shortly thereafter that "romantic" love becomes the basis for marriage.⁷¹ In other words, marriage up to this point was founded on the Law of God. Love was a vital part, but it was defined in terms of the Law. Hutchinson and the Anabaptists moved marriage away from an objective standard. The result: a slow erosion of the home.

Erosion and even destruction had been the effects of Anabaptist thought on marriage in the past. The tendency of this subjective thought dating all the way back to the monastics has been to avoid marriage. Thus it was not uncommon for these groups to take vows of celibacy. When the Anabaptist movement broke loose, celibacy appeared in protestantism. Today in evangelicalism one is often thought to be more righteous or dedicated if he abstains from marriage, at least long enough to be a missionary. Regrettably, Bill Gothard has more than any other representative of Anabaptist theology advocated celibacy. Since he has been so influenced by Charles Finney, one of the leading exponents of subjective theology in the 19th century, it would seem to follow that Mr. Gothard would move into some of the deviant practices of such theology.

The connection among these views of marriage, subjective theology, and Baptist evangelicalism is twofold. One, separation-from-the-world theology implies that the creation is *inherently* evil. Orthodox Christianity has held that the world is fallen, but not initially so. The difference: Anabaptism sees that contact with the world *inescapably* causes sin. But orthodoxy maintains that the world has been redemptively overcome, and that the evil in nature is parasitic. Thus it is easy to see why the Anabaptist would eventually say that sex and marriage are carnal practices that detract from becoming holy. Two, this separation of material from spiritual leads to another tendency, life in eternity. The Bible is clear that there will be no marriage in eternity. Marriage is a temporal provision for man to accomplish God's purposes (Genesis 1:26-28). Thus, some Anabaptists have built on the first premise and asserted the avoidance of marriage in an attempt to have *heavenly* holiness. The fault lies in the first premise. Pagan Greek philosophy originated the idea that eternity does not consist of the material world. How could it, if the material world was viewed as intrinsically wicked? Contrary to this, the Bible has a *resurrectional* view of eternity and that involves a *material* body. Therefore, we cannot live in eternity *now*,

71. *Ibid.*, pp. 325-404.

and marriage is an inherently good aspect of God's program. Take away marriage, and the primary means of promoting the kingdom, children, is removed. The effect which Platonic/Anabaptist systems have had on the children of the covenant is the bottom line.

The greatest damage to the home of Baptist theology has been the change it brought in the status of children. The exclusion of children from the covenant completely alters how they are approached. One, since they are outside the church they should not be prayed with. John Bunyan is an example of one who pressed his theology to consistency at this point. Second, they should be preached to as lost. Thus the child is pressed to have a conversion experience. Jesus said that the standard of faith was that of a little child (Luke 18:15-17). The Baptist makes it the opposite. The child must become like the adult.

The covenantal-Biblical view of children is different. It creates a much more positive atmosphere for the child. He is raised in the faith, not outside of it. Contrary to Thomas Aquinas, the parent of a covenant child does not believe the greatest faith comes from the greatest doubt. Rather, he raises his child to be like Timothy, who knew Christ from his youth, which probably means his early childhood (II Timothy 3:15). To raise the child outside the faith also encourages unbelief. It makes the child subjectively evaluate his faith. Obedience to the Lord is not enough, according to Baptist theology. The child therefore conjures up the subjective experience. Eventually, years are lost when the child could be trained in the faith. It should be noted that even Reformed groups have been influenced by the Baptist paradigm. They too want to wait for the child to reach an age of "rationality," as the Baptists wait for the age of accountability. Many Reformed groups practice confirmation, which is little other than a form of adult baptism.⁷² Even worse, they do not attach the correct symbol to the child's re-profession. But that is the type of dilemma that ensues when the child of the covenant is viewed sceptically. Thus Anabaptist failure in the home can even be detected in the effect it has had on the various Reformed movements. The home, therefore, like the other spheres, is broken down by subjective theology.

Conclusion

In conclusion several summary statements must be made. First, not all modern day Baptists are consistent with their theology. As

72. Troeltsch, p. 717.

this paper has argued, that is because of the Augustinian/Reformed influence. Hopefully, the Baptists of America will continue to listen to and read the writings of Augustinians. Second, many Baptists who read this paper will object to the way various sect groups have been lumped together with the Anabaptist movement. They have been so grouped because they all have an important and essential point of contact in *subjective theology*. To the degree that this paper has succeeded, this point of contact will have been grasped. Third, Baptist history, theology, and sociology spell failure. The system at root centers around man. For that reason the American Baptist paradigm will go the way of man—death. Finally, “to-day the problem of the organization of religious groups is more obscure than ever. The growth of sects [spawned by Franciscan/Anabaptist/Baptist thought] and mystical movements, combined with the problematic character of the relation between Church and State, has produced a situation analogous to that which existed at the beginning of the period of the Reformation.”⁷³ May God be pleased once again to give the victory to *objective* theology and restore our civilization!

73. *Ibid.*, p. 799.

CALVIN'S COVENANTAL RESPONSE TO THE ANABAPTIST VIEW OF BAPTISM

Peter A. Lillback

Introduction

ALTHOUGH many baptistic theologians drink deeply from the well of Calvin's theology, his doctrine of infant baptism is deemed to be at best unpalatable, at worst poisonous.¹ It is considered one of the unfortunate carryovers of Romish doctrine in the Reformers' thought.² Consequently, the baptists and those who hold a baptistic view of baptism see themselves as the completion of

1. Several examples of Reformed or Calvinistic Baptists can be given to illustrate their abrupt about-face in their attitude toward Calvin's theology when the question of paedobaptism arises. Charles Spurgeon wrote, "If I thought it wrong to be a Baptist, I should give it up and become what I believed to be right. . . . If we could find infant baptism in the Word of God, we would adopt it. It would help us out of a great difficulty, for it would take away from us that reproach which is attached to us—that we are odd and do not as other people do. But we have looked well through the Bible and cannot find it, and do not believe it is there; nor do we believe that others can find infant baptism in the Scripture, unless they themselves first put it there." *Autobiography* I. London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1899-1900, cited by Paul K. Jewett, *Infant Baptism & the Covenant of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1978), p. v. G. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1962), p. 339 writes, ". . . it is difficult to see how this view [the Reformed view] is reconcilable with the teaching of Paul on the covenant in Galatians 3." The greatest of the Reformed Baptist theologians John Gill wrote, "It is not fact, as has been asserted, that the infants of believers have, with their parents, been taken into covenant with God in the *former ages* of the church if by it is meant the covenant of grace; . . ." (italics mine) in *A Body of Divinity* (Grand Rapids: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1971), p. 903. Jewett describes Calvin's view as "a study in paradox" (p. 99) and as a "palpable incongruity" (p. 100).

2. Again, several examples of this sentiment can be found. A. H. Strong in his *Systematic Theology* (New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son, 1889), p. 538 writes, "There is therefore no logical halting place between the Baptist and the Romanist positions. The Roman Catholic Archbishop Hughes of New York, said well to a Presbyterian minister: 'We have no controversy with you. Our controversy is with the Baptists.' Lange of Jena: 'Would the Protestant Church fulfill and attain to its final destiny, the baptism of infants must of necessity be abolished.' " William R. Estep, *The*

the Reformation begun by Luther and advanced by Calvin.³ Calvinistic Baptists believe that no great injustice is done to Calvin's

Anabaptist Story (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1975), p. 145 writes, "Luther's battle cry, 'Justification by faith,' became his plumb line for interpreting the Bible. However, due to the persistent Roman Catholic appendages of his theology, he was never able to give this truth consistent expression." James A. Kirkland, *The People Called Baptists* (Texarkana: Bogard Press, 1971), p. 28 states, "The Reformation was not a full return to New Testament teachings. The Protestants brought some of Rome's errors, modified somewhat, into their new churches." Again on p. 29, he writes, "The Reformers refused to renounce Roman Baptism." Jewett's remarks imply a similar merging of Catholic and Protestant thought at this juncture, "Confronted with this argument from ancient custom, early Baptists used to remind their Paedobaptist brethren that subjects of the triple crown are fond of tradition, and that it ill becomes a Protestant to cry, 'The Fathers, the Fathers,' " p. 15.

3. Kirkland writes, "When the Anabaptists saw that the Reformers were halting short of a full return to the New Testament faith, they separated completely from the Reformation movement" (p. 30). C. E. Tulga writes in *Why Baptists are Not Protestants*, "Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli considered them heretics and consented and sometimes encouraged their punishment and death as heretics. . . . The Reformers must share with the Roman Catholics the responsibility for the bloody persecution and death of a great host of Anabaptists. It is true that the history of the Baptists can be traced by their bloody footprints on the sands of time; it is also true that the hands of the Reformers are stained with the blood of many of the saints of God who dared to stand by the Word of God and oppose their sinful compromises." Cited by Kirkland, p. 30.

While the point of these citations is to illustrate the baptistic conception of their role in "completing the Reformation," it also raises the question of the problem of persecution. First, it must be admitted that both Rome and the original "Protestants" at the Diet of Speyer in 1529 joined in reenacting the death penalty for rebaptism as provided by the Justinian Code. Yet, this was not the standard practice. Luther for several years refused to accept the notion that the sword could be brought in defense of the gospel and thus advocated exile as the extreme form of punishment. Later, in the wake of what he viewed as seditious activities, he allowed for capital punishment as a means of restraining Anabaptist threats to the social order. It is well known that Zwingli executed Anabaptists. The reason, however, appears to be less theological than political. In view of their official defeat at the two baptismal disputations against Zwingli in Zurich, their continued activities were seen as directly contrary to the authority of the civil leaders. Once this became a repeated pattern of resistance, the death penalty was imposed. While it can be argued that religious tolerance should have prevailed, it must also be admitted that in that age, Zwingli was carrying out his understanding of obedience to the civil order.

Martin Bucer, the theological mentor of Calvin, is undoubtedly the best example of religious toleration among the early Reformers. He sought to exercise Christian love and acceptance if this was mutually shared by both the Reformed and the Anabaptists. If this proved impossible, the penalty was not then death, but rather exile. Bucer's attitude two years after the Diet of Speyer is well illustrated in his letter written to Margaret Blaurer in September 19, 1531, concerning Pilgram Marpeck: "What is the view of your Anabaptist of whom you write to me but that of the ancient

system by discarding this one doctrine.⁴ It is normally thought that Calvin's penetrating insights into the doctrine of Scripture, the mediatorial work of Christ, justification, and eternal life are entirely independent of the baptism question. While this attitude is understandable, it raises the important question of whether Calvin himself perceived the significance of baptism in such a narrow and independent fashion.

Fortunately, Calvin's conception of the relationship of baptism to other important doctrines of Scripture is not difficult to ascertain. The reason for this is found in his very detailed and lengthy response to the theology that developed from the Radical Reformers. In a passage from his discussion of infant baptism, Calvin assails the Anabaptists and others of similar conviction by claiming that their rejection of the equation of infant baptism and circumcision results in a horrible corruption of Scripture. Calvin exclaims:

Now let us examine the arguments by which certain mad beasts ceaselessly assail this holy institution of God. First of all, since they feel that they are immoderately cramped and constrained by the likeness between baptism and circumcision, they strive to set these two things apart by a wide difference so that there may seem to be nothing in common between them. For they say that these two signify different things, that the covenant in each is quite different, and the calling of children under each is not the same. . . . In asserting a difference between the covenants, with what barbarous boldness do they dissipate and corrupt Scripture! And not in one passage only—but so as to leave nothing safe or untouched! For they depict the Jews to us as so carnal that they are more like beasts than men. A covenant with them would not

Cyprian who wanted to rebaptize all those who had been baptized by heretics! And if he does not condemn other churches, neither do the others condemn him. Heresy is not this or that fancy or error at all, but a disease of the flesh which presumes to adopt a better doctrine or life (only in appearance) than that of the common church's divine practice, and therefore separates from the church and a separatist gang and sect is formed. They want to be better than other people but in love they are grossly lacking." Cited by John C. Wegner in the *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, XII, 148. Bucer had followed this policy with Marpeck, but after repeated confrontations, exile was imposed.

4. This is illustrated by the Reformed Baptist theology of John Gill. He is often termed a "Hyper-Calvinist" due to his rejection of the free offer of the gospel. Many of the historic Baptist confessions used in America are quite consciously extracted from the *Westminster Confession of Faith* excepting the articles on the doctrines of baptism, the church, and the relationship of church and state. In fact, Paul Jewett in the early 1950's reissued the *Baptist Catechism* that was the same catechism used by Spurgeon, "the prince of Baptist Calvinists."

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go beyond the temporal life, and the promises given them would rest in present and physical benefits. If this doctrine should obtain, what would remain save that the Jewish nation was satiated for a time with God's benefits (as men fatten a herd of swine in a sty), only to perish in eternal destruction? (IV. 16. 10)⁵

While Calvin's invective strikes the modern reader as extreme, it nonetheless indicates Calvin's deep feelings on the issue. But more importantly, it must be noticed that Calvin's concern is not simply for the sacrament of infant baptism, but for what he felt to be the inherent and inevitable danger to all of Scriptural doctrine if the Anabaptist argument was to be accepted.⁶ If infant baptism is to be overturned, then the continuity of the Old Covenant with the New Covenant must be denied. But to do this, Calvin argues, is to make the Old Testament saints nothing more than recipients of material blessings from God at the expense of their salvation.⁷ In light of this,

5. All citations of Calvin's *Institutes* are from the translation of Ford Lewis Battles in *The Library of Christian Classics* series. All citations of Calvin's commentaries are from the Calvin Translation Society as reprinted by Baker Book House, 1979. These works will be referred to simply by Scripture reference.

6. This conception of the discontinuity of the Old and New Covenants is repeatedly seen not only in the early Anabaptists, but also in the modern Anti-paedobaptist writings. For the Anabaptists writings, cf. George H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), pp. 828-32; Leonard Verduin, *The Reformers and Their Stepchildren* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), p. 209ff.; Jan J. Kiwiet, *Pilgrim Marbeck* (Kassel: J. G. Oncken Verlag, 1957), pp. 101, 102; August Baur, *Zwingli's Theologie* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1889), II:228-29. For modern Anti-paedobaptist writings, cf. Beasley-Murray, *op. cit.*, pp. 337, 338; Estep, *op. cit.*, pp. 86, 87; Gill, *op. cit.*, p. 903; Jewett, *op. cit.*, pp. 93, 96. Gill goes so far as to deny that the Abrahamic covenant was even a covenant of grace! He writes, "Now that this covenant was not the pure covenant of grace, in distinction from the covenant of works, but rather a covenant of works, will soon be proved; and if so, then the main ground of infant's baptism is taken away. . . ." This reminds one of the efforts of dispensationalists to discover *two* new covenants in the New Testament so that their Church/Israel distinction can continue. Cf. John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), pp. 210, 218. Gill goes on to argue that the covenant of grace referred to in Galatians 3 refers to God's covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12, but not to this "covenant of works" in Genesis 17. Thus in both the Baptist and Dispensationalist approaches, the clear teaching of the continuity of the Old and New Covenants, has compelled some of their writers to search out a "second" covenant so that their structures might conform better to the evidence.

7. Calvin has in view here Servetus and some of the Anabaptists: "Indeed, that wonderful rascal Servetus and certain madmen of the Anabaptist sect, who regard the Israelites as nothing but a herd of swine, make necessary what would in any case have been very profitable for us" (II. 10. 1). Not all Anabaptists would have argued as perversely as Servetus. Nevertheless, as was seen in the citation from IV. 16. 10,

one can see why Calvin did not view paedobaptism in a narrow class by itself, but instead as an important safeguard of Scripture and doctrine. To affirm infant baptism meant that one saw the unity of the Bible and consequently its constant theme of redemptive history. In other words, infant baptism was covenantal for Calvin, and since so many other doctrines of Scripture were related to the covenant, to deny the sacrament meant that other central truths were in jeopardy as well. It is clear, then, that Calvin would not agree with those who claim that they do little harm to his system by simply excising paedobaptism. To deny infant baptism is to deny the covenant, and so to put the other doctrines of Scripture in danger. As one explores Calvin's thought with respect to the covenant, he is immediately struck with the numerous points of doctrine that he intimately couples with it.⁸ In this way, Calvin demonstrates the danger to all doctrine by the Anabaptist approach.

Calvin's point in this extended discussion is to show that this same destructive view weighs on all Anabaptists as a logical result of their insistence on distinguishing so absolutely the Old and New Testaments. Even if it is denied, it must be done by an inherent logical inconsistency.

8. It is often thought that Calvin paid little attention to the covenant idea, and that covenant theology developed after the Reformation. Cf. Perry Miller, *The New England Mind* (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1939), pp. 381, 389. Fred Lincoln, "The Development of the Covenant Theory" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 100 (1943): 136 states, "It was [covenant theology], of course, unknown to the apostolic and early church fathers, never taught by the church leaders of the middle ages, and *not mentioned* even by any of the great teachers of the reformation period itself" (*italics mine*). Similarly, Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), p. 180 writes, "Covenant theology does not appear in the writings of Luther, Zwingli, Calvin or Melancthon, . . . They had every opportunity to incorporate the covenant idea, but they did not. It is true that Calvin, for instance, spoke of the continuity of redemptive revelation and of the idea of a covenant between God and His people, but this was not covenant theology." While Ryrie indicates an advance on Lincoln's "not mentioned," he still insists that there is no covenant theology in Calvin.

Perhaps the best response to this assertion is to point out the frequency of the covenant idea in Calvin's writings and the general contexts where Calvin makes important use of the idea. Calvin uses in the 1559 edition of the *Institutes* the Latin terms *Pactum* 35x, *Foedus* 154x, and *Testamentum* 84x, for a total of 273x. As we shall see, Calvin makes great use of the idea of the covenant in the context of the relationship of the Old and New Covenants and sacraments (53x in IV. 16 in his discussion of infant baptism alone!). In addition, he uses the idea in several texts: on the law—II. 8 (7x), on faith—III.2 (2x), on prayer—III. 20 (11x), on repentance—once each in III. 4. 32, IV. 1. 27, IV. 15. 17. His discussion of justification uses the concept 13x in III. 17. His analysis of election uses the idea 12x in III. 21. This is remarkable since many see the covenant as an idea that is antithetical to the doctrine of election! He also uses the idea of the covenant as a justification of the Protestant Reformation against Rome in IV. 2. 11, IV. 7. 30, IV. 8. 2, IV. 9. 2, IV. 18. 15. I personally

I. *Calvin's Argument for the Continuity of Doctrine
in the Old and New Covenants*

Calvin's fundamental proposition in his argument for the continuity of the covenants is that God always covenanted His people to Himself by the same law and doctrine. Thus he writes,

. . . all men adopted by God into the company of his people since the beginning of the world were covenanted to him by the same law and by the bond of the same doctrine as obtains among us. (II. 10. 1)⁹

Similarly he states, "The covenant made with all the patriarchs is so much like ours in substance and reality that the two are actually one and the same. Yet they differ in the mode of dispensation" (II. 10. 2). Not even the Mosaic legal system can be seen to be without its necessary conjunction with the one divine covenant,

I understand by the word "law" not only the Ten Commandments, which set forth a godly and righteous rule of living, but the form of religion handed down by God through Moses. And Moses was not made a lawgiver to wipe out the blessing promised to the race of Abraham. Rather, we see him repeatedly reminding the Jews of that freely given covenant made with their fathers of which they were the heirs. It was as if he were sent to renew it. This fact was very clearly revealed in the ceremonies. (II. 7. 1)

Calvin beautifully portrays his understanding of the single covenant of God in its different administrations in terms of progressive redemptive history,

believe that Calvin taught an inchoative doctrine of works as well. Cf. the Spring 1981 edition of the *Westminster Theological Journal* where I seek to defend this in an article entitled, "Ursinus' Development of the Covenant of Creation: A Debt to Melancthon or Calvin?" Considering the fact that the Bible only uses the covenant idea 314x, and even Dispensationalists give a great deal of attention to this idea, it does not seem quite accurate to say that Calvin's teaching at this point "was not covenant theology!" He did in fact teach a covenant of grace and a covenant of works, as well as make extensive use of idea in a wide range of contexts.

9. That Calvin understands this "law" and "covenant" that have existed from the "beginning of the world" to include Adam in his unfallen state is seen in the fact that the moral law is equivalent to man's conscience and natural law: ". . . the very things contained in the two tablets are in a way dictated to us by that internal law . . . written and stamped on every heart (II. 8. 1)," and ". . . the law of God, which we call moral, is nothing other than the testimony of the natural law and of that conscience which God has engraved on the minds of men. . . (IV. 20. 6)." This is important evidence for the question of whether Calvin taught a pre-fall covenant with Adam. It appears from this that he *did*.

The Lord held to this orderly plan in administering the covenant of his mercy: as the day of full revelation approached with the passing of time, the more he increased each day the brightness of its manifestation. Accordingly, at the beginning when the first promise of salvation was given to Adam it glowed like a feeble spark. Then, as it was added to, the light grew in fullness, breaking forth increasingly and shedding its radiance more widely. At last—when all the clouds were dispersed—Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, fully illumined the whole earth. (II. 10. 20)¹⁰

Since all of God's people have enjoyed the same law and doctrine albeit in different degrees of revelation and varying administration, it follows that they have always known Christ as Mediator. Speaking of the Old Covenant saints, Calvin says, ". . . they had and knew Christ as Mediator, through whom they were joined to God and were to share in his promises" (II. 10. 2). Again he asserts, "There are two remaining points: that the Old Testament fathers (1) had Christ as pledge of their covenant, and (2) put in him all trust of future blessedness" (II. 10. 23).

And if the Old Covenant was blessed with Christ, it is just as certain that they also possessed the grace of justification.¹¹ So Calvin argues,

For the same reason it follows that the Old Testament was established upon the free mercy of God, and was confirmed by Christ's intercession. For the gospel preaching, too, declares nothing else than that sinners are justified apart from their own merit by God's fatherly kindness; and the whole of it summed up in Christ. Who, then, dares to separate the Jews from Christ, since with them, we hear, was made the covenant of the gospel, the sole foundation of which is Christ? (II. 10. 4)

But if the grace of the covenant was equal in the Old Covenant era to that of the New Covenant era, then the sacraments must also have equal significance in both eras. Calvin contends that Paul held this,

10. In view of Calvin's clear understanding of redemptive history as revealed by this text, the charge that he failed to discern any progress in revelation cannot be legitimately lodged against him. Cf. Ryrie, *op. cit.*, p. 19. In fact, this emphasis on the history of redemption led some *Anabaptists* to criticize the Reformed theology at this point. Cf. II. 11. 13 and note 17. The real state of the question is whether there is progress in *unity* (Reformed viewpoint) or progress by *discontinuity* (Anabaptists, Baptists, Dispensationalists)?

11. Besides the use of the covenant in the context of justification in III. 17 mentioned above, cf. the following passages in the commentaries: Gen. 7:1, Dt. 30:11, Ps. 18:20, 19:11, Ezk. 14:14, 18:17, 20:11, Mal. 3:17, Luke 1:6, 17:10.

Indeed, the apostle makes the Israelites equal to us not only in the grace of the covenant but also in the signification of the sacraments. In recounting examples of the punishments with which, according to Scripture, the Israelites were chastised of old, his purpose was to deter the Corinthians from falling into similar misdeeds. So he begins with this premise: there is no reason why we should claim any privilege for ourselves, to deliver us from the vengeance of God, which they underwent, since the Lord not only provided them with the same benefits but also manifested his grace among them by the same symbols. (II. 10. 5)

Because the Word of God was present in the Old Covenant, eternal life was also a key blessing of the covenant that the Old Covenant saints shared with the New Covenant believers,

. . . the spiritual covenant was also common to the patriarchs. . . . Now since God of old bound the Jews to himself by this sacred bond, there is no doubt that he set them apart to the hope of eternal life. . . . Adam, Abel, Noah, Abraham and other patriarchs cleaved to God by such illumination of the Word. Therefore I say that without any doubt they entered into God's immortal kingdom. For theirs was a real participation in God, which cannot be without the blessing of eternal life. (II. 10. 7)

The very formula of the covenant which was possessed by the Old Testament saints for Calvin demanded that they be seen to be possessors of eternal life.¹²

. . . let us pass on to the very formula of the covenant. . . . For the Lord always covenanted with his servants thus: "I will be your God, and you shall be my people." The prophets also commonly explained that life and salvation and the whole of blessedness are embraced in these words. . . . He is our God on this condition: that he dwell among us, as he has testified through Moses. But one cannot obtain such a presence of him without, at the same time, possessing life. And although nothing further was expressed, they had a clear enough promise of spiritual life in these words: "I am . . . your God." For he did not declare that he would be a God to their bodies alone, but especially to their souls. Still souls, unless they be joined to God through righteousness, remain estranged from him in death. On the other hand, such a union when present will bring everlasting salvation with it. (II. 10. 8)

12. One of Calvin's great themes in II. 6-11 is that eternal life is the great benefit of the covenant regardless of what point in the history of redemption one is discussing. In Psalm 67:2 Calvin calls the covenant "the source and spring of salvation." In Zech. 12:1 he says that the "hope of salvation is founded on the covenant."

A little later, Calvin repeats this same point more briefly,

. . . the Old Testament or Covenant that the Lord had made with the Israelites had not been limited to earthly things, but contained a promise of spiritual and eternal life. The expectation of this must have been impressed upon the hearts of all who truly consented to the covenant. (II. 10. 23)

In light of all this evidence Calvin believes that he has established the spirituality of the covenant of the Old Testament saints, and hence its continuity with the New Covenant. He concludes, "Yet unless we shun the proffered light, we already possess a clear affirmation of the spiritual covenant" (II. 10. 5). Again, he concludes,

Therefore, when we hear the public oracles of the Holy Spirit, in which he so clearly and plainly discussed spiritual life in the church of the Jews, it would be intolerable stubbornness to relegate them solely to a carnal covenant, wherein mention is made only of the earth and of earthly riches. (II. 10. 19)

At this point, one can begin to understand Calvin's vehement assault on the Anabaptist rejection of infant baptism. Since this rejection demanded that the Old Testament covenant be made into a material or carnal covenant—circumcision was not a spiritual symbol—several important doctrines associated with the covenant were as a result severely injured. If the Anabaptist basis for rejecting infant baptism prevailed, then there would be no Old Testament progressive revelation and preparation for the Messiah. Since the Old Testament covenant was only material, Christ would be never present before them, and so God would in essence have mocked them by withholding salvation from them. Just as serious, there would have been no Old Testament counterpart of the grace of justification which was founded upon Christ. If such a carnal covenant were correct, Paul's argument on the example of Israel's punishment for disobedience supported by the equality of sacraments of the Old and New Covenants would be utterly in error. And every bit as unthinkable, the Word of God present in the covenant formula would be severed from eternal life. It is because of these resulting errors that Calvin can speak of infant baptism as a safeguard of Scripture and doctrine. If it is taught, the continuity of Scripture in the one divine covenant of grace is affirmed. For Calvin, there is one covenant which is constant throughout Scripture. To reject infant baptism is to deny the unity of the covenant and thus to result in such confusion.

It is undoubtedly true that no contemporary baptist would be willing to make the kind of affirmations that Calvin is refuting. Nevertheless, a serious inconsistency remains.¹³ If the Old Covenant was in fact a history of redemption, with Christ as Mediator being gradually revealed, Who was the ground of the Old Covenant saints' justification, and Whose Word was truly present, how could the sacraments not be spiritual as well? Yet baptists of all varieties reject the equation of circumcision and infant baptism by asserting that circumcision was really a material-political sign, not primarily a spiritual sign as New Covenant baptism. If they agree with Calvin at the first points, it is impossible not to agree with Calvin at the last point of the spirituality of the covenantal sign of circumcision and remain consistent.¹⁴ And if this is granted, Calvin will argue, there is nothing that prevents the New Covenant believer from also claim-

13. Modern Anti-paedobaptists continue to reject the equivalence of the spiritual significance of circumcision and baptism by their insistence on the material blessings associated with circumcision, although they affirm emphatically the existence of salvation in the Old Testament. Cf. Gill, *op. cit.*, p. 903, Beasley-Murray, *op. cit.*, p. 341, Jewett, *op. cit.*, pp. 95, 97. While many Baptists do not espouse dispensationalism, this strong emphasis on God's covenant and material blessings is a fundamental argument for the dispensational scheme of an eternal "earthly people" and "heavenly people." Cf. Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Dispensationalism* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1951), pp. 32-33, 107. If the material blessings of the covenant share an equal importance with the spiritual, and if there is such a profound difference between the testaments as the Anti-paedobaptists argue, then the dispensational interpretation appears rather convincing! While Chafer was a paedobaptist (Cf. Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* [Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948], VII:34-43), his rejection of the covenant theology and hence the equation of the spiritual significance of the two signs leaves little more than the household baptism texts in its defense. It is little wonder that he makes the matter of the subjects of baptism an unimportant issue in the church (cf. VII:34, "... the consideration of ritual baptism cannot be eliminated, though to do so would be easier and to avoid countering good men would in itself be desirable."). Nor is it surprising that dispensational schools are today essentially baptistic or in fact Baptist.

