

CHRISTIANITY AND SOCIETY

THE BIENNIAL JOURNAL OF THE KUYPER FOUNDATION

VOL. XVII, No. 1

SUMMER 2007

THE GRAMMAR OF THE GREAT COMMISSION AND ITS ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS

Greek	<i>πορευθέντες</i>	<i>οὖν</i>	<i>μαθητεύσατε</i>	<i>πάντα τὰ ἔθνη</i>
	nom. pl. masc. part. aor. of <i>πορεύομαι</i>		2nd pers. pl. aor. act. imper. of <i>μαθητεύω</i>	acc. neuter pl. case of direct object

Lit.	Going	therefore	disciple	all the nations
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AV	Go ye	therefore	and teach	all nations
RV	Go ye	therefore	and make disciples of	all the nations
NASB	Go	therefore	and make disciples of	all the nations
RSV	Go	therefore	and make disciples of	all nations
NKJ	Go	therefore	and make disciples of	all the nations
NIV	Therefore go		and make disciples of	all nations
JBP	You, then, are to go		and make disciples of	all the nations

Christianity & Society is published biannually in Summer and Winter by the KUYPER FOUNDATION, a Christian charitable trust founded in 1987 to promote a renaissance of Christian culture in society by furthering awareness of the implications of the Christian faith for every sphere of life, including the Church, family and State. Its vision of Christian society was expressed in the words of Abraham Kuyper, the Dutch Christian theologian and statesman, who said: "One desire has been the ruling passion of my life. One high motive has acted like a spur upon my mind and soul. And sooner than that I should seek escape from the sacred necessity that is laid upon me, let the breath of life fail me. It is this: that in spite of all worldly opposition, God's holy ordinances shall be established again in the home, in the school and in the State for the good of the people; to carve as it were into the conscience of the nation the ordinances of the Lord, to which Bible and Creation bear witness, until the nation pays homage again to him." The Foundation seeks to promote this vision of Christian society by publishing literature, distributing audio-visual materials, and running lecture courses and conferences.

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SUMMER, 2007

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Advertisements are accepted at the discretion of the editors. All manuscripts should be sent to the editorial office in England. Correspondence should be sent to the editorial office in England or by e-mail to: cands@kuyper.org. *Christianity & Society* is published biannually by The Kuyper Foundation, a registered charity in England.

Designed and typeset by Avant Books, P. O. Box 2, Taunton, Somerset, TA1 4ZD, England.

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EDITORIAL

THIS issue of *Christianity & Society* marks a significant change in our method of publication and distribution. Starting with this issue the journal will no longer be commercially printed and distributed by post. The only way to receive *Christianity & Society* will be by downloading it as a PDF file from our web site. For our rationale for this change please see the Editorial for Vol. XVI, No. 2, which is available as an html file on the “What’s New” page of the web site. There is no longer any subscription charge for the journal (though we do ask for donations from readers to help keep the work going).

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This issue of *Christianity & Society* also marks a new beginning for the work of the Kuyper Foundation. From now on more of our resources will be directed to making our message available in other formats. This will include provision of MP3 files on the web site, multimedia projects and eventually production of films in DVD and on-line formats. This does not exclude publishing altogether, as we still hope to publish books from time to time, but other formats, which have until recently been financially prohibitive, are now more within reach of our means. However, we still need to maintain our present income and indeed increase it if we are to accomplish our aims of presenting the message in these other formats. We ask our supporters, therefore, to continue supporting us financially and to introduce our work to others as much as they are able.—SCP

THE EMERGING RIGHT TO RESIST: THEODORE BEZA’S CONTRIBUTION TO HUGUENOT POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

by *Brian Douglas*¹

THEODORE DE BEZE, or Theodore Beza as he is usually known, is most often remembered as the right hand of John Calvin during the Genevan Reformation and as Calvin’s successor upon his death. It would be a mistake, however, to understand Beza as simply carrying Calvin’s torch without making a significant contribution of his own. Rather, Beza was a skilled theologian, poet, linguist and biographer in his own right, but perhaps his most lasting influence was on Protestant political philosophy.

Church historian Philip Schaff wrote: “The history of the Swiss Reformation would not be complete without an account of Calvin’s faithful friend and successor, Theodore

Beza, who carried on his work in Geneva and France to the beginning of the seventeenth century.”² Schaff rightly divided the geography of Beza’s work, for although he laboured with Calvin in Geneva, he had an equal impact on his native land of France. Whereas his influence upon Geneva was primarily theological, his labours in France were of a more political nature.

This article will outline Beza’s political thought by examining his most important political writing, *Concerning the Rights of Rulers Over Their Subjects and the Duty of Subjects Towards Their Rulers*, and underscore his key role in expanding the right of citizens to resist tyranny within the Protestant political philosophical tradition.

1. Brian Douglas is a DPhil candidate in intellectual history at the University of Sussex, Brighton, England, where he lives with his wife and son.

2. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1996), Vol. 8, p. 846.

Beza's Life and the Huguenot Situation

Beza was born in Vézelay, Burgundy, on June 24, 1519, the seventh child in a family of lesser nobility. His mother died just before his third birthday, but by that time Theodore was already living with his uncle Nicholas, an accomplished lawyer in Paris. From the youngest age he displayed an aptitude for learning. When Theodore was nine years old, his uncle arranged for him to study with Melchior Wolmar, a scholar and humanist of immense reputation who sympathized with the emerging Protestant Reformation. Beza excelled under Wolmar's tutelage, living with him until 1534, when Wolmar left France to join the Lutheran movement in Germany.

At his father's request, Beza then studied law at the University of Paris, graduating with high marks in 1539. He had little interest in law, however, only starting a practice in order to enable himself to pursue his new-found passion: literature. His free time was spent reading and writing; his principal interest was classical poetry.

The events of the year 1548 were the great turning point in Beza's life. He had previously pursued his own interests and largely ignored the rapidly changing and increasingly violent climate of Reformation Europe. His name as an intellectual already established, the publication of his *Juvenilia* in early 1548 made him foremost among the Latin poets of his day. Just as it seemed his career was on the rise, Beza fell deathly ill. His sickness caused him to rethink his life, and at last the Reformation teachings in which Wolmar had instructed him years before began to change his thinking. As soon as he was over his illness, Beza set out for the place he could most rapidly learn and readily work: Geneva.

In October 1548, Beza was welcomed to Geneva by fellow Wolmar alumnus John Calvin. At first, Beza was employed in a print shop, but soon proved that his academic training made him an exceptional exegete of Scripture. In 1549, he accepted a position as professor of Greek at Lausanne. It was during his tenure there that he became increasingly concerned about the growing religious strife in France.

By 1558, Beza had returned to Geneva to be the first rector of the new academy there. He was a leader in the Church of Geneva until his death, serving at various times as professor in the academy, a pastor in the Church of Geneva, and moderator of its company of pastors.

In the history of the Reformation in Geneva and its effect on the Western world, the life and writings of Beza are second only to Calvin in prominence. Although other Reformers wrote more than Beza, none wrote as widely: he published Latin poems, Greek and French grammars, dramas, satires, biographies, polemical and theological treatises, a French Psalter, and annotated Greek and Latin New Testaments. But Beza's work of perhaps most enduring influence was his political writing concerning the Huguenot situation in France.

Frederick Copleston rightly assesses the political task of the Reformers as twofold: defining the proper relationship between Church and State and defending the right of resistance against usurpers and tyrants.³ While the political struggles within Geneva were more concerned with the former task, the latter was the more pressing need of the French Protestants, known as the Huguenots.

The Huguenots suffered through severe oppression under kings Francis I (1515–1547) and Henry II (1547–1559); but that would turn out to be only a foretaste of the cruelty to come. When ten-year-old Charles IX (1559–1574) came to the throne, his mother, Catherine de Medici, ruled as his regent. The real power in France at that time, however, was wielded by the aristocratic Guise family, who were violently anti-Protestant.

Catherine called the Colloquy of Poissy in July, 1561, in an attempt to establish her political power by unifying Catholics and Protestants, and the Huguenots begged the eloquent Beza to lead their delegation. He reluctantly went, but the Colloquy was a bitter failure. From the first, the Catholics were in control. The Huguenots were not given seats. Only after Catherine's intervention were they allowed to speak, but even then they were interrupted and harassed. After Poissy, the Guise-led Catholic majority applied increasing social, political, and military pressure on the Protestants.

Despite Catherine's attempts to stave the conflict by issuing the Edict of Toleration in January, 1562, the Wars of Religion exploded across France that March after the army of the Duke of Guise slaughtered Protestants worshipping in a barn near Vassy. Intermittent conflict would mar the nation until the Edict of Nantes in 1598. Beza traveled with the Protestant armies during several campaigns, never as a soldier, but as a counsellor to the Huguenot leaders. When not in France, he kept in regular contact with those leaders, providing advice and support.

The most notorious incident during the Wars of Religion occurred on St. Bartholomew's Day, August 23, 1572, when a nationwide attack orchestrated by Catherine and the Duke of Guise led to the deaths of more than twenty thousand Protestants.⁴ Before the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, the prevalent Huguenot political philosophy had been largely one of toleration and reconciliation, but the massacre caused Protestants across Europe to rethink their position.

No one was more deeply moved by the massacre than Beza. In Geneva he discussed its implications with friends and fellow Frenchmen. The writings produced in Geneva after the massacre would be formative of Huguenot political theory and later Western political thought as a whole.

Calvin's Influence

Although he had died eight years before the massacre, John Calvin's political views shaped Geneva's response to it. From the beginning of his public life Calvin displayed a deep concern for political issues. He became a powerful force in the politics of Geneva, regularly communicated with political leaders across Europe, and dedicated many of his writings to political figures. His famous *Institutes of the Christian Religion* was originally written as a political tract, an apology for French Protestantism to Francis I. Calvin concluded the *Institutes* with a chapter on civil government and closed that chapter with a discussion of the doctrine of interposition, the right of lower magistrates to resist tyrants and usurpers:

3. Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, Vol. III, *Ockham to Suárez* (New York: Doubleday, 1953), p. 313.

4. N.R. Needham, *2000 Years of Christ's Power, Part Three: Renaissance and Reformation* (London: Grace Publications, 2004), p. 347.

For if there are now any magistrates of the people, appointed to restrain the willfulness of kings . . . I am so far from forbidding them to withstand, in accordance with their duty, the fierce licentiousness of kings, that, if they wink at kings who violently fall upon and assault the lowly common folk, I declare that their dissimulation involves nefarious perfidy, because they dishonestly betray the freedom of the people, of which they know that they have been appointed protectors by God's ordinance.⁵

Calvin added a key clause to the final edition of the *Institutes*:

But in that obedience which we have shown to be due the authority of rulers, we are always to make this exception, indeed, to observe it as primary, that such obedience is never to lead us away from obedience to him, to whose will the desires of all kings ought to be subject, to whose decrees all their commands ought to yield, to whose majesty their scepters ought to be submitted . . . And here let us not be concerned about all that dignity which the magistrates possess; for no harm is done to it when it is humbled before that singular and truly supreme power of God. On this consideration, Daniel denies that he has committed any offense against the king when he has not obeyed his impious edict . . . For the king had *exceeded his limits*, and had not only been a wrongdoer against men, but, in lifting up his horns against God, had himself *abrogated his power*.⁶

In this passage, together with parts of his commentaries on Daniel and Acts, Calvin expanded the right of resistance to private citizens. When rulers exceed their limits and thus abrogate their power, they are nothing more than ordinary men, and therefore "we are not violating the authority of the king where our religion compels us to resist tyrannical edicts which forbid us to give Christ and God the honor and worship which is their due."⁷ With these assertions, Calvin laid the foundation for subsequent Genevan political philosophy.

The Emergence of a Huguenot Resistance Theory

The first Genevan response to the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre was *Francogallia*, published in 1573, by François Hotman, who barely escaped the slaughter in Paris before fleeing to Geneva. He taught law in Geneva and Basel until his death in 1590. He never returned to France, but he kept in close contact with the leaders of the Huguenot movement and regularly wrote and undertook diplomatic missions at their request.

Francogallia was a Renaissance humanist re-examination of the historical documents that functioned as the basis of the French legal system. According to Hotman's research, these documents demonstrated that the king's political authority was derived from the people and not intrinsic to his office. It was the Estates, a parliament of various nobles, who had in times past acted as representatives of the people and installed kings. At his coronation each king swore an oath to protect the people and uphold the laws of France. If the king violated that oath, Hotman concluded, the Estates, acting on behalf of the people, could remove him from office.⁸

In 1574, Beza contributed Geneva's second response to the massacre with his *Concerning the Rights of Rulers Over Their Subjects and the Duty of Subjects Towards Their Rulers*, a "systematic transformation of Hotman's reflections on the ancient constitution into a general constitutionist doctrine of state."⁹ Beza expanded upon Hotman's reasoning by adding Roman law and the Scriptures to the argument. Because *Francogallia* was more historical than polemical, *Rights of Rulers* has been called "the first major statement of Huguenot resistance doctrine"¹⁰ and "the most explicit statement [at its time of publication] of the Huguenot belief in the right of revolution for religious reasons."¹¹

Beza opened his treatise by asserting the duty of citizens to disobey rulers who issue commands contrary to the law of God:

The only will that is a perpetual and immutable criterion of justice is the will of the one God and none other. Hence Him alone we are obliged to obey without exception. Princes too would have to be obeyed implicitly if they were always the voice of God's commandments. But since the opposite too often happens, an exception is imposed upon obedience, when their commands are irreligious or iniquitous . . . If your magistrate commands you to do what God forbids, as did Pharaoh the midwives of Egypt and Herod when he ordered his followers to slay the innocents, it is your duty to refuse to act . . . But if the tyrant forbids you to do what God has commanded, then you will not have done your duty merely by refusing to obey the tyrant, but you must render obedience to God.¹²

Beza then shifted his focus to instances of injustice done by a ruler to citizens. Although "Jesus Christ and all the martyrs afterwards surely teach us that injustice should be suffered patiently," Beza affirmed that citizens have remedies "against a sovereign who abuses his dominion against all law divine and human."¹³ His position echoed Calvin's: if a ruler exceeds his authority and betrays the very people and laws he is sworn to defend, he abrogates his power and can be resisted, even to the point of removal from office.

For to put the matter properly, those who teach that notorious tyranny may be resisted in good conscience are not denying good and legitimate rulers the authority that God has given them, nor are they encouraging rebellion. On the contrary, the authority of magistrates cannot be stabilized, nor that public peace, which is the end of all true governance, preserved unless tyranny is prevented from arising or else abolished when it does.¹⁴

However, Beza insisted that the right of resistance be approached with great care. His first consideration when evaluating a people's right to resist was the legitimacy of the ruler's claim to power. He regarded resistance to usurpers to be straightforward. Since they have no lawful claim to authority, they must be viewed as invaders and opposed as such. In the event that one who seizes power is properly ratified by the people as their true magistrate, then that one becomes the lawful ruler and should be obeyed accordingly. But until such ratification takes place, all usurpers should be vehemently resisted by citizens and magistrates alike.¹⁵

5. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), p. 1519.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 1520, emphasis added.

7. Quoted in Douglas F. Kelly, *The Emergence of Liberty in the Modern World: The Influence of Calvin on Five Governments from the 16th Through 18th Centuries* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1992), p. 31.

8. Cf. Julian H. Franklin, trans. and ed., *Constitutionalism and Resist-*

ance in the Sixteenth Century: Three Treatises by Hotman, Beza, and Mornay (New York: Pegasus, 1969).

9. *Ibid.*, p. 30. 10. *Ibid.*

11. David C. Steinmetz, *Reformers in the Wings: From Geiler von Kaysersberg to Theodore Beza* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.

116. 12. Franklin, *op. cit.*, p. 101f.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 105–108.

If the ruler had not usurped his power, Beza's next consideration was the source of resistance. He understood the right of resistance to be different for three classes of people.

Private citizens could not resist on their own: "It is illicit for any private subject to use force against a tyrant whose dominion was freely ratified beforehand by the people."¹⁶ Their resistance should be "exclusively by legal means, and then only insofar as it is expedient."¹⁷ Their options are to "bear the yoke," go into exile, or ask lesser magistrates to intercede on their behalf.¹⁸

Beza asserted that lesser magistrates possess a greater right of resistance. Because they retain their office even after a king dies, their authority is "not of the sovereign but of the sovereignty."¹⁹ Therefore, their primary responsibility is to the sovereignty, and they may resist a sovereign in order to protect its people and laws.

[S]overeign governance is granted to kings or other sovereign magistrates with the proviso that if they depart from the good laws and conditions they have sworn to uphold and become notorious tyrants who are unwilling to take good advice, it is the right of lesser magistrates to provide for themselves and those within their care by resisting flagrant tyranny.²⁰

However, Beza limited the authority of the lesser magistrates to resistance; they could not remove a king from office.²¹

Like Hotman before him, Beza appealed to history and ancient documents to demonstrate that the greatest right of resistance belonged to the Estates.²² Each king swears an oath to the people and laws of France at his coronation, and it is the duty of the Estates to enforce that oath, even to the point of removing a king from office.

And the Estates of the country, or a similar body, to whom such authority is given by law, can and should resist until good order is restored and may, if need be, punish the tyrant according to his crimes. In so acting, they are in no sense mutineers or rebels, but are simply doing their sworn duty to God and to their country.²³

Throughout *Rights of Rulers*, Beza attempted to preclude any charge of anarchy and to distance himself from the Anabaptists,²⁴ who had a reputation for rebellion and lawlessness. He urged all citizens, whatever their position, toward lawfulness, patience, and perseverance:

[N]ot everything licit is expedient, and I do not hold that where religion is authorized by law, it must always be defended against open tyranny by force of arms. But that this can be done in good conscience by those with appropriate authority when God has given them the means is attested by the example of Libnah against Jehoram, of Jerusalem against Amaziah, and the war of Constantine against Maxentius at the request of Rome . . . And thus I conclude that we must honor as martyrs not only those who have conquered without resistance, and by patience only, against tyrants who have persecuted the truth, but those also who, authorized by law and by competent authorities, devoted their strength to the defense of true religion . . .²⁵

Beza drew support for his arguments from numerous and varied sources. *Rights of Rulers* applies Calvin's political philosophy, makes use of Hotman's research, appeals to

Roman Law, and cites numerous ancient historians, especially Plutarch. Beza was also heavily influenced by the Confession of Magdeburg, as were Knox, Goodman, Ponet, and other Protestant political writers.²⁶

But more than on any other source, *Rights of Rulers* relied on the Bible. Beza cited numerous commands and examples from Scripture to support his assertions. *Rights of Rulers* presupposes a distinctly Genevan theology, especially the doctrines of the corruption of all men²⁷ and the impartiality of God.²⁸

It seems that some interpreters of *Rights of Rulers* do not take as seriously as they should Beza's dependence upon Scripture to justify his position. For example, the best available English translation of *Rights of Rulers*²⁹ edits out a great many of Beza's biblical references, as if they are unnecessary to his argument. But Beza considered himself to be chiefly a theologian and not a political philosopher. Those biblical references are the core of his argument and should not be ignored.

Beza's Influence

In 1579, the last, most influential, and most militant sixteenth-century Huguenot treatise on resistance, *Vindiciae, Contra Tyrannos*, was published. Written under the pseudonym Junius Brutus, its author was probably Philippe du Plessis-Mornay,³⁰ a diplomat, soldier, and leader in the Huguenot movement. *Vindiciae* drew very heavily from *Rights of Rulers* but was "more impassioned and rhetorical" and "a more ample and eloquent restatement of Beza's major themes."³¹ Its popularity and influence earned Mornay the nickname, "the Huguenot pope."³²

These three principal Huguenot political treatises (Hotman, Beza and Mornay) transition in geographical focus from specifically French politics (Hotman) to a universal political theory (Mornay). Further, each treatise builds upon and expands the arguments of those previous, moving from a solely historical argument (Hotman) to one of the first true Protestant political philosophies (Mornay). Because of his position between Hotman and Mornay, expanding upon the former and influencing the latter, Beza functioned as the lynchpin in the formation of Huguenot political thought.

Until his death in 1605, Beza continued to play a key role in the Huguenot movement, corresponding regularly with Huguenot leaders, raising support for their cause, and providing a safe haven for French Protestants in Geneva.

The Wars of Religion continued into the reign of Henry IV (1589–1610). A former Huguenot leader, Henry converted to Catholicism for the purpose of peace when he assumed the throne, but he did not forget his Protestant friends. In 1598, he issued the Edict of Nantes, granting religious freedom in the lands of nobles sympathetic to Protestantism.

However, the Edict of Nantes was of no lasting effect. Subsequent kings resumed persecution of the Huguenots,

26. *Ibid.*, 31f. For the Confession of Magdeburg, see Roland H. Bainton, *The Age of Reformation* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1956), p. 172f.

27. Cf. Theodore Beza, *A Little Book of Christian Questions and Responses*, trans. Kirk M. Summers (Allison Park, Pa.: Pickwick Publications, 1986), 30ff., 50f.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 89ff.

29. Franklin, *op. cit.*, pp. 97–135.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 138f. 31. *Ibid.*, p. 39. 32. Needham, *op. cit.*, p. 348.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 110. 17. *Ibid.*, p. 102. 18. *Ibid.*, pp. 102, 108.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 111. 20. *Ibid.*, p. 123. 21. *Ibid.*, p. 112.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 113–124. 23. *Ibid.*, p. 123f.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 103. 25. *Ibid.*, p. 135.

and in 1685 Louis XIV (1643–1715) formally revoked the edict. By 1700, most of the Huguenots had fled France for such less hostile countries as Prussia, Holland, England, Ireland, America and South Africa.

A result of this migration was the spread of Huguenot political thought throughout Europe and America. The treatises of Beza and Mornay “immediately influenced the political thinking of the Dutch Rebellion” and were “frequently used and cited by English writers of the seventeenth century.”³³ They functioned as a bridge between the Reformers and later Protestant political thinkers³⁴ such as

33. Franklin, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

34. Kelly, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

Johannes Althusius of Holland, who drew from both Beza and Mornay and in turn influenced such noteworthy political philosophers as Samuel Rutherford, John Locke and John Adams.³⁵

Thus, through his primary political treatise, *Rights of Rulers*, Theodore Beza holds a key place in the formation of Huguenot political thought and helped set the course for the development of resistance theory in subsequent Protestant political philosophy. *C&S*

35. Cf. Johannes Althusius, *Politica*, ed. and trans. Frederick S. Carney (Indianapolis, In.: Liberty Fund, 1995).

JONATHAN EDWARDS AND THE HOLY COMMONWEALTH

by A. Bruce Dayman

The Holy Commonwealth

ONE of those obscure concepts that is not talked about today but may be found in older history books and in a few theological books is the Holy Commonwealth idea. It was promoted by early Puritans who took seriously the notion of applying covenant theology to all areas of life. These men and women, many who fled the tyranny of England, believed God had sent them to a new promised land for the very purpose of establishing the commonwealth in the new world.

It was into such a milieu that Jonathan Edwards was born on October 5, 1703, in East Windsor, Connecticut, only eighty-three years after the landing of the Mayflower at Cape Cod. His influence during his brief fifty-five years cannot be denied. He is considered by many today to be America's greatest thinker and theologian.

What was Edwards' influence in relation to the Holy Commonwealth? Did he embrace and promote it? Was he a covenant theologian in the tradition of the Puritans? If so, did his covenantalism enhance the commonwealth or did it devalue it?