14. Jewett, *op. cit.*, pp. 89, 93, continually criticizes the Reformed approach for its movement from the New to the Old. This seems rather strange since the Reformed always insist that their viewpoint is the Old Testament practice of circumcision in its spiritual implications being carried over into the New (cf. Col. 2:10-12), or exactly the opposite of Jewett's contention. Jewett makes this charge because he believes that the Paedobaptists' contention that faith was always a requirement for circumcision is not substantiated by the cases of the circumcision of Abraham's household. Ishmael and the sons of Keturah, and the practice of Old Testament Israel. This requirement, he says, is reading the requirement of New Testament baptism back into Old Testament circumcision. Thus the Reformed viewpoint reads the Old Testament as though it were the New. Yet, in each case, this approach fails to secure its point. In the cases of Abraham's household and thus Ishmael and later the

ing the same promise by the spiritual sacrament of infant baptism that the Old Covenant believer claimed in the spiritual sacrament of infant circumcision.

*II. Calvin's Explanation of the Differences Between the Covenants:
The Relationship of Law to Gospel and Letter to Spirit*

Having argued ardently for the essential unity of the Old and New Covenants, Calvin is conscious that his opponents can charge him with failing to come to grips with the numerous biblical testimonies to the differences between them. To this matter he next turns his attention,

sons of Keturah, it is precisely Abraham's faith as a covenantal head of the household that allows this sign to be administered.

In respect to Israel, faith was still required although as Calvin points out so forcefully, hypocrisy often took the place of true faith: "He says, that the Israelites had transgressed the covenant of the Lord, and conducted themselves perfidiously against his law. He repeats the same thing twice, for the covenant and the law are synonymous; only the word, law, in my view, is added as explanatory, as though he had said, that they had violated the covenant of the Lord, which had been sanctioned or sealed by the law. God then had made a covenant with Israel, which he designed to be comprehended in the tables. Since then it was not unknown to the Israelites what they owed to God, they were covenant-breakers. It was then the doubling of their crime, as the Prophet shows, that they had not fallen through mistake when they transgressed the covenant of the Lord, for they had been more than sufficiently taught by the law what faith and what purity the Lord required of them: at the same time, the covenant which the Lord so openly made with them was yet neglected" (Hosea 8:1). Note below Calvin's comments on Gen. 21:12.

The point really is that Jewett is refusing to see that it is the New Testament itself that presents baptism as the legitimate expression of the spiritual reality of the Old Testament practice of circumcision. Contrary to Jewett's assertion, Paedobaptists do not try to turn Old Testament circumcision into New Testament baptism. Rather, they accept the fact that the New Testament itself declares that baptism *is* circumcision, in their proper spiritual meanings. So then, even though Jewett is bothered by all the paedobaptists who repeatedly "intone such conventions as 'circumcision was not *exclusively* a national sign,'" he nevertheless must not only admit this fact (which he does, p. 89), but must also come to grips with its implications. Jewett is entirely correct that the history of redemption has shown us that the material aspects of circumcision have been jettisoned in its New Testament form of baptism. Nevertheless, it is precisely the history of redemption that demands the spiritual equivalency of the two sacraments! If the Old Testament sign which was fraught with such spiritual significance and was demanded by God to be given to infants who yet could not consciously believe (as Jewett himself forcefully argues), then how can the validity of infant baptism be gainsayed? Thus, the Paedobaptist does not make the error of reading the Old Testament as if it were the New. He reads the New in light of its own expression of its relationship of continuity with the Old. Rather, it is the Anti-paedobaptist who reads the New Testament in discontinuity with the Old Testament and with itself.

What then? You will ask: will no difference remain between the Old and New Testaments? What is to become of the many passages of Scripture wherein they are contrasted as utterly different?

I freely admit the differences in Scripture, to which attention is called, but in such a way as not to detract from its established unity. (II. 11. 1)

Calvin enumerates five differences between the covenants, each of which is related only to the externals of the covenant and not to its substance. The *first* is that the Old Covenant used material or temporal blessings to represent spiritual blessings, while New Covenant members meditate upon these spiritual blessings directly.¹⁵ Although affirming this, Calvin distances himself from the materialistic covenant idea of the Old Covenant with no uncertain terms,

The point of our quarrel with men of this sort is this: they teach that the Israelites deemed the possession of the Land of Canaan their highest and ultimate blessedness, and that after the revelation of Christ it typified for us the heavenly inheritance. We contend, on the contrary, that, in the earthly possession they enjoyed, they looked, as in a mirror, upon the future inheritance they believed to have been prepared for them in heaven. (II. 11. 1)

Calvin perceives this difference as one of divine dispensation that is explained simply by God's own will,

But we shall readily dispose of these misgivings if we turn our attention to this dispensation of God which I have noted. He willed that, for the time during which he gave his covenant to the people of Israel in a veiled form, the grace of future and eternal happiness be signified and figured under earthly benefits, the gravity of spiritual death under physical punishments. (II. 11. 3)

The next three differences Calvin summarizes as the differences between the law and gospel (*cf.* II. 11. 10). In this context, Old Testament means "law" and New Testament means "gospel." The *second* difference between the covenants, and the first in this category, is that truth in the Old Testament was conveyed by images and ceremonies as types of Christ, while the New Covenant has the benefit of having the full revelation of Christ's incarnation. Calvin depicts this difference this way,

The second difference between the Old and New Testaments con-

15. This might be termed the "sacramental" character of the land. This idea is well developed by Philip E. Hughes, *Interpreting Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1976), pp. 41-44. This is undoubtedly one of the chief hermeneutical principles for the amillennial interpretation of Scripture.

sists in figures: that, in the absence of the reality, it showed but an image and shadow in place of the substance; the New Testament reveals the very substance of truth as present. (II. 11. 4)

But while Calvin appears to be making a distinction between the two Covenants with respect to substance due to the presence and absence of the reality, he shortly clarifies himself. The difference is with respect to promise and fulfillment, or viewing Christ from the standpoint of His first advent that was future in the Old Covenant or from the New Covenant where His coming as man is past. Calvin explains,

Here we are to observe how the covenant of the law compares with the covenant of the gospel, the ministry of Christ with that of Moses. For if the comparison had reference to the substance of promises, then there would be great disagreement between the Testaments. But since the trend of the argument leads us in another direction, we must follow it to find the truth. Let us then set forth the covenant that he once established as eternal and never perishing. Its fulfillment, by which it is finally confirmed and ratified, is Christ. (II. 11. 4)

This difference is best seen in the presence of ceremonies that were temporary and hence accidental to the covenant, which were thus able to be discarded at Christ's coming without harming the covenant itself,

While such confirmation was awaited, the Lord appointed, through Moses, ceremonies that were, so to speak, solemn symbols of that confirmation. A controversy arose over whether or not the ceremonies that had been ordained in the law ought to give way to Christ. Now these were only the accidental properties of the covenant, or additions and appendages, and in common parlance, accessories of it. Yet because they were means of administering it, they bear the name "covenant," just as is customary in the case of other sacraments. To sum up, then, in this passage "Old Testament" means the solemn manner of confirming the covenant, comprised in ceremonies and sacrifices. (II. 11. 4)

Thus in Calvin's mind, the Old Testament and the New Testament were not absolutely different, but the Old Testament actually *became* the New Testament when Christ came and ratified the New Testament that had always been symbolized in the shadowy ceremonies of the Old Testament. Calvin explains,

Or, if you prefer, understand it thus: the Old Testament of the Lord was that covenant wrapped up in the shadowy and ineffec-

tual observance of ceremonies and delivered to the Jews; it was temporary because it remained, as it were, in suspense until it might rest upon a firm and substantial confirmation. It became new and eternal only after it was consecrated and established by the blood of Christ. Hence Christ in the supper calls the cup that he gives to his disciples, "the cup of the New Testament in my blood." By this he means that the Testament of God attained its truth when sealed by his blood, and thereby becomes new and eternal. (II. 11. 4)

The *third* difference between the Old and New Covenants, and the second between the law and gospel, is the letter-spirit distinction. This idea is in many respects an extension of the point Calvin has just explained—that the Old Covenant became the New Covenant. In the prior point, the change from the Old to the New was by the coming of Christ. In this difference, the basis for the variation is due to the special work of the Holy Spirit in the New Covenant. Here Calvin explains Jeremiah 31:31-34 and II Corinthians 3:6-11. The passages are undeniably critical for Calvin's perspective since they clearly contrast the Old and New Covenants. The "Old" is termed that which was broken by Israel or a covenant only of the letter, while the "New" is called a covenant that is written by God upon the heart and hence a spiritual covenant. These passages seem to argue that there is not one divine covenant throughout Scripture, but rather that there are two of quite a different character. Should that interpretation be correct, then Calvin would be forced to concede the argument to the Anabaptists after all. How can he explain this difference and still maintain the continuity of the Covenants?¹⁶

16. This point is argued by Lincoln, *op. cit.*, p. 135, "Therefore, in spite of the multitude of texts which place the 'old covenant' of the law of Moses in direct contrast with the 'new covenant' of grace in Christ, showing that the one was a failure and the other superseded it (comp. Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8:7-12, etc.), in order to maintain the unbroken continuity of the Covenant of Grace, they are forced to the unscriptural and untenable position of saying that the law of Moses was a part of the grace covenant."

An interesting departure from historic Reformed covenant theology is that viewpoint articulated by Meredith G. Kline, *By Oath Consigned* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1968), pp. 16-25. Kline in essence accepts the viewpoint of dispensationalism in asserting that there is a fundamental opposition of the covenant made at Sinai with that made with Abraham and renewed by Christ. Hence, Kline articulates the law-gospel distinction as portrayed by Lincoln as the difference between the "law-covenant" and the "promise-covenant." In the "law-covenant," God is not the one who swears to the stipulations of the covenant, but only man. On the other hand, the "promise-covenant" occurs without human stipulation but only divine stipulation, or promise. While it is not our purpose to critique Kline's perspective here, it is important to evaluate his use of Calvin to justify his viewpoint. Kline

Calvin understands these texts to be calling the law "literal" and the gospel "spiritual" (II. 11. 7). This Calvin understands to be because of the purpose of Jeremiah and Paul to analyze law in terms of what properly belongs to it in contrast to what is associated with it by its borrowing elements from the gospel. He explains,

For example: the law contains here and there promises of mercy, but because they have been borrowed from elsewhere, they are

writes, "Calvin reflects the contrast in principle brought out by Paul when he says that although promises of mercy are found in the law taken as a whole ('the whole law'), they are borrowed elements there and 'are not considered as part of the law when the mere nature of the law is the subject of discussion.'" To begin with, it is worth quoting a passage already cited above from II. 7. 1: "And Moses was not made a lawgiver to wipe out the blessing promised to the race of Abraham. Rather, we see him repeatedly reminding the Jews of that freely given covenant made with their fathers of which they were the heirs. It was as if he were sent to renew it. This fact was very clearly revealed in the ceremonies." Here we see Calvin asserting that Moses was one who renewed the covenant of grace made with Abraham. Further, the very requirements of the law such as the ceremonies illustrated the covenant of grace. Thus Kline's desire to make Calvin affirm that the Sinai covenant was primarily law with a sprinkling of mercy is out of accord with Calvin's fundamental understanding of the covenant.

As to the point where Kline affirms that promises of mercy are "borrowed" by the Old Covenant, we must carefully evaluate Calvin's own thought to see if this faithfully reflects his viewpoint. Perhaps no clearer passage in Calvin can be found than that of II. 9. 4: "Hence, also, we refute those who always erroneously compare the law with the gospel by contrasting the merit of works with the free imputation of righteousness. This is indeed a contrast not at all to be rejected. For Paul often means by the term 'law' the rule of righteous living by which God requires of us what is his own, giving us no hope of life unless we completely obey him, and adding on the other hand a curse if we deviate even in the slightest degree. . . . But the gospel did not so supplant the entire law as to bring forward a different way of salvation. Rather, it confirmed and satisfied whatever the law had promised, and gave substance to the shadows. . . . From this we infer that, where the whole law is concerned, the gospel differs from it only in clarity of manifestation." In sum, Calvin's point is that there is not an irreducible difference of merit verses grace between the Old and New Covenants. Nor was there a different "way of salvation" implicit in the law or the gospel. The difference was of degree of manifestation but not in substance. Calvin's point in speaking of the "whole law" was not to speak of it in some abnormal sense, but in its regular role in the believer's life. It was Paul's taking the law in an "abnormal" sense due to his opponents that results in the law-gospel dichotomy in his theology. This point will be fully illustrated in the discussion to follow. So Calvin can speak of the law in separation from Christ or in union with Christ (*cf.* I. 9. 3) with the latter's being normative. He also can speak of the "restricted sense": "Whenever the word *law* is used in this restricted sense, Moses is implicitly contrasted with Christ. We are then to see what the law contains in itself when separated from the Gospel" (Rom. 10:4).

not counted part of the law, when only the nature of the law is under discussion. They ascribe to it only this function: to enjoin what is right, to forbid what is wicked; to promise a reward to the keepers of righteousness, and threaten transgressors with punishment; but at the same time not to change or correct the depravity of heart that by nature inheres in all men. (II. 11. 7)

In other words, the law can only be letter because in itself it can only tell sinful men what to do and hence point out their sin, but never enable them to overcome their evil. The gospel, on the other hand, has the Holy Spirit that enables men actually to begin to be holy and do what the law demands, since all of their sin is forgiven by Christ's redemptive work.

This letter-spirit distinction is very carefully addressed in Calvin's commentaries on the passages under discussion. Thus Calvin explains how one ought to compare law and gospel in his comments on Jeremiah 31:32ff. First, Calvin notes, one must recognize what the law is in itself—a rule of righteousness that only speaks to the ear as letter since it does not have the Spirit. But secondly, Calvin adds, this contrast ceases once the Spirit is joined with the law. It is then no longer letter, but actually spirit or the gospel itself. In fact, Calvin insists that it is not a new law that the Spirit writes on the heart, but the very same law that was once only letter.¹⁷ Therefore Calvin insists that the benefits of the New Covenant were even present in the law of the Old Covenant. To illustrate this, Calvin mentions John 1:17. If grace and truth have come through Christ and the law was of Moses, does this mean that these benefits were absent from the law? His answer is that even though grace and truth are only found in Christ, and the law does not have them as benefits it can actually bestow, they were nonetheless present adventitiously. Simply, they were borrowed from the gospel. In light of this, Moses can be considered in two different senses. If he is

17. The Lutheran conception is quite distinct from Calvin's view of the law at this point. Commenting on Psalm 19, Luther writes, "This psalm teaches similarly that a new Word will be preached, namely, one that will go through the whole world and save those who believe in it; for the Law of Moses was given only to the Jews" (*Luther's Works*, 12:139). Again, he says, "For the Law reveals God's wrath and not God's grace to us. Therefore now God is rightly known" (*LW*, 12:140). Here one can see that Luther interprets Psalm 19 as a prophecy of the Gospel to the utter rejection of the law of Moses. Not only does this overlook entirely the historical context of the Psalm, but it also shows the great difference between Calvin and Luther at this point. For Calvin, the law is unquestionably the law of Moses in terms of the moral law.

considered without Christ in his narrow office (*cf. comm. ad Rom.* 10:4ff.) as lawgiver, his message was only letter and hence produced only death. But if Moses is considered in his whole teaching, he is seen to preach Christ as well. In that case, he must be considered as a preacher of the gospel, the same gospel as is found in the New Covenant.

Calvin's explanation of this critical point of the differences between the Covenants in the midst of the one Covenant of Grace is even more fully explained in two other texts in his commentaries. In Calvin's comments on Psalm 19:8, a "question of no small difficulty" is considered. David has been extolling the virtues of the law, but Paul later in his epistles seems to overthrow entirely the commendations of the law which David has cited—how can these two biblical authors be made to agree? Calvin spells the contrast out in sharp clarity. The law restores the souls of men, yet it is only a dead and deadly letter. It rejoices men's hearts, yet by bringing in the spirit of bondage (Calvin's fourth difference between the Old and New Covenants), it strikes men with terror. David says the law enlightens the eyes, yet Paul says that it casts a veil before men's minds, and so excludes the light which ought to penetrate it. What Calvin here indicates is that the differences between the Covenants, presented by Paul and Jeremiah, actually contradict David's understanding of the "Old" Covenant if they are taken in an absolute sense as the Anabaptists were wont to do.¹⁸ Calvin's answer to the

18. This is well illustrated in Pilgram Marpeck's letter translated in the *Mennonite Quarterly Review* XXXII:198-99: "Ah, my brethren, how diligently and carefully we have to take heed that we do not consider our own impulse the impulse of the Holy Spirit, our own course the course and walk of Christ. . . . God also uses such servants now, often as a provisional forerunner and preparer of the way for those who are rightly driven of the Holy Spirit of Christ, that they may make the path and the road, clear it, and weed it; they are however only servants and not friends or children, who do not know what their master is doing nor what he has in mind. Such a servile compulsion has taken place in our time, for quite a while now and by contributing to all divisions and sects, in order that the righteous driven by the Holy Spirit of Christ may become manifest.

"Luther, Zwingli, M. Hofman, C. Schwenckfeld, S. Frank, and others have been only servants who did not know what their Lord would do." [This last line was printed in red for emphasis.] Just as the Old Testament saints were only servants and not friends of God due to their not having the Spirit, so also, Marpeck says that not only the Reformers but other Anabaptists were without the Spirit and were also only servants while the true Anabaptists were the friends due to their possession of the Holy Spirit. Williams points out the interesting implications of this aspect of Marpeck's thought for his view of the civil order: "At issue with Bucer was Marpeck's insistence that the freedom of the gospel should never be thrust upon the whole

dilemma is similar to what he said in Jeremiah 31. Just as the law of Moses can be viewed with the Spirit and so be gospel, or without the Spirit and so be the letter that kills, so also David must be seen as speaking not just of the moral law, but of the "whole covenant by which God had adopted the descendants of Abraham." Thus David is seen by Calvin to be joining to the law—the rule of living well—the free promises of salvation, or Christ Himself. On the other hand, Paul must be interpreted in light of the opponents he was dealing with. He was addressing persons who abused and perverted the law by making it a basis of human meritorious salvation. Thus it was Paul's point to show that the law without the Spirit was unprofitable and deadly to men's souls. The law without Christ could only be inexorable rigor which consequently curses all mankind to wrath and the curse of God. Calvin's conclusion is that Paul must be seen to be rehearsing what the law can do by itself without the promise of grace. In this capacity, the law strictly and vigorously exacts men's duty owed to God, which none fulfills. David's praise of the law, however, is because he is considering the whole doctrine of the law, which includes the gospel. Thus Calvin concludes, ". . . under the law he comprehends Christ." It is clear, therefore, that Calvin does not see the law as antithetical to the gospel since it includes Christ. It is only so when Christ is excluded from it as the Judaizers had done, and as was consequently considered by Paul in his refutation of their doctrine of salvation by human merit.

But Calvin does not simply explain the passages of Jeremiah and Paul on the differences between the Old and New Covenants by viewing the Old Covenant in a *narrow* sense without Christ and in a *normative* sense in which Christ or the whole of the blessings of the covenant are included. He is too much aware of the history of redemption and God's distinctive administration of the covenant in

population, indeed that the untutored masses in so far as they were incapable of self-discipline should remain under the yoke of the law of the Old Covenant. Marpeck sought for the true, self-discipling evangelicals (the Anabaptists) the public authorization of their use of at least one of the church edifices of the city.

"Constitutive for such evangelical or truly New Covenantal church living under the gospel rather than under the law was the acknowledgment of personal sin, the entry into the New Covenant by believers' baptism, and the observance of the evangelical law. This meant expressly the separation from the world, including the whole sphere of the law and its *legitimate but subchristian* institutions such as the state" (pp. 274-75). In light of this, one can also understand why the magistrates of the Reformation period saw the Anabaptist movement as seditious and hence by definition dangerous for the state.

various ages to do this. Thus in his evaluation of the citation of Jeremiah 31:31ff. found in the eighth chapter of Hebrews, Calvin indicates that there is also the important difference of the comparison of the lesser to the greater. Thus Calvin asks if the Spirit's regeneration and Christ's forgiveness of sins were benefits enjoyed by the Old Testament saints. These he has already called "the two main parts in this covenant." He affirms that they indeed had these benefits of the covenant even in the Old Testament administration of the covenant of grace, but to a lesser extent than the New Testament saint. Calvin points to three ways in which the New Covenant is greater than the Old Covenant. First, he indicates that the power of the Spirit is greater. God the Father has more fully put forth the power of the Spirit under the kingdom of Christ. Second, He has poured forth more abundantly his mercy on mankind, such that in comparison to this the grace of God on the fathers is insignificant. Third, while the promises of God with respect to salvation were known in the Old Covenant, they were obscure and intricate in comparison to the clarity of revelation of the New Covenant. Calvin likens this to the light of the moon and the stars in comparison to the clear light of the sun.

Yet Calvin is aware that this interpretation can be challenged by the case of Abraham. In comparison to him, New Covenant believers are lesser, and he is the greater. Calvin's response is that this comparison is not to be made of specific persons, but with respect to the economical condition of the church. Thus under the Old Covenant economy of the Covenant of Grace the fathers' spiritual gifts were accidental to their age. They had to direct their eyes to Christ in order to possess them. So Calvin says that the apostle's comparing of the law to the gospel as two different covenants was taking away from the law what was peculiar to the gospel. Nevertheless, Calvin asserts, "There is yet no reason why God should not have extended the grace of the New Covenant to the fathers." This Calvin says is the "true solution of the question."

In attempting to summarize Calvin's viewpoint on the relationship of the Old and New Covenants in light of the letter-spirit distinction, it is helpful to keep in mind that he uses the term "New Covenant" in two distinct senses. In the strict sense of Biblical redemptive history, Calvin understands the New Covenant as the gospel era brought to pass by Christ's redemptive work and His subsequent sending of the Holy Spirit in His full apostolic manifestation and power. But Calvin also understands the New Covenant in a broader sense, that is, the New Covenant has always

been the saving relationship between God and His elect throughout the ages. It either looked forward in promise to Christ's coming or it harks back to His accomplishment of redemption. While this viewpoint is distinctively a mark of Calvinism, it is not unimportant to realize that Calvin was fully conscious of his indebtedness to Augustine at this point. Referring to Augustine, he writes,

In the same passage he very aptly adds the following: the children of the promise, reborn of God, who have obeyed the commands by faith working through love have belonged to the New Covenant since the world began. This they did, not in hope of carnal, earthly, and temporal things, but in hope of spiritual, heavenly, and eternal benefits. For they believed especially in the Mediator; and they did not doubt that through him the Spirit was given to them that they might do good, and that they were pardoned whenever they sinned. It is that very point which I intended to affirm: all the saints whom Scripture mentions as being peculiarly chosen of God from the beginning of the world have shared with us the same blessing unto eternal salvation. (II. 11. 10)

Calvin in full agreement with Augustine understands that the New Covenant has always been the place of salvation. So Calvin must be read with care with respect to which of the two meanings of the New Covenant he is employing.

It is also true that Calvin has a twofold use of the term "law." It can be used either in the strict sense of the Pauline usage to combat self-congratulatory works of human merit, or in the broad sense of the rule of living well which is coupled with the Spirit's enablement and Christ's forgiveness. In the first sense, there is a very profound difference between law and gospel. In the second, however, there is no longer any difference between the law and gospel since the Spirit has been added to the law and Christ's forgiveness as well. Calvin states this with succinctness in his comments on Dt. 30:11 where he argues that law and gospel are one by the New Covenant.¹⁹ Under the heading of "The Use of the Law" in the same commentary,

19. Calvin comments on Dt. 30:11: "But this is the peculiar blessing of the new covenant, that the Law is written on men's hearts, and engraven on their inward parts; whilst that severe requirement is relaxed so that the vices under which believers still labour are no obstacle to their partial and imperfect obedience being pleasant to God." In light of this doctrine, Calvin can go on to say that believers actually receive the promises of the law, that is the reward promised to obedience, because of their being viewed in light of the promises of the gospel. Calvin writes in III. 17. 3: "But when the promises of the gospel are substituted, which proclaim the free forgiveness of sins, these not only make us acceptable to God but also render our works pleasing to him. And not only does the Lord adjudge them pleasing; he also

Calvin lists four distinct uses of the law which highlight this twofold use of the term "law." The first two are for instruction and condemnation. The second two correspond to the first two respectively as explanations of them. Thus the third is that the law is used by the Spirit in His regenerating work in the believer (*cf.* instruction). The fourth is an explanation of why Paul "seems" to abrogate the law (*cf.* condemnation).²⁰ The fourth point is once again Calvin's under-

extends to them the blessings which under the covenant were owed to the observance of his law. I therefore admit that what the Lord has promised in his law to the keepers of righteousness and holiness is paid to the works of believers, but in this repayment we must always consider the reason that wins favor for these works."

In this same context, a further criticism of Kline's viewpoint may be discerned. Kline avers that "the systematic theologian possesses [p. 25] ample warrant to speak both of 'promise covenant' and, in sharp distinction from that, of 'law covenant.'" For Calvin, however, this sharp distinction does not exist once God begins to exercise his "fatherly indulgence" toward His people (*cf. Commentaries on the Last Four Books of Moses*, III:199-205, 214, 218, 227). See the references cited in note 11 as well.

Nor would Calvin accept the idea that the "covenant of mercy" or Kline's covenant of promise does not include the believers' oath of obedience. First, Calvin insists that "... in all covenants of his mercy the Lord requires of his servants in return uprightness and sanctity of life, lest his goodness be mocked or someone, puffed up with empty exultation on that account, bless his own soul, walking meanwhile in the wickedness of his own heart. Consequently, in this way he wills to keep in their duty those admitted to the fellowship of the covenant; nonetheless the covenant is at the outset drawn up as a free agreement, and perpetually remains as such." Thus when Calvin speaks of covenant, the condition of obedience remains.

In fact, Calvin insists that the covenant of grace still demands the perfect obedience of the believer. Calvin explains in IV. 13. 6, "All believers have one common vow which, made in baptism, we confirm and, so to speak, sanction by catechism and receiving the Lord's Supper. For the sacraments are like contracts by which the Lord gives us his mercy and from it eternal life; and we in turn promise him obedience. . . . And there is no obstacle in the fact that no one can maintain in this life the perfect obedience to the law which God requires of us. For inasmuch as this stipulation is included in the covenant of grace under which are contained both forgiveness of sins and the spirit of sanctification, the promise which we make there is joined with a plea for pardon and a petition for help" (italics mine). Since the "vow" or oath made in covenant of grace by baptism includes the believer's obedience to the law, Calvin must be seen to be in deep disagreement with the Kline perspective. Grace does not exempt absolute obedience, rather it pardons imperfect obedience by the believer ("plea for pardon") and it enables the believer to begin to accomplish this goal ("petition for help").