The Holy Commonwealth was a comprehensive worldview where all facets of life worked together under God.

... these three things do not undermine, but do mutually and strongly maintain one another (even those three which we principally aim at): authority in magistrates, liberty in people, purity in the church. Purity, preserved in the church, will preserve well-ordered liberty in the people, and both of them together establish well-balanced authority in the magistrates. God is the author of all

these three, and neither is himself the God of confusion, nor are his ways the ways of confusion, but of peace.¹

Here John Cotton lists the three goals of the holy commonwealth idea and shows how they are interrelated to each other and stand or fall as one. True liberty is dependent upon godly rule that is the product of a pure church. Herman Dooyeweerd, Cornelius Van Til and R.J. Rushdoony² have all shown how society has a religious base and that all thought proceeds from this into every sphere that man is involved in. If man doesn't recognise God as the final point of reference in all his thinking, the only alternative is to make man himself the final point of reference.

A man's belief-system or worldview will have repercussions in every thing he sets his hand to. "Ideas have consequences." So taught Richard Weaver,³ a former English

1. John Cotton, "Copy of a Letter from Mr. Cotton to Lord Say and Seal in the year 1636," in Perry Miller and Thomas J. Johnson, eds, *The Puritans* (New York: Harper and Row, 2 vols, revised edition, 1936), p. 212, cited in Terrill Irwin Elniff, *The Guise of Every Graceless Heart: Human Autonomy in Puritan Thought and Experience* (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, 1981), p. 28.

2. Herman Dooyeweerd, *In The Twilight of Western Thought, Studies in the Pretended Autonomy of Philosophical Thought*, (Nutley, New Jersey: The Craig Press, [1960] 1980); Cornelius Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, (Phillipsburg, N. J.: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co., 1969); R.J. Rushdoony, *The One and the Many, Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy*, (Fairfax, Virginia: Thoburn Press, 1978).

3. Richard Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948). This book is vital reading for Christians.

professor at the University of Chicago. Since ideas are interrelated, they can have consequences in the least expected places. A good example of this is the Puritan work ethic,⁴ which was the unintended consequence of the doctrine of “calling,” where a man is seen as being called by God to a particular occupation or profession. The fact that man is created in God’s image means that he has to operate in his reality. Anything else is schizophrenic.

The Puritans of early New England were aware of this and sought to create a social structure in accordance with God’s Word.⁵ These colonies, having their own charters and forms of government, regarded themselves as Christian civil governments under a common king. It was assumed that each provincial planting was a new commonwealth in which men formed their own Christian government under God. Each was a Christian society within the empire. The colonies were holy commonwealths founded in a new world on the basis of faith in God and in obedience to a covenant with God.

There were three covenants basic to their faith. The first was the covenant of grace, which was personal, and included all those who were redeemed, including the children of believers. Man is saved by grace and made a covenant keeper in Christ. This covenant undergirded all other covenants including family, calling, magistracy, Church, State, school and every other human endeavour. The second was the Church covenant, the Church being the covenant people of God organised in terms of their churchly calling. The third covenant was the civil covenant where Christian man creates a Christian civil government.

Church and State were not joined as one, but both were seen to fulfil particular functions under one God. The Christian State was a protector of the Church and the Church was protector of the State, yet both were free from one another to maintain the sanctity of the oath, prohibit blasphemy, and further Christian law and order in the civil sphere. Nevertheless, the Church could not become the State nor the State become the Church. There was even legislation which prohibited the civil office to ministers and also prohibiting the office of elder to any magistrate while he was in office. Political rights did not belong to men based on status or wealth, but on the personal covenant of grace. “Visible saints” were men who were mature and responsible Christians rather than babes in Christ. They gained full membership and voting rights in the Church and State.⁶

One of the criticisms of this social system is that it produced hypocrites. Forcing men to attend church produced hypocrites because they conformed to outward laws and customs out of fear of punishment. This caused John Cotton to respond by saying “if it is so, yet better to be hypocrites than profane persons. Hypocrites give God part of his due, the outward man, but the profane person giveth God neither outward nor inward man.”⁷ The unity in the

foundation of religion and Church order which was meant to maintain God’s institutions was more important than exposing hypocrisy.

The early Puritans were more concerned with the antinomians and dissenters and the threat they represented against God’s institutions. As a matter of fact the Puritans were not arguing for a perfect, unspotted Church on earth. Their Arminian opponents in the Church of England branded them with the odious name of Puritan.⁸ Arminianism grew under James I (to whom the King James Version of the Bible is credited), a man trained under Calvinists to lead the Calvinist cause. James hated Calvinism because he saw in it teachings which contradicted the “divine right” of kings, a doctrine that his heir, Charles I also embraced.⁹ This prompted the Presbyterian, Samuel Rutherford, to write his irrefutable blast against “divine right” called *Lex Rex, or The Law and the Prince*, which declared that God’s Law is King and even the King of England must submit to it, or else he forfeits the divinely ordained office of king. Needless to say, great persecution followed, resulting in the civil war that brought the Commonwealth to England under Oliver Cromwell.

One cannot understand the history of New England and Virginia and the founding of the holy commonwealth without recognising the coincidence between it and the commonwealth of Oliver Cromwell.¹⁰ The issues of both commonwealths were the same, namely, that all institutions are given by God and therefore must submit to the authority of his word. This is why tens of thousands left England under persecution by Charles II. Their reasons were purely religious. Why else would they come to such a formidable wilderness, a land full of savage Indians, a land that had to be cleared and settled, and the agricultural condition largely unknown? The ideas planted by Calvinists during Cromwell’s time found a home in the colonies and the Stuart Kings gave the impetus for such a large migration.

The holy commonwealth was a theocracy. It was founded on the sovereignty of God and recognised Jesus Christ alone as King of Kings. Yet with respect to human society it was a commonwealth. The Church did not rule the State, nor did the State rule the Church; yet both were to support one another in reference to God’s will as revealed in his law, the Bible.

The personal covenant of grace was the cornerstone to the holy commonwealth, but it was not the whole edifice. All the spheres in which God moved, whether Church, State, family or others, were bound and limited by the objective word of God. The soundness of the commonwealth was

Irwin Elniff, *The Guise of Every Graceless Heart: Human Autonomy in Puritan Thought and Experience*, p. 30.

8. Nicholas Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism, c. 1590–1640* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1987) “... until the 1620s Puritan, as a technical term, was usually employed to describe those members of the English Church who wanted further Protestant reforms in liturgy and organization. Only thereafter was the definition of Puritanism publicly extended so as to include Calvinist doctrine... Yet much more was involved in redefining of terms, for the accession of Charles I in 1625 meant the overthrow of Calvinism.”

9. The divine right doctrine finds its origin in cultures of the past such as Egypt and Babylon, where a ruler is believed to be a man-god, a child of the gods, or one who becomes godly by virtue of the office he holds; his authority then becomes very great. To challenge his authority is to challenge the god of the system. If the king is not divine, but merely has divine right, his power is still very great.

10. Otto Scott, “1676: Our First War Of Independence,” in *Otto Scott’s Compass*, Volume 6, Issue 63 (November 1, 1995).

4. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1958).

5. Perry Miller, *Errand Into The Wilderness* (New York: Harper and Row, 1956), pp. 1–15.

6. R.J. Rushdoony, *This Independent Republic, Studies in the Nature and Meaning of American History*, (Fairfax, Virginia: Thoburn Press, 1978), p. 96.

7. John Cotton, “Letter to Richard Saltonstall,” in Alden T. Vaughan, ed., *The Puritan Tradition in America 1620–1730* (Columbia, S. C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1972), p. 203; cited in Terrill

what the religious leaders of New England sought to protect.

When the Great Awakening washed upon this edifice it was resisted in the pulpit, in the village square, in the court and in State actions. Ultimately, it was the holy commonwealth idea that triumphed. Jonathan Edwards, as one of the leaders of the Great Awakening, wrote nothing explicitly concerning the commonwealth idea in his *History of Redemption* or any of his other books. He lived in its reality and breathed its air, but he never plainly gave an explanation of it.

The Puritan Dilemma

The Puritan dilemma is the theme that runs through most of the modern studies of the Puritans.¹¹ The Puritan dilemma was defined as the problem of “how to apply a rigorous ethic to the existential situation without endangering the structure of the community.” The dilemma concept can take many forms, including: a this worldly outlook versus an otherworldly outlook; schism and reform; law and liberty; form and freedom; unity and diversity; or piety and intellect. Though all of these are not specifically Puritan problems but human problems, they are ones that the Puritans sought to address.

Of particular concern to our discussion were three major problem areas:¹²

(1) Church membership. If a membership in a particular Church is to be restricted to visible saints, how can it be determined who is a visible saint and how can there be a comprehensive, national Church?

(2) Church establishment. If there is to be religious uniformity in the State by establishment, how can Church and State be kept separate? And if orthodoxy of doctrine be imposed, how can liberty of conscience exist?

(3) Church Government. If independent congregations are the essence of Church government, how can uniformity among the congregations be maintained?

Of these three concerns, the first one, Church membership, is the one in which Jonathan Edwards fought his greatest battle.

Puritan Churches advocated baptism of infants of believing parents. The child, when baptised was not considered to be the recipient of saving grace, but had to “own the covenant”¹³ when he reached maturity. This involved conversion and profession of faith that would then make him a visible saint and allow him to be admitted to the Lord’s Supper. Unfortunately the children of the first generation did not experience the conversion and so were not able to fulfil the requirements for church membership even though they may have been moral and upright citizens. As the colony grew, the problem grew. As the problem grew, the pressure to come up with some solution also grew.

The result was the Halfway Covenant in which a distinction was made between the purity of full membership and the halfway status of the unconverted second generation who had been baptised in the Church and now wished to have their children (the third generation) baptised. It did not give

halfway members admission to communion or the right to vote. If it had done so, Churches would have eventually admitted unconverted members to full membership and in time would have given governmental control of the Church to these unconverted or unqualified members.

The Halfway Covenant was introduced to cope with problems raised by the test of visible sainthood. It was a way of retaining what was good about visible sainthood (i.e. the Church in control of the visible, or mature, saints) whilst maintaining a national and comprehensive Church which would include everyone in the colony who desired to be under the oversight of the Church, regardless of whether they met the test of visible sainthood. In this way the Kingdom of God and his covenant could be continued and propagated from one generation to another.

The immediate challenges this faced can be seen in antinomians such as Anne Hutchinson, who called visible sainthood a covenant of works and therefore could not be a vehicle to judge whether a candidate for Church membership was actually a member of the invisible Church. In other words it was the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the believer which made him a member, not outward profession and works. She also claimed to be in bodily communion with the Holy Spirit and moved by immediate revelation. This ran against the prevailing position of the leaders of the New England Churches which judged visible sainthood and the covenant of grace by the outward profession of faith and a life lived in accordance to it. In other words, a tree was to be judged by its fruit and not by a subjective, internal test.¹⁴ To make an internal test of salvation the standard rather than an outward and visible one is to make individuals the judge of the grace of God within the believer. This is knowledge impossible to men, and something only God can know.

The Profession of Faith

Jonathan Edwards was dismissed from his pulpit in 1750. It was the culmination of a long and intense controversy with Northampton and the surrounding communities over the qualifications for admission to the Lord’s Supper. While there were many political factors involved, Edwards rejected the views of his grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, which had been held by the Church for many years. This was seen as an attack, especially by Stoddard’s many powerful relatives, on the Williams clan.

The controversy raised the perennial question: What is the nature of the Christian Church? Is it inclusive or exclusive? Where do baptism and communion fit into the scheme? Are they converting ordinances or merely seals of one’s faith? It also raised the issue of Church government and whether power resides in the congregation, the minister or the presbytery.

Stoddard’s views, as with the Halfway Covenant, stemmed from the fact that he saw later generations of Puritans no longer “owning the covenant” of grace with the same conviction as the first generation. His answer to this was to extend full communion to as many as possible and so prolonging the existence of the established Church in America.¹⁵ His overarching concern also was that the Church

11. Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Dilemma: The Story of John Winthrop* (Boston: Little Brown, 1958), p. 7. See also Perry Miller, *Errand Into the Wilderness*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1956).

12. Elniff, *The Guise of Every Graceless Heart*, p. 57.

13. Edward Hickman, ed. *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 1 (1987).

14. Elniff, *The Guise of Every Graceless Heart*, p. 69.

15. Solomon Stoddard, *An Appeal to the Learned*, (Boston, 1709), pp. 97–98; cited in Conrad Cherry, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards: A*

“watch over” the “lives and manners” of all her Christian people. Stoddard went further than the Halfway Covenant by opening the Lord’s Supper to those who were neither ignorant nor scandalous and arguing that the Supper was for the conversion of sinners. A man did not need to profess the faith, he only needed to be morally sincere. This would make him a visible saint and qualify him for the Supper. This view was adopted by many in the Connecticut Valley and was known as “Stoddardism.” As a result the Church embraced “visible saints” as well as real, “professing” saints.¹⁶

In 1749 Edwards stated his case concerning the sacraments in his book *An Humble Inquiry into the Rules of the Word of God, Concerning the Qualifications Requisite to a Complete Standing and Full Communion in the Visible Christian Church*. He was already embroiled in public controversy with the neonomian Arminians who wanted to make works and free will the way to salvation, and enthusiasts who followed very much in the train of Anne Hutchinson, who wanted their experience to be the standard for membership in church.

Edwards had admitted individuals into communicant membership of the Church in the same way that his grandfather, Solomon Stoddard had. Now he wanted, not just a general profession of faith, but for each one applying for membership in the local Church to give a testimony of his own personal faith in Christ.

Christ came into the world to engage in a war with God’s enemies, *sin* and *Satan*; and a great war there is maintained between them; and the contest is, who shall have the possession of OUR HEARTS. Now it is reasonable, under these circumstances, that we should declare on whose side we are, whether on Christ’s side, or on the side of his enemies. If we would be admitted among Christ’s friends and followers, it is reasonable, that we should profess we are *on the Lords’ side*, and that we yield OUR HEARTS to him, and not to his rivals. And this seems plainly to be the design and nature of a public profession of Christ. If *this* profession is not made, no profession is made that is worth regarding, in such a case as this, and to any such purpose as being admitted among his visible friends. There is no being on Christ’s side, in this case, but with an *undivided heart* preferring him to all his rivals, and renouncing them all for his sake.¹⁷

Piety of Heart

According to Edwards, the underlying foundation of a profession of faith must be piety of heart.¹⁸ He spent a great deal of time showing from the Scriptures how true piety is essential for those who would be part of the true Church.¹⁹

Reappraisal, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1966), p. 209. Cherry also says in a footnote that Stoddard originally argued for opening communion to the unconverted on the basis of the Supper being a “converting ordinance.” Stoddard insisted that the Supper was for the conversion *not of heathen* but of “professing men,” i.e. of those adhering to Christian doctrines yet themselves unconverted to true faith. Whether Stoddard meant the elect is not made clear by Cherry.

16. Stoddard, *Nature of Saving Conversion*, p. 2, cited in Cherry, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, p. 210. Stoddard’s view was not erroneous but was generally acceptable in New England in that it saw Communion as a continuity with the Passover in Israel. If Israelites were not barred from Passover, why should probable Christians be barred? Again probability was based on acceptance of those who possessed an adequate knowledge of the Christian faith and lived a life that was not scandalous.

17. Edward Hickman, “An Humble Inquiry,” *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 1, pp. 445–446.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 448–449.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 449–460.

No one today would likely argue with the need for true piety, nor would have most of Edwards’ contemporaries. Unfortunately, Edwards does not really give a clear, precise definition of what true piety is. On top of that, he does not give an objective standard by which the Church may judge whether a person has true piety or not. Instead, he agitates for what he considers to be signs of true piety. In denying the sufficiency of a common faith and a moral sincerity of the school of Christ (the Church) he describes those he considers to have true piety of heart.

Neither have they who are not truly pious persons, any true disposition of heart to submit to the laws and orders of Christ’s school, the rules which his word prescribes to all his scholars; such as, *to love their Master* supremely; *to love one another as brethren*; and *to love their book*, i.e. their Bible, more than vain trifles and amusements, yea, above gold and silver; *to be faithful to the interest of the Master and of the school*; *to depend on his teachings*; *to cry to him for knowledge*; *above all their gettings*, *to get understanding*, etc.

What we see here is a mixture of both inward and outward actions of believers with no real standard by which we can make a clear judgement or definition about true saints. Edwards does not really give a means by which an objective observer can differentiate between true piety and the common faith and the moral sincerity of other members of the Church. Unless someone openly denies the faith, how does one know whether his sincerity is true faith or not?

Ultimately, what Edwards wanted was a credible profession of faith from those who were applying to be communing members of his Church. This was something more than what Stoddard asked for, which was moral sincerity. History shows that Stoddard’s followers went even further than Stoddard while using his principles. They brought about a shift from faith to respectable morals. The danger in this was the substitution of mere moralism for faith. Yet, in the light of history, one wonders if Edwards’ emphasis on a pious experience of conversion producing a so-called credible profession of faith really produced anything more. Easy-believism, which makes salvation something equal to mental assent is seen as credible by the majority of Evangelical Churches who stand in Edwards’ wake.

Edwards paid lip service to many of those who criticised his emphasis on the internal experience of the believer.²⁰ At times he seems to be arguing from both sides of the coin by declaring the external fruit as vital in determining one’s profession; yet, on the other hand he continues to emphasise an internal experience that can be determined by man. He even went as far as to say that there was no “certain rule” in which the church can judge those things which exist in a man’s soul.²¹ At times the differences he has with his opponents were so fine as to become almost indistinguishable.

While we can’t ignore the reality of nominal Christians in Edwards’ time, it may be that the argument was more about politics than theology. Edwards may have solved

20. *Ibid.*, p. 468.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 469. In his response to Solomon Williams’ written contribution to the controversy he denies that men can be searchers of others’ hearts and that inward feelings are the discriminating marks of grace. He maintained that profession and practice can be made so visible to others that they may rationally judge their reality. See Solomon Williams, *The True State of the Question Concerning the Qualifications Necessary to Lawful Communion in the Christian Sacraments* (Boston, 1751), p. 7; cited in Cherry, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, p. 205.

many of the problems he faced in his Church if he had been more discreet in pastoring his congregation. The “bad book” controversy and other issues had made enemies that sided against him in his hour of need. Instead of properly exercising discipline, Edwards forced the issue of who qualifies for communion.

Edwards’ claim in the communion controversy simply stated, was that entrance into full communion requires a visible covenanting with God by professing the faith of the covenant of grace. It did not require absolute purity or freedom from doubt. It is remarkable that this would cause the furore it did in his Church. Yet the communion controversy reveals something in Edwards that may help us understand his relationship to the holy commonwealth idea.

Covenant

There can be no question that Jonathan Edwards believed in the central theme of Puritan thought, which is the covenant. It is mentioned throughout his writings. Regarding the sacraments he wrote the following, comparing them to the marriage covenant:

There are *some duties* of worship, that imply a *profession of God’s covenant*; whose very nature and design is an exhibition of those vital active principles and inward exercises, wherein consists the *condition of the covenant of grace*, or that union of soul to God, which is the union between Christ and his spouse, entered into by an inward hearty consenting to that covenant.²²

Covenant theology was proclaimed by Edwards to describe the relationship of the saints to God in faith. Yet his primary emphasis was on the Church-covenant and its ramifications.²³ In other words his defence of the covenant of grace was emphasised to such a degree that it made the covenant more powerful for the Church. Rather than a canopy with an all-purpose function for society (i.e. the holy commonwealth), the covenant was weakened to such a degree that it “spelled the dissolution of Puritan theology as the all-purpose guardian of thought.”²⁴

Perry Miller claims that Edwards “threw over the whole covenant scheme” and “declared God unfettered by any agreement or obligation.”²⁵ It is hard to understand how a scholar of Miller’s calibre could make this statement when the covenant is always near the surface of Edwards’ writings. Conrad Cherry refutes this aspect of Miller’s analysis but does recognise that we must take into consideration one aspect of Miller’s critique. Edwards and other New England covenant theologians were preoccupied with the “preparation”²⁶ for salvation. Cherry goes on to say that this preparation exercise “actually laid the groundwork for later American Arminianism by obligating God to bestow salvation on those who sufficiently performed their part of the legal bargain by preparing themselves for grace.”²⁷

What Cherry says and what Perry Miller was eluding to in Edwards show a glaring problem in Jonathan Edwards’ thought and indeed in the whole Great Awakening. It was the preoccupation with the inner life of the believer that created an amazing blindness to other facets of the covenant and indeed ultimately aided modern day evangelicalism into its pietistic retreat from the world that God has created. The rocks upon which the tides of the Great Awakening fell were the rocks of the holy commonwealth. This is what Edwards confronted and this is why many Calvinistic ministers in New England so fervently resisted him. His ideas were resisted in all areas of public and private life. Edwards, in all his writings, never mentions the Christian commonwealth idea even once.

It was the inner emphasis, or psychological bias in Edwards, which caused him to focus on the soul of man and man’s personal experience. The holy commonwealth idea was replaced by the religious experience of the individual. While the commonwealth clearly recognised the experience of the individual, Edwards’ writings seem to be completely consumed with it. This is clearly seen in his writings on the conditions for entrance into Church membership. While he recognises the covenant, he sees it primarily in terms of personal religious experience.

According to R. J. Rushdoony, Edwards was influenced by Platonic thinking and by John Locke, which made Edwards an Enlightenment man.

The essence of Christianity was now the religious experience. Man was religious man only when possessed by the religious sentiment or affections. Edwards did not see, as Calvin did, man as always religious man, whether covenant keeper or covenant breaker. Edwards’ man was Enlightenment man, basically secular except when possessed by religious experience.²⁸

Edwards was acutely aware of the problems raised by emotionalism and the odd manifestations of the Great Awakening. It was these things that he tried to address in his books, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* and *Thoughts on the Revival of Religion in New England*. However much he attempted to walk the tightrope between the enthusiasts on one side and the rationalists on the other, he ended up endorsing the former in the sweep of revival torrents.

Old Light and New Light

Not all of the critics of Edwards’ day were liberals or rationalists. This can be seen in the Old Light/New Light controversy²⁹ where many of those who have been called

22. Edward Hickman, “An Humble Inquiry,” *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, p. 472.

23. Cherry, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards: A Reappraisal*, p. 109.

24. Mark A. Noll, *America’s God, From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 44–50.

25. Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), p. 98.

26. See John J. Gerstner, “Edwardsean Preparation for Salvation . . .” *The Westminster Theological Journal*, 42 (Fall, 1979), pp. 5–71.

27. Conrad Cherry, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards: A Reappraisal*,

p. 115. See also Perry Miller, “‘Preparation for Salvation’ in Seventeenth-Century New England,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, IV (June, 1943), pp. 253–286; cited in Cherry, p. 115.

28. R. J. Rushdoony, *This Independent Republic*, pp. 105–106. I find it interesting that John Locke, whom Edwards imbibed, is known as the father of modern psychology. I also find it remarkable that modern evangelicalism, which inherited much from Edwards, is today awash in psychology and personal religious experience. See David F. Wells, *No Place For Truth or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993) and David F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (Grand Rapids Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994).