20. Calvin in his *Last Four Books of Moses*, III:199 says: "Further, because Paul seems to abrogate the Law, as if now-a-days it did not concern believers, we must now see how far this is the case" (italics mine). Contrast this with what Melancthon says, "That part of the law called the Decalogue or the moral commandments has been abrogated by the New Testament." *Melancthon and Bucer*, ed. Wilhelm Pauck (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969), p. 121. Luther, in fact states, "The

standing of Paul's special task of refuting the attempt to gain salvation by meritorious observance of the law. Calvin himself offers a helpful summary of these matters in his comments on Galatians 3:25 and 4:1. In the first text he asks, "How is the law abolished?" His answer is that it is not abolished as a rule of life and cites II Timothy 3:16-17. It is abolished, however in all that differs in comparison of Moses with the covenant of grace. These differences he lists as an unabating demand for exact obedience without forgiveness, a severe reckoning of the smallest offenses, Christ is not openly exhibited, but rather He and His grace are seen only distantly in ceremonies. In the second text he concludes, "All this leads to the conclusion, that the difference between us and the ancient fathers lies in accidents, not in substance. In all the leading characters of the testament or covenant we agree. . . ." In light of these considerations, two texts already cited take on a greater depth of meaning. Calvin's statement that God's people "since the beginning of the world were covenanted to him by the *same law* and by the bond of the same doctrine" (II. 10. 2) can be seen to be understood by him as the normal use of the law as a rule of life. Similarly, Calvin's view that "Moses was not made a lawgiver to wipe out the blessing promised to the race of Abraham. Rather, we see him repeatedly reminding the Jews of the freely given covenant made with their fathers . . ." is also clearly a further affirmation that the Pauline interpretation of law is not the normal use of law, but rather a special application of it. In interpreting Calvin's theological perspective on the relationship of the Old and New Covenants, then, one must be cognizant of his twofold use of the terms "New Covenant" and "law."

Can Men Break the New Covenant?

Yet one last matter of importance for Calvin's understanding of

greatest art of Christians is to be ignorant of the whole of active righteousness and of the law; whereas outside the people of God, the greatest wisdom is to know and to contemplate the law. . . . For if I do not remove the law from my sight and turn my thoughts to grace, as though there were no law and only pure grace, I cannot be blessed." Cited in Gerhard Ebeling, *Luther*, trans. R. A. Wilson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), pp. 123-24. It should from this be clear that Luther and Melancthon understood that the law *had been* abrogated even in the form of the moral law while Calvin believed that this was a misreading of Scripture. Calvin insists that Paul only *seems* to abrogate the law. While Luther would have the Christian ignorant of the law, Calvin would remind them that the covenant of grace includes perfect obedience to the law as one of its stipulations!

the relationship of the Old and New Covenants must be examined in relation to the letter-spirit distinction. If these two are really one and the same covenant that are different only in externals, then does the mass defection of Israel also imply that there can be a mass defection of the New Covenant era saints? But if this is admitted is not one forced to say that the covenant is defective since God would therefore seem not to write His law effectually on the hearts of His people? But if this is denied, then does not the letter-spirit distinction actually prove that they are two different covenants having a different substance? The Old Covenant of the letter could obviously have many who could fall away from it since the law was not Spirit written. On the other hand, the New Covenant cannot allow any to fall away since they are infallibly secured by the effectual application of the law to their heart.²¹ In a word, does the New Covenant allow for such covenant-breaking as the Old Covenant experienced in light of the former's being only of the letter and the latter's being of the Spirit?²² How can Calvin's claim that the only difference between the two is with respect to the extent and power of the Spirit's work explain this dilemma? Does this accord with the Bible's view of the church?

Calvin is keenly aware of this argument that would substantiate the Anabaptist claim of a substantial rather than an accidental difference between the Old and New Covenants. For instance, he admits that the Old Covenant is seen as inferior to the New, "Indeed, Jeremiah calls even the moral law a weak and fragile covenant." Yet Calvin is unwilling to see this defect in the covenant, but rather in the people.

But that is for another reason: by the sudden defection of an ungrateful people it was soon broken off. However, because the people were to blame for such a violation, it cannot properly be charged against the covenant. (II. 11. 8)

Calvin's answer thus far is that the covenant was not weak in itself but was weak by the ingratitude of the covenanted people. His next point is that the difference between the two is once again to be interpreted not as an absolute contrast but as a comparison.

We are not to surmise from this difference between letter and spirit that the Lord had fruitlessly bestowed his law upon the

21. Cf. Strong, *op. cit.*, pp. 536-37; Gill, *op. cit.*, pp. 903-04.

22. Gill, *ibid.*, p. 903 states, "It is plain, it was a covenant that might be broken; of the uncircumcised it is said, *He hath broken my covenant*, Gen. xvii. 14, whereas the covenant of grace cannot be broken; God will not break it, and men cannot; . . ."

Jews, and that none of them turned to him. But it was put forward by way of comparison to commend the grace abounding, wherewith the same Lawgiver—assuming, as it were, a new character—honored the preaching of the gospel. (II. 11.8)

Even though the covenant was weak due to the people's ingratitude, Calvin says, this must not be made to teach that there were none who experienced its benefits in the Old Testament era. Rather, in comparison to the New Covenant, there were almost none although in its own right there were many. Calvin states,

For suppose we reckon the multitude of those whom he gathers into the communion of his church from all peoples, men regenerated by his Spirit through the preaching of the gospel. Then we will say that in ancient Israel there were very few—almost none—who embraced the Lord's covenant with their whole hearts and minds. Yet, reckoned by themselves without comparison, there were many. (II. 11. 8)

Since Calvin has argued for the continuity of the covenant on the basis of comparison, must he not therefore admit the reality of covenant-breaking in the New Covenant? Further, how can this concept be consistent with the very benefit of the covenant that promises that God writes the law upon the believer's heart?

Calvin's answer to this question is not found in the immediate context of the letter-spirit distinction (II. 11. 8). While Calvin makes passing reference to this question at numerous points in the *Institutes*,²³ his most thorough explanation comes from his comments on Romans 11:22. There is no question in Calvin's mind that people in the New Covenant era can by their ingratitude not persevere in God's goodness.

They indeed who have been illuminated by the Lord ought always to think of perseverance; for they continue not in the goodness of God, who having for a time responded to the call of God, do at length begin to loathe the kingdom of heaven, and thus by their ingratitude justly deserve to be blinded again.

In saying this, Calvin is fully admitting that there is in reality the experience of covenant-breaking in the New Covenant era even as

23. I have counted over thirty examples in the *Institutes* alone where Calvin argues from the idea of conditionality, mutuality, and covenant-breaking. Cf. II. 5. 12; II. 10. 8; II. 11. 8; III. 2. 22; III. 17. 3; III. 17. 6; III. 21. 6; IV. 8. 2; IV. 13. 6; IV. 15. 17; IV. 16. 14; IV. 16. 24. In his commentaries cf.: Zech. 8:7, 8; Mal. 2:6, 4; Dan. 9:4; Hos. 5:7; Amos 6:13; Gen. 17:1, 9, 14; Hos. 2:4, 5; 4:6; Zech. 11:10, 11; Ps. 89:30; Rom. 2:25; 3:3, 29; 8:12; Heb. 8:7, 9.

there was in the Old Covenant administration,

For he would have the gentiles to depend on the eternal covenant of God, so as to connect their own with the salvation of the elect people, and then, lest the rejection of the Jews should produce offence, as though their ancient adoption were void, he would have them to be terrified by this example of punishment, so as reverently to regard the judgment of God.

At this point, Calvin goes on to make an important distinction between God's corporate and individual election. Paul, according to Calvin, is speaking primarily of corporate election and covenant breaking,

But as he speaks not of the elect individually, but of the whole body, a condition is added, if they continued in his kindness. I indeed allow, that as soon as any one abuses God's goodness, he deserves to be deprived of the offered favour; but it would be improper to say of any one of the godly particularly, that God had mercy on him when he chose him, provided he would continue in his mercy; for the perseverance of faith, which completes in us the effect of God's grace, flows from election itself. Paul then teaches us, that the Gentiles were admitted into the hope of eternal life on the condition, that they by their gratitude retained possession of it.²⁴

Thus Calvin sees this breaking away from the covenant as a real possibility for the gentiles of the New Covenant as the corporate people of the covenant, although Calvin states that this has implications for individuals as well. But not only does Calvin state that covenant-breaking is a distinct possibility for the gentiles in the New Covenant, he insists that this has already happened,

And dreadful indeed was the defection of the whole world, which afterwards happened; and this clearly proves, that this exhortation was not superfluous; for when God had almost in a moment watered it with his grace, so that religion flourished everywhere, soon after the truth of the gospel vanished, and the treasure of salvation was taken away. And whence came so sudden a change except that the Gentiles had fallen away from their calling?

Calvin applies this point specifically to the Roman Church with a profound sense of the God-abandonedness that he sees characteristic

24. Calvin employs his distinction between "corporate" and "individual" election at several places in his writings: III. 2. 22, III. 21. 5-7, III. 22. 6; Zech. 1:17, Hos. 12:3-5, Mal. 1:2-6. Cf. Calvin's *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, trans. J. K. S. Reid (London: James Clarke & Co. Limited, 1961), pp. 132-33.

of the Papal Church in the Reformation. Calvin declares, in his commentary on Hosea 2:4, 5,

. . . that it is not enough that God should choose any people for himself, except the people themselves persevere in the obedience of faith; for this is the spiritual chastity which the Lord requires from all his people. But when is a wife, whom God hath bound to himself by a sacred marriage, said to become wanton? When she falls away, as we shall more clearly see hereafter, from pure and sound faith. Then it follows that the marriage between God and men so long endures as they who have been adopted continue in pure faith, and apostacy in a manner frees God from us, so that he may justly repudiate us. Since such apostacy prevails under the Papacy, and has for many ages prevailed, how senseless they are in their boasting, while they would be thought to be the holy Catholic Church, and the elect people of God? For they are all born by wantonness, they are all spurious children. The incorruptible seed is the word of God; but what sort of doctrine have they? It is a spurious seed. Then as to God all the Papists are bastards. In vain then they boast themselves to be the children of God, and that they have the holy Mother Church, for they are born by filthy wantonness.

Calvin makes use of this fact of the covenant-breaking of the Roman Church several times in his writings. But Calvin has already said that this has some bearing on individuals even though it has primary application to the corporately elect people of the gentile church. How does this idea of covenant-breaking apply to individuals in the New Covenant?

Continuing in his exposition of Romans 11:22, Calvin addresses the question of how this warning of covenant-breaking applies to the elect,

We now understand in what sense Paul threatens them with excision, whom he has already allowed to have been grafted into the hope of life through God's election. For, first, though this cannot happen to the elect, they have yet need of such warning, in order to subdue the pride of the flesh; which being really opposed to their salvation, ought justly to be terrified with the dread of perdition. As far then as Christians are illuminated by faith, they hear, for their assurance, that the calling of God is without repentance; but as far as they carry about them the flesh, which wantonly resists the grace of God, they are taught humility by this warning, "Take heed lest thou be cut off."

In essence, Calvin here affirms that the warnings of Scripture are not merely hypothetical, but are true warnings. Even though one is elect, he still is in battle with the pride of the flesh which is opposed

to his salvation. To be taught humility before God, the warnings are a necessary means of grace. Calvin does not stop with his adherence to the necessity of warnings for the elect in his explanation of how covenant-breaking applies to New Covenant people. To this idea, he adds a highly developed scheme of how an individual is grafted into and excised from the covenant. Calvin explains,

But if it be asked respecting individuals, "How any one could be cut off from the grafting, and how after excision, he could be grafted again,"—bear in mind, that there are three modes of insition, and two modes of excision. For instance, the children of the faithful are ingrafted, to whom the promise belongs according to the covenant made with the fathers; ingrafted are also they who indeed receive the seed of the gospel, but it strikes no root, or it is choked before it brings any fruit; and thirdly the elect are ingrafted, who are illuminated unto eternal life according to the immutable purpose of God.

Calvin begins his approach to this question with three possible modes of entrance into the covenant: by birth into a Christian home, by hypocritical faith, and by true conversion growing out of divine election. To these three modes of insition, Calvin adds two modes of excision,

The first are cut off, when they refuse the promise given to their fathers, or do not receive it on account of their ingratitude; the second are cut off, when the seed is withered and destroyed; and as the danger of this impends over all, with regard to their own nature, it must be allowed that this warning which Paul gives belongs in a certain way to the faithful, lest they indulge themselves in the sloth of the flesh. But with regard to the present passage, it is enough for us to know, that the vengeance which God had executed on the Jews, is pronounced on the Gentiles, in case they become like them.

Covenant children according to Calvin can be cut off from the covenant by refusing the promise or by ingratitude. Hypocrites are cut off from the covenant when the seed of the Word of God is destroyed in their lives. With respect to the elect, Calvin once again affirms his conviction that this warning is also applicable to the elect since they in this life are burdened with the lust of the flesh and could from the vantage point of human responsibility apostatize. For Calvin, it is highly significant to realize that the warnings of apostasy are not to be ignored, since there are always members of the church—the corporately elect people of the covenant—who will fall away from the promise of their baptism or their profession of faith. While the truly

elect of God can never fail to persevere, they must ever be on guard against the flesh and are in fact aided in their struggle by the warnings.

Here, then, one sees that Calvin's understanding of the letter-spirit distinction has a bearing of his view of the church. The church is not composed entirely of those who have the Spirit-written law upon their hearts, but also of those who have the promise that such will be done (baptized children) and those who claim that it has been done, but in reality are hypocrites. The Anabaptist view of the gathered church grows out of an absolute view of the differences between the Old and New Covenants. Calvin's perspective on the church recognizes that there is a broader sphere of election than those who are the true recipients of the Spirit. This is in keeping with the church of Israel where there was a mixed multitude. The difference for Calvin, then, is found in the fact that there are many more truly elect in the New Covenant church than in the Old Covenant church, but since the covenant is broader than its actual application, there can be still covenant-breaking in the New Covenant. In this way Calvin is able to explain how the reality of covenant-breaking relates to the infallibly applied New Covenant.

It is of interest to observe how Calvin applies this approach to the covenant to his own experience. Calvin had been baptized into the covenant by a Roman priest. Yet, he failed to keep the promise of baptism and become a covenant-breaker. Nevertheless, God in His mercy restored him back into the covenant relationship. Each of these points may be observed in his comments on Hosea 2:19, 20,

What fellowship have we with God, when we are born and come out of the womb, except he graciously adopts us? for we bring nothing, we know, with us but a curse: this is the heritage of all mankind. Since it is so, all our salvation must necessarily have its foundation in the goodness and mercies of God. But there is also another reason in our case, when God receives us into favour; for we were covenant-breakers under the Papacy; there was not one of us who had not departed from the pledge of his baptism; and so we could not have returned into favour with God, except he had freely united us to himself: and God not only forgave us, but contracted also a new marriage with us, so that we can now, as on the day of our youth, as it has been previously said, openly give thanks to him.

Did Calvin take the warning of falling away from the covenant seriously? Did he believe that he might stumble away from the covenant even though he was one of God's elect? Calvin answers this question

question very pointedly although indirectly in his prayer at the conclusion of Lecture Fourth in his Commentary on Hosea. There he depicts the idea of the broken covenant he had experienced in the Roman Church that had been restored in his life by the Reformation with the earnest prayer that he might not fall away again, this time as a hypocrite,

Grant, Almighty God, that as thou hast not only of late adopted us as thy children but before we were born, and as thou hast been pleased to sign us, as soon as we came forth from our mother's womb, with the symbol of that holy redemption, which has been obtained for us by the blood of thy only begotten Son, though we have by our ingratitude renounced so great a benefit—O grant, that being mindful of our defection and unfaithfulness, of which we are all guilty, and for which thou hast justly rejected us, we may now with true humility and obedience of faith embrace the grace of thy gospel now again offered to us, by which thou reconcilest thyself to us; and grant that we may steadfastly persevere in pure faith, so as never to turn aside from the true obedience of faith, but to advance more and more in the knowledge of thy mercy, that having strong and deep roots, and being firmly grounded in the confidence of sure faith, we may never fall away from the true worship of thee, until thou at length receivest us into that eternal kingdom, which has been procured for us by the blood of thy only Son. Amen.

While the matter is quite complex, it must be admitted that Calvin has thoroughly thought through his viewpoint of the letter-spirit distinction. He insists that the distinction of law-gospel is a specific application of the law—severed from Christ—and not its normative use. The law is fully in accord with the New Covenant in its continual progress in all the ages of redemption, even until the New Covenant actually “became” new with its ratification in Christ's redemptive work. Thus Calvin asserts that the relationship of the Old and New Covenants is one of lesser to greater in comparison rather than an absolute dichotomy. In keeping with this viewpoint, Calvin further maintains that there is covenant-breaking even in the New Covenantal era of the “New” Covenant or Covenant of Grace. This is different from Israel only in the extent of those who fall away; nevertheless, the apostasy of Rome indicates that a near total apostasy of the gentiles was equally possible as that of Israel. Therefore, Calvin understands that the Covenant is broader than the actual application of the Spirit-written law to the heart in the New Covenant even as it was in the Old Covenant. Thus, for Calvin, the church is not made up exclusively of

"regenerate" members of a gathered church, but of those who have some claim to the promise of the covenant. In fact, Calvin includes himself among those who have been severed from the covenant by ingratitude, and who have been restored by divine grace. Further, Calvin also is struck by the warnings of apostasy and prays that he be kept from falling away again as a hypocrite.

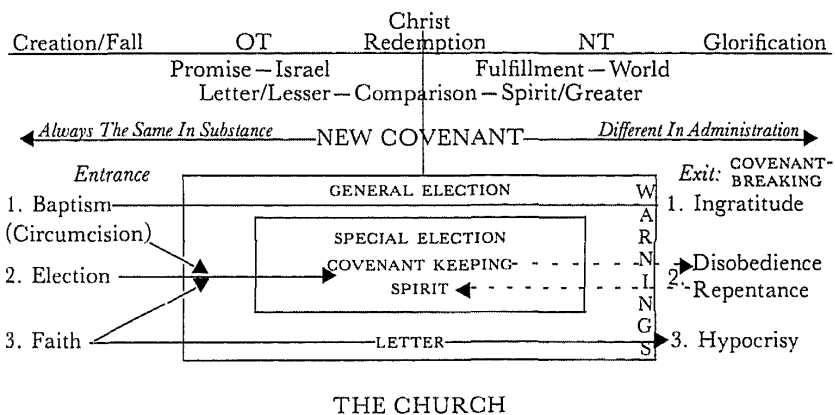
If modern Baptists object to this approach by claiming that the baptistic approach is much simpler and more likely to maintain the purity of the church by its insistence on regenerate church membership, it is important to realize that the problems that Calvin has here struggled with are applicable to them as well. Is it not true that many "regenerate" people have walked an aisle or sought baptism and have received the ordinance of baptism as adult believers only to fall away from their profession? It is this fact of experience itself that indicates the impossibility of inerrantly practicing the regenerate church concept. If anyone has ever been baptized and then later shown himself to be a genuine hypocrite who has finally apostatized from the truth, the reality of a regenerate church membership is disproved. While Calvin's approach may not appear ideal to the baptistic viewpoint, it nevertheless is the only approach that can handle the state of the church as it really exists in this world.

Perhaps no better illustration from Calvin's writings of this interplay between law, letter-spirit, and the genuine and hypocritical peoples of the covenant or church can be found than his comment on Genesis 21:12. There Calvin speaks of the "perpetual condition of the church". Calvin says that the church or the spiritual kingdom of Christ is born of the *law*. From the law, two types of children are born — those born of the letter and those born of the Spirit. The first are illustrated by Hagar who is the letter giving birth to Ishmael who is an adulterous son. Overagainst these two are Sarah who illustrates the Spirit, and Isaac who is the true son. Calvin proceeds to say that the church has children of the letter or adulterous sons who are born into slavery to the law and are so hypocrites. In his day, these children of the letter, or adulterous sons in slavery to the law and hypocrisy are the members of the papal church. One can now understand why he called them "bastards" in his comment on Hosea 2:4, 5 cited above. On the other hand, Calvin sees the true sons of the Spirit as those who are born into liberty as the sons of God. These, of course, are the Protestants, although Calvin does not say so in this passage.²⁵ The first group, Calvin says, are "apparently

25. Calvin admits that there are hypocrites in the Reformation as well in Zeph. 1:2, 3. Micah 3:11, 12 will be cited below saying the same.

born of the Word of God, and therefore in a sense, the sons of God." The latter group, however, are "born of the incorruptible seed of the Word" and hence are true sons. For Calvin, then, "law" can result in slavery and hypocrisy or it can result in liberty and true sonship. What makes the difference? The answer is found in a proper understanding of the letter-spirit distinction. To absolutize the distinction results in an Anabaptist conception of the church. Yet this view leaves the Old Covenant saints as without the Spirit's blessing. Nor can it explain why there are covenant-breakers in the New Covenant era, if the difference is taken as absolute. On the other hand, Calvin's interpretation of a comparison from lesser to greater explains the Old Covenant saints' experience of salvation, how David can delight in the law and Paul can be terrified by it, and how there can be covenant-breaking even in the New Covenant. The result is a Reformed conception of the church that recognizes the impossibility of having a totally "regenerate" church membership. Calvin's view recognizes that the unity of the covenants in all the ages demands that the church also be arranged along the lines of the covenant. While all of this may seem complex, it can be simplified if it is studied in graphic form. This chart attempts to incorporate the main points considered so far.

*Calvin's View of the Relationship of the Church
and the Covenant Throughout History*



It would perhaps be helpful to provide a few more specific examples from Calvin's writings to illustrate how he viewed this matter

of members of the New Covenant in the sense of "general election" being designated as covenant-breakers. Calvin sees the reality of covenant-breaking associated with baptism in the case of the papal church.

The same thing that the Prophet brought against the Israelites may be also brought against the Papists; for as soon as infants are born among them, the Lord signs them with the sacred symbol of baptism; they are therefore in some sense the people of God. We see, at the same time, how gross and abominable are the superstitions which prevail among them: there are none more stupid than they are. Even the Turks and the Saracenes are wise when compared with them. How great, then, and how shameful is this baseness, that the Papists, who boast themselves to be the people of God, should go astray after their own mad follies!²⁶

Even though they have the sign of the covenant, they fail to keep God's Word by their superstitious practices. Not only does Calvin see this form of covenant-breaking, but he also is keenly aware of the reality of hypocrisy, both in the papal church and in the church of the Reformation as well.

Since then the sacrifices were daily performed and since the kingdom still retained its outward form, they thought that God was, in a manner, bound to them. The same is the case at this day with the great part of men; they presumptuously and absurdly boast of the external forms of religion. The Papists possess the name of a Church, with which they are extremely inflated; and then there is a great show and pomp in their ceremonies. The hypocrites also among us boast of Baptism, and the Lord's Supper, and the name of Reformation; while, at the same time, these are nothing but mockeries, by which the name of God and the whole operation of religion are profaned, when no real piety flourishes in the heart.²⁷

Because of the ever present danger of disobedience, one who is in the "special election" sphere must be ever mindful of his responsibility to keep the covenant. Even one who believes that he is truly elect may stumble and prove himself to be a hypocrite. Perhaps no passage in Calvin's writings more graphically presents the necessity of taking the warnings of Scripture seriously and thus repenting from sin than his comments on Leviticus 26:40:

Whence too, it follows, that all punishments are like spurs to arouse the inert and hesitating to repentance, whilst the sorer

26. Hosea 4:12.

27. Micah 3:11, 12.

plagues are intended to break their hard hearts. Yet at the same time, it must be observed that this favor is vouchsafed by special privilege, to the church of God. Moses soon afterwards expressly assigns its cause, that is, that God will remember his covenant. Whence it is plain that God out of regard to his gratuitous adoption, will be gracious to the unworthy whom He has *elected*; and whence also it comes to pass, that provided we do not close the gate of hope against ourselves, God will still voluntarily come forward to reconcile us to Himself, if only we lay hold of the *covenant* from which we have *fallen* by our own guilt, like shipwrecked sailors seizing a plank to carry them safe into port. (Italics mine.)

Here Calvin pointedly indicates the reality of falling from the covenant by disobedience. Only if one does not "close the gate of hope against" himself, and seizes the covenant from which he has fallen, will God "come forward to reconcile" Himself. Here Calvin is emphasizing the element of human responsibility in the covenant relationship. The covenant-breaker is responsible to seize the "plank" if he desires to be carried "safe into port". It is of utmost importance to note that Calvin once again uses the personal pronouns "we", "ourselves", and "us" in his application. He undoubtedly saw this as a reality for himself, that could be prevented by taking the abundant warnings of Scripture seriously. Calvin here unhesitatingly unites the danger of falling away from the covenant with the doctrine of election (note italicized words). Once again it is seen that Calvin's view of baptism is not an independent doctrine with little significance for his other doctrinal formulations. Instead, as here, it results in a very important perspective in his overall doctrinal perspective. Calvin sees that his doctrine of infant baptism explains why there is at least in part covenant-breaking in the new covenant. Because the letter-spirit distinction is one of comparison and not absolute contrast, the baptized members of the New Covenant can fall away by ingratitude from their place in the covenant even as Old Covenant people rejected in unthankfulness the promise of their circumcision. In fact, Calvin, avers, this is the experience of the Roman Church and his own spiritual life.

* * * * *

The remaining differences between the Old and New Covenants in Calvin's understanding have already been touched upon above in an indirect manner. The *fourth* difference and the third between law and gospel is the bondage of the Old Covenant and the freedom of

the New Covenant. Calvin explains,

The fourth difference arises out of the third. Scripture calls the Old Testament one of "bondage" because it produces fear in men's minds; but the New Testament, one of "freedom" because it lifts them to trust and assurance. (II. 11. 9)

This understanding of the Old Testament seems, however, to take away the blessings of the Spirit that Calvin has already argued properly belonged to the holy patriarchs. Did they not have the same freedom and joy? Calvin's explanation once again indicates his understanding of the New Covenant as the place of salvation in all of redemptive history. It further points to his recognition of the comparison of lesser to greater in that the Old Testament saints did not have this freedom and joy to the same extent as the New Testament saints. He states,

But when through the law the patriarchs felt themselves both oppressed by their enslaved condition, and wearied by anxiety of conscience, they fled for refuge to the gospel. It was therefore a particular fruit of the New Testament that, apart from the common law of the Old Testament, they were exempted from those evils. Further, we shall deny that they were so endowed with the spirit of freedom and assurance as not in some degree to experience the fear and bondage arising from the law. For, however much they enjoyed the privilege that they had received through the grace of the gospel, they were still subject to the same bonds and burdens of ceremonial observances as the common people. They were compelled to observe those ceremonies punctiliously, symbols of tutelage resembling bondage; . . . Hence, they are rightly said, in contrast to us, to have been under the testament of bondage and fear. . . . (II. 11. 9)

The *fifth* and final difference between the Covenants for Calvin is that the Old Covenant was limited to the nation of Israel while the New Covenant is extended by God to all nations. Calvin explains,

The fifth difference, which may be added, lies in the fact that until the advent of Christ, the Lord set apart one nation within which to confine the covenant of his grace. . . . He lodged his covenant, so to speak, in their bosom; he manifested the presence of his majesty over them; he showered every privilege upon them. But—to pass over the remaining blessings—let us consider the one in question. In communicating his Word to them, he joined them to himself, that he might be called and esteemed their God. In the meantime, "he allowed all other nations to walk" in vanity, as if they had nothing whatsoever to do with him. (II. 11. 11)

Because God changed His administration of the gospel by opening it up to all nations, Calvin sees this as a superiority of the New Covenant over the Old Covenant. He states,

The calling of the Gentiles, therefore, is a notable mark of the excellence of the New Testament over the Old. Indeed, this had been attested before by many very clear utterances of the prophets, but in such a way that its fulfillment was postponed until the Kingdom of Messiah. (II. 11. 12)

III. *Calvin's Use of the Covenant to Defend Infant Baptism.*

Thus far, we have seen Calvin's understanding of the continuity of the Old and New Covenants as well as his perspective on how they differ from one another. In both instances, Calvin develops his conception of the covenant against the viewpoint of the Anabaptist theology. In the first case, Calvin insists that the New Covenant has always been the place of redemption whether in the Old economy or the New. Thus he rejects the Anabaptist idea of the radical disjuncture of the Old Testament and the New Testament. He refuses the idea of a materialistic covenant versus a spiritual covenant. Secondly, Calvin also recognizes Biblical differences between the two covenants, but not in a substantial sense as the Anabaptists aver. The differences are due to variations in externals. Thus there is in Calvin's mind a real ministry of the "Spirit" in the Old Covenant of the "letter." With this "hermeneutical" background, we can now approach the question of Calvin's defense of infant baptism *vis a vis* the Anabaptist view of believer's baptism.