29. Iain Murray, “Division and Disorder,” *Jonathan Edwards, A New Biography*, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1992), pp. 201–229.

liberals were only rejecting experientialism. The fact is that both sides were predominantly Calvinistic in theology, which only confused the issues at hand. The orthodoxy of the New Lights received a fresh impetus from the Great Awakening, yet there were new ideas that brought it into conflict with the accepted orthodoxy of the time. While it is true that Arminianism and Unitarianism were making inroads into the teachings of some of the Old Light ministers, it would be unfair to say that these had developed and become established.³⁰

Jonathan Edwards, as one of the leaders of the New Lights, tried to incorporate the teachings of John Locke into his defence the evangelical cause. Yet it seems none of Edwards' supporters today are willing to recognise that the influence of Locke's empiricism may be the very thing that ultimately restructured Puritanism in New England. His critics go even further and say he "unwittingly aided the triumph of the Enlightenment."³¹ Gregg Singer goes on to say,

Edwards developed a metaphysical idealism which was quite foreign to the historic Calvinism of Puritanism. Declaring that bodies have no existence of their own, and that all existence is mental, he reinterpreted some basic aspects of Calvinism in a manner which was quite destructive to its biblical foundations. In his own theology he labored to remain true to the Calvinism which he believed, but he sowed the seeds of its later rejection in New England, and of the later rise of Arminianism and Arianism . . . There can be little doubt that the idea of the benevolence of God in the Edwardian theology was a contributing factor in the rise of liberalism among the Colonial clergy after 1730.³²

So to lay the blame for these errors at the feet of the Old Light ministers is specious at best.

The division of Churches as a result of the revival compromised those who sought to defend the cause of the commonwealth because they could no longer face opposition with a unified voice in the church. Instead, the civil sphere increased in strength as the ecclesiastical sphere weakened. The holy commonwealth came to be understood as the civil government and Christianity instead of Church,

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 215–216.

31. C. Gregg Singer, *A Theological Interpretation of American History*, (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1981), p. 28. Singer goes on to say, "Edwards developed a metaphysical idealism which was quite foreign to the historic Calvinism of Puritanism. Declaring that bodies have no existence of their own, and that all existence is mental, he reinterpreted some basic aspects of Calvinism."

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 29–29.

State, family and all other spheres as limited authorities administering God's power in society.

Conclusion

The result of Edwards' ideas and the Great Awakening was to weaken the Church in its relation to the rest of God's divinely instituted authorities. Whenever the Church is weakened inevitably the State takes up the slack. In Edwards' time this happened though the holy commonwealth idea of the State remained in the minds of the people and continued to be considered Christian. Edwards' emphasis on the internal life of the believer led to the church being a power without unified form, while the state maintained its form. To emphasize the inner life at length leads to a retreat from the world and a forfeiture of influence in many areas of culture. The conclusion of an inward focus is paralysis. If we constantly have our eyes turned inward, we cannot see past ourselves to act.

This is what we see around us today in the Church. Most Christians today are caught up in psychologising about every area of their life. They have bought into what modern secular psychologists say in an attempt to answer legitimate problems. The loss of the concept of sin and repentance, which was discarded by liberal theology, is now entering the Church through psychology. This can only have disastrous consequences.

The emphasis on conversion has its positive effects in the life of the Church and should not be downplayed; yet if we see it only in personal terms, in terms of self-preservation from the hands of an angry God, then we no longer see the Christian man in his role as the regenerated and predestined lord of all the earth. Instead, Christians become hermits seeking refuge from a wicked world. This results in secularisation and other-worldliness in the Church. It leads to a downplaying of what believers do in this world and a preoccupation with subjective experience in their hearts. The Scripture teaches that the work of salvation is the work of God in Christ on the cross and in his resurrection. It is an objective reality, meaning it happened outside our hearts and before we were born. While we experience this reality in time, the objective fact is prior to and determines our experience. When salvation becomes a subjective experience, God's decree is replaced by man's decree. When this is the case, man becomes god in the Church, State, and family. Contrary to the holy commonwealth idea, power inevitably comes to reside in the State, which then becomes the voice of god to the people. C&S

THE TRADITIONALIST

The Traditionalist is a wide-ranging Christianity-based quarterly which seeks to play a part in establishing a Christianity-based society. It is nondenominational, non-party-political, and unconnected with any group or organisation. Reader participation is welcomed.

There is no annual subscription, but small sums towards production and distribution costs from time to time are not refused.

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THE GREAT DECOMMISSION

by Stephen C. Perks

EXODUS 19:5–6; PSALMS 2:7–12; 19:7–11; ISAIAH 2:2–4; MATTHEW 5:17, 48; 12:28–31; LUKE 18:17; JOHN 1:45; 4:34; 5:20, 43, 46–47; 8:28–30; 10:30; 14:15, 17; 15:10; 16:13; ACTS 2:39; 16:33; 1 CORINTHIANS 12:13; ROMANS 8:16, 26; 13:8–10; GALATIANS 1:22–23; EPHESIANS 6:4, 6; 1 PETER 2:9; REVELATION 11:15

Go ye therefore, and teach [i.e. disciple] all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. (Mt. 28:18–20)

THE Great Commission consists of three parts: (1) the command to disciple the nations, (2) the command to baptise the nations, and (3) the command to teach the nations to obey God's law. Before looking at the implications of this Great Commission, however, there is a matter of grammar that needs to be addressed first if we are to understand properly what Christ has commissioned his Church to do.

The modern English translation of the first part of v. 19 is ambiguous. The reason for this is that English, strictly speaking, has no verb meaning to *disciple*. *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (Eighth Edition) lists the word *disciple* as a noun only. The nearest verb to it is *to discipline*, which, although not without relevance to what it means to be a disciple of Christ, does not convey the meaning of the Greek term used, *μαθητεύσατε* (aor. act. imp. of *μαθητεύω*). The Greek verb *μαθητεύω* means *to be a disciple*.¹ This verb is used in classical Greek only in an intransitive sense.² In the koine Greek of the New Testament, however, which was the everyday language spoken by the people, it was used transitively to mean *to make a disciple of*,³ taking as its direct object in Mt. 28:19 “all the nations” (*πάντα τὰ ἔθνη*).

Because there is, strictly speaking, no single term in English that translates this Greek verb, the AV, following Tyndale and the Geneva Bible, translates the first part of the Great Commission as “Go ye therefore, and *teach* all nations.” This translation preserves the grammar and the unambiguous meaning of the original Greek accurately.

Most modern translations, however, have followed the translation of the Revised Version, which reads: “Go ye therefore and *make disciples of* all the nations.” Thus the NASB reads: “Go therefore and *make disciples of* all the nations.” Likewise the RSV reads: “Go therefore and *make disciples of* all nations.” Even the New King James Version changes the AV wording to “Go therefore and *make disciples of* all the nations,” failing completely to observe an important reason for keeping the AV's “*teach* all nations.”

There are two problems with this modern translation: first, it turns the Greek verb *to disciple* (*μαθητεύω*) into the English verb *to make*, and the direct object of this verb becomes the English noun *disciples* instead of *nations*. Second, it turns the direct object of the Greek verb into a genitive; i.e. it turns the word “nations,” which in the Greek is in the accusative case (the case of the direct object), into a genitive case governed by the preposition “of,” which is not in the Greek. This gives us an English phrase that is ambiguous in the place of a Greek phrase that is not ambiguous. The difference between the Greek original and the various English translations of the phrase is set out in the chart on p. 13.

The modern English translation could be taken to mean just what the Greek says, i.e. “make the *nations* [direct object] the disciples of Christ.” But it does not have to be understood in this way. It is ambiguous, vague. It could equally be taken to mean something else, and unfortunately in modern times, because of the pietistic theological consensus that has come to dominate the Church's understanding of the faith, it has overwhelmingly been taken to mean something else, namely “make disciples *from among* the nations.” This is a perfectly reasonable and correct understanding of the English. But it is an incorrect rendering of the Greek. The Greek says that we are to go and disciple the *nations*, not make disciples *of* the nations, i.e. *from among* the nations. The same English phrase can mean two different things. The English language can be wonderfully vague and ambiguous, and such ambiguity is not without its uses. But it is not helpful here. It hinders our

1. G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1986), p. 275.

2. H. A. W. Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Gospel of Matthew* (Winona Lake: Alpha Publications, Sixth Edition [1883] 1978, trans. Peter Christie), p. 527.

3. K. H. Rengstorff, “*μαθητεύω*” in Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968, trans. G. W. Bromiley), Vol. IV, p. 461; F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 1961, trans. Robert W. Funk), §148, p. 82af.

understanding of the Scripture. Many people misunderstand the Great Commission as a command to make disciples of people from all nations. This is not what Jesus commanded us to do. Rather he commanded us to disciple the nations *as* nations. i.e. to make Christian *nations*. The vagueness of the modern English translation has led to, or at least has helped to confirm in the opinion of most Christians today, an incorrect understanding of the Great Commission. This misconception has been so readily accepted because of the pietistic nature of contemporary Christian belief, i.e. the idea that the Christian faith relates to an understanding of spirituality that is narrowly focused on the individual's private devotional life, Church worship—which is increasingly equated with singing choruses—and the “afterlife.” In this perspective the faith is not seen as having a direct bearing on the everyday issues that determine so much of our lives—for example education, politics, welfare, the economy, the arts and culture generally. The Christian faith is not seen as addressing these areas at all by the vast majority of Christians today. The faith has been privatised and as a result has been neutered of its power to transform society. In this context the misreading of the Great Commission as a command to make individual disciples from among the nations has seemed natural. But the modern context has distorted our understanding of the Bible and the modern understanding of the Great Commission is erroneous.

This misunderstanding of the Great Commission and of the nature of the Christian faith generally has not always prevailed. In previous centuries the Church did understand the necessity of converting the nations. The concept of Christendom was the result of the Church's understanding of the Great Commission historically: i.e. the creation of Christian nations. Britain is still constitutionally a Christian nation, though no longer in practice because of the triumph of secular humanism, which has been aided and abetted in its destruction of Christian culture and values in our country by the pietistic conception of the faith as a private devotional cult that has no role as public truth and therefore no *religious* value. Indeed it has been one of the shibboleths of modern

Christian practice to claim that the Christian faith is *not* a religion.⁴ As a consequence, even within the Church of England there is much talk of disestablishment of the Church. Disestablishment would mean of course not only that Britain would be apostate, as it is now, but also no longer constitutionally Christian, and therefore not part of Christendom. Instead it would be part of the kingdom of another religion: secular humanism.

Why is the idea of Christendom so unpopular among Christians today and why is Christianity no longer believed to be a religion by so many Christians? Quite simply because Christians have believed what non-believers, secular humanists, have told them about the nature of the Christian faith, i.e. that it is only a devotional cultus and has no relevance to the rest of life. In particular they have been told by secularists that Christianity must be kept out of politics and social affairs altogether. It is the idolatrous religion of secular humanist politics that now dominates and controls our lives and our society, not Christianity. Therefore secularists insist that Christianity has no business interfering in these areas. Christians should keep their faith out of these affairs altogether. What is astonishing about this is not that secularists have argued in this way, but that Christians on the whole have agreed with them, followed their advice and reduced their faith to a personal worship hobby.

But this restriction of the Christian faith to a narrow “spiritual” realm of life is not the Christian faith of the Bible or history; it is, rather, a departure from it. Such a departure from the faith has occurred in previous ages among certain sects and movements, but it has not been considered orthodox in the way that it is today. The Great Commission, by contrast, is a command to work for the creation of Christendom, to convert the kingdoms of this world into the kingdom of Christ. This is, after all, what the Bible teaches will be the consequence of the Great Commission: “And the seventh

4. See further, “Christianity as a Cult” in Stephen C. Perks, *Common-Law Wives and Concubines: Essays on Covenantal Christianity and Contemporary Western Culture* (Taunton: The Kuyper Foundation, 2003).

THE GRAMMAR OF THE GREAT COMMISSION AND ITS ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS

Greek	πορευθέντες	οὖν	μαθητεύσατε	πάντα τὰ ἔθνη
	nom. pl. masc. part. aor. of πορεύομαι		2nd pers. pl. aor. act. imper. of μαθητεύω	acc. neuter pl. case of direct object

Lit.	Going	therefore	disciple	all the nations
AV	Go ye	therefore	and teach	all nations
RV	Go ye	therefore	and make disciples of	all the nations
NASB	Go	therefore	and make disciples of	all the nations
RSV	Go	therefore	and make disciples of	all nations
NKJ	Go	therefore	and make disciples of	all the nations
NIV	Therefore go		and make disciples of	all nations
JBP	You, then, are to go		and make disciples of	all the nations

angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 11:15). "And the *nations* of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it [the heavenly city]; and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it" (Rev. 21:24).

Let us now look at the implications of the three parts of the Great Commission.

First, we are told to disciple the *nations*. (The lack of a verb meaning *to disciple* has largely been overcome today, at least in Church life, since we do frequently use the noun *disciple* as a verb. Hopefully, this will be introduced into future editions of the *Oxford English Dictionary*.)

This first part of the command means that we are to work to bring the nations under the leadership and discipline of Jesus Christ. We are commanded to work for the establishing of Christian nations, and by implication where a nation has been Christian but has apostatised, as the United Kingdom has, we are to work for its repentance and restoration as a Christian nation.

It is essential that we do not understand the existence of a Christian nation to mean that such a nation would be perfect. There is no perfection in this life, whether at the individual, family, Church or national levels. But this does not mean that there can be no Christian nation, that God cannot be honoured nationally, the Church established, and the law of God enshrined in our constitution as the basis of our system of justice, as indeed it has been in the past. No individual Christian is perfect in this life. This does not mean that there can be no individual Christians. No Christian family is perfect in this life. Neither does this mean there can be no Christian families, that a Christian family is just a collection of individual Christians who happen to live in the same house. A Christian family is much more than a boarding house for individual believers. A Christian family has an ethos and practice that is Christian, or at least should have. It has a way of life involving the honouring of God and obedience to his word, a shared understanding of life and common standards of behaviour. No Christian society is perfect in this life. That does not mean there can be no Christian societies. The Church is a Christian society. The fact that no Church is perfect in this life does not mean that there can be no Christian Church. And no Christian nation, which is a Christian society, just as the family and the Church are Christian societies, can be perfect in this life. That does not mean there can be no Christian nation. The denial of Christendom by modern Christians is preposterous. If the implications of the reasoning behind such a denial were to be followed out to their logical conclusions it would mean that there can be no Christian society, no Christian Church and no Christian family either. The fact that Christian nations are not perfect no more invalidates the possibility of a Christian nation than the fact that Churches are not perfect invalidates the possibility of a Christian Church. It means rather, that we must pray and work for improvement just as we pray and work for improvement, progress, or to use more "religious" language, sanctification, in this life on the individual level. Even a brief look at the history of Christendom shows that there is progress, development in this, just as there is in the individual Christian life; and it shows also that there is backsliding and apostasy, which is demonstrated by the condition of Britain today. This should be of great

concern to us. We should be concerned for the conversion of the nation as a nation, i.e. the conformity of its institutions, culture, justice system etc. to the will of Christ, just as much as we are concerned for the conversion of the individual soul and his submission to the lordship of Christ.

Britain has been a Christian nation for a long time. The coronation of the monarch and the coronation oath are Christian institutions, and the coronation service is a Christian Church service—it includes a communion service. The oath taken by the Queen at her coronation in 1953 included the promise to maintain the laws of God and the true profession of the gospel, and to maintain in the United Kingdom the Protestant Reformed Religion established in law. The Bible was presented to the Queen while the Archbishop spoke the following words: "Our gracious Queen: to keep your Majesty ever mindful of the Law and the Gospel of God as the Rule for the whole life and government of Christian Princes, we present you with this book, the most precious thing this world affords." The Moderator of the Church of Scotland then said: "Here is wisdom; This is the royal Law; These are the lively Oracles of God."⁵ There then followed a communion service during which the Queen was anointed.

Now, the United Kingdom was not at that time, nor at any time previously, a kingdom of perfectly sanctified people. But it was a Christian nation. And although there has been a great deal of grievous apostasy since 1953, it remains a Christian nation *constitutionally*. Whether it will remain so in the future remains to be seen, but the future does not look propitious at the moment. Why? Not only because the heir to the throne seems very far from being a Christian with any intention of functioning as a Christian monarch, nor merely because our governments seem so determined to obliterate all that is left of the Christian faith in our culture by trampling upon the Christian values and institutions that for so long constituted the nation's soul, but also because the people are no longer concerned about being part of a Christian nation, and perhaps most significantly of all, because Christians themselves largely no longer believe in the value, nor even the possibility, of the country being a Christian nation. Christendom is a concept that has become obsolete in the minds of most Christians because of the adoption of a narrow other-worldly spirituality that has little resemblance to the concept of spirituality given us in the Bible. And in order to maintain this faulty spirituality the greater part of the Bible, the Old Testament, has been spiritualised into irrelevance in most Churches because it is so difficult to reconcile with this pietistic spirituality. With the Old Testament marginalised in this way, the New Testament is cut off from its context, i.e. the Old Testament, and radically reinterpreted through a pietistic perspective. Because of the dominance of this pietistic spirituality it is thought on the whole today that the very idea of Christendom is no longer valid, and this in turn has contributed to the misunderstanding of the Great Commission as a command to convert individuals rather than nations. The result of this faulty theology, this misunderstanding of the Great Commission, has been the *de-commissioning* of the nation as a Christian nation. The popular evangelical misunderstanding of the

5. *The Coronation Service of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, with a short Historical Introduction, Explanatory Notes and an Appendix* by Edward C. Ratcliff (London: SPCK/Cambridge University Press, 1953), p. 38f.

Great Commission as a command to disciple individuals from among the nations has, ironically, led to the negation of the Great Commission, i.e. the *de-commissioning* of the nation, the very opposite of what Christ commanded.

Second, in the Great Commission we are told to baptise the *nations*. It is not uncommon at this point for Baptists to point out that the Scripture says “baptise *them*” not “baptise the *nations*” and that the reason for this is that it is not possible to baptise a nation, but only individuals from among the nations. There are two points to be made here: first, it is unnatural to take “them” to refer to some imaginary individuals rather than to refer back to the natural antecedent, “nations,”⁶ and secondly, it is possible to baptise a nation. Of course, the command to baptise a nation necessarily involves the baptising of individuals, but a command to baptise individuals does not necessarily involve the baptising of the nation. The difference is a question of mission. Is our mission to snatch brands from the fire or is it to disciple the nations? The Great Commission demands the latter. There is no reason to impose the individualistic obsession of modern Western culture onto the text. How then, one may ask, is it possible to baptise a nation, and how do we go about baptising a nation?

We must answer this first by asking another question and then by looking at one of the most important responsibilities that faces the Church, the education of Christian children.

The question is this: is it possible to baptise a Church or only individuals? If only individuals then the Church cannot exist as anything more than a mere collection of individuals who also happen to be baptised. But it is clear from the Bible that the Church is more than this. It is not a mere club or association of individual people. There are not many baptisms and many faiths in the Christian Church, but one baptism and one faith (Eph. 4:4–6), and Christians are all baptised by one Spirit into one body (1 Cor. 12:13). The Church is defined, at least in part, by the rite of baptism. An un-baptised Church is not a Christian Church. Baptism is the formal means of entry into the Church. If one is not baptised one is not accepted as a member of the Church. The Church is a baptised society.

But the Church, we are told in Scripture, is also a *nation*: “ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation” (1 Pet. 2:9). These words, written by Peter, are merely a restatement of the words spoken in Ex. 19:5–6 to the nation of Israel. Peter identifies and addresses the Church as a nation, just as Moses addressed the people of Israel as a nation. And the word chosen by the Holy Spirit to designate the body of Christ, the Church (ἐκκλησία), is a *political* term referring to the assembly of the people (δῆμος) as a political body. The Church is a baptised society. It is far more than a mere collection of individuals. It is made up of individuals, but the members together constitute something more than a mere collection of individuals. If it is not possible to have a baptised society, only baptised individuals, then it is not possible to have a baptised Church, nor is it possible to have a baptised family, because both Church and family are societies. This would be to say that all associations of individuals, such as families, societies and nations, are nothing more than conglomerates of individuals and that they can never add up to anything more than that. But it is clear from

the Bible that God does *not* see families, Churches or *nations* in such an individualistic fashion, that although the individual is important, he is considered part of something greater than himself; he is part of a covenanted society. God always deals with mankind by means of a covenant. The relationship that man has to God is always a covenantal relationship. Man is always a covenant creature and therefore he always stands in a covenantal relationship to God. This covenantal relationship with God also determines man’s relationship to the rest of the world. In other words, the covenant structures not only man’s relationship with God but also his relationship with other people. It is important to understand at this point, therefore, that the covenant is not just individualistic, it is also societal, at the family level, at the Church level, and also at the *national* level. Surely it will not be denied that it is possible for a nation to be in covenant with God. Israel was. And as such she was called to be an example to and the pattern for *all* the nations (Gen. 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; Is. 2:1–4). And Christ came to *fulfil* the law and the prophets, to bring them to full development, not to abrogate them (Mt. 5:17). This is why Christ commanded his disciples to disciple *all* the *nations*.

If the modern individualistic view were correct there could be no Church, not in the biblical sense of one body where each member belongs to something greater than himself. The Church is a society of people,⁷ a *baptised* society. And the Church is a family, a family of adopted sons of God. Baptism is the formal act of adoption into this family. Just as it is possible to baptise a family, which is a small society, and we have the testimony of Scripture in this (Acts 16:33), so also it is possible to baptise a larger society, the Church, since the Church also is a society. When someone is baptised he is baptised into a covenanted *nation*, the Church. Why then is it insisted upon by so many today that it is impossible to baptise a nation?

Such a theology is both a symptom of and a contributing factor in the persistence of the pietistic spirituality that dominates modern Church life in the UK, and it is this pietistic spirituality that has played such an important role in the progressive decommissioning of the Christian nations of the West. E. L. Hebden Taylor stated the problem clearly:

[P]ietism, no doubt, expressed the religious reaction of devout evangelicals against orthodox formalism, and it tended to concentrate upon the doctrine of salvation and to develop an Arminian rather than a Reformed doctrine of grace. God’s offer of salvation was supposed to be made to all men and it was believed that Christ died for all mankind. Given such a doctrine of grace it is not surprising that pietists have tended, with a few notable exceptions, to think of religion as being mainly concerned with the salvation of the individual and with his spiritual states of mind and feelings. As a consequence, pietism has greatly assisted the secularization of Western society as a whole, since its religious individualism takes for granted or ignores the structures of church and state, seeking within society to build up significant religious cells. The main concern of Dutch pietists, as of Wesleyan pietists in England and America, became the salvation of one’s individual soul rather than of society as a whole. Instead of thinking that Christians should be concerned with the whole of life—business, political, educational and cultural, pietism demands the segregation of a certain sphere of life as peculiarly religious and teaches that the believer should concentrate his entire efforts upon cultivating subjective religious

6. On the relevance of the gender disagreement between the noun ἔθνη and its pronoun αὐτοὺς see the excursus on p. 20.

7. The word *society* comes from the Latin verb *socio*, meaning *to unite together, associate, to do or to hold in common, to share*.

states of mind and feeling, as well as various personal devotional and ascetic disciplines. The larger questions of church and state and culture tend to become discounted, sometimes because of apocalyptic expectations, or because they are considered to be religiously neutral. As a result, the attention of the evangelical pietist tended to become concentrated upon personal rather than social morals, and the sins of the flesh have been more often feared than the spiritual sins, such as selfishness, pride, envy and jealousy.⁸

Pietism—the reduction of the Christian life to a narrow personal devotional hobby—has saddled the Church with a spirituality that has been unable to meet the challenges that face her in the modern world. As a result, the practice of the faith in the twentieth century collapsed under the weight of the secular humanist opposition to Christian values. It collapsed because it was not strong enough, not robust enough, to meet the challenge of the growing secular humanist faith, and this was in large part because pietistic spirituality had weakened the ability of Christians to see the whole of life as the arena of their faith, as their mission field; individuals *from* all nations were seen as needing to convert to Christianity, but *nations* as such were no longer seen as needing to be conquered for Christ. This vitiated the witness of the Church by holding forth a pietistic vision of the Christian faith that is irrelevant to real life and therefore irrelevant and useless to society. The Church's pietistic world-view is no match for the secular humanism and neopaganism that increasingly dominate our society.