It must be strongly emphasized that Calvin's exposition of infant baptism is saturated with the concept of the covenant. In fact, the sacrament of baptism is the common vow of the church whereby both God and man are joined in a contractual relationship. Baptism is for Calvin the contract of the covenant of grace. In this relationship, God gives mercy and eternal life while man accepts the stipulation of perfect obedience in the context of forgiveness of sins and the Spirit's sanctification.²⁸ In light of this and all that has been presented above, it is little wonder that Calvin unleashes his assault on Anabaptist theology by a barrage of covenantal argumentation.²⁹

28. This is a summation of the passage from IV. 13. 6. cited in note 19.

29. As was mentioned above in note 8, Calvin utilizes the term covenant or testament 53x in this chapter (IV. 16) alone. Karl Barth's criticisms of Calvin's approach

Calvin both presents his case for paedobaptism as well as defends it against various attacks by employment of the covenant idea. His positive arguments build initially upon his already established point of the continuity of the Old and New Covenants. It is due to the continuity of the covenant with the Jews and with Christians that enables Christians to baptize their infants:

For he expressly declares that the circumcision of a tiny infant will be in lieu of a seal to certify the promise of the covenant. But if the covenant still remains firm and steadfast, it applies no less today to the children of Christians than under the Old Testament it pertained to the infants of the Jews. Yet if they are participants in the thing signified, why shall they be debarred from the sign? (IV. 16. 5)

On the other hand, the discontinuity of the covenants in externals allows Calvin to refute an objection against his view:

The objection that there was a stated day for circumcision is sheer evasion. We admit that we are not now bound to certain days like the Jews; but since the Lord, without fixing the day yet declares that he is pleased to receive infants into his covenant with a solemn rite, what more do we require? (IV. 16. 5)

Calvin is so adamant that the covenant with the Jews continues into the New Covenant era that he asserts that to deny this is nothing less than blasphemy. This is because such a view implies that Christ's coming actually narrowed God's grace rather than expanding it:³⁰

at this point are worth citing: "I venture the affirmation: the confusion into which Luther and Calvin and their respective disciples have tumbled headlong in this matter is hopeless. . . . Let anyone read chapters XV and XVI of Book IV of the *Institutio* in order and convince himself where the great Calvin is sure of his subject and where he obviously is not sure of it, but is patently nervous, involved in an exceedingly unperspicuous train of thought, scolding; where he lectures when he should convince, seeks a way in the fog which can lead him to no goal because he has none." Cited in Jewett, *op. cit.*, p. 92. One can only remark that Barth's analysis does not accord with Jewett's own frequent comment on how often Calvin's various arguments have been employed by his theological descendants! If they were that "unperspicuous" they would have been discarded long ago. It also appears evident that Barth's deepest charge against Calvin that his thought is a "fog" that leads him to an non-existent "goal" is a direct negation of Calvin's fundamental concept of covenant. Can one really believe that Barth faithfully reflects Calvin's thought elsewhere if he so little appreciates and understands Calvin's intense commitment to the doctrine of the covenant?

30. Beasley-Murray addresses this question in a few words, *op. cit.*, p. 343. His response attempts to use election as that which "cuts right across the distinctions of circumcision and uncircumcision: not all of Israel are Israel (Rom. 9:7, Gal. 4:30)."

Yet Scripture opens to us a still surer knowledge of the truth. Indeed, it is most evident that the covenant which the Lord once made with Abraham is no less in force today for Christians than it was of old for the Jewish people, and that this work relates no less to Christians than it then related to the Jews. Unless perhaps we think that Christ by his coming lessened or curtailed the grace of the Father — but this is nothing but execrable blasphemy! Accordingly, the children of the Jews also, because they had been made heirs of his covenant and distinguished from the children of the impious, were called a holy seed. For this same reason the children of Christians are considered holy; and even though born with only one believing parent, by the apostle's testimony they differ from the unclean seed of idolators. Now seeing that the Lord immediately after making the covenant with Abraham commanded it to be sealed in infants by an outward sacrament, what excuse will Christians give for not testifying and sealing it in their children today? (IV. 16. 6)

Because children in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament are a holy seed in virtue of the same covenantal promise made by God with Abraham, infant baptism bears the same force of command as circumcision.³¹ Nor does Calvin accept the evasion that the children of the Old Testament Covenant simply foreshadow the true children of Abraham of the New Covenant, that is, believers.³² This

Because of this, he believes that Christian parents are not at an inferior position than Old Testament parents. The failure of this response, however, is that it once again sets at opposition the Old and New Testaments as if God's electing purposes did not function in the Old Testament as they do in the New. Every baptist who accepts the doctrine of election is compelled to affirm as equally true that "divine election cuts right across the distinctions of" baptism and unbaptism! Baptists believe that their unbaptized infants who die are in fact elect. They also often assert that new converts who die before their baptism are also elect. They also affirm that some baptized people are not elect. So whatever this argument may establish, it still does not set aside the fundamental fact that Baptist theology narrows the scope of the grace of God in its historical manifestations inasmuch as it excludes infants from an initiatory sign of promise that had always been theirs in virtue of God's administration of the Abrahamic covenant.

31. Cf. Calvin's powerful words in Gen. 17:14 where he treats the subject of what punishment is due to those who neglect baptism. Cf. also IV. 16. 9 cited below.

32. Cf. Strong, *op. cit.* pp. 536-537. Strong remarks, "As the national Israel typified the Spiritual Israel, so the circumcision which immediately followed, not preceded, natural birth, bids us baptize children, not before, but after spiritual birth." And again he says, "The Christian church is either a natural, hereditary body, or it was merely typified by the Jewish people. In the former case, baptism belongs to all children of Christian parents, and the church is indistinguishable from the world. In the latter case, it belongs only to spiritual descendants, and therefore only to true believers."

cannot be, because of this ongoing covenant that God established with Abraham:

In the use of the term "children" they find this difference: those who had their origin from his seed were called children of Abraham under the OT; now, those who imitate his faith are called by this name. They therefore say that that physical infancy which was engrafted into the fellowship of the covenant through circumcision foreshadowed the spiritual infants of the NT, who were regenerated to immortal life by God's Word. In these words, indeed, we see a feeble spark of truth. But those fickle spirits gravely sin in seizing upon whatever first comes to hand where they ought to proceed further, and in stubbornly clinging to one word where they ought to compare many things together. . . . We should, accordingly, aim at a better target, to which we are directed by the very sure guidance of Scripture. Therefore, the Lord promises Abraham that he will have offspring in whom all the nations of the earth will be blessed, and at the same time assures him that he will be his God and the God of his descendants. All those who by faith receive Christ as author of the blessing are heirs of this promise, and are therefore called children of Abraham. (IV. 16. 12)

Calvin's point is that while there is an element of truth in the objection, it does not fully explain all of the salient Scriptural data. It is true that the offspring of Abraham's flesh foreshadowed the future offspring of Abraham by faith. Yet, Calvin insists, this fact does not in the least remove the promise that God made to Abraham's physical offspring. God did in fact assure Abraham "that he will be his God and the God of his descendants." Calvin's response, then, is that it is not an either/or, but a both/and. The implication for the practice of baptism is that the offspring of Abraham are heirs of the promise, even those who become his offspring by faith. Thus, even the children of Abraham's offspring by faith are made full partakers of the promise made to Abraham, since they too are now part of the family of Abraham. Calvin insists that the covenant with Abraham does in fact exist in the New Covenant era.

One of the criticisms most often brought against Calvin's argument for Paedobaptism due to the continuity of the covenant is that the sign of circumcision has ceased. Since this is true, it is concluded that the covenant signified by it is no longer valid in its original form. The covenant of circumcision has changed even as the sign that characterized it has been changed. From this, it would seem apparent that it is an invalid argument for infant baptism. Calvin's simple answer to this challenge is that the changing of the sign does not change the covenant.

And let no one object against me that the Lord did not command that his covenant be confirmed by any other symbol than circumcision, which has long since been abolished. There is a ready answer that for the time of the Old Testament he instituted circumcision, to confirm his covenant, but that after circumcision was abolished, the same reason for confirming his covenant (which we have in common with the Jews) still holds good. Consequently, we must always diligently consider what is common to both, and what they have apart from us. The covenant is common, and the reason for confirming it is common. Only the manner of confirmation is different—what was circumcision for them was replaced for us by baptism. (IV. 16. 6)

In fact, Calvin goes on to argue, if it were true that there is no replacement for circumcision since it was abolished, Christ's coming actually narrowed the manifestation of God's grace rather than increasing it:

Otherwise, if the testimony by which the Jews were assured of the salvation of their posterity is taken away from us, Christ's coming would have the effect of making God's grace more obscure and less attested for us than it had previously been for the Jews. Now, this cannot be said without grievously slandering Christ, through whom the Father's infinite goodness was more clearly and liberally poured out upon the earth and declared to men than ever before. (IV. 16. 6)

Because the Anabaptist rejection of infant baptism often argued that circumcision was not the spiritual equal of baptism, Calvin points out with detail how Paul assumes the spirituality of the sign of circumcision in opposition to their assertion:

Paul, also, therefore when he shows to the Ephesians out of what destruction the Lord has delivered them, from the fact that they had not been admitted into the covenant of circumcision infers that they were without Christ, without God, without hope, strangers to the testaments of promise—all of which the covenant itself contained. But the first access to God, the first entry into immortal life, is the forgiveness of sins. Accordingly, this corresponds to the promise of baptism that we shall be cleansed. Afterward, the Lord covenants with Abraham that he should walk before him in uprightness and innocence of heart. This applies to mortification, or regeneration. . . . Circumcision is the sign of mortification; . . . As God when he adopts the posterity of Abraham as his people commands them to be circumcised, so Moses declares that they ought to be circumcised in heart, explaining the true meaning of this carnal circumcision. Again, that no man should strive after it by his own strength, Moses teaches that it is a work of God's grace. . . . We have, therefore, a

spiritual promise given to the patriarchs in circumcision such as is given us in baptism, since it represented for them forgiveness of sins and mortification of flesh. Moreover, as we have taught that Christ is the foundation of baptism, in whom both of these reside, so it is evident that he is the foundation of circumcision. For he is promised to Abraham, and in him the blessing of all nations. To seal this grace, the sign of circumcision is added. (IV. 16. 3)

Calvin then turns this argument of the Anabaptists back on themselves. If baptism and circumcision are paralleled by Paul, and circumcision is only a material sign, then baptism as well must be a material sign.

Clearly, if circumcision was a literal sign, we must estimate baptism to be the same. For the apostle, in the second chapter of Colossians, makes neither more spiritual than the other. . . . It is quite certain that the primary promises, which contained that covenant ratified with the Israelites by God under the Old Testament, were spiritual and referred to eternal life; then, conversely, that they were received by the fathers spiritually (as was fitting) in order that they might gain therefrom assurance of the life to come, to which they aspired with their whole heart. (IV. 16. 11)

For Calvin, the Bible in its Old and New Testaments insists in clear language that circumcision is a spiritual sign that signifies all that baptism does. While the Bible speaks of the change of the sign, it affirms the continuity of the covenant and the equivalence of the two signs. Since baptism has taken the place of circumcision, it surely must be administered in the same fashion as its counterpart: to infants of believers as well as to new believers and their children.

While Calvin has asserted the covenantal arguments growing from the continuity of the covenant and the parallel of circumcision and baptism, he also argues for paedobaptism by the implications for the covenant and baptism from Christ's attitude toward infants. Calvin writes:

If it is right for infants to be brought to Christ, why not also to be received into baptism, the symbol of our communion and fellowship with Christ? If the kingdom of heaven belongs to them, why is the sign denied which, so to speak, opens to them a door into the church, that adopted into it, they may be enrolled among the heirs of the kingdom of heaven? How unjust of us to drive away those whom Christ calls to himself! To deprive those whom he adorns with gifts! To shut out those whom he willingly receives! But if we wish to make an issue of the great difference between baptism and this act of Christ, how much more precious shall we regard baptism, by which we attest that infants are contained

within God's covenant, than the receiving, embracing, laying on of hands, and prayer, by which Christ himself present declares both that they are his and are sanctified by him? (IV. 16. 7)

His argument in essence is that regardless of how different the actions of Christ's embracing infants and infants being baptized may appear to be, their significance is identical. Calvin's concluding question must be answered by "none at all." Being received into the covenant (baptism) and being embraced by Christ and thus sanctified are not capable of being interpreted as the Anabaptists attempt. To them baptism is a blessing of a far greater sort than being brought to Christ. But how can this be since each implies the full acceptance and sanctification of Christ? What Calvin has done with this argument is to change the comparison from a greater spiritual reality (baptism) and a lesser spiritual reality (reception by Christ), to simply a matter about the external mode of offering the child to Christ. If the two actions imply the same thing, then there is no reason to prohibit infants from the sign of baptism on the ground that the unbelieving child is not entitled to the sign of spiritual grace. This is because Christ has made abundantly clear that infants are received by him, and that to such belongs the kingdom of heaven. Of course, the paedobaptist cannot find any water in this text. But, this is simply a matter of externals at this point since the spiritual equivalence of Christ's embracing infants and baptism has been established, which is the most critical point. The propriety of water for infants is established by the continuity of the covenant and the replacement of circumcision by baptism. Baptism, almost needless to say, implies water. For Calvin, then, Christ's embracing infants and promising them the kingdom of heaven is tantamount to attesting "that infants are contained within God's covenant." For Calvin, the arms of Christ are the arms of the covenanting God. This episode from the life of Christ corroborates the legitimacy of infant baptism for Calvin.

Calvin's concluding positive argument for infant baptism by the covenant is the great blessing for parents and children that results from this administration of the covenant sign, as well as the accompanying danger inherent in the delay of the administration of the sign. Calvin explains:

Accordingly, let those who embrace the promise that God's mercy is to be extended to their children deem it their duty to offer them to the church to be sealed by the symbol of mercy, and thereby to arouse themselves to a surer confidence, because they see with their very eyes the covenant of the Lord engraved upon the bodies

of their children. On the other hand, the children receive some benefit from their baptism: being engrafted into the body of the church, they are greatly spurred to an earnest zeal for worshipping God, by whom they were received as children through a solemn symbol of adoption before they were old enough to recognize him as Father. Finally, we ought to be greatly afraid of that threat, that God will wreak vengeance upon any man who disdains to mark his child with the symbol of the covenant; for by such contempt the proffered grace is refused, and, as it were, foresworn. (IV. 16. 9)

The parents benefit in the confidence gained by visibly seeing God's covenant promise attested. The children benefit by nurture in the church and later by the humble joy of realizing that God had made them His own even before they chose Him. Infant baptism is thus a graphic representation of the sovereign grace of God—He loved us before we loved Him. Further, the danger of spurning the promised grace of God is not only wicked, but a risk that no believer should take.

Not only does Calvin defend infant baptism by employment of the covenant idea, but he also resists the arguments that oppose paedobaptism by constant reference to the covenant. The first example of this comes from the Anabaptist charge that God's sovereign election and rejection of Israel in the Old Covenant disproves any validity for the practice of infant baptism by the argument from circumcision. Calvin presents the objection:

But they will bring forward in opposition another passage of the apostle, where he teaches that those who are of the flesh are not children of Abraham, but that only those who are children of promise are counted among his offspring. This seems to hint that physical descent from Abraham, to which we give some place, is nothing. (IV. 16. 14)

Calvin's response begins with an affirmation of divine sovereign grace in election. He then points out that this election of Israel was not a grounds for complacency on their part since the covenant demands obedience to its stipulations:

. . . Paul cites, by way of proof, Ishmael and Esau, who were rejected just as if they were strangers; even though they were real offspring of Abraham according to the flesh, the blessing rests on Isaac and Jacob. From this follows what he afterwards affirms, that salvation depends upon God's mercy, which he extends to whom he pleases; but that there is no reason for the Jews to preen themselves and boast in the name of the covenant unless they keep the law of the covenant, that is, obey the Word. (IV. 16. 14)

In saying this, Calvin once again affirms his recognition that those who have had a place in the covenant, can in fact fall away as covenant-breakers, and this can in fact be traced back to the divine election. But does this certain fact of Scripture set aside the divine promise to Israel made in His covenant with Israel's father Abraham? To this Calvin responds with an emphatic "no." He explains:

Nevertheless, when Paul cast them down from vain confidence in their kindred, he still saw, on the other hand, that the covenant which God had made once for all with the descendants of Abraham could in no way be made void. . . . For this reason, despite their stubbornness and covenant-breaking, Paul still calls them holy (such great honor does he give to the holy generation whom God had held worthy of his sacred covenant); . . . Therefore, that they might not be defrauded of their privilege, the gospel had to be announced to them first. For they are, so to speak, like the first-born in God's household. Accordingly, this honor was to be given them until they refused what was offered, and by their ungratefulness caused it to be transferred to the Gentiles. (IV. 16. 14)

In essence, Calvin here insists that Israel has broken covenant, yet God continues to stand faithful to His promise made to Abraham. As a result of this perspective, Calvin is able to assert that physical Jews are in fact children of the covenant by right of birth, but if they do not keep the obligations of the covenant, they lose the reality of the covenant blessing. Even though only true believers are members of the covenant in its fullest sense, God still holds forth his promise to covenant-breaking Israel. The condition of restoration to the covenant is repentance:

However the covenant might be violated by them, the symbol of the covenant remained ever firm and inviolable by virtue of the Lord's institution. Therefore, on the sole condition of repentance they were restored into the covenant which God had once made with them in circumcision; and which, moreover, they had received at the hand of a covenant-breaking priest, and then done their utmost to defile and render ineffectual. (IV. 15. 17)

Calvin then goes on to show that his view that the physical offspring of Abraham have a right to the covenant in spite of their covenant-breaking is supported by the perspective of the New Testament itself. He writes:

The apostle writes that "Christ" is "a minister of the circumcision, to fulfill the promises which had been given to the fathers." Speak-

ing thus, he does not philosophize as subtly as if he had spoken in this fashion: "Inasmuch as the covenant made with Abraham applies to his descendants, Christ, to perform and discharge the pledge made once for all by his Father, came for the salvation of the Jewish nation." Do you see how, after Christ's resurrection also, he thinks that the promise of the covenant is to be fulfilled, not only allegorically but literally, for Abraham's physical offspring? To the same point that the benefit of the gospel belongs to them and their offspring by right of the covenant; and in the following chapter he calls them "sons of the covenant," that is, heirs. (IV. 16. 15)

Calvin's answer to this objection made by the Anabaptists is that the reality of covenant-breaking does not set aside the promise of God to the physical seed of Abraham. The promise still stands if they repent or not. The blessing of the covenant is only received, however, if they do repent. Thus Calvin points out that election can only be spoken of in any specific case by its fruits. Only the children of promise are truly the children of Abraham, but they are known only by their keeping the "laws of the covenant." The promise of God, however, is unchanging and is open to all of Abraham's seed if they claim it in their human responsibility, and thus keep the covenant as those marked out by promise as "sons of the covenant."

A second major criticism against paedobaptism that Calvin answers by use of the covenant is the Anabaptist argument that New Testament baptism demands mental awareness of the significance of the act, that is, a spiritual understanding by conscious faith.³³ Calvin's answer is that the child grows into an understanding of his baptism. What is important is that circumcision was not an act that placed no significance on understanding, and yet it was used by God to seal His covenant. Calvin reasons:

But they repeatedly go wrong through their deluded notion that the thing ought always to precede the sign in order of time. For the truth of circumcision too rested upon the same testimony of a good conscience. But if it ought of necessity to have preceded, infants would never have been circumcised by God's command. Still, in showing that the testimony of a good conscience underlies the truth of circumcision, yet at the same time commanding the infants to be circumcised, he clearly indicates that circumcision is conferred, in this case, for the time to come. Accordingly, in infant baptism nothing more of present effectiveness must be

33. Calvin points out that the Anabaptist assertion that a covenant cannot take place without mental awareness is disproved by the Noahic covenant where God covenants with "brute animals" in Gen. 9:10.

required than to confirm and ratify the covenant made with them by the Lord. The remaining significance of this sacrament will afterward follow at such time as God himself foresees. (IV. 16. 21)

Since circumcision was a sign that demanded understanding and yet God commanded His covenant to be sealed by it to infants who were unconscious of its import, the same must hold for baptism. Calvin thus argues that the sign is to confirm and ratify the covenant promise, which will later be experienced by the infant as God's sovereign purpose has already determined.

Further, Calvin asserts that it is a basic misunderstanding of Scripture to treat children and adults in the same fashion. This is seen in the differing way new converts to Judaism in the Old Covenant were given circumcision as opposed to the manner of giving circumcision to infants. Calvin says:

But it is perfectly clear that infants ought to be put in another category, for in ancient times if anyone joined himself in religious fellowship with Israel, he had to be taught the Lord's covenant and instructed in the law before he could be marked with circumcision, because he was of foreign nationality, that is, alien to the people of Israel, with whom the covenant, which circumcision sanctioned, had been made. (IV. 16. 23)

Calvin then goes on to illustrate this difference between adults and infants by the examples of Abraham and Isaac. God declares His covenant to Abraham before the sign was given since in his case it was dependent on faith. This, however, was not the case with Isaac. Calvin interprets this in terms of an adult's coming into the covenant from the outside and an infant's receiving the promise of the covenant by hereditary right:

The Lord also, when he adopts Abraham, does not begin with circumcision, meanwhile concealing what he means by that sign, but first declares what the covenant is that he intends to make with him, then after Abraham has faith in the promise, the Lord makes him partaker in the sacrament. Why, in Abraham's case, does the sacrament follow faith, but in Isaac, his son, precede all understanding? Because it is fair that he who as a grown man is received into the fellowship of the covenant to which he had been till then a stranger should learn its conditions beforehand; but is not the same with his infant son. The latter by hereditary right, according to the form of the promise is already included within the covenant from his mother's womb. Or (to put the matter more clearly and briefly), if the children of believers are partakers in the covenant without the help of understanding, there is no reason why they should be barred from the sign merely because they cannot swear

to the provisions of the covenant. (IV. 16. 24)

Having shown this basic distinction between adult and infant in covenant with God, Calvin proceeds to clarify how an adult unbeliever is outside of the benefits of the covenant. Then, Calvin contrasts this with the right an infant of believers has in the covenant:

But he who is an unbeliever, sprung from impious parents, is reckoned as alien to the fellowship of the covenant until he is joined to God through faith. No wonder, then, if he does not partake in the sign when what is signified would be fallacious and empty in him! Paul also writes to this effect: that the Gentiles, so long as they were immersed in their idolatry, were outside the covenant. The whole matter, unless I am mistaken, can be clearly disclosed in this brief statement. Those who embrace faith in Christ as grown men, since they were previously strangers to the covenant, are not to be given the badge of baptism unless they first have faith and repentance, which alone can give access to the society of the covenant. But those infants who derive their origin from Christians, as they have been born directly into the inheritance of the covenant, and are expected by God, are thus to be received into baptism. (IV. 16. 24)

With this development of the believer's entering the covenant as an adult by faith, and the simultaneous inclusion of his children by right of the covenant, Calvin believes that he has successfully answered the Anabaptist argument of the universal necessity of faith before the administration of baptism.

Calvin concludes his analysis of paedobaptism with a denial and an affirmation. He first denies that his doctrine of infant baptism implies that all unbaptized are lost. Having said this, however, Calvin nevertheless resists the implication that baptism is unimportant. To despise baptism is to despise God's covenant:

The promise of the Lord is clear: "Whosoever believes in the Son will not see death, nor come into judgment, but has passed from death into life." Nowhere do we find that he has ever condemned anyone as yet unbaptized. I do not want anyone on this account to think of me as meaning that baptism can be despised with impunity (by which contempt I declare the Lord's covenant will be violated—so far am I from tolerating it!); it merely suffices to prove that baptism is not so necessary that one from whom the capacity to obtain it has been taken away should straightway be counted as lost. (IV. 16. 26)

In these words, Calvin is attempting to insist on the necessity of

baptism without giving room to the idea of baptismal regeneration or the saving efficacy of baptism. It is worthy of note that the necessity of baptism arises out of the need to keep rather than violate God's covenant.

IV. *Summary and Conclusion*

Our study has been designed to highlight Calvin's use of the concept of the covenant as he responded to the Anabaptist view of baptism. Calvin's general perspective can be summarized in three propositions. *First*, there is one covenant of grace throughout all of Scripture, both Old and New Testaments. If this is denied, either we must hold that the Old Testament saints are robbed of salvation and received only material benefits, or else we are left with the contradiction of affirming the salvation of the Old Testament believers who nevertheless did not have a spiritually significant sacrament.

Second, there are differences in the Old and New Testaments when they are compared. These differences are with respect to administration and externals but not substance. Thus the main differences are bound up in promise and fulfillment. With this viewpoint, Calvin naturally unfolds the distinction of the Old and New Covenant as primarily one of comparison of the lesser to the greater since the blessings of the New Covenant have always existed either in terms of promise or in terms of fulfillment. Thus too, Calvin sees that the church is made up of those who can in reality break covenant in hypocrisy since the departure of people marked by the covenant in the Old Testament is a reality for people of the New Testament. While the elect can never fall, the warnings must be taken seriously due to the weakness of the flesh.

Third, baptism is an expression of the continuity of the covenant in that infants are still included within the covenant, as well as an expression of the discontinuity of the covenant since circumcision has ceased and has been replaced by baptism. In expounding this doctrine, Calvin shows that the covenant is its center. It is the explanation of Christ's embracing arms, as well as the comfort of believing parents. The covenant stands fast even if Israel or the church falls away since the promise of God made in baptism can be renewed by true repentance. It is entrance into the covenant that explains why some must believe first before administration of the sacrament and others receive it before faith—adults enter by faith, infants enter by birth into the promise. While salvation does not demand baptism, nevertheless, not to baptize one's children is to

violate God's covenant. Obedience to God requires the baptism of one's children and in this sense baptism is necessary.

While Calvin's interpretation of the sacrament of baptism may be distasteful to many, it must not be thought of as an irrelevant or minute part of his theology. Baptism means covenant to Calvin, and covenant means almost everything else! To preserve the Calvinian system, paedobaptism is not an option but a prerequisite. It is thus clear that Calvin's answer to the Anabaptist perspective on baptism was that they failed to understand this foundational doctrine of the covenant between God and his people and their children.

A Selection From Henry Martyn Dexter, AS TO ROGER
WILLIAMS AND HIS "BANISHMENT" FROM THE
MASSACHUSETTS PLANTATION; ETC.

HENRY Martyn Dexter's book, entitled in full *As to Roger Williams, and his "Banishment" from the Massachusetts Plantation; with a few further words concerning the Baptists, the Quakers, and Religious Liberty: A Monograph*, was published in Boston by the Congregational Publishing Society in 1876. Dexter's purpose was to demythologize the many fantasies surrounding the relationship between Williams and the Puritans of Massachusetts Bay. His 146 pages demonstrated thoroughly, for instance, that Williams was not a Baptist when he was in Massachusetts, and thus was not disciplined for being a Baptist by the Puritans; that Williams's views concerning religious liberty were not at issue when he was dealt with by the Puritans; and that Williams was never banished into the wintry wilderness, but chose to leave of his own accord rather than accept comfortable accommodations back to England or move to another colony.

Despite Dexter's labors and his many proofs, which are completely incontrovertible, the myths remain. Every American schoolchild is taught about how noble Roger Williams was sent out into the howling wilderness by vicious Puritans simply because he wanted freedom to worship according to his own conscience and to be a Baptist.

We cannot reproduce Dexter's entire book here, of course. What follows comes from pages 1-2 (introductory remarks), 79-90 (major summaries), and 104-105 (conclusion). Mr. Dexter's original footnotes have been omitted.