How has this faulty spirituality been worked out in the practice of the modern Church? *First*, the general practice of most Churches today, at least in the UK, is to send the children out of the Church service to Sunday school until they reach an age at which they are believed to be able to make a decision about the faith for themselves. What is the message that children get from this practice? It is this: children do not understand, and therefore the faith is not relevant and does not apply to them as it does to adults who have “made a decision.” Of course they are kept happy with Bible stories in Sunday school when they are little, and they may be taught *about* the faith as they get older, but the message is that Christianity is not really for them, not yet anyway. They are not old enough to understand. This is the message children get even if it is not stated overtly—and it *is* very often stated overtly. Despite the fact that Jesus said “Suffer the little children to come unto me and hinder them not: for of such is the kingdom of God” (Mk 10:14; Lk. 18:17), the Church has sent the children out of the worship of the covenant community and told them that this is not for them, and that they will have to make their own minds up about the faith when they become adults. This may not have been stated blatantly, but it is the message that children get from this practice. In some respects the more subtle a message is the more effective it is, even for children. Children are told on the whole that they are not part of the covenant community and participation in the covenant rituals is denied them—and unfortunately baptism, the Lord's Supper and Church worship is all that exists of the covenant life of faith in most Churches. Even where baptism is administered to infants and therefore nominally children are deemed to be included in the covenant life of the Church, the constant removal of children

from the worship service and the refusal to admit them to the Lord's Supper is a practical excommunication that puts them outside what little is left of the covenant life of the faith in modern Churches. In this respect, the difference between Baptist and modern paedobaptist theology is insignificant in practice. Children are denied participation in the covenant life of the Church in both systems.

Second, Christian parents have very strongly and powerfully reinforced this message by sending their children to be educated in secular schools where their children's world-view is formed under the influence of a godless religion, secular humanism, in terms of a curriculum that denies the Christian God and teaches children that the world and all things in it can be understood independently of the God who created it. This reinforces the pietistic understanding of the faith that children are taught and see practised by their parents, i.e. the belief that the faith has a narrow spiritual application to the devotional life and the unseen world, the afterlife. This is the version of Christianity that secular humanists have foisted upon lazy Christians who refuse to use their minds in the service of God. The faith for these people is not about life and having one's *mind* renewed by the Holy Spirit so that the Christian sees *all* things in a new way, in a new relationship to God. Rather it is about going to church to sing mindless choruses, developing one's “quiet life” and being delivered from the torments of hell at death. The faith is a form of escapism essentially; escape from this world here and now into some unseen “spiritual” realm and escape from hell in the afterlife. In this context everything children learn at school about the world and life as being independent of God and irrelevant to the Christian faith of their parents makes sense; it fits with the kind of faith practised by their parents. Christianity in this perspective is not a religion, it is a private worship hobby. The real religion that determines most of their lives and the lives of their parents is secular humanism, which reaches all those parts of the body politic that the pietistic version of Christianity fails to touch.

Education, therefore, has been divorced from the mission of the gospel. This has had disastrous consequences for both the Church and the nation. The secular schooling system is a complete indoctrination into the secular humanist world-view. In Britain teachers in State schools are charged with the intellectual, physical, emotional and *spiritual* education of the child. This is a complete education in terms of a world-view, a religion, that denies God. And even if these children go to church and are taught that Jesus will save them from hell-fire if they believe in him, they see there that the faith as practised by their parents and the Church does not address life, only issues relating to their parents' personal devotion hobby and their expectations in the afterlife. *This* life is governed by a different religion: secular humanism, and an hour of Sunday school once each week is no match for five full days of indoctrination each week in the Baalist religion of secular humanism.

In this sense most Christians in the West today are polytheists, i.e. they do not worship one God, but several. They serve the Christian God on Sundays and in those matters relating to their narrowly defined spiritual lives—Church worship, “quiet times,” their beliefs about soteriology, the afterlife and eschatology—but in their everyday lives, in the education of their children, their political beliefs, their cultural lives generally, they serve the gods of secular hu-

8. E. L. Hebden Taylor, *The Christian Philosophy of Law, Politics and the State* (Nutley, New Jersey: The Cragin Press, 1966), p. 29f.

manism, including secular humanism's chief god, the idolatrous State.

Having refused to baptise their children; having sent them out of the Church worship service for most of their lives because it is deemed unsuitable for them; having told them that the Lord's Supper is not for them; having told them that they must make their own minds up about the Christian faith when they become adults; and having sent them to godless secular schools for the whole of their school life (the most formative period in their lives) to be indoctrinated into the religion of secular humanism;—in other words having effectively excommunicated their children from the covenant life of faith from birth, parents then turn round to them when they reach adolescence and ask them to make a decision about the faith. Then they are shocked and upset when their children respond by saying: "Well, I've thought about it and I've decided it's not for me." What else should such parents expect? Education is not religiously or spiritually neutral. In fact nothing we do as human beings is religiously or spiritually neutral. If we fail to give our children a Christian education we give them instead, wittingly or unwittingly, a *non-Christian* education, e.g. a secular humanist education, which is not religiously neutral but rather in rebellion against God. So many parents seem to think they should not "indoctrinate" their children with the Christian faith. But their determination to avoid what they call "indoctrination" has led them, unwittingly perhaps, to *indoctrinate* their children with secular humanism, a *religion* that teaches that man is the master of his own fate. Why then should they be upset or disappointed when their children demonstrate by their "decision" the belief that *they* are the captains of their own fate, not Jesus Christ?

It is the duty of Christians to bring their children up in the faith, *as* Christians, teaching them to see the world and everything in it in relation to the God who created it. This gets called "indoctrination" both by non-believers and by many Christians, and yet somehow subjecting one's children to a godless secular education is not seen as indoctrination. But it is. It is the worst form of indoctrination a parent can subject his children to because it will turn them into consistent secular humanists and neo-pagans with a world-view that is in rebellion against God.

Parents may think that their children are making their own minds up about the faith, "making their own decision." But they are not. Children in such a context will no more make their own minds up about the faith than children who have been "indoctrinated" with their parents' Christian faith. Their minds have already been formed by the godless atheistic education, the godless world-view, that they have imbibed in the secular schooling system. But their minds should be formed by a Christian education, a Christian world-view imbibed in a Christian school or in terms of a Christian home schooling education, because only such an education can equip them for life in the real world, namely the world that God created and that he providentially governs according to his own purposes. This is the world they must live in, not the godless world that secular humanists imagine exists. Surely, it is the purpose of an education to equip children for life. If children are to be equipped for life in the real world, God's world, they must be equipped with a Christian world-view, not a godless secular humanist world-view. The only world that exists out there is God's world. The secular humanist world-view is false, a fantasy,

and those who live in terms of that world-view will waste their lives. Christians must provide their children with an education in terms of the Christian world-view. An education in either context will condition the child's understanding of life.

Even if children who are sent to secular schools do become Christians by God's grace, this will not mean that they will suddenly become Christian in their thinking, that their world-view will instantly become a Christian world-view. It will not. They may well spend the rest of their lives unlearning the secular world-view that they imbibed at school and learning to think in terms of a Christian world-view. This will take time and it will be difficult because it is not just a matter of learning the truth, but also a process of deprogramming the mind, which has been thoroughly programmed to think in a way that is contrary to the Christian world-view by the secular schooling system, which has its effect in the most formative period of a person's life. There is a saying: "it is hard to teach an old dog new tricks." It is not impossible for adults to change their world-view, but it is more difficult to inculcate a new world-view in an adult than it is to raise a child in such a world-view from the beginning, which is much more effective. But unfortunately, as adult converts to the Christian faith they may very well *not* spend the rest of their lives learning the Christian world-view, but instead go through life with saved souls and wasted lives, trusting Christ for their salvation from hell but living like secular humanists in terms of a secular humanist world-view, as so many Christians live today. They may well never understand the effect that the secular world-view has had on them and never see the need to bring their thinking about the whole of life into a correct relation to God and his law. Their "Christian" faith may well amount to nothing more than a form of escapism in this life and a good hell-fire insurance policy for the next, which is how many Christians see the faith, i.e. not as a *religion* to live by, but as a safety net for the afterlife. They may well see Christianity as essentially not about *life* at all, but rather about *death*. They will therefore probably get no further than their parents in the Christian life, and in an aggressively secular culture such as the West has become, they will most likely go backwards and end up with *less* understanding than their parents had. The purpose of an education is to prepare and train a child for life. If we give someone a secular humanist education we prepare and train him for a secular humanist life. He may well have a saved soul as an adult convert to the Christian faith, but if his understanding of the faith is pietistic and focused merely on the devotional life, Church and the afterlife, his life will largely be lived in terms of the secular humanist understanding of Christianity imbibed in his youth, i.e. he will see the Christian faith not as a religion to live by, but as a personal devotional hobby that will pay off well when he dies.

How can we expect to convert and baptise the *nation* while this remains the practice of the greater part of the Church? It is impossible for our society, our nation, to be disciplined to Christ until we start educating the next generation in terms of the Christian faith. Without this children get no further in their Christian lives than their parents, which is often not very far at all. The abandonment of Christian education and the secular State's usurpation of parental responsibility in the education of children, along with the willingness of Christians to hand their children over to non-believers to be indoctrinated into the religion of secular

humanism in the secular schools, has been and continues to be one of the major contributing factors to the decommissioning of Britain as a *Christian* nation because it has produced a generation of people who live in terms of the denial of God in all they think and do. Even Christians educated in the secular world-view will most likely deny God in much of their lives. Although they may have saved souls they may well remain rebellious in the way they live their lives, refusing to submit to the lordship of Christ in all things. This is the situation we have in the British Church today. Sending our children to secular schools that operate in terms of this rebellious secular humanist world-view is a contradiction of the Great Commission. It will not help to disciple the nation in any sense; it is rather a significant aspect of the decommissioning of the nation as a Christian nation. It is part of the great decommissioning, an abdication of parental responsibility by Christian parents that is a contradiction, an overturning, of the Great Commission.

The answer to this problem is for parents to baptise their children as Christians, because God has made a promise to them as parents (Acts 2:39), *and* to bring them up as Christians in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). This must include giving our children a Christian education in terms of the Christian world-view. But this involves far more than merely the academic, though it includes academic education as well. It involves the whole of our children's development, and this means also that they must be fully included in the covenant life of the Church. It is the whole process that will inform and shape the minds of our children and inculcate in them a Christian world-view that will prepare them for the whole of life, which is their mission field. Our children's minds will either be formed by a Christian world-view or they will be *de*-formed by a secular humanist world-view. If we wish to disciple the nation to Christ we must not send our children to secular schools to be indoctrinated into the atheist world-view of the secular establishment. We must provide a Christian alternative, either in Christian schools or by means of Christian home schooling, and the Church must be fully behind this, both by encouraging it and facilitating it, especially where parents face insurmountable difficulties without the help of the Church.