* * * * *

The general subject of the character of Roger Williams, and of his relation to the early colonists of New England, has been called up to public attention afresh by a petition from sundry residents in the town of Sturbridge, Mass., addressed to the Massachusetts Legislature of 1874-5, asking them to revoke the order of banishment before which, in the winter of 1635-6, he retreated into what is now known as Rhode Island. It is not important here to refer to the various inaccuracies of statement found in that petition itself, or to

discuss either the legal question how far the General Court of the Commonwealth, in these years of Grace has power to annul action taken by the Court of the Colony two hundred and forty years ago; or the moral question, how much such action, if taken, could do in the way of securing any needed "justice" toward the remarkable man to whom reference is made, or to his memory. It does seem to be suitable, however, to avail of the occasion for making a clear, authentic and complete statement of the facts, as they actually occurred; to the end that slanders oft-repeated may be seen in their true character, and "justice" be done to *all* the noble memories involved.

It is astonishing how much the inherent difficulty of thoroughly comprehending a man who lived two or three hundred years ago is increased, if he were a somewhat pivotal and distinguished person; and more especially, if he have been subsequently taken up and glorified, as their pet hero, by any large and enthusiastic body of believers. This seems to be particularly true of Roger Williams. The materials for his exact history are exceptionally abundant. Of few who shared with him the labors, and excitements, and controversies, of the first half-century of New England, will the close student discover so many and so amply revealing testimonies; from his own hand in letters and treatises, and from the hands of friends and enemies in letters, records, and anti-treatises. He, of all men, ought, by this time, to be as accurately as widely known. But the denomination of Christians known as Baptists, having canonized him—although never such a Baptist as they are, and for but a very short period of time a Baptist at all—have manifested great reluctance to give due consideration to a large portion of the evidence bearing upon the case; and seem to prefer, without regard to facts making fatally against their position, to re-utter the old encomiums and denunciations; as if an inadequate statement could, by persistent reiteration, be made a whole truth.

It has thus become a common representation of the case, that it was the Church-and-State controversy, and Mr. Williams's superior liberality on that subject, which led to his banishment; and it has even gone so far that leading journals of that denomination scout the very idea of any other view, as something which to all the rest of the world but Massachusetts is special pleading, that is, on the face of it, absurd.

There is a very simple, albeit a laborious, way to settle this question. It is the only way in which it ever can be settled. It is to go straight to the original sources, and candidly, and in detail, to examine them, and make up a judgment upon them; without regard

to the rhetoric of superficial biographers, or prejudiced historians or the misapprehensions of a later public sentiment by them misled. This it is proposed now to attempt.

* * * * *

Studying carefully now all this evidence, I find it conducting the mind with irresistible force straight toward one conclusion. It is true that Mr. Williams did hold, in an inchoate form, and had already to some extent advocated, that doctrine of liberty of conscience, with which his name afterward became prominently identified. It is true that the language of the official sentence is susceptible of a construction which might include this among his "newe and dangerous opinions." It is true that Mr. Williams did himself claim that it was so included. But it appears to be also true that he himself never claimed more than this; and that, in his own view, his banishment was only incidentally—in no sense especially—for that cause. While the careful and repeated statements of Mr. Cotton, with their reiterated endorsement by Gov. Winthrop, go to show that Mr. Williams was mistaken in supposing that the subject of the rights of conscience had anything whatever to do with the action of the Court upon his case; action, in reality, solely taken in view of his seditious, defiant, and pernicious posture toward the State. This, it appears from the testimony of Mr. Gorton, and of Gov. Winslow, supported by that of Secretary Morton, of Mr. Hubbard, of Judge Scottow, of Cotton Mather and of Gov. Hutchinson, was the general understanding had of the matter by the New England public of that day; while Edwards and Baillie speak to the same point from over sea. And, as I am aware of nothing purporting to be proof to the contrary, other than the (necessarily biased, and presumable ill-informed and partial) opinion of Mr. Williams himself, before cited; I cannot help thinking that the weight of evidence is conclusive to the point that this exclusion from the Colony took place for reasons purely political, and having no relation to his notions upon toleration, or upon any subject other than those, which, in their bearing upon the common rights of property, upon the sanctions of the Oath, and upon due subordination to the powers that be in the State, made him a subverter of the very foundations of their government, and—with all his worthiness of character, and general soundness of doctrine—a nuisance which it seemed to them they had no alternative but to abate, in some way safe to them, and kindest to him!

Let it here be distinctly remembered that Roger Williams was,

in 1635, a Congregational minister in good and regular standing; and so remained without any taint of doctrinal heresy for months, almost for years, after his banishment; so that he was not driven away because he was a Baptist. Nor was his offence, as so many seem to think, that he was too tolerant in spirit for his times; for the most grievous thing about him, and that which clearly most exasperated his enemies, was that he was so intensely rigid in his principles of Separation, that almost two years after John Robinson's treatise *Of the Lawfulness of Hearing of the Ministers in the Church of England*, "found in his studie after his decease, and now published for the common good," had seen the light, he refused even to commune with his own church, because it would not break off from communing with the other churches in the Bay — for that they would not decree that if their members, when now and then visiting home in Old England, should go inside the parish churches, and listen to the preaching of the Establishment, they must undergo Ecclesiastical censure on their return for so doing!

The intelligent reader will not fail to perceive that the question which I have been laboring to settle, is one solely of fact, and not of casuistry; whether the General Court of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay did; or did not, banish Roger Williams for a certain alleged reason; rather than whether they acted wisely in what they did, or whether he deserved banishment for any reason? These are separate ranges of investigation. That which may furnish satisfactory reply to the former, may shed no gleam of light upon the latter. And having disposed of the one, it is not my purpose to enter upon any conclusive discussion of the other. I can hardly close, however, without putting on record a few further suggestions which have come to me in the study of the literature of the case, and which are perhaps worthy of being noted as contributions to any exhaustive consideration of the equity of the subject.

1. All candid inquiry must fairly weigh the true character of the plantation. I have shown that it was not an ordinary colony. It was a select settlement upon a vast, lonely, and almost empty continent, open on every side to the choice of other settlers of different affinities. It was first of all intended to afford its undertakers an opportunity to live together in the free and unmolested enjoyment, and following, of certain spiritual ideas which were very dear to them. There can be no question that they were entrusted with the legal prerogative to purge themselves of alien elements; while their right in courtesy and justice to do so, stood essentially on the same ground on which a pleasure party of special friends may properly

eject an incongenial intruder. And, that one of radically hostile opinions, under these circumstances, and with the world all before him where to choose, should persist in forcing himself upon them; and, being resident among them, should spend his strength in decrying their fundamental principles, nor merely, but in doing his utmost to cut the very hands by which their social order was held together, was a thing as much more intolerable to them than would be a similar procedure to the Vineland settlement, or either of those close "communities" which now exist among us; as the necessary perils of an experiment in process of trial two centuries and a half ago under nearly every conceivable disadvantage, on the edge of a savage wilderness, must outweigh the petty risks of a modern pleasure venture in the science of sociology. And how long even Vineland would tolerate the presence of one who should disturb its peace in any manner kindred to that in which Roger Williams disturbed that of the Massachusetts Colony; and how much the well-informed community should pity such a disturber upon his consequent ejection; I leave others to judge.

2. Not less essential is some careful consideration of the essence of the man. It is difficult to look over the grand delights of the achievements, and the loftiness of the mature quality, of some who have filled large space in the public eye, to note minutely the follies of their early days. And there was so much of sweetness, wisdom, and true nobility in the adult development of Mr. Williams, as to make it hard for us to remember that he always had great faults, and that those faults were of a kind to make his immaturity uncomfortable to others. In itself, no student could desire to go back now to draw his frailties from their dread abode; but if the justification of others become his inculcation, the truth must be spoken. It would be a curious study of character to follow exhaustively the traces he has left of himself upon the history of his time—in what he did and said, and wrote; and in what others wrote to, and of him, and said about him. Those were days of free and rugged speech, when even the best of men sometimes allowed themselves to suspect and stigmatize the motives of others, and to employ bitter words in so doing; and just allowance must be made for this. But after all due deduction, it will unquestionably be concluded that Mr. Williams did somehow exceptionally provoke the censures of the good. When he lived in Massachusetts, he was evidently a hot-headed youth, of determined perseverance, vast energy, considerable information, intense convictions, a decided taste for novelty, a hearty love of controversy, a habit of hasty speech with absolute carelessness of conse-

quences, and a religious horror of all expediency; whose logical instincts and whose mobile sensibilities acted and reacted upon each other with intensifying power; whose convictions of moral obligation were as likely to be the result of sudden flashes of feeling as of calm and well balanced consideration; and whose eyes were so intently fixed upon a great ideal line of duty stretching onward through the far future, and upward toward the judgment seat, as to withdraw his consciousness largely from the path that was under his feet, and so to permit him to stumble into entangling inconsistencies which might have been avoided if his attention had been more recalled to the practical obligations of the hour. He forgot, too, that God's ships seldom have a wind fair enough to speed with a flowing sheet straight into port; and that the most pious seamanship must often manifest itself in sailing close-hauled as near toward the desired point as may be, and in getting, in the face of adverse gales ever and anon well about from the star-board to the lar-board tack, and the reverse; while the highest, devoutest skill of all may sometimes show itself in laying to, in the face of a storm which, for the time being, forbids all progress. John Quincy Adams happily characterized him as "conscientiously contentious." Equally felicitous is Prof. Masson's phrase describing him as "the arch-Individualist."

With all, were an abiding patience under trial, and meekness toward reproof; a calm courage, a noble disinterestedness and public spirit, and a predominant good temper in every strait, and toward every opponent, which were the crown and glory of his remarkable character; . . .

It is not, necessarily, a hyperbole to say that the better, the more devout—and Mr. Williams was devout, "the people being, many of them, much taken with the apprehension of his godliness"—such a man might be; the more dangerous, under certain circumstances, his influence might become.

3. It may be well, moreover, for the student who desires to go to the bottom of the subject of the banishment of Mr. Williams, to expend a little thought upon the question whether the importance of the transaction itself has not been overestimated and overstated. Clearly the action of the Court, at the time, notwithstanding the local excitement at Salem, made small general sensation. It was merely the renewed exercise, for cause, of a power repeatedly before asserted. In the February following, the event was lumped with some petty troubles in the church at Lynn, and with the existing scarcity of corn, as occasioning the proclamation of a fast in the

Colony. Thomas Lechford, who published his *Newes from New England* in 1642, although he speaks of Williams, says nothing of it. Capt. Edward Johnson, in the *Wonder-Working Providence of Sions Saviour in New England*, in 1654, makes only slight and obscure reference to this, although he devotes considerable space to the disturbances occasioned by Samuel Gorton and Mistress Hutchinson. Quaint Cotton Mather—with an obvious suggestion—entitles his chapter which is mainly devoted to Mr. Williams and Samuel Gorton, "Little Foxes." Dr. Backus was the first of our historians to develop the modern idea of the vast significance of the trial, and he was writing "A History of New England with particular reference to the Denomination of Christians called Baptists." While those biographers of our day who have acted on the hints which he gave, and drawn attention to that rude court-room at New Town on the 9-19 Oct. 1635, as if it were one of the focal points of modern history,—Knowles, Gammell, Elton and Underwood—have all been Baptists. On the whole, perhaps Dr. Palfrey is nearer right, when he styles the disturbance produced by it, "limited, superficial, and transient," and goes on to add:

Had it not been for later transactions, which revealed him in more favorable lights, and for the connection of his exile with the origin of a State, that exile, instead of taking the place in history in which it presents itself to us, might have been recorded simply as the expulsion of one among several eccentric and turbulent persons. His controversy speedily narrowed down to a merely personal dispute; not a half-score of friends followed when he went away, nor were they of a character to show that he inspired confidence in the best and soberest men; scarcely a larger number of persons who remained behind adhered to his peculiarities; and the returning waters presently closed over the track his dashing bark has made. . . .

4. It is indispensable, further, that one note the temper of those times. For half a century there had been a religious commotion in England which had effectually stirred up the masses of the people, and in the general confusion, dangerous elements had now and then manifested themselves. Most adult New Englanders could then remember the Gunpowder plot, and shared that intense and stinging hatred of Popery, as politically synonymous with treason, as well as odious in its superstitions, which has not even yet died out of the hearts of the London populace; whom one sees still fiercely handling their effigies of Guy Fawkes on the 15th November. One hundred years before, a terrible fanaticism had raged over Germany and the

Netherlands, which had left in the general conservative mind a vague, yet vivid, horror of all claims to special light from heaven, all particularly loud-voiced accusations of public sin, and especially all plans looking towards civil reconstruction, and all denunciations of the regular magistracy, and the usual sanctions of justice; as being—all ills in one—Anabaptism! The settlers of Massachusetts, as a class, were moderate reformers, as anxious, on the one hand, not to wreck their enterprise and imperil its reputation among the sober-minded at home, by excesses in the name of liberty; as, on the other, to avoid being forced back into the old conformity, or—still further back—into the clutch of the Man of Sin. We have seen moreover, that Mr. Williams's advent, and busy activity in Massachusetts affairs, had taken the plantation in an evil time in respect to the fact that the arrogant Court of England was just then looking toward it with some intent against its charter; that disaffected persons, who had been sent home for the colony's good, were doing their utmost to play into the hands of the King by accusing the settlers of intending rebellion, of proposing entire and absolute separation from the mother country, of habitually railing against the State, Church and Bishops, and of revolutionary and anarchical behavior, in general. Only by remembering that at every step the chief actors in Mr. Williams's case would feel themselves compelled to inquire what the effect of all was likely to be in London, can one hope to arrive at any entirely fair judgment upon the quality of their action.

Pre-eminently is it essential that the dread, and almost horror, with which a general toleration of religious beliefs was then conscientiously regarded by most good men, be recalled; because it is conceded on all hands that Mr. Williams was already to some extent a believer in, and an advocate of this doctrine; although, as we have seen, the subject entered only in the most unimportant manner, if at all, into the conflict of opinion which led to his removal.

5. It would be well, also, that some consideration be given to the necessity, and the alternative, then existing, into which Mr. Williams himself had forced the Company. Matters had been pushed by him to such a pass that, so far as his influence extended, all were really standing on the very edge of chaos. Had he been permitted to remain, and been able to carry out his views, it is not easy to see how some grand catastrophe could have been averted. The patent would have been surrendered to the King with repentance and humiliation that any use had ever been made of it; which would have dropped the bottom at once from under all commercial foun-

dations, destroyed all land-titles, and disorganized business among them in every department; while in the existing condition of the royal mind, they could have hoped for no redressive grant, or legislation. The administration of the Freeman's and Resident's Oath would have been abrogated; and the way thereby opened to a disintegration of civil affairs rivaling in disastrous completeness that which would have been wrought upon their commerce by the other. In a religious point of view, their Congregational liberality would have been transmuted into an unlovely, unreasonable and bitter Separatism; which would have made the colony odious, as well as ridiculous, in the eyes of all intelligent and high-minded men, even of that day; in that it would insist on disfellowshipping every New England church which should decline to excommunicate one of its own members, who, revisiting Old England, should drop in to hear a sermon, even from the godliest rector, in an Established church, without avowing his repentance of the act, as of a sin, on his return. While that most hateful and dangerous form of the interaction of Church and State which Mr. Williams—in spite of all his philosophies—had entered upon, in endeavoring, through the medium of the discipline of the churches to which they belonged, to compel the members of the General Court to modify their action in regard to the Marblehead land, endangered an excitement, and an overturning, in those churches, quite as much to be dreaded as any calamities likely to ensue in other departments of the public welfare.

The irresistible fact which confronts the honest and thorough inquirer into the minute history of that time, a fact which cannot be ignored, nor explained away, is that the teaching and influence of Roger Williams—to use the careful language of John Quincy Adams—were "altogether revolutionary." Our fathers felt themselves reluctantly compelled to choose between his expulsion, and the immediate risk of social, civil and religious disorganization. To say otherwise is to confess an amount of ignorance, or a degree of prejudice, sufficient to disqualify one from forming any useful opinion upon the subject.

6. In this connection it is impossible to overlook the marked kindness with which Mr. Williams was treated by the Massachusetts men. They were very patient with him under circumstances eminently calculated to exhaust patience. When complaint had been first made against his teaching, his letter of apology was generously received. And when, some ten months after, the Court were informed that he had broken his promises, and renewed the obnoxious and dangerous teachings, nearly half a year was still allowed to lapse

before he was brought to their bar to answer. Even then two months more passed by before any formal trial. That trial ended in the express adjournment of the whole subject, through three further months, to the next General Court; in the hope that he would be brought to "give satisfaction." At the final hearing he was tendered still another month's additional delay; was labored with, at length, by one of his peers in the ministry in the vain endeavor to persuade him to abandon his positions; and was then granted six additional weeks—which weeks were subsequently lengthened into months—before the requisition of final departure. It was only from a necessity induced by his own point blank violation of all the conditions on which postponement had been accorded, that his leave to remain was cut short in January. Nor was he even then "driven from society of civilized man, and debarred the consolations of Christian sympathy to find among heathen savages the boon of charity which was refused at home,"—a "solitary pilgrim," in "the sternest month of a New England winter," under "great hardship." It was the purpose of the magistrates to send him by ship comfortably home to England; not as a criminal for trial, but as a British subject; who having proved incompatible here, might take other chances of usefulness and happiness there. Evading this by sudden flight, it was still at his option to have sought the near shelter of the Plymouth Colony, where aforetime he had found welcome, and which was never addicted to banishing people; or to have turned his steps northward toward white men, nascent institutions, and comfortable, albeit as yet rude, firesides on the banks of the Cocheco, or under the shadows of Agamenticus.

Mr. Gammell intimates an injustice in the proceedings against Mr. Williams, on the ground that "there appears to have been no examination of witnesses, and no hearing of counsel" and this is echoed by Prof. Elton. It is astonishing that intimations so unfounded should come from gentlemen of such intelligence. One would think they could neither have read the contemporary account of the trial, nor studied the history of the time. No witnesses are needed where the defendant pleads guilty to all charges and seeks to justify the acts complained of; while the employment of counsel, in the modern sense, to aid in any trial, was then, and for years after, a thing unknown in the colony.

I insist, then, that forbearance and gentleness of spirit toward Mr. Williams, did characterize the proceedings of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay. It was his bitterly separative spirit which began and kept alive the difficulty,—not theirs. He

withdrew communion from them—not they from him. In all strictness and honesty he persecuted them—not they him; just as the modern "Come-outer," who persistently intrudes his bad manners, and pestering presence upon some private company, making himself, upon pretence of conscience, a nuisance there; is—if sane—the persecutor, rather than the man who forcibly assists, as well as courteously requires his desired departure.

* * * * *

And not until the student has patiently considered the points here presented—the peculiar character of the plantation; the idiosyncrasies of the man; the actual nature of a "banishment" often overestimated, as well as misunderstood; the temper of the times; the quality of the necessity which Mr. Williams himself had created, and the nature of the alternative which he had forced upon the colonists; yet the thorough and inexhaustible kindness with which, nevertheless, they treated him; with the facts that—in nearly every particular—he subsequently confessed the substantial justice of their dealing with him, and that in the important matter of the Patent, he abandoned his own opinion to revert to theirs—will he be in a position fitting him to speak wisely and conclusively upon this vexed passage of New England history.

CHRISTIANITY AND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY:

A Letter to the Reverend Kemper D. Smith*

Craig S. Bulkeley

I trust that this letter finds you well and in good spirits. Presently I am perplexed. As of late I have become increasingly dissatisfied with a religious notion which seems to be gaining wider acceptance every day. It is not only a religious notion, but a religious philosophy which seems to me to be fraught with difficulty and bound to cause Christians much trouble if we are taken in by it. I hope that you won't mind my sharing these dissatisfactions with you, since I consider you not only a noble Christian saint, but a father in the faith as well.

I must confess that I lay these criticisms out before you with some trepidation, since I know that this religious philosophy is one to which you have given some support in years past. The godly character of your daughter and of her husband are certainly a testimony to your ministry over the years; and I understand that they also have a godly seed. I ask myself, "Who am I to criticize any theological tenet to which K. D. Smith subscribes?"

But it has been a while since we last communicated, and it may well be that your own circumstances have made for a change in your theological perspective. If not, then I know that you will be able to straighten out any misconceptions which I might have. In any case, I cannot help but bring up this subject, since it seems to me bound to bring us great trouble if we are not careful. I fear for Christ's church and need your counsel.

Some call it "religious liberty," others call it "liberty of conscience." I call it trouble. As I understand it, this view holds that every man should be permitted to practice *whatever religion he chooses, according to the dictates of his own conscience*. No man may tell any other

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man what is right or wrong, and by no means may he, or any government of men, "force" his religion upon anyone else. This is the only way, they say, that we can all live at peace with one another, without fear of having our religious rights violated.

Now it seems like a great idea at first glance, K. D. Obviously I don't want some godless Marxist telling me what's right and wrong, and forcing his wicked religion on me. We Christians need some protection against that kind of thing, and the "religious liberty"/"liberty of conscience" concept seems to provide that protection.

But, it also seems to me that we have to look deeper into this thing in order to see the real trouble that lies below the surface. After thinking for a long time about how I could best present to you the problems I see in this position, it seemed like a good idea to give you an historical illustration of the problem. I don't know how well you remember the American colony Rhode Island, but as I see it, its history provides a perfect argument against this concept of "liberty." If I explain to you something of its Baptist founder and his ideas, as well as something of the history of the colony itself, I think you will see my point.

This particular notion of "liberty" will bring nothing but the very dissent it claims to avoid; and furthermore, K. D., I should say that it is directly contrary to the Christian faith we profess. This sounds strange, I know. But I hope that upon closer examination you will agree with me. This religious philosophy can produce, in the long run, nothing but confusion.

Roger Williams, the Baptist founder of Rhode Island, was, as I understand it, a very gifted man, both in intellectual ability and personal presence. Edward Coke, that famous British jurist, is said to have been so impressed with him that he sent him off to study at Cambridge University in England. When Williams came to the American colonies, he was offered one of the principal teaching positions in the Massachusetts Bay area at only 28 years of age. While he lived in the town of Salem, his charm and earnestness found an immediate positive response among the people. In spite of his extreme views he never antagonized other people by sanctimoniousness and he had a sweetness of spirit that clothed even his most disputable positions with a mantle of holiness. He was, to all appearances, a saint, and in a society like Puritan New England that set so high a value on sainthood, he could not fail to find a following. While he was in Rhode Island, he was elected president of the colony more than once.

But as I see it, Williams had some fundamental theological misconceptions which eventually caused him much grief. I think that these misconceptions rest at the heart of Baptist theology; at least that is what I have come to believe. They are the very thing on which his position of "liberty of conscience" was founded, and they are the very things which brought that position into question.

By the way, I forgot to mention why I chose Rhode Island for my example. It was founded for the very purpose of being a society in which the "religious liberty"/"liberty of conscience" idea could be put into practice. Most of Europe was deep in the throes of war at the time, and every nation seemed to be trying to impose its particular religion over the inhabitants of every other nation. No one seemed free to exercise real "liberty of conscience" in religion; it was just forced on them. At least that's what some of the history books say.

Rhode Island, as Williams and some of his followers hoped, would be an alternative, a truly free place, far apart from the turbulent, oppressive, overly-religious world, where individuals could live and practice their own religions without anyone telling them what to believe and do. And, in light of all the wars in the world, and the social restraints of some of the more religiously rigorous colonies like Puritan New England, Williams believed, as I understand it, that true religious liberty could be maintained only by allowing for every religion. In fact, social stability, he believed, depended on it.

But he had some misconceptions, as I mentioned. The first, which was explicit in his thinking, involved the relationship between the world of nature and the world of grace. For him, there was a radical split between them, a dichotomy. His second misconception, which was implicit in his thinking, had to do with the reasonableness of all men and the basic uniformity of religions throughout the world at that time. I'll try to explain these to you, since I think that when seen in their proper light, they'll show the foolishness of his position. They'll also point us to a Biblical resolution to the problem of "liberty" in a religiously diverse world.

First of all, I'll try to lay out the Nature/Grace dichotomy for you. You are probably already familiar with it somewhat, so I'll try not to make this discussion too laborious. I'll try to stick to the particulars of Williams's own position. He claimed that no individual or group could sit in judgment over another individual or group, because man is a fallen, natural creature. He picked up some of this

from the Calvinists, though as I understand them, he misunderstood what they were saying. He believed that man was so fallen into sin as to be incapable of making right decisions in religious matters. There was no grace given to solve this problem sufficiently. The Reformed, or Calvinist theologians never believed that.

Oddly enough, Williams thought that one of the chief flaws in man's nature was his faulty conscience. God had given him enough grace to save his soul for heaven, but nothing beyond this bare minimum. He could be saved, but he still had a conscience prone to error. If anything was certain, it was that man had a tendency to error. I know I make my share of errors, K. D., and I know you would say the same of yourself.

Well, in light of the fact that we have faulty consciences, and that we're bound to err by our very nature, none of us is really capable of making judgments regarding the absolute truth or falsehood of another man's religious beliefs. Since we are all finite and subject to error, one man must be prevented from imposing his possibly errant religious opinions on another. The conscience of man is just not dependable. Here's what Williams said:

The conscience is found in all mankind, more or less; in Jews, Turks, Papists, Protestants and pagans . . . I have fought against many several sorts of consciences; is it beyond all possibility that I have not persecuted Jesus in some of them?

Granted. We all make mistakes. But it seems to me that he is not interested in any "more or less" error, or in any distinction between possible and probable error. Man is subject to error, so we should all just keep quiet and do our own things. You can't judge me because you don't know whether you're judging error or judging Christ. Isn't it possible that, in the end, you're persecuting Christ?

He extended his position of personal, individual fallibility to the Christian Church as well. Now I know that we both agree that there is no infallible Pope, or for that matter, any infallible church. And neither of us believes that as individuals we are infallible. So it would seem to follow that just as the individual conscience could be mistaken in some important matters, so could the corporate conscience—the Christian Church. And just as the individual should be prohibited from inflicting his possibly erring conscience on anyone else, so also the church should be prohibited. You as an individual might err in your judgments and condemn others by your own misconstrued religious opinions. The church also might

persecute unrighteously on the basis of misconstrued religious opinions.

Williams criticized the Puritan theocracy of Massachusetts in particular. He thought that the Puritans took things too far. In fact, he charged that they had even transgressed Christian bounds in persecuting idolatry, blasphemy, and other infractions of the commandments. They were persecuting others for religious faith, matters of conscience. I have read in his booklet, *The Bloody Tenent Yet More Bloody* something of his opinion. For example, he says:

. . . although it concern . . . all the nations of the world who practice violence to the conscience of any Christian, or antichristian, Jews, or Pagans; yet it concerns your selves [the Massachusetts Puritans] in some more eminent degrees: . . . as New England . . . professeth to draw nearer to Christ Jesus than other states and churches, and partly as New England is believed to hold and practise such a bloody doctrine, notwithstanding Mr. Cotton's vails and pretences of not persecuting men for conscience, but punishing them only for sinning against conscience and of but so and so, not persecuting, but punishing heretics, blasphemers, idolators, seducers, etc. . . .

Anti-christians, Jews, Turks, and other pagans could legislate and punish unjustly in matters of religion, and so the Christian church could be accused of punishing unjustly and, therefore, be guilty of the same "bloody doctrine."

Now personally, I don't condone everything the Puritans did, but from my reading of history and the Bible, I like what they were *trying* to do. They *believed* that the Bible was true. They made some mistakes, of course. But then let us not throw the baby out with the bathwater. As far as I am concerned, I like the idea of seeing God glorified in *every* area of life. I *don't* think that a man should be punished for beliefs which he holds *privately* in his conscience. But then if he's really only holding them privately, we'd never know about it. You're not a mind-reader, K. D., and neither am I. But I do know when a man is doing *more than* holding a *private* opinion. When someone makes his conscience public, and leads others into idolatry, blasphemy, adultery, and other such things, I think it's become more than a private opinion. He's promoting new public policy. And that, I think, should be stopped. I think God has the same perspective. Take Satanism, for example. Who knows, someday we might have a Church of Satan around the corner. Then what will we say: it's a matter of *private* conscience and freedom of religion? It's no longer just a matter of private conscience.

But let me save the criticism for later. Williams's Nature/Grace dichotomy, it seems to me, made him think that the Scripture itself was not a clear enough statement of absolute truth. We have to allow for every religion because we can't maintain firmly "Thus saith the Lord."

Now, I don't think that Williams, his followers then, or his more modern Baptist supporters would *claim* a radical independence from the Scriptures, that their consciences were not dependent upon it. Scripture, they thought, had established the principle of "liberty of conscience," especially in interpreting the Scripture for themselves. (Strange, though, that they claimed a fallible conscience, yet each trusted his own alone for his interpretation. You would think that they all would have pooled their insights and opinions, at least.)

But though they claimed some authority for Scripture, I think that they really denied it by *their* version of the doctrine of the right to private interpretation. One fellow, in describing the position and its effects, said that "a Protestant theocracy must always suffer from a grave inner contradiction: for one significant tenet of Protestantism is the individual's ability to interpret the Bible free of ecclesiastical dictates. Although particular Protestant creeds may have no intention of countenancing or permitting dissent, the Protestant stimulus to individual interpretation must inevitably provoke that very dissent." Now I think that he has missed the boat, K. D. He has completely misunderstood the "significant tenet." While it is true that the individual Christian is responsible before God for his interpretation of the Bible, he is not supposed to base his interpretation on his own private conscience. That is not the Protestant doctrine.

For the true Biblical approach, which the Protestants took I think, the key interpretive principle is not the individual, but the Word of God itself. The text itself is the key. "Scripture interprets itself," they said. There may be cases in which one passage is not clear, but through diligent application of one part of the Bible to the other, the difficult passages can be understood in the light of the clearer ones. If anything is true, it is that one should *not read into* the Scripture his own religious opinions. Scripture is clear enough in and of itself to make it free from the need of conscience's genius. But, as I mentioned before, there is a paradox here in Williams's Baptist thinking: On the one hand, the conscience is so depraved as to prevent any one man from exercising his fallible conscience over the conscience of any other—he is bound to misinterpret; but on the other hand, the conscience is not so depraved as to be prevented from being the key interpretive principle for Scriptural understanding.

But the Nature/Grace dichotomy is resolved when one understands that the Bible is its own key to interpretation and speaks to us in our own terms. All the grace is internally consistent, and clearly intelligible to man, despite his "natureliness." It is not what men don't understand about the Bible's teaching that bothers them; it is what they do understand and refuse to believe.

And furthermore, if a person is a Christian, he always stands with the Mediator Jesus Christ. And as he stands with Christ he must subject his "liberty of conscience" to the demands of Christ. The individual's ability and right to interpret "free of ecclesiastical dictates" doesn't mean that he may interpret it any way he chooses. After all, man's conscience is not so capable as to be able to anathematize *all* the opinions and positions of the Biblical teachers that have gone before him. That is only pride. And man certainly is not "free" to interpret Scripture as irrelevant when some of its clear teaching does not suit his conscience. Jesus was clear when he said, "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets . . . until heaven and earth pass away not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law . . . whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven." He assumes that the commandments are intelligible to every conscience. One does not need an especially illuminated conscience to understand them. But as I also mentioned, it is not what men don't understand about the Bible's teaching that bothers them, it is what they do understand clearly and refuse to believe that makes them resort to their "liberty of conscience."

But there is an important point here—I mean in that statement about the individual's ability to interpret the Bible free of ecclesiastical dictates. I think the misunderstanding presented reveals the very problem with the "liberty of conscience" position. When the conscience is *not* submitted to the clear teaching of the Scripture as it interprets itself, it is *bound* to provoke dissent, since it is bound to nothing other than the individual's vacillating conscience. To imply that the Scriptures do not have objective, indisputable intelligibility is to open the door for the most catastrophic confusion and dissension. This was clearly seen (eventually) by Williams, as I'll show you when we look at his confrontation with the Quakers and others of Rhode Island with *truly* "liberated" consciences. To divorce religious truth and true liberty from the authority of self-interpreting Scripture is to *guarantee* religious dissent.

Paradoxically enough, Williams said that the Christian could

learn much by listening to those least likely to give a truthful report. The strange thing, K. D., is not that truth can be found in the least likely places—we've all seen God confront us with truth out of a source we thought unlikely to teach us anything. But the odd thing is that a man with a fallible conscience can distinguish between the truth and falsehood. He criticized the Puritans for their dogmatism over non-negotiable religious truth—how could they or anyone else for that matter, say with absolute certainty that one thing was infallibly true and therefore non-negotiable in any religious, social, or political setting? Yet he turned around and said to the same Puritans he criticized:

I add, it is a glorious character of every true disciple or scholar of Christ Jesus, to be never too old to learn. It is the command of Christ Jesus to his scholars, to try all things: and liberty of trying what a friend, yea what an (esteemed) enemy presents, hath ever (in point of Christianity) proved one especial means of attaining to the truth of Christ. For I dare confidently appeal to the consciences of God's most knowing servants, if that observation be not true, to wit, that it hath been the common way of the Father of Lights, to inclose the light of his holy truths, in dark and obscure, yea and ordinarily in forbidden books, persons and meetings by Satan stiled conventicles.

That also is in his *Bloody Tenent Yet More Bloody*. On the one hand, grace is so far removed from man as to leave him with a confused and uncertain conscience. This prevents him from being a judge of absolutes. Yet, on the other hand, grace is so connected with nature that it can be found in the most unlikely places and we have the ability to find it! At one and the same time, we are *incapable* of establishing Biblical righteousness based on the revealed, objective, intelligible Word of God, *and* yet so *capable* of discerning righteousness that we can find it, and must defend it, even from the darkest sources. On the one hand we are prevented; on the other we are required. Conscience cannot tell us what is absolutely true according to the Bible—that violation of Biblical law is punishable by the civil authority—but it must tell us that we can find undisputable truth in strange places, and know it when we see it.

Because of our consciences, Williams seems to say, we cannot know for certain that the laws of the Bible are absolutely true and relevant. We may be mistaken in our judgments at some point and persecute Christ. Yet, because of our consciences, we can know for sure that the light of truth is found in dark places. At one point *we can* count on our consciences, and at another, *we cannot*. Tell me,

K. D., *by what standard will we judge our differing consciences?* The only thing that *you* can be certain of is that *you* can't be certain. And because we are certain that we can't be certain, we must allow for anything and everything. We know for certain that Christianity is not absolutely true; we know that all men need not be obedient to God's laws as they relate to their fellowmen. Our consciences are truly liberated when they understand their bondage to uncertainty.

One thing is for certain here, and that is that when one believes as Williams did, he ends up in great confusion with an irrelevant Christianity.

Convinced that all men are bound to err, Williams trusted no one. He became a "perfectionist." I'm sure you're somewhat familiar with the term. He was satisfied with no one's judgments but his own and those who agreed with him in every detail—those who understood grace as truly as he did. He expected all or nothing.

In search of the perfect church, I am told, Williams separated himself from the Church of England. It promoted some errant practices, and so he could be no part of it. Many others of his day, as well, were leaving that church. But his perfectionism then forced him to spurn the Boston church and the Puritan commonwealth of Massachusetts because it too, despite the ocean's distance, had not separated itself completely from the English church. The Puritans were not pure enough for him. He then separated himself from the Plymouth congregation (itself known for its perfectionism and separatism) because it had not proved as perfectionistic and separatistic as he had at first thought it to be. One account of this last situation I think you will find interesting. As Mr. Edmund Morgan records it: "The cause of Williams's discontent, by his own account, was the fact that the Plymouth church had not proved as separatist as he first supposed it to be. When members of the church returned on visits to England, they attended Church of England services there, and were not cast out of the Plymouth church for doing so. In this way the Plymouth church was communicating with the churches of England and by implication acknowledging them to be true churches. Williams, by remaining a member, shared in this acknowledgment; therefore he must leave them." He ended up taking communion only with his wife.

Williams did have some strange ideas on the nature of the Church. Just as the individual was to be perfect, separated from the world into the mystical body of Christ, so the church also was to be separated from the natural, physical realm. It was so holy and perfect, so full of *grace*, that it could have no connection to the

natural, fallible, material world. It was a "spiritual" thing. He saw the New Testament as a repudiation of the Old, and denied that there was any parallel between the fallible, historical, physical Israel of the Old Covenant, and the infallible, eternal, "holy mystic nation" of the New Covenant.

This led him to deny the application of any Christian standards to any concrete area of life, especially politics. The testament of Christ, he said, is "opposite to the very essentials and fundamentals of the nature of a civil magistracy, a civil commonwealth or combination of men, which can respect only civil things." There was no connection in his thinking between this world and the spiritual one, between nature and grace. He also says, "civil weapons are improper in this business and are never able to reach the soul . . . being of a material civil nature . . . (they) cannot extend to spiritual and soul causes." To tie the church to the state, he said, would be "to put God and Christ and Spirit out of heaven and subject them to natural, sinful, inconstant men . . . and so, naturally, to Satan himself, by whom all peoples are guided."*

But I don't want you to get me wrong, K. D. I'm not advocating that we mix church and state. But the notion that Christianity is so far removed from life that it cannot speak to any area of life, even politics, seems to me to be foolish and naive. Suffice it to say, with Williams's radical dualism between this world and the next, the world of nature and that of grace, Christianity can have little to do with life. From his perspective, an evil world is no place for a holy Christian. He wrote to one fellow, the governor of Massachusetts in fact, "abstract yourself from the dung heap of earth." As he saw it, the Christian and the church have no place in a sick, dying world. I can't help but think of the response which Jesus gave to just such a thought: "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

It is surely a great evil that many who profess the "liberty of conscience"/"religious liberty" idea do so on the basis that the well-being of God's creation is below their concern. If God sent Jesus to die for the world because He loved it and wanted to redeem it, then should we think ourselves so good and holy that we bar God's Word from all those areas of life for which God is truly concerned? He is just as interested in our political lives as He is in our personal lives. He cares *that much*, as far as I can tell.

*At the end of the letter I'll mention a book or two that I've found helpful on the subject. These quotations can be found in them.

Yes, Williams was a strange one. After taking communion with his wife alone, he revolted against any restriction and welcomed everyone into the church regardless of profession. Having found no one as perfect as himself, he concluded that no perfection could be found and that the church belonged in a different world. Grace was completely removed from nature. His adherence to the Nature/Grace dichotomy eventually forced him to abandon grace altogether; his perfectionism led him to abandon the church.

But particularly annoying to me, K. D., is the low opinion which the "religious liberty" proponents have of the church, despite the accolades with which they praise it. Williams thought that the church was to be "pure," as he defined purity. But at the same time, he refers to the church as though it is irrelevant. Somehow, it seems, God would have been better off to leave the world alone, let it have its right to do what it pleases, without the life-giving influence of the preaching of the Word and communal prayer and praise. As far as Williams and, it seems to me all those with him, are concerned, the church of Jesus Christ is completely unnecessary for social stability. The church, according to Williams is "... like a corporation . . . (which) may dissent, divide, break into schisms, yea, wholly break up . . . and yet the peace of the city be not in the least measure impaired or disturbed. Because the essence . . . of the city . . . is essentially distinct. . . . The city was before and stands entire when such a corporation . . . is thrown down." The one social institution through which grace is preeminently made available (through the preaching of the Word of God) now has no necessary connection to the properly functioning city. As I see it, that was Cain's attitude. Grace is not needed for nature. Society can function well without it. To me, K. D., this doesn't seem like Christianity. It seems like the religion of man apart from God. The world is "a dung heap" and the church and the Christian message are not really needed. Men are free to do what they want, and we don't make any effort to yank them from the dung. After all, our consciences might be mistaken about the truth.

Now this brings me to that second misconception which I mentioned at the outset. The one about the reasonableness of man and the uniformity of religion throughout the world. They go hand in hand. I think that these are important assumptions, since without them one couldn't possibly entertain the idea of "religious liberty" for everyone. In other words, you, K. D., would have to be assured that the rest of the individuals in the world are as reasonable as you

are, and that they will maintain certain fundamentals in their religions like those you maintain in yours. Unless you have that guarantee, you're looking for trouble.

Now first of all, I don't think that everyone who promotes the "liberty of conscience"/"religious liberty" idea *really* takes seriously the idea that all the world's a "dung heap." A good portion of it is rotten, but certainly not so rotten that none of us can stand it. I means it's not as rotten as it was in the days of Sodom and Gomorrah; God could no longer stand the stench at that point.

You see, I don't really think that Roger Williams and his Baptist followers really understood what a "dung heap" the world is—at least how much of a dung heap the world could be—like in the days of Sodom and Gomorrah. Williams and the rest of them did not believe that they were abandoning their culture to destructive forces. Irrelevant Christian dogma didn't make for a stable society, as far as they were concerned. But while the world was filled with "natural, sinful, inconstant men," immorality in the seventeenth century American colonies was far less pervasive than the immorality to which some of the world has since become accustomed. In some places of the world I have heard that there are actually churches of Satan, and homosexuals kidnapping young boys, not to mention murderers going free while innocent men are called criminals for defending their families and homes. But the seventeenth century was a bit more tame. The colonial era had its vices and crimes, but in the New World especially, civil infractions of the generally accepted moral code were met with effective civil penalties. The effects of sin, or the smell of the dung, was readily sensed only on a small scale.

But this was part of the problem—I mean, this generally accepted moral code. You see, K. D., I think that it provided a convenient solution to the otherwise perplexing problem of religious confrontation—a solution which, as I see it, proved as untenable for Roger Williams as it is for some places in the world today (not to mention the problems it could cause for us).

There were certain religious beliefs, Williams and his followers assumed, which were common among all men because they were so obviously reasonable. It was on these religious "basics" that men could build a peaceful society without having to quarrel and contend over doctrinal issues. While men's consciences were fallible, there were some things which all men confessed—at least so the "liberty of conscience"/"religious liberty" supporters assumed. All men seemed to profess certain things, and they all seemed to condemn certain

things. There was a common ground of religious ideas to which all seemed to subscribe. Especially, they thought, there were certain standards of *practical* religion to which all men and religions subscribed. And, if all men required the same standards for *practical* religion, then what further need did they have for defending all the possible bones of contention among them? There was no need for them to squabble over religious doctrine or dogma. The generally accepted moral code was enough. Everybody knows, K. D., that you just don't go around killing people. Not only is it unchristian, it just isn't reasonable. What religion could condone it?

And that brings up the subject of "reason." It seems like a common possession of everyone. It clearly dictates "rights" from "wrongs." And if there is to be any neutral ground found on which we can build a peaceful and orderly society, it has to be on that common ground of reason.

From my reading of the seventeenth century, "Reason" (with a capital "R") was the heart of a new religious philosophy called "Deism." I think this affected Williams. I don't know whether you're familiar with it, but it seems to me that it plays a crucial part here in this subject. Williams and his followers, and for that matter all those who support the "religious liberty" idea, all embrace the religion of Deism in principle and practice, if not also in name. I hope I don't sound too dogmatic to you, but this Deism is so slippery a notion that it could come into our thinking without our ever really knowing it. And frankly, K. D., that worries me.

As I understand it, one of the "fathers" of this religion was a fellow named Edward, Lord Herbert of Cherbury. Quite a name to carry around. Now Mr. Cherbury believed that despite the fact that man is in nature, a state removed from grace, he is a rational being. Here's where I think Williams was contradictory in his thinking; man's conscience is so marred that he can't be assured of the legitimacy of any of his actions in a world that's a dunghheap; yet he's not so unreasonable and not so covered with the soot that he can't make a proper society—a "city" as he called it. I think he was influenced by Mr. Cherbury or someone like him.

Mr. Cherbury believed that all men, according to their reason, held to some "Common Notions." His book, *De Veritate, Prout Distinguitur a Revelatione, a Verisimili, a Posibili, et a Falso* presents some of his position on this. Mr. Cherbury, whom I think we could call a "religionist" more than a "theologian," says that among all religions there are certain undisputed, basic principles; and these principles are evident from religion, philosophy, law, and of course,

the conscience. All religions, he says, believe in the following:

1. There is a Supreme God who is blessed, the cause of good, and both the end and the means of life.
2. This Sovereign Deity ought to be worshipped.
3. Virtue, or practical piety, is the most important part of religious practice.
4. All men abhor wickedness and require some repentance and penitance for expiation.
5. There is reward and punishment after this life.

I suppose that in the seventeenth century, most everybody believed in these things. And in some respects, they are all true. But for my money, K. D., I believe that they are true not because I see that they are reasonable, and that the majority has, so to speak, cast its vote for them; I believe they are true (to the extent that they are) because the Bible teaches them.

In some ways, it seems to me that these ideas, though they sound reasonable, ought to be subjected to criticism. After all, does this mean that it is just fine and dandy for people to commit their lives to Allah or Buddha—each could be the one god, just with different names? What's all the fuss about? Jehovah? Buddha? What's in a name? Each of these religious systems has just this one "Sovereign Deity" to be worshipped. And, as far as most can tell, most of the followers of those religions are fairly noble (so they say), and they all have some kind of required repentance and penitance for their wickedness. I'm not sure whether they believe in rewards or punishments after this life, but then it doesn't really make any difference at this point anyway, right? We're all reasonable enough to know that our dispute over what happens after this life will be decided for us when we die—so why fight about it now? And after all, practical piety is the most important thing; so as long as we use our reason to agree on what is virtuous right now, we won't have to fight over doctrine. Right?

But, K. D., I do have some real problems with this. Mr. Cherbury says that Christianity is of the highest order of religions and the Holy Scriptures of the highest order of books. This sounds fine. But he also says that it might need to be amended when it departs from the "common notions"; what is appropriate to right reason is paramount. But what happens when people aren't as reasonable as we think they ought to be, and yet they claim that they are being reasonable? What happens when the common notions men have come to appreciate are changed by men who claim to be more reasonable? *By what standard will we judge conflicting "reasonable" ideas?* Obviously

Sodom and Gomorrah thought that they were quite reasonable. The Greeks, in fact, who are applauded for their reasonableness, treated homosexuality as a reasonable part of life. And I don't think that the prophets of Baal or the Canaanites considered themselves to be unreasonable. By what standard will we judge "reasonableness" when both sides claim reason as their ultimate standard? Child sacrifice has been seen as reasonable in many religions, to give one more example.

As far as Mr. Cherbury is concerned, and I'm sure we would have to put Mr. Williams and his followers in this camp—though Christianity may be *one* embodiment of truth, morality, liberty, and social stability, it is *not the only* embodiment of truth, morality, liberty, and social stability. In fact, one would have to conclude as Williams did (by implication), that Christianity is dispensable—it is only one religion among many in a pluralistic, yet reasonable world. The reason of enlightened men is enough. We can best facilitate religious concord among men by letting "Reason" dictate religious communal needs. A Christianity which is too distinctive will just get in the way.

I don't think that it is some fluke of history, K. D., that Williams postulated the success of a society without the Christian religion at its base at the same time that Mr. Cherbury was writing on these universal notions. By 1636, the year of the founding of Rhode Island, *De Veritate* was in its second edition, and soon to be coming out in its third edition in 1639. As I see it, Williams, like Cherbury, was a product of his times. All men were looking for a way to end the religious disputes and wars in Europe and it seemed like this idea of "Reason"/"Common Notions" could do the job. We could have religious liberty if we just let live all the differing religions; everyone seemed reasonable.

But this didn't solve the problem. The "live and let live" policy, I mean. Rhode Island, at least, had its troubles. In fact, I would put it to you, K. D., that the very thing the "religious liberty"/"liberty of conscience" idea tries to avoid, it creates. When everyone is free to do just as his conscience dictates, to do what seems reasonable to him, dissension is unavoidable. Rather than preserving social unity and stability, it destroys it.

But, before I get into that, I want to say a thing or two more about his idea of "reasonableness," as well as something about the idea of "neutrality" or "common ground." Something in one of Roger William's statements made me think that I should add something here. Actually, it ties together a number of things that I've

been talking about. In particular, it has to do with Williams's analogy of the church as a corporation. He said: "... the essence . . . of the city . . . is essentially distinct. . . . The city was before and stands entire when such a corporation . . . is thrown down." In support of his idea that the city can exist without the church, it seems to me that he has somewhat of a primitivistic attitude. I don't mean that he is bringing up an outmoded idea. But, he seems to be supporting his case from history, and primitive history at that. He seems to idealize the city, and I would guess the ancient ones at that — cities like Greece and Rome. A number of Protestants in Williams's day looked up to those pagan cities as paragons. One fellow in particular, Hugo Grotius, preferred the ancient cities as models of strength and stability; as illustrations from history they had great weight in discussions such as this because they were taken "from better times and better people." I see a great deal of Williams's "religious liberty"/"liberty of conscience" idea in Grotius, and I wouldn't be surprised if history ends up showing some connection between the two.

As far as Grotius was concerned, as I understand him, these cities were examples of good cities. Behind it all, I think, was his commitment to reason, and ultimately, a misconception of the relationship between nature and grace similar to Williams's. Whether one appealed to Scripture, nature, or history, one could find ideal models and final solutions to political problems in reason. Particularly, these cities were built on reason, and not on Scripture. And this, ultimately, makes Scripture irrelevant. It makes the church and Christianity irrelevant.

But unlike Williams, Grotius didn't believe that man was so depraved as to be bound to fallibility. This is where it gets interesting. From Williams's perspective, we are so much at war because of our depraved consciences that only by retreating from our dogmatic positions and being "reasonable" can we survive together. Williams, we could say, was a hyper-Calvinist who ended up having to abandon all his religion for a social peace based on reason.

Grotius, on the other hand, was an Arminian. He did not believe that man was really depraved at all. And just as Williams's view of man — irredeemably depraved — affected his view of the relationship of nature to grace, so Grotius's view affected his position on the Nature/Grace relationship. For Williams, grace could not be found in nature. But that was no great problem. Reason was satisfactory. His reason was a bottom-line common denominator retreat zone; it was purely natural, but it would do the job.

But for Grotius, man was not so depraved as to make grace really necessary for nature. Man and nature already had enough capabilities to exist as a well-functioning city. What strikes me is that when one has a dichotomy between the realms of nature and grace, he ends up doing away with grace altogether. Grotius, as an Arminian, believed in a "free" and undepraved will in man—he ended up denying the need for God's grace in the social realm. Natural man already had enough grace on his own. He still had some grace in him and so he could depend upon his own enlightened reason. Just like the Greek and Roman cities, the modern city could be based on man's innate ability to reason. The church could add some good things, but they would just be "extras," nothing absolutely necessary.

And Williams, who distorted the Calvinistic position, also ended up denying the need for grace. Man couldn't really be restored adequately to a position of clear social responsibility according to grace, so he ended up denying the need for grace altogether and depending upon his own fallible, though sufficient, reason. The church is not needed for the city. All I am trying to say, K. D., is that when one takes either extreme—so depraved that grace is not possible, or not depraved so that grace is not needed—he ends up denying the work and need of grace in the world altogether.

If we take the proper Calvinistic position, the one that I have come to think is Biblical, we will be better off. Man is thoroughly depraved, dead in sin, but God can bring him back to life through His grace and make him a capable and responsible judge of right and wrong—always according to the Scriptures, of course. To that he subjects his conscience. To that he must hold fast.

And furthermore, if Williams, Grotius, or Cherbury really understood Greece, Rome, and the other "noble," "reasonable" ancient cities, I don't think that they ever would have suggested that reason, apart from the objective revelation of the Word of God, can make a city secure. I don't imagine that they would have condoned the fornication, homosexuality, and radically unchristian ideas and actions which those cities not only permitted but promoted. The eventual persecution of the Christian church by Rome should, at least, say something for the foolishness of the position.

As I see it, K. D., these three men lived in a Christianized society. Now granted it had its problems. But they did all maintain a morality which was basically Biblical—and because that morality had been in their culture for such a long time, it seemed quite reasonable and was taken for granted. But to wrench that morality

away from its Biblical foundation and re-establish it on the foundation of "Reason" is shaky business. I think it could just be called stealing morality from the Bible, the Word of God, and giving it to man's reason. And if the principles which the Bible sets out are really just in the reason of man, then the Bible just becomes some book for social confusion. It's just a set of irrelevant, dissension-causing doctrines. Maybe it's better just to say that these men "borrowed" the Christian morality and renamed it "reason." It is reasonable—to hold these moral positions, I mean—but reasonable only because we understand it to be so through our contact with God's revealed Word. *That* makes it reasonable. Maybe we should just call it "borrowed capital." The "religious liberty"/"liberty of conscience" advocates borrowed the Biblical morality and loaned it to man. Man forgot where he got it, and so claimed it as his own. I think that's what they did. I think that's what everyone does who suggests that there is some "reason" out there which tells us how to order society. But if we don't hold fast to the Bible, and all along say that our morality is reasonable because it comes out of the Bible, and not the other way around, then we will eventually call the Bible unreasonable.

The same line of reasoning can be applied to "liberty." If we start by saying that liberty comes through reasonableness, rather than through adherence to the Word of God, then we will eventually find that we no longer have any liberty, because we are prohibited from telling the very message that gives liberty. Jesus said, "If you love me, keep my commandments"; and "if the Son shall make you free you are free indeed." True liberty comes from following all the commands of Jesus, not making them negotiable because of some notion called "reason." Only the foundation of practical Christian principles established over many centuries in the European mind made it possible for these men to propose a common ground apart from the Bible for the social and religious order. But when this common ground erodes, the culture has to look for new foundations. I think, K. D., that when based on anything but the revealed Word of God, that common ground does erode. And when this happens, and one maintains the "liberty of conscience"/"religious liberty" idea, there is trouble.

I want to share with you some of my thoughts on the idea of "neutrality" or the "common ground"/"common notions" idea, but I don't want to forget about Rhode Island. It didn't take long for the "liberty of conscience"/"religious liberty" idea to give Williams

trouble. From looking at some of the problems Rhode Island had, I think, K. D., that you will see where this idea eventually leads. Then I'll pick back up the "neutrality" subject.

I propose, K. D., that when the "liberty of conscience"/"religious liberty" idea is allowed to run its full course, it leads inevitably to dissent and social disintegration. Williams himself came to recognize this in a limited way through his confrontation with consciences more liberated than his own. And this is the problem: the "liberated conscience." Once you grant that it is the ultimate standard along with "reason," there's no defense against it. Man, Williams found out, was not always as "reasonable" as he had supposed him to be. And he found out that man could even appeal to "liberty of conscience" and "religious liberty" to support his unreasonable rights.

The Quakers, a religious group in colonial America, claimed something in particular which bothered Williams and pressed his principle of "liberty" to its breaking point. It was their claim to union with God. This struck right at the Achilles heel of Williams's Nature/Grace dichotomy.

Rather than appealing to Nature and to Reason, as Williams and so many other had done, the Quakers claimed direct communion with God—or, we could call it, with grace. As I understand it, their emphasis lay in direct communion or communication with God as His Spirit would emerge at a typical meeting and speak in and through the people. With this Williams had no sympathy. Complaining against the Quakers he said:

The Spirit of God was most purely rational, and a spirit of pure order, and did not prompt or move men to break hedges and leap over one ordinance to another.

Williams says that the Spirit is "purely rational," and therefore, He cannot be operating the way that the Quakers say He is. But the Quakers would say that it is perfectly reasonable for the Spirit to work the way He does—after all, if the Spirit comes to us and works this way, then we have to conclude that this is "reasonable" according to "spiritual reason." We have to be open to the way the Spirit works. We can't confine Him to *our* reason; we have to let Him work according to what is natural *for Him*.

Here the Quakers were destroying Williams's Nature/Grace dichotomy—or rather, emphasizing one aspect of it. That is, according to the Quakers, God (or grace) could break into nature and operate any way in which He chose. Nature is not such a self-

contained system that He can't come into it and work according to His own "reason."

Now, Williams had no defense against this, K. D. Not according to his idea of "liberty." For the Quakers, they were just exercising their religious rights. Their consciences were free — and especially, they thought, illuminated by the infallible Spirit. If it seemed irrational to Williams (to have a Spirit that "moved men to break hedges and leap over one ordinance to another"), then he would have to argue with God. If the liberated conscience were in union with God, then how could man complain about irrationality? In fact, the irrational conscience was the truly liberated conscience in this case. Natural reason was superseded by a higher order of things. Williams, of course, had received his basic understanding of the way the Spirit of God works from his understanding of the Scripture. But his appeal to reason (naturalness) and "liberty" made him defenseless in the face of an immanent Spirit (grace) and true "liberation."