When a whole generation has been brought up and educated in this way, in terms of a Christian world-view, we shall begin to see the discipling of the nation to Christ. The results of this approach will be far more effective than the meagre results of lobbying, which many Christians seem to think exhausts their duty in the public sphere.

This is how we baptise the nations. The task involves far more than baptising adult converts, though obviously it includes that as well. It involves far more than the rite of water baptism. Baptism with water in the name of the Trinity signifies the initiation of the one being baptised into the covenant life of faith. This involves the whole life of the person from baptism onwards. Likewise, baptising the nation includes water baptism, but it implies far more than the mere performance of a rite. Just as baptism of the individual signifies the initiation of the one being baptised into the covenant life of faith, so also baptism of the nation signifies the initiation of the nation into the covenant life of faith. This also involves initiating our children into the Christian faith in the whole of life from birth onwards while they are under our care so that when they reach adulthood they can live life

fully in terms of the Christian world-view and in their turn bring up the next generation in the same way. This is how we initiate the nation into the covenant life of faith—i.e. baptise the nation.

If you do not want this you do not have to have it. You can bring your children up as non-believers, give them a secular education and then evangelise them when they reach adolescence or adulthood. They may even become Christians and begin a life-long struggle to divest themselves of the secular humanist world-view foisted upon them as children by the secular schooling system, or possibly—indeed probably in the present climate—they might simply go through the rest of their lives as pietists with a dualistic understanding of the faith, unable to relate their faith to the real world and their everyday lives. But do not expect the discipling of the nation to Christ. It will not happen because the *de*-commissioning of the nation is the inevitable outcome of such a theology and practice. Far more than this is required if we are to disciple the nation.

Baptising the nation requires baptising our children, initiating them into the Christian life in its fulness and raising them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. This involves initiating each generation into the whole covenant life of the Church and educating them in terms of it. We cannot baptise a nation without baptising our children into the faith and bringing them up in terms of it. It will take several generations and a great deal of sacrifice and hard work to accomplish this. But it will work. How do I know this? Because God is in it. It is his will and command to his Church and he will accomplish it through his Church by the power of the Holy Spirit. He will not accomplish it in any other way. Christianity does not work by magic. God works through his Church, the body of Christ on earth. It is through the witness and work of the Church that the nations will be disciplined. But only if the Church embraces that work obediently.

Third, in the Great Commission we are commanded to teach the law of God to the nations, "all things whatsoever I have commanded you." And what is the command of Christ? Christ came to fulfil the law, to bring it to full expression, to completion, i.e. to put it fully into effect. He did not come to abrogate it (Mt. 5:17). He appeared on the mount of transfiguration in the presence of Moses and Elijah to confirm the gospel's continuity with the law and the prophets, not to demonstrate the abrogation of the law and the prophets. "If ye love me" says Jesus "keep my commandments" (Jn 14:15). What are his commandments? They are the commandments of God. How do we know this? Because Jesus tells us so. He and the Father are one (Jn 10:30). He came to do the will of the Father (Jn 4:34; 5:20; 8:28–30). He came in his Father's name (Jn 5:43). He kept his father's commandments (Jn 15:10). Moses wrote about Christ (Jn 1:45; 5:46). Christ told the Jews that if they had believed Moses they would have believed him (Jn 5:46). Jesus asked the Jews, and he asks us the same question today: "if ye believe not his [i.e. Moses'] writings, how shall ye believe my words?" (Jn. 5:47). Christ tells us that the great commandments are to love God and our neighbour (Mk 12:28–31). How do we do this? The Bible tells us that we do this by fulfilling, i.e. by *keeping*, the law of God (Jn 14:15; Rom. 13:8–10).⁹

9. The word translated as "fulfilment" in Rom. 13:10, *πλήρωμα*, means the *performance* of the law. Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New*

Yet we have today in the West a form of Christianity that is hostile to God's law. This has not always been so. In previous ages the Church has fully recognised the importance of God's law and its essential role in her mission to disciple the nations. But not as a form of self-righteousness or a means of justification. The law was never meant to function in that way, not even in the Old Testament. Its function rather is as a positive way of life, a standard or rule of life. The law is, after all, a transcript of God's righteousness, and we are to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect (Mt. 5:48). This means that our goal must be to conform to God's will as it is revealed in his law.

There can therefore be no disciplining of the nations without the nations' embracing God's law. And this was how the Church understood the Great Commission in past ages. This is not a new doctrine; it is the orthodox doctrine of the Church, and it is historically what happened. The Christian religion was described in mediaeval times as *lex Christiana* (the Christian law) as opposed to *lex Muhametana* (Muslim religion) and *lex Antichristi* (pagan religion).¹⁰ English common law was shaped under the influence of the Christian concepts of justice and equity. A doctrine of the common law stated that "Any law is or of right ought to be according to the law of God."¹¹ Likewise, equity was aimed at upholding justice in terms of God's law.¹² The British justice system was based on God's law and a Christian understanding of the rule of law. This is why the British justice system was in the past so effective. There is a qualitative difference between the justice systems of those nations that have embraced the Christian faith and those that have not. Our civilisation, and Western civilisation generally, has been superior to the civilisations of pagan nations in so many ways because it has been a Christian civilisation. The justice systems of the Christian nations have been superior to the barbarous systems of justice found in pagan cultures because the justice systems of Christians nations have come under the disciplining influ-

ence of God's law. The establishing of God's law as the basis upon which justice is understood and practised has been an essential part of the fulfilling of the Great Commission, and without it in future there will be no progress in the Great Commission.

Yet today we have a Church that largely denies the relevance of God's law. Is there any wonder that non-believers have abandoned it and that now we are seeing the progressive de-Christianising of the nations? At the time of the Reformation in England the Ten Commandments were put up on large boards in all the churches for the people to read and the Ten Commandments were read aloud in church every Sunday. During the twentieth century the Ten Commandments were taken down in most churches and they are no longer read in most church services. What sort of message does this give to the nation? It is a message that fits well with the pietistic view of the Christian faith that dominates Church life today, namely that the Christian faith has no relevance to the nation or the public sphere; it is a private devotional cult. The Church in England no longer believes it is her duty to preach the law of God. The consensus of opinion in the Church, among both clergy and laymen, is that God's law does not apply to the nation. It is not even deemed to apply to the individual any more, let alone to the nation. To preach such a negative message about God's law is to engage in the *de-commissioning* of the nation as a Christian nation.

Britain today is in the process of being decommissioned as a Christian nation. The process is almost complete, and Christians who have argued that God's law does not apply to the nations, that we are not under obligation to obey it and base our justice system upon it, are complicit with that process of decommissioning of the nation as a Christian nation. The rejection of God's law not only as a personal standard of moral behaviour but also as a standard upon which the nation should base its legislation and justice system is a denial and an overturning of the Great Commission. Where a nation has already been a Christian nation the rejection of God's law is a reversing, a wrecking, of what Christians of previous generations worked for and with God's help achieved. And it is what some of them gave their lives for. British justice and the concept of the rule of law as this has been understood historically in the West was based upon the law of God.¹³

The preaching of God's law is a vital aspect of the Great Commission to disciple the nations. The Bible tells us that the law of God shall go forth from Zion and that all the peoples of the earth shall come to Zion to learn the law of God, and that as a result of this the nations will learn to live in peace (Is. 2:1–4). Was this written only for the Jews? Hardly. It has never been fulfilled. It is unfulfilled prophesy. Is this of relevance for us to day? Of course it is. It is only the establishing of God's law as the foundation for our justice systems that will enable the nations of the world to achieve peace. Only as God's law is embraced by the nations will the people of the world be delivered from the injustice that characterises so much of contemporary world politics.

Yet today the Church is going backwards, along with our secular humanist culture, because our society has aban-

Testament gives the following definition of the word in the context of Rom. 13:10: "4 The 'act of filling'; a. active: as ἀγάπη is not an ethical disposition, so πληρωμα in R[om]. 13:10 is not a formal ethical concept ('sum'). Both words refer to the act. Loving conduct is a 'complete and entire fulfilment' of what God demands in the Law. An act. meaning is suggested for R[om]. 13:10 by v. 8b . . . We have a compact train of thought in vv. 8b–10b. The statement in 8b is proved in 9–10a (v. 9 γάρ) and then recapitulated in 10b when proof has been given (οὕτως). The argument would be poorly handled, however, if πληρωμα had the same meaning as ἀνακεφαλαιοῦν [summing up], which is part of the actual proof. πληρωμα, then, does not mean 'sum'; it is the 'complete fulfilment' of the Law in deed, and in this sense it is the opp[osite] of the formal ἀνακεφαλαιοῦν" (Gerhard Dellling, "πληρωμα" in Kittel and Friedrich, *op. cit.*, Vol. VI, p. 305). Likewise C. K. Barrett: "The meaning of 'complete fulfilment' (πληρωμα) is disputed, but it must be decided in the light of the use of the cognate verb in v. 8. The man who loves has fulfilled the law, that is, he has done what the law requires; the love, therefore, which he exercises constitutes the fulfilment of the law's requirement. Thus love is not the *completion* but the *performance* of the law. V. 9 shows that by the law Paul means the Old Testament law in its preceptual character" (C. K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans* [London: Adam and Charles Black, 1957], p. 251).

10. Thomas Schirmacher, "Lex' (Law) as Another Word for Religion: A Lesson from the Middle Ages" in *Calvinism Today*, Vol. II, No. 2 (April 1992), p. 5.

11. This statement is taken from a Year Book of Henry VII's reign (cited in A. K. R. Kiralfy, *Potter's Historical Introduction to English Law* [London: Sweet and Maxwell Ltd, Fourth Edition, 1958], p. 33).

12. See Stephen C. Perks, *Christianity and Law: An Enquiry into the Influence of Christianity on the Development of English Common Law* (Avant Books, 1993), p. 44 and *passim*

13. See further Harold J. Berman, *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983), *passim*.

doned the law of God as the standard of justice that should govern the life of the nation. Our society has suffered immensely from the abandonment of God's law as the standard of personal and social behaviour and the basis of our understanding of justice, and as a nation we shall continue to decline in this way until God's law is re-established as the standard of conduct required, not only in our personal lives, but also as the standard upon which our national system of justice should be based.

The Bible does not give us a negative view of God's law, either in the Old Testament or the New. Rather, it stresses the perfection of God's law and its role in providing guidance for mankind personally and nationally (Ps. 19:7–11; Is. 2:2–4). The law of God is the law of *Christ*, and we are commanded in the Great Commission to teach the law of God to the nations. Only as this is accomplished will the blessing of Is. 2:2–4 be realised, since what Isaiah describes is the accomplishment of the Great Commission.

To sum up, the Great Commission consists of three commands, or a command in three parts: (1) the discipling of the nations, (2) the baptising of the nations, and (3) the teaching of God's law to the nations. And it is the *nations* that are the object of each part of the command, not merely individuals from among the nations. The Great Commission does not command us to go out converting individuals, snatching brands from the fire. It commands us to disciple the *nations*.

This understanding of the nature and practice of the Great Commission produces very different results from the idea of the Great Commission as a command to convert individuals from among the nations. Discipling the nations necessarily involves the conversion of individuals to the Christian faith. There can be no Christian nation without individual Christians. But a command to convert individuals to the Christian faith does not necessarily mean that this will lead to the discipling of the nation, especially in the spiritual climate that dominates Church life in the West today, where the faith is seen in narrow terms as a personal devotional hobby with no relevance to the nation socially or politically. Converting individuals does not necessarily lead to the discipling of the nations. Discipling the nation is impossible without converting individuals to the faith, but it also involves far more than this.

Unfortunately, as a result of the modern misunderstanding of the nature of the Christian faith as a private devotional hobby, and the Great Commission as a command to disciple individuals, the Great Commission has been turned into the very opposite of what Jesus commanded