Oddly enough, this was the same problem which the Puritans of Massachusetts had tried to make clear to Williams. That is, that one could not depend on man, his reason, or his conscience — but only upon the objective, intelligible, Word of God. They knew that this version of "religious liberty" and "liberty of conscience" idea was bound to trouble. The Reverend Uriah Oakes, I have read, said, "The loud outcry of some is for liberty of conscience . . . I look upon an unbounded toleration as the first born of all abominations." Shepard (the Rev. Thomas) said "'tis Satan's policy to plead for an indefinite and boundless toleration." One of the stronger statements I have come across is found in the Puritan divine John Norton's *The Heart of New England Rent*: "We both dread and bear witness against liberty of heresy . . . It is a liberty . . . to answer to the dictate of error of conscience in walking contrary to rule. It is a liberty to blaspheme, a liberty to seduce others from the true God, a liberty to tell lies in the name of the Lord." Just as the Puritans feared Williams's position on liberty, so Williams feared the Quaker position. It could lead to — well, anything. And who could argue with the Spirit of God?

But the Puritans rested their case in the revealed Scripture; liberty was as God defined it and not as man's conscience defined it. Williams, on the other hand, had argued for unbounded, though "reasonable," religious liberty. The Quakers did him one step better. What could Williams say? He knew that such an incalculable and uncontrollable grace as the Quakers proposed could lead only to

confusion. He condemned their position — contrary to the dictates of his “liberty of conscience”/“religious liberty” principle.

But, K. D., that isn’t all. This “liberty” idea ends up being challenged by more than just the religious “enthusiasts.” Williams’s principle was challenged from a different, more radical sector of free-thinkers in Rhode Island. For this, I need to lay out just a little Rhode Island background for you.

In 1655, Rhode Island’s right to self-government was confirmed by Oliver Cromwell under a previously established charter drawn up in 1644. Williams, as I understand it, wrote to a friend on this occasion and recounted to him some of the freedoms that the colony had enjoyed as it drank from the “sweet cup” of liberties. Rhode Island, he said, had been spared the “iron yolk of wolfish bishops” [speaking against England], and the “new chains of Presbyterian tyrants . . . nor in this colony have we been consumed with the over-zealous fire of the so-called godly Christian magistrate” [speaking against the Puritan theocracy of Massachusetts]. He continued in this letter, “Sir, we have not known what an excise means; we have almost forgotten what tithes are, yea, or taxes either, to church or commonwealth.” Williams, I gather, was glad he was “his own man,” and not the least bit subject to anyone else either in church or state.

But in this letter he also talked about some of the problems the colony had faced. He had not forgotten some of the dissension which was pervading Rhode Island. The first Rhode Island settlements were made at Providence by Roger Williams in June of 1636, and at Portsmouth on the island of Aquidneck by the Antinomians (those who didn’t believe that they were subject to any law but themselves), William Coddington, John Clarke, and Anne Hutchinson in March and April of 1638. They had left Massachusetts so that they could all have their “liberty” and live together peacefully.

But Coddington and Clarke became dissatisfied with the conditions at Portsmouth and left. They weren’t happy. They moved a few miles farther south in April of 1639 and established a settlement at Newport. Meanwhile, Providence was having its problems and in 1643, a fellow named Samuel Gorton and other “seceders” left that city and founded Warwick, Rhode Island. Portsmouth and Newport had formed a union in March of 1640 and all four settlements were consolidated in 1647. But this didn’t last long. Some consciences felt too bound by it. The individualism and “religious liberty” sentiments were so strong that no one could get along with anyone else. In 1651 the union split into two confederations, one of the mainland

towns and the other of the island towns. Finally, in 1654 Roger Williams was able to bring back some unification to the colony, but only after some confrontation with his own notion of "liberty."

Getting back to this letter Williams wrote, in it he said that Rhode Island had "long drunk of the cup of as great liberties as any people that we hear of under the whole heaven." But he also said that the "sweet cup hath rendered many of us wanton and too active." He was, no doubt, becoming a slave to his own idea of "liberty." One example of this can be seen in his attempt to secure some protection for the colony.

Aware of dangers to the colony's well-being and the possibility of its complete demise, Williams instituted compulsory military service. Now I'm not advocating conscription and the draft system, K. D.; I'm bringing this up only to show that Williams's conscience and reason moved him in a particular direction. Now others in the colony were not interested in going in that direction. You will be interested in reading what one man has said about the opposition he received: "The leaders of this libertarian opposition were the Baptists, who denounced the bearing of arms as un-Christian and conscription as an invasion of religious liberty and of the natural rights of the individual. This opposition was itself radicalized by the crisis precipitated by Williams, and the logic of the pacifist opposition to conscription and arms-bearing led them straight to the *ne plus ultra* of libertarianism: individualist anarchism. The opposition—led by Rev. Thomas Olney, former Baptist minister at Providence, William Harris, John Field, John Throckmorton, and Williams' own brother Robert—circulated a petition charging that it was 'blood-guiltiness, and against the rule of the gospel, to execute judgment upon transgressors, against the private or public weal.' In short, government itself was anti-Christian." The principle upon which the colony was founded was now bringing about its destruction. The conscience of Williams was telling him one thing; the consciences of the other Baptists were telling them something different. The Lord was leading in opposite directions and any convergence was impossible. They ended up with "individualist anarchism." Each claimed that his position was "Christian," but on differing bases. The one group thought that what Williams was doing was an invasion of religious liberty and of the natural rights of the individual. Williams had a slightly different response. The same man I quoted just a minute ago explained his defense as follows: "He likened human society to a ship on which all people were passengers. All may worship as they pleased, he graciously declaimed, but none

is to be allowed to defy 'the common laws and orders of the ship, concerning their common peace or preservation.' And if any should mutiny against their 'officers' or 'preach or write that there ought to be no commanders or officers because all are equal in Christ, therefore no masters nor officers, no laws nor orders, no corrections nor punishments . . . the commanders may judge, resist, compel and punish such transgressions. . . .' " Williams claimed that his concerns were in accordance with Christ, but especially in his interest for the well-being of "the common laws and order of the ship." Williams could see the handwriting on the wall and he could get the gist of its meaning. The fact that all were "equal in Christ" did not relieve the necessity for one conscience to have *some* command over other consciences. After all, the people had elected a president to direct the colony. Social stability required *some* order and leader other than the diverging opinions of private consciences. It must have been a strange situation K. D., but then, they had committed themselves to individualism, and all were to worship as they pleased. No wonder that the worship of one conflicted with the worship of the other. In a way, they got what they deserved. There was a rebellion, I hear, but it was put down by force.

In 1655, a few months after the rebellion, Williams was reelected president of Rhode Island. But this did not end his troubles by any means. He still was having to combat those who took his "liberty of conscience"/"religious liberty" position farther than he thought tolerable. As one man described it, "Baptist anarchism continued to multiply in Rhode Island. One of the new adherents was none other than Catherine Scott, the leading Baptist minister and sister of Anne Hutchinson. Anne Hutchinson's lone pioneering in philosophical anarchism before her death had planted a seed that came to fruition a decade and a half later. Also adopting anarchism were Rebecca Throckmorton, Robert West, and Ann Williams, wife of Roger's brother Robert. Catherine Scott and Rebecca Throckmorton were soon to espouse the Quaker faith. Finally, in March 1657 the crackdown arrived, and the four individualists were summoned into court by Williams as being 'common opposers of all authority.'" When Anne Hutchinson was in Rhode Island, she came to the conclusion — her reasonable conscience did — that any magistracy, or position of civil rule, is immoral. She took Williams's position to its logical conclusion and Williams himself is supposed to have been a bit bewildered. She convinced her husband, who had had a leading position in the government, to give up his position "because of the opinion, which she had newly taken up, of the unlawfulness of

the magistracy." She had been led to the ultimate in "religious liberty": individualist anarchism. One woman who wrote a biography of her said: "She was supremely convinced that the Christian held within his own breast the assurance of salvation. . . . For such persons magistrates were obviously superfluous. As for the other, they were to be converted, not coerced." Now this *sounds* like a fancy idea, but at that point in Rhode Island's history I don't think there were laws even against adultery and other types of loose living, and householders were not held responsible for the licentiousness of their servants or minor sons. Mr. Murray Rothbard, the man from whom I have received much of my information on this subject, is quite sympathetic with Mrs. Hutchinson and quite opposed to such laws, at least as I understand what he is saying. A Christian, no doubt, should care more about social stability and, by all means, the proper nurture of young people in any society. While I have found much good information from Mr. Rothbard on the subject of descriptive economics, I think his social views, along with those of Mrs. Hutchinson, are clearly defective. Society needs a righteous legal structure. But to what could Williams appeal when Mrs. Hutchinson, and the others after her, came up with their anarchistic ideas? He had laid the ground-work for the dissent by his very principle of "liberty." Though the charges against the four women were dismissed, they did stand as a testimony to the failure of the "liberty of conscience" idea.

But I ought also to bring up the situation of Mr. William Harris, one of the Baptist anarchists. He circulated to all the towns a manuscript denouncing "all civil government," and urged the people to "cry out 'no lords, no master.'" He condemned all punishments and prisons, as well as all officials and legislative assemblies. Mr. Rothbard tells of his position also: "He was . . . hauled into court, charged with 'open defiance under his hand against our Charter, all our laws . . . parliament the Lord Protector and all government.'" Harris, instead of quieting down under intimidation as had Mrs. Scott and the others, swore that he would continue to maintain his anarchism 'with his blood.' Persistently refusing to recant, Harris repeated his interpretation of Scripture that 'he that can say it is his conscience ought not to yield subjection to any human order amongst men.' The General Court found that Harris was guilty of being 'contemptuous and seditious' and he and his son were heavily bonded for 500 pounds. The evidence was sent to England in preparation for a trial there for treason." The "liberty" idea of the Baptist will, in the end, destroy

the very liberty which he is trying to preserve. In this case, Harris's religious principle of "no lords, no masters" was the logical conclusion of "religious freedom." How could anyone be a "lord" or a "master," or for that matter *any* ruler over another, when each man is "free" to do just as his conscience dictates, and whatever seems reasonable to him? His "conscience" came into direct conflict with Williams's "conscience," if you see what I mean. The right to religious freedom had to mean the abolition of all authority, political and ecclesiastical. The Christian "commanders" who preserved "the common laws" and "the common peace" of the land no longer had any meaning—because there was no longer any "commonness." Each man was "free" to do "that which seemed right in his own eyes" and, well, you can guess the outcome. The "reason" was, well, becoming irrational.

From looking at the problems of Rhode Island, K. D., I think that the case against the "liberty of conscience"/"religious liberty" is clear-cut. It is trouble. In the end, one conscience always ends up competing with another conscience. It's inevitable. The principle of the Quakers—that the free conscience is unleashed from nature to unite with the divine—can lead only to religious confusion with every man hearing the voice of the spirit in his own way. And how will we argue against the Spirit? At the same time, the anarchism of the Harris and Hutchinson/Scott variety, with its foundation in the natural, individual free conscience can lead only to a conflict in which each contestant is determined to maintain his position "with his blood." Once each man was guaranteed the inviolable right of religious "liberty," founded upon the judgment of his own conscience, there was no higher court of appeal to which each could bring his complaint and see the conflict resolved. Dissent in this system is inevitable. In fact, K. D., I wouldn't be surprised if one day some "free"-thinker with a "liberated" conscience comes up with a philosophy that says that the only way for a man to be truly "free" is for him to be a rebel against society; that's the only way that he can be sure that he hasn't been made a slave to someone else's conscience, someone else's religion!

As I see it, K. D., the most important thing in this whole subject is not that Williams and those who thought like him had a dichotomy between the world of nature and the world of grace. That's bad enough. And it's not that they stole, or borrowed, the moral basis for their society from God's revealed Word and attributed it to the "Reason" in man. That, too, is bad. And it's not

that the idea of "liberty of conscience"/"religious liberty" ultimately leads to the very dissent it attempts to avoid. These things are enough for God to condemn it. But the biggest dissatisfaction I have with this idea is that it is grounded on the idea that this can be a "neutral" world in which Jesus Christ is a dispensable part.

This is not a neutral world, K. D. You know that. God has not called us to bide our time and allow the life-giving gospel of Christ to be slapped down at every point, treated as nothing more than a shot of morphine for socially maladjusted religious fanatics. God has put us here to be salt and light in the world; to be like a city set on a hill; to let our good works shine before men so that they will glorify our Father who is in heaven. And if we are truly responsible citizens of Christ's kingdom, then we will seek to promote His law before all men. Our social well-being depends on it. The safety of our families depends upon it. If we're not for Christ, then we are against him; at least that is what He said. And for my money, I think He cares about the society in which we live, politics and all. No area of life is unimportant to Him. And as the Proverb says, "Those who hate Me love death." Whenever the life-giving Word of the gospel goes out, there will inevitably be those who hate God and promote an alternative, destructive form of life, which is really only death—and all along it will masquerade as life-giving under the banner of "liberty." That liberty is not Christianity; it is humanism. Any commitment to neutrality is not in accordance with God's Word. He wants men to be obedient to Him. When they are not, *they* are the ones that make the war. Not the Christians. But they will turn the argument around and say that we are the oppressive ones. And all we want to do is be faithful sons of God, obedient to His law in Christ.

That's what bothers me about Roger Williams and this "religious liberty"/"liberty of conscience" idea. It does seem strange to you, doesn't it K. D., that a Christian man would promote a religious philosophy and social system in which Christianity is dispensable? The Great Commission is clear; the Christian's chief task is teaching the commands of Christ to an ignorant and often rebellious world—not voiding His commands in the face of a "higher," "more reasonable" religious system in which wickedness triumphs while the light of God's Word is hidden.

From my reading of the Bible, hardship and warfare are to be expected; as Jesus said: "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword . . . he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He

who has found his life shall lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it." And Paul says that we don't wrestle against flesh and blood; the warfare we fight down here is nothing less than warfare against the principalities and powers of the air. And, as Luther wrote in his "Mighty Fortress," "We will not fear for God has willed his truth to triumph through us." Hardship and warfare are not to be exchanged for a tenuous detente—at least as I read the Good Book.

K. D., I think that any suggestion of peaceful co-existence between one faith, which says that Jesus Christ is the central factor in life, and the other, which says that Jesus Christ is not only dispensable to life but a potential troublemaker, is absurd. An expectation of convergence between these two faiths, without the reconciliation of the latter to the former, is both naïve and unbiblical. God wants us to promote His kingdom in the world—"thy kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven"—not pretend that it belongs *only* in heaven. We can't live under the illusion that Christianity is just another religion in a world full of equally friendly religions. The idea of convergence is a soothing theory which overlooks the fact that these worlds—of Christianity and paganism—are not at all evolving toward each other, and that neither one can be transformed into the other without "violence." Besides, convergence inevitably means the acceptance of the other side's defects, too, and this can hardly please anyone. It won't please the unbeliever—and it shouldn't please the Christian. One system says that Jesus is essential. The other, that He is dispensable and dangerous. Conflict is inevitable. In a system like that, how could you even preach the gospel?

In fact, it is in just such a system that the gospel *needs* to be preached. Its whole purpose is to tell men that they *need God to save them and direct* their lives. Again, Jesus said, "Go, teach them all things whatsoever I have commanded you." And He also said: "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven." God didn't send His Son to be dispensable. True peace comes only when those who say Jesus isn't necessary come to understand that they need Him, when they're willing to say, "Blessed is the one coming in the name of the Lord."

Which brings me to one more point. "*Liberty*," I mean true liberty,

how can we define it unless we get our definition from God? Is it possible for us to make up our own definition — like, “liberty is when we are permitted to do whatever we want as long as it is according to our conscience and reasonable.” Is this liberty? Is it possible for us to make up such a definition and to operate a society according to it? Especially when the design of the definition is to do away with having to follow God’s Word?

I think not. First of all, if we are God’s people, then we will take our definition of liberty from Him. Not from man. Jesus said, “If you abide in My Word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and *the truth* shall make you free. . . . If the *Son* shall make you free, you shall be free indeed.” He says that we have true liberty *only* when we follow His words. And His Word says that true love for God and our fellow man is the sum of all the Law and the Prophets. And that means not only that we can trust the Law of God to be good for us, but that we must hold to it as absolutely necessary for showing love to God and man. Unless we follow the Law, we cannot hope to show love to God and our fellow man, except by accident. And frankly, K. D., I don’t think God intended for us to grope around in the darkness and leave our relationships with men on such a shaky foundation. We can’t count on society’s operating properly by accident.

And, second of all, *liberty itself is meaningless unless God defines it.* The “religious liberty”/“liberty of conscience” school seems to me to be predicated on the assumption that all religious ideas are possibly true, while the Christian religion is definitely not true—at least not completely necessary for life. It claims to be willing to accept any religion that appears on the scene, but unwilling to start with Jesus Christ and His law. That the Christian religion and the law of God are absolute non-negotiable factors for true liberty, this they do not believe.

So it seems to me here, K.D., that the “religious liberty”/“liberty of conscience” philosophy of religion is contradictory and unbiblical. It is, we could say, psychologically self-contradictory because it claims to be making no judgment of any sort when it proposes its “liberty” position, while as a matter of fact, it makes a *universal negative judgement* in its effort to make no judgment at all. What I mean is this, K. D.; the “religious liberty” school says that it is making no judgment on the truth or falsehood of any religious position, and so we must allow for all positions. While at the same time it says that *Christianity is not justified in saying that its definition of “liberty” is the only true definition.* So you can’t go around saying that

your position is absolutely true. So, everyone is free except the fellow who is absolutely right—the one with the objective law of God. In fact, in this system you would be *immoral* to claim that you had the absolute morality. You would be suppressing liberty if you were promoting the Biblical idea of liberty.

Which brings me to another contradiction. In general, the “religious liberty” school maintains that absolute truth is not possible, that all truth to the human conscience is relative. We can’t know for sure what is right and what is wrong. Therefore, all religions must be allowed to exist. But, I ask you K. D., if one maintains that all truth is relative, then how can he claim that his definition of liberty is absolutely right? In other words, how can the “liberty of conscience”/“religious liberty” school be so dogmatic about its definition of liberty when it says that dogmatism is not justifiable. Is it not reasonable according to its own relativism to conclude that it may well be wrong in its condemnation of the absolute truth of the Biblical definition of liberty? Is it not borrowing again from Biblical law—claiming that there is an absolute right and wrong—to maintain its position that relativistic “liberty” is absolutely true? The “religious liberty” position bases its case on the denial of absolute truth, and then bases its case on the existence of the absolute truth that all is relative. Tell me, K. D., *on what basis can a relativist claim the absolute truth of his relativism if he does not presuppose an absolute, and therefore the denial of his position?* The only way to support the “religious liberty” position is to presuppose that it is the only absolutely true form of liberty. But that denies its own commitment to true religious liberty—at least for the Christian with the absolute truth. He does not have religious liberty in that system.

Which in turn brings me to another criticism of the “religious liberty”/“liberty of conscience” idea. This school pretends to be very humble. After all, they claim to be making no sweeping conclusions. But, K. D., this seems to me to be a big problem, in fact, the biggest problem. God’s Word clearly says that man is truly free when he lives in accordance with God’s Word. Isn’t this the point of our message, that men are slaves to sin unless they live as God tells them to live? They have true liberty, as God defines liberty, when they trust in Jesus Christ to forgive them for having lived according to their own standards, their own consciences, and turn from this sin to following the footsteps of Christ. In *that* is true humility and true liberty. As I see it, the “religious liberty”/“liberty of conscience” school is full of pride—they want to be their own gods. And this is just what the gospel preaches against.

And so, K. D., if we accede to this idea of "liberty," then we have given up our very freedom to preach and promote the truth of God in which there is true liberty. And all along we will suppose that we are being very charitable and "loving," as some call it, when, in reality, we are prohibiting the progress of the gospel in a sick world. To me, that is not loving. Natural man is at enmity against God, and only when he forsakes his own conscience and depends upon God will he find true liberty.

We Christians may have some "religious liberty" today, but in the "liberty of conscience"/"religious liberty" system we will soon be excluded from any meaningful area of life, only because we as Christians find it impossible to lay aside *our* religion with its absolutes. Neither of us believes in mixing church and state; but I guarantee you, that one day we will not even be allowed to mix our *religion* with life, because it will be taken as "mixing church and state." It may not look bad now, K. D., but give it time. If we lose our true Biblical liberty of preaching the whole counsel of God, we will be able to say only that we lost the battle before we began, because we did not take God's liberty, but man's. We have to go back to God's law, K. D., and put Jesus before all men without apology, teaching everything that He commanded. If we do not do this, we will leave ourselves and all men in bondage. If we do, we will enjoy the true liberty that only God can give.

With Christian love
For the Kingdom of Christ,

Craig S. Bulkeley

P. S. Here is a list of some books that I think you will find interesting. Some discuss the "liberty of conscience"/"religious liberty" issue directly, others apply to it indirectly.

Roger Williams and the Massachusetts Magistrates: Problems in American Civilization, edited by Theodore P. Greene, published by D. C. Heath and Company, Lexington, Massachusetts, in 1964.

The Idea of Fraternity in America, by Wilson Carey McWilliams, published by the University of California Press, Berkeley, California, in 1973.

The Puritan Dilemma: The Story of John Winthrop, by Edmund S. Morgan, published by Little, Brown and Company, Boston, in 1958.

Conceived in Liberty, Vol. 1, by Murray N. Rothbard, published by Arlington House Publishers, New Rochelle, N. Y., in 1975.

In Defense of the Faith: (Vol. 2), A Survey of Christian Epistemology, by Cornelius Van Till, published by the den Dulk Christian Foundation in 1969.

You will also be interested in the *Declaration of the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief*, issued by the United Nations in April of 1981 (15 United Nations Law Report). I noticed it in the *Religious Freedom Reporter* of December, 1981.

Article I

1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.
2. No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.
3. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

Article II

1. No one shall be subject to discrimination by any State, institution, group of persons or person on grounds of religion or other beliefs.
2. For the purpose of the Declaration, the expression "intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief" means any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on religion or belief and having as its purpose or as its effect nullification or impairment of the recognition, enjoyment or exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis.

Article III

Discrimination between human beings on grounds of religion or belief constitutes an affront to human dignity and a disavowal of the

principles of the Charter of the United Nations, and shall be condemned as a violation of the human rights and fundamental freedoms proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and enunciated in detail in the International Covenants relating to human rights, and as an obstacle to friendly and peaceful relations between nations.

Article IV

1. All States shall take effective measures to prevent and eliminate discrimination of the grounds or religion or belief in the recognition, exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms in all fields of civil, economic, political, social and cultural life.
2. All States shall make all efforts to enact or rescind legislation where necessary to prohibit any such discrimination, and to take all appropriate measures to combat intolerance on the grounds of religion or other beliefs in this matter.

Article V

1. The parents or as the case may be the legal guardians of the child have the right to organize the life within the family in accordance with their religion or belief and bearing in mind the moral education in which they believe the child should be brought up.
2. Every child shall enjoy the right to have access to education in the matter of religion or belief in accordance with the wishes of his parents or, as the case may be, legal guardians, and shall not be compelled to receive teaching on religion or belief against the wishes of his parents or legal guardians, the best interest of the child being their guiding principle.
3. The child shall be protected from any form of discrimination on the ground of religion or belief. He shall be brought up in a spirit of understanding, tolerance, friendship among peoples, peace and universal brotherhood, respect for freedom of religion or belief of others, and in full consciousness that his energy and talents should be devoted to the service of his fellow men.
4. In the case of a child who is not under the care either of his parents or of legal guardians, due account shall be taken of their expressed wishes or of any other proof of their wishes in the matter of religion or belief, the best interests of the child being the guiding principle.
5. The practices of a religion or beliefs in which a child is brought up must not be injurious to his physical or mental health or to his full development, taking into account Article I, paragraph 3.

Article VI

In accordance with Article I, and subject to the provisions of

paragraph 3 of Article I, the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief shall include, *inter alia*, the following freedoms:

(a) To worship or assemble in connection with a religion or belief, and to establish and maintain places for these purposes;

(b) To establish and maintain appropriate charitable or humanitarian institutions;

(c) To make, to acquire and to use to an adequate extent the necessary articles and materials related to the rites or customs of a religion or belief;

(d) To write, to publish and to disseminate relevant publications in these areas;

(e) To teach a religion or belief in places suitable for these purposes;

(f) To solicit and receive voluntary financial and other contributions from individuals and institutions;

(g) To train, to appoint, to elect or to designate by succession appropriate leaders called for by the requirements and standards of any religion or belief;

(h) To observe days of rest and to celebrate holidays and ceremonies in accordance with the precepts of one's religion or belief;

(i) To establish and maintain communications with individuals and communities in matters of religion and belief at the national and international levels.

Article VII

The rights and freedoms set forth in the Declaration shall be accorded in national legislation in such a manner that everyone shall be able to avail themselves of such rights and freedoms in practice.

A REFORMED VIEW OF FREEMASONRY

Everett C. De Velde, Jr.

MY first meaningful encounter with Freemasonry occurred during my ministry to a Presbyterian Church in Savannah, Georgia. One of the elders had been a 32nd degree Mason and one of the deacons was a leader of the "Blue Lodge." With several other leaders of the church being involved with Freemasonry, I undertook a study of the subject and after due course all who were so involved, demitted Masonry. These men supplied me with ample quantities of study materials and the local city library provided much more. While Freemasons certainly entertain "secrets," the doctrines of Freemasonry have been openly published and are readily available. It seems incredible that many men, who have given so much of their lives to Freemasonry, should know so little about it. In this essay I will attempt a brief overview of what I have come to know as Freemasonry.

* * * * *

The term "Freemason" is supposedly derived from King Solomon's use of Hiram's craftsmen. Hiram (or Hiram), then King of Tyre, did in fact supply craftsmen to work on the Temple in Jerusalem, but he received from Solomon "wheat, barley, oil and wine"¹ in return for his services. The term "Freemason," at the outset, is to some extent a misnomer.

The actual historical origins of Freemasonry relate to the fact that, unlike other craft guilds, masons had to travel from place to place to find work. In order to preserve distinctions of rank, and craft secrets, masons devised a set of secret signs so that one mason might recognize another as a true mason, and not as a pretender to the craft. In time, numbers of Renaissance freethinkers came to be


1. II Chronicles 2:15

attracted by these arcane signs, and became honorary masons. By the early 1700s there were large numbers of non-operative masons in England, and these organized into the lodges so familiar to Freemasonry today.

One defender of Freemasonry has written: "Freemasonry is a beautiful system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols. The design of the Masonic Institution is to make its members wiser, better and consequently happier; and this is accomplished by means of a series of moral instructions taught, according to ancient usage, by types, symbols, allegorical figures and lectures."²

From my own studies of Freemasonry, I perceive it to be Unitarian in theology, to profess a soteriology of humanism, to exhibit Muhammedanism particularly in the higher degrees (e.g. the Shrine), to be influenced by the Cabala³ in its handling of Biblical symbols, and to be antithetical to Biblical and Reformed Christianity. My estimation of Freemasonry has been well stated by Chief Justice John Marshall: "The institution of Masonry ought to be abandoned as one capable of much evil, and incapable of producing any good which might not be effected by safe and open means." The Masonic Shrine has indeed been philanthropic with hospitals to care for children. On the other hand one need not participate in asinine, murderous oaths and an evil, occult religious philosophy to be philanthropic.

Masonry is Unitarianism

The Masonic symbol  stands for GAOTU or Great Architect Of The Universe. The Mason recognizes this being as God. In order to embrace many religions such as Muhammedanism the GAOTU does not explicitly involve Jesus Christ. In the preface to the Masonic Bible⁴ entitled "The Bible in Masonry," the Reverend J. F. Newton writes ". . . [We] join hands with the man of Islam as he takes oath on the Koran, and with the Hindu as he makes covenant with God upon the book he knows best." And of Masonry he continues ". . . therefore it invites to its altar men of all faiths,

2. *Masonic Manual and Code of the Grand Lodge of Georgia*, Free and Accepted Masons, 8th ed., 1963.

3. An occult religious philosophy developed by certain Jewish Rabbis, based on a mystical interpretation of the Scriptures.

4. The Masonic Bible is an annotated King James Version, also known as the Temple Version.

knowing that if they use different names for the nameless one of a hundred names, they are yet praying to one God and Father of all, knowing also that while they read different volumes they are in fact reading the same vast book of faith of Man as revealed in the struggle and sorrow of the race in its quest for God. . . . We honor every book of faith. What Homer was to the Greeks, the Koran to the Arabs, the grand old Bible is to us." Thus is Masonry opposed to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, because it would limit Masonic adherents to one religion.

There is a strange view of God, however, given to the Mason who is preparing for the 19th degree. This is known as the "Royal Arch" degree. He, to this point, does not know the name of the GAOTU or God but over the "Arch" is written JEHBULON, an abbreviation for Jehovah Baal Osiris! And consider the following blasphemy. One of the Lodge Hymns sung to the tune "Come Thou Almighty King" has this first stanza:⁵

Hail, Masonry divine!
 Glory of ages shine,
 Long may'st thou reign!
 Where e'er thy Lodges stand,
 May they have great command,
 And always grace the land!
 Thou art divine.

Masonry Is Humanistic In Its Soteriology

The means of salvation consistently presented in Masonry is the performance of virtuous works. This is the stated meaning of the "Lambskin" or white leather Apron which is the emblem of innocence to the Mason when worthily worn. "By it we are reminded of that purity of life and conduct so essentially necessary to gaining admission to the Celestial Lodge above, where the Supreme Architect of the Universe presides."⁶ Likewise, the Common Gavel is said to teach Free and Accepted Masons "the more noble and glorious purpose of divesting our hearts and consciences of all the vices and superfluities of life, thereby fitting our minds as living stones for that spiritual building, that 'House not made with hands; eternal in the heavens.'"⁷

To maintain that people gain entrance to heaven by God's

5. *Masonic Manual and Code etc.*, p. 173.

6. *Ibid*, p. 141.

7. *Ibid*, p. 19.

sovereign conversion of sinners and imputation of the blood of Christ to them, would again limit the purview of Masonry to Christianity. Evangelical, certainly not Reformed, soteriology is nowhere found in Masonic dogma.

Harold J. Bolen writes: "Freemasonry believes it is more holy to live by reason than to live by faith, for reason is a bridge of understanding while faith is only a bridge of hope. Reason challenges our minds, while faith might give comfort without achievement. Our mind is like unto God's, and man has a God-given obligation to use it to the benefit of his fellow man and to God's glory."⁸ Can there be a more transparent humanism than this? Consider that the Word of God states to the contrary "The just shall live by faith" and "Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him."⁹

Masonry Exhibits Muhammedanism

Shriners are actually Masons who have completed the higher degrees of study. After the "Blue Lodge," the first three degrees, there are thirty higher degrees for a total of 33. Albert Pike, for example, was a 33rd degree Mason and as such was the supreme commander of the southern jurisdiction of Free and Accepted Masons just after the Civil War. It is his large volume that influences much of my perception of Freemasonry. He dwells at length on the Jewish Cabala and its application to Masonry. The Cabala, apparently, is the source of the occult leanings found in many Masonic concepts. The obverse of the United States Seal shows a pyramid with the "All-seeing Eye" at the top. This eye, one of the symbols of Masonry, is the eye of God, be he Allah, Osiris, Jehovah, etc. The Great Seal of the United States bears this occult symbol because of Masonic influence. It has been noted that the date (1776) on the base of the pyramid refers to the commencing of the "Illuminati" under Adam Wishupt.¹⁰ It is well known that the Illuminati

8. *A Revelation of the Royal Secret*, New Age Magazine. Bolen explains the meaning of several Masonic symbols in this essay. He attempts to show that the Zoroastrian god Ahura-Mazda, and the Hindu gods Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva, are really other names for the true God. Most of the Masonic writings I have read are of this genre.

9. Romans 1:17, Hebrews 11:6.

10. *Destruction of Freemasonry through Revelation of their Secrets*, General Eric Friedrich Wilhelm Ludendorff, 1927, Munich, Germany. English translation by J. Elisabeth Koester, P. O. Box 280, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48107. Ludendorff also identifies the

infiltrated Freemasonry especially on the European continent. George Washington, a 32nd degree Mason and Master of the Alexandria Lodge, warned of this infiltration. All this should certainly raise questions for the Christian, concerning Masonry.

The Islamic flavor of the Shrine is obvious. The Shriners' places of meeting are called temples and are given Islamic names. The Masonic or Shriners temple in Chicago is called Medinah, and in Savannah is known as Alea ("my God" in arabic). The Masonic temple in Ft. Myers, Florida, is constructed to look like a Muhammedan Mosque complete with minarets! The Shriners wear the Islamic Fez (hat) and wear Islamic earrings. All of this is quite in keeping with the theology of Masonry, which openly panders to Muhammedanism.

Masonry is Antithetical to Christianity

Freemasonry is in fact a complex organization with several "rites" and ancillary organizations. The two rites with which I am familiar are the Scottish and the York. At the apex of the York Rite is a select group known as the Knights Templar and I have previously made reference to the Shriners. It is this latter that in my opinion is the most evil branch of Masonry. The Knights Templar present, perhaps, the best image of Masonry. In addition to these there are dozens of Masonic "Colleges" and Councils such as The Council of the Nine Muses, The Grand College of Rites, or The Societies Rosicruciana In Civitatibus Foederatis, etc. There are also Masonic organizations for the ladies and young people, such as Eastern Star. However "Christian" some of the Masons may appear to be, there is yet a great polyglot embracing of all forms of religion, cult, and occult. Then, too, many great men have been Masons such as George Washington, and Warren G. Harding, a Knight Templar. My point here is this: The great thrust of Masonry does not establish the Kingdom of Christ; it is in fact hostile to Christ. The Scottish Rite Creed states, for example, "The cause of human

Jewish secret order B'nai B'rith, as Masonic. He seeks to show that B'nai B'rith as a part of Freemasonry and a Zionist organization, is concerned with world revolution. Another source for this material is the B'nai B'rith Magazine, September, 1940. In addition, Albert Pike signed a treaty in 1874 stating "The supreme Dogmatic Directory of Universal Freemasonry recognizes the Jewish Lodges, such as they already exist in the principal countries. He further establishes by this treaty, the B'nai B'rith headquarters in Hamburg Germany known as the Sovereign Patriarchal Council of Hamburg."

progress is our cause, the enfranchisement of human thought our supreme wish, the freedom of human conscience our mission, and the guarantee of equal rights to all peoples everywhere, the end of our contention."¹¹ The Scottish Rite also re-affirms its desire to refrain from criticizing any faith or religion, yet making on the other hand profound statements of religious dogma that would embrace all religions into a kind of Theosophy. This is the teaching of humanism.

The mission of Christians is not merely the promotion of human progress, and compassion for others is certainly a Christian virtue, but true human progress is impossible apart from Christ and His Kingdom. The one who makes the precepts and counsels of the True and Living God his way of life is the only one who will prosper in the end. All other efforts to promote human progress are the way of the wicked, the counsel of the ungodly or the seat of scoffers. They are but chaff!

Many godly people have studied Freemasonry and have come to the opinion that I present herein. A few examples are the Missouri Synod Lutheran Church,¹² the Christian Reformed Church, and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Should this not raise serious questions about the nature of Freemasonry? How can a Mason take oaths that cannot be performed without breaking God's law?¹³ Is this not sin in itself?

I plead with our Christian men to spend their substance and energies on programs and organizations that really serve to glorify Christ and establish His Kingdom. Let us dominate this world for Christ as good soldiers. Let us not waste ourselves on a hodge-podge of well-meaning but ineffective humanism.

Appendix: An Example of a Freemason Oath

According to Theodore Graebner's *A Treatise on Freemasonry* (pp. 22, 23), the first oath taken by an Entered Apprentice Mason is: "I, _____, of my own free will and accord, in the presence of Almighty God and his Worshipful Lodge, erected to Him and dedicated to the Holy Saint John, do hereby and hereon most solemnly and sincerely promise and swear that I will always hail,

11. *The New Age*, vol. LXXVI, No. 10, October 1968 (A publication by the Scottish Rite).

12. *Masonry in the Light of the Bible*, Concordia Publishing House, Saint Louis, Missouri, 1964.

13. See Appendix.

ever conceal, and never reveal any of the secret arts, parts, or points of the hidden mysteries of Ancient Freemasonry, which have been heretofore, may at this time, or shall at any time in any future period be communicated to me as such, to any person or persons whomsoever, except it be to a true and lawful brother Mason, or within a regularly constituted Lodge of Masons, and neither unto him nor them, until by strict trial, due examination, or legal information I shall have found him or them as lawfully entitled to the same as I am myself.

"I furthermore promise and swear that I will not write, print, paint, stamp, stain, cut, carve, make, nor engrave them, nor cause the same to be done upon anything movable or immovable, capable of receiving the last impression of a word, syllable, letter, or character, whereby the same may become legible or intelligible to any person under the canopy of heaven, and the secrets of Freemasonry be thereby unlawfully obtained through my unworthiness.

"To all of this I most solemnly and sincerely promise and swear, with a firm and steadfast resolution to keep and perform the same without any equivocation, mental reservation, or secret evasion of mind whatever, binding myself under no less a penalty than that of having my throat cut across, my tongue torn out by its roots and buried in the rough sands of the sea at low water mark, where the tide ebbs and flows twice in twenty four hours, should I ever knowingly or willingly violate this my solemn oath or obligation as an Entered Apprentice Mason. So help me God, and keep me steadfast in the due performance of the same."

Similarly the second degree obligation has the following penalty: "Binding myself under no less penalty than that of having my left breast torn open, my heart plucked out, and given as a prey to the wild beasts of the field and the fowls of the air . . ."; and the third degree oath contains: "Binding myself under no less a penalty than that of having my body severed in twain, my bowels taken from thence and burned to ashes, the ashes scattered to the four winds of heaven, so that no more trace of remembrance may be had of so vile and perjured a wretch as I, . . ."

These oaths are a direct breaking of the third commandment. They take God's name in vain by connecting His Holy Name with murder.

REVIEWS OF BOOKS

W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1979 (hardcover), 1981 (paperback). xvi + 302 pages. Paperback GB-653, \$5.95. Reviewed by James Michael Peters.

A quantitative approach to writing history is a relatively recent innovation in the craft and William J. Rorabaugh's lively and readable *Alcoholic Republic* is a fine example of the clarity that can be brought to an historical subject by the proper use of such a tool. In an analysis of American drinking patterns between 1790 and 1840, Rorabaugh brings a significant amount of concreteness to the social circumstances surrounding the emergence of the temperance organizations of that period; organizations that, according to Rorabaugh, quickly solidified into the Protestant institutions that came to dominate much of the social reform throughout the 19th century.

Post-Revolutionary Spirits

The America that is described for us in *The Alcoholic Republic*, is not the America that a reader living in the late 20th century is familiar with, and it takes a considerable mental effort to think in such terms. Rorabaugh is quick to point out that America at this time was physically primitive and economically agrarian. Manufacturing was something America's leadership spoke of in terms of a future destiny. Overland transportation systems were almost non-existent and the American frontier in 1800 began at the Appalachian mountain range. The people who lived, or we might say struggled, to the west of this natural barrier were for all practical purposes independent of the developing federalism to the east of it. Any significant control that the new government might have over the lives of its citizens effectively stopped at the Appalachians.

Within the context of this primitive setting, the distilling of alcohol, or spirits as they called it then, became the manufacturing base of America's struggling economy. Rorabaugh points out that the logic of such a move was irresistible and the production of spirits almost singlehandedly moved

the United States toward an industrial economy. At that time America was completely dependent upon Europe for its manufactured goods. Always short of money, and with an ever increasing surplus of highly perishable agricultural produce, American entrepreneurs turned to alcohol. Easily stored and transported, it got better with age. Rum, whisky, fruit brandy, and hard cider became America's negotiable replacement for hard cash.

According to *The Alcoholic Republic*, there was also an ideological spirit upon the land that blended well with liquor during this time. It was the spirit of independence and the expectation of national glory, both of which put great social pressure on the traditionally agrarian culture. At the turn of the century whisky was almost unknown in the States, but within 25 years it was king of the spirits and seemed to symbolize the American style of vitality and ingenuity. Produced in the west and consumed throughout the ready-made markets in the east, whisky was the all American drink that "achieved the status of a cult" (p. 91). Rorabaugh goes on to say, "The worship of whisky as a national drink, can be viewed as an expression of national aspirations for distinction and greatness. The whisky binge was not only an episode of euphoric intemperance; it was also a celebration of a waning reliance upon such foreign products as rum. Whiskey was truly the spirits of independence" (p. 92).

Drinking for Effect

Rorabaugh's quantitative data indicates that from 1820 to 1836 Americans drank 4.7 gallons of distilled alcohol per capita, every year. The consumption of hard liquor during this period was significantly greater than at any other time in American history. The essential reasons given for such a prolonged binge are the most interestingly interpretive aspect of *The Alcoholic Republic*. Prior to the advent of the medical research of doctors Thomas Cadwalader and Benjamin Rush in the late 18th century, it was commonly held that spirits (no distinction was made among liquor, wine, and beer) were healthful to the body. The daily dram was part of life, and it was not uncommon for many medicines during this period to be predominantly alcoholic.

Along with the regular consumption of liquor at home, Rorabaugh points out that the "communal binge and the solo binge" were the other common drinking patterns of the time, and that between 1825 and 1835 drinking at home declined while communal and solo drinking rose significantly. Rorabaugh is here talking about drinking to the point of drunkenness. As one popular recipe for a punch called Royal Nectar claimed, "half a dozen tumblers of this legitimate liquor will put a gentleman in high spirits, and

make him 'ripe for sport of any sort' " (p. 250). "Sport of any sort" was often of a very serious nature, and lest a modern reader not think so, Rorabaugh includes many anecdotes, some of which are quite startling. An example comes from reminiscences of Henry S. Foote, a contemporary of the communal drinking fad of the time:

It was expected that a man attending a Southern barbeque would follow the barbeque law, which required that everyone drink to intoxication. The only excuse for refusing a round was passing out. To refuse to imbibe gave serious offense, suggesting a lack of respect and friendship. It was sometimes dangerous. A gang of lusty Kentuckians, angry with an obstinate comrade is reputed to have roasted him to death. (p. 151)

By 1830, America's preoccupation with strong drink had become something of a national spectacle. It was even a popular topic among European travelers.

Rorabaugh considers many factors which helped cause such a social abuse of alcohol during this particular period, but believes that anxiety and institutional instability were the underlying causes. These created a sense of apprehension and powerlessness among American men, who had been largely responsible for attaining the revolutionary ideals of the previous generation—liberty, equality, and national prosperity. According to Rorabaugh, American society was changing so fast that the institutions and organizations which usually provide people with a sense of indirect power and security did not exist. To a large extent Rorabaugh is dealing with the emergence of relatively new social classes that America had not experienced before. Many of these people were rootless laborers helping to build the new commercial and industrial society. In any case, the American drinking pattern had progressed to the solitary drinker, and although some men drank to forget their boredom like the landed gentry of the South, while other men drank to forget their labors, all of them drank to assuage their sense of powerlessness to change their condition.

A New Institution

The answer for most Americans facing rapid dislocation and a society that was determined to drown itself in alcohol was the temperance movement—organized abstinence. If inebriation provided anxiety-stricken men with a temporary illusion of power, how much more appealing would an organization with the ability to reform social conditions be? According to Rorabaugh, herein was the real persuasive power of the temperance organizations. Less concerned with the theological beliefs of such groups, he focuses our attention on their techniques of persuasion and social reform. The temperance reformers successfully identified alcohol as the tool of the

devil, and abstinence as an indication of personal salvation and national renewal. To be temperate was not only to be holy but also to be productive. It seems that in final analysis the war against alcohol was a means to a larger end, and as this problem was overcome the organizations moved on to new reform issues such as slavery. Rorabaugh believes that there was an ideological continuity here that precariously balanced Protestant revivalism with entrepreneurial capitalism, both of which were curiously antinomian in character. Revivalists tended to suppress doctrine to gain converts and entrepreneurs tended to suppress ethical standards to gain profit. Although Rorabaugh does not make the connection, we may make it for him: This was Christian reform without Christian law. It was a continuation of Christian social reform movements, but without a foundation in Christian theology and Biblical law. It satisfied (temporarily) men's religious needs for meaning and security, without actually converting them. The consequences of this can be seen in the many religious aberrations and economic abuses throughout the 19th century.

Quantitative History

The Alcoholic Republic by W. J. Rorabaugh is a special kind of historical study made possible by the aid of computer science and long hours of evaluating data bases and interpreting statistical readouts. Since most readers of history have little expertise in this area, including the present reviewer, one is glad most of this information was abbreviated and placed in an appendix. In addition, Rorabaugh's work is an analysis of the dynamic of alcohol production and consumption in a given time frame, and since history moves by a plurality of dynamics, Rorabaugh's interpretation often moves beyond the information present in the book. This, however, is only a minor flaw, and the author himself cautions us about this very problem. If a reader is interested in this period of transition in American history, he might also read *Revivalism and Social Reform; American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* by Timothy L. Smith, in conjunction with Rorabaugh's work, in order to gain a greater sense of the continuity of events.

Kenneth Ronald Davis, *Anabaptism and Asceticism: A Study in Intellectual Origins* (Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History, XVI). Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1974. 365 pp. \$12.95. Reviewed by Ray R. Sutton.

In an introduction to this book, J. C. Wegner writes, "The editors are happy to include this creative study in their series, and anticipate that its support of Ritschl (Anabaptism's similarity to the Franciscan Tertiaries) will

evoke lively debate" (p. 10). Indeed, anyone interested in Anabaptist/Baptist theology will find Davis's conclusions thought-provoking. As Wegner noted, the point of interest stems from the source of Davis's thesis: Albrecht Ritschl, a nineteenth century German theologian who linked Anabaptistic movements of the sixteenth century to the Franciscan monastic movement of the twelfth. Ritschl perceived Anabaptism as flowing out of the Roman Catholic Church. This goes contrary to the view, popular in many Baptist circles, which sees Baptist religion as the true expression of Christianity, existing in oppression in small sects and groups down through the centuries, until the Reformation. Moreover, the Ritschl thesis holds that Anabaptism, in its early phases at least, was Medieval in theology, and not Protestant.

The subtitle of the book, *A Study in Intellectual Origins*, makes it clear that Davis intends to examine the Anabaptist movement from an ideological point of view, and this is the most important feature of the book. Davis states, in his introduction, "Any historian investigating the transfer of ideas from medieval predecessors to Anabaptism faces a serious problem with the sources. Due to their persecution, even the Anabaptist leaders had little time to write in depth; sermons were rarely written at all, and even their brief polemical pamphlets were published only with the greatest of difficulty. . . . They tended in their writings to avoid references to either influential historical antecedents or to contemporary influences. . . . But one must not assume that there were none; rather, the task of discerning requires a *broader approach*. For example, one must ask not only what books their leaders read and with whom they associated in formative years, but also what patterns or *presuppositions* seem to affect their interpretations of Scripture and what mental, emotional, and spiritual preconditioning is expressed in their theological affirmations, religious life-style, and condemnations of their opponents" (p. 33, emphasis added).

Davis's analysis leads him to connect Anabaptism with the ascetic movements within the Medieval Roman Church. In the second chapter, he develops what he calls the "Christian ascetic tradition" from the early desert monks to the *Devotio Moderna* movement in the fifteenth century. Asceticism is seen as the separation of oneself from the world and anything associated with it, by a process of self-denial. In the third chapter, Davis demonstrates the influence of the ascetic heritage on the early Anabaptists, looking at several aspects of the Anabaptist movement: their leadership, ex-monks who became Anabaptists, Anabaptist preaching, and the polemics between the Anabaptists and the magisterial Reformers. Calvin, for instance, referred to the Anabaptists as monks (p. 127). These two chapters make the relevant historical connections.

The fourth chapter concentrates on theological connections, and here

the differences between the Anabaptists and the Protestant Reformers stand out more clearly. For centuries, two movements had fought each other within the Catholic Church: Pelagianism and Augustinianism. While Augustinianism had been influential in the early Medieval period, the rise of semi-Pelagianism from the Synod of Orange (529 A.D.) eventually resulted in the suppression of Augustinianism, and the persecution of such men as Gottschalk and Berengarius. The Reformers were Augustinian, while the Anabaptists held to the same view as Rome, and were Pelagian.

Moreover, the Protestant Reformers wanted to reform the state as well as the Church, and held that the civil magistrate had an important role to play in reform; as a result, the Protestants are sometimes called the "magisterial Reformers." The Anabaptists, on the other hand, because of their ascetic view of holiness, subjective in emphasis, opposed by and large the reform of the state.

In this fourth chapter, Davis relies heavily on three works, whose titles indicate their concern with ascetic theology: Ethelbert Stauffer's *Theology of Martyrdom*, Harold Bender's *Theology of Discipleship*, and Robert Friedmann's *Doctrine of the Two Worlds*. In describing what he calls an *ascetic theology of holiness*, Davis writes that its essentials are these: "First, there must be a conviction that the development and attainment of actual sanctity, of Christlikeness in inner spirit and outer conduct in the individual Christian disciple, is both a possibility and at the same time the supreme objective of the redemptive purposes of God. Second, every person hoping for salvation is required to actively pursue and, in some measure, attain in this life some similitude of this otherworldly perfection—based on Christ's words: 'Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.' Third, if the ideal of the pursuit of holiness is to become a full theology of holiness, it must be demonstrably the determinative interpretive principle for understanding and expressing all other aspects of Christian doctrine and practice" (p. 130).

The fifth and final chapter concerns the *agencies* which transferred ascetic theology to the Anabaptists: the *Devotio Moderna*, and Erasmianism. The *Devotio Moderna* was a sort of Medieval Salvation Army. As a movement it displayed a "reforming brand of medieval piety" in the following: (1) establishing "brother houses," or "cloisters" for the more spiritually minded as retreats from the world, which differed from the Franciscans in that lay person were involved; (2) because talent was limited, restricting their activities to work as chaplains, spiritual advisors, and promoters of pious literature; (3) creating student hostels to minister to students; and (4) for the remainder, the erection of a few schools and the publication of literature. Through these efforts they became a most influential movement, for they laicized Franciscanism, and transmitted it to the Anabaptists.

The *institutional* relationship between the *Devotio Moderna* and Franciscanism is revealed through Franciscan dependence on their schools for prospective priests and nuns. Erasmus pointed out that Franciscan and Dominican friars heavily recruited students from the Brethren of the Common Life, a group which was part of the *Devotio Moderna*. The *ideological* connection between the two groups, Davis holds, can be seen in that both groups emphasized the salvation of souls by means of separatistic holiness, the partial fall of man in Eden with a concomitant emphasis on man's free will, universal atonement, and preparational repentance or contrition before confession. These teachings, combined with the institutional means to disseminate them, captured students when they were young; in fact, many of the Protestant Reformers had been educated, in part at least, via the *Devotio Moderna*.

One student who became the pivotal connection between the *Devotio* and Anabaptism was Erasmus of Rotterdam. According to Davis, Erasmus received early schooling from the Brethren of the Common Life, and maintained association with them at the Windesheim Reformed Monastery at Steyn. Moreover, his writings, such as *De Contemptu Mundi*, *Enchiridion*, and *Philosophy of Christ*, demonstrate the influence of the writings of Brethren authors, such as Thomas á Kempis's *Imitation of Christ*. Erasmus was close to Conrad Grebel and was so influential with various leading Anabaptists that he himself was called an Anabaptist (p. 277). Erasmus, thus, was a major link between Franciscan ideals and practices, and Anabaptism. Davis does not mention it, but of course another affinity between Erasmus and the Anabaptists was their mutual espousal of a semi-Pelagian view of grace.

Davis, in fact, goes to considerable lengths in attempting to dissociate Pelagianism from Anabaptism. Here, in the opinion of this reviewer, lies the only pronounced weakness of the book. First of all, Davis, like many Arminian authors, attempts to grant the Pelagian premises of a limited fall and free will, yet reject the autosoteristic consequences of this line of reasoning. "In contrast to Luther, they (Anabaptists) also insist on the retention of some initial freedom of choice. This freedom is limited to be sure. While it is sufficient to make each man responsible for his destiny, to make him eligible for further grace and greater freedom, or for damnation, yet it is totally without capacity, power, or knowledge to achieve anything, redemptively, unaided by special grace" (p. 146f.). Jesus, however, said, "No one can [is able to] come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him" (John 6:44). Nor are all men given equal opportunities to be saved: "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had been performed in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes" (Luke 10:13). We want to know, then, why God chose not to do such miracles in Tyre and Sidon, and save them. Only

the Augustinian has an answer for this: God chooses to draw only some men to Himself, and they alone have ability to come; yet God holds all men responsible. For the Pelagian, however, responsibility is limited by ability. Another element of Pelagianism is seen in the notion, expressed in Davis's statement above, that men are "totally without capacity . . . to achieve anything, redemptively, *unaided* by special grace." Implicit in this phraseology is synergism, the heresy that man cooperates with God in saving himself. God does so much, but man must meet God half-way and complete God's work. Thus, Davis's attempt to dissociate Anabaptism from the heresy of Pelagianism simply serves to implicate him in the same error.

A second aspect of Pelagianism, generally considered, is perfectionism. Zwingli was one of the first to charge the Anabaptists with perfectionism, but he was not the last, for the charge has been repeated throughout the history of Anabaptism. Once again, Davis's attempt to clear "pure" Anabaptism from this charge only convinces the reader that in fact the Anabaptists really did believe in perfection, potential and actual. "Evangelical Anabaptists conceived of the goal of holiness, or godliness, as a limited kind of 'divinization' (participation in the divine nature) of man by a restoration through a regenerative and healing process in conjunction with one's conscious, voluntary emulation of Christ" (p. 137). Davis sees this as incorporation into Christ's humanity, not implying actual divinization, so that "the awareness of one's creatureliness, of an eternal 'distinctiveness of being' from ultimate Deity, is never lost" (p. 137). We may ask, however, whether Davis is perhaps reading orthodox Calvinism back into Anabaptist thought at this point. Whatever the confusion among the Anabaptists at this point, it is clear that the line between creature and Creator was not fully maintained even by the more evangelical wing of Anabaptism, and wherever that line is obscured, Pelagianism results, and with it perfectionism. A defective view of depravity always leads to personal or social utopianism (cf. B. B. Warfield, *Perfectionism* [Presbyterian and Reformed], pp. 3, 63.). Augustinianism, however, follows Scripture in holding that indwelling sin remains until man receives the glorified body (Rom. 7:7-25; 8:30).

A third line of criticism here is that Davis fails to speak to the connection between Franciscanism and Pelagianism. Davis's greatest strength, and the real contribution of his book, is his drawing of theological connections among the Anabaptists and their predecessors. This reviewer, however, believes that Davis fails to make several important connections, important from a Reformed point of view at least. For example, in common with all Anabaptist historians this reviewer is familiar with, Davis wants to speak of pure Anabaptism as *essentially* different from certain extreme or aberrant forms of it. German mystics and Muntzer fanatics are two of the groups which Davis tries to sever from Anabaptism as a whole. Theologically, how-

ever, their systems are not that much different. However much they may have differed over peripheral issues, all Anabaptistic groups rejected objective justification in favor of salvation through subjective transformations wrought by the power of the individual. Anabaptism, in all its various manifestations, is always subjective theology.

Coming then to the relation between Franciscanism and Pelagianism, connections should be made. As Davis aptly points out, historical links may be missing, but the theological ones are more important. Both the Anabaptists and the Franciscans were Pelagian movements, and this is one of the most important connections between the two. Since, however, Davis does not approach the question from a Reformed point of view, this is obscured from him.

In spite of these shortcomings, *Anabaptism and Asceticism* is a book of tremendous importance, and probably the most helpful study of Anabaptism in recent years. It should serve the purpose of making present day Baptists more self-conscious of the implicit premises of their theology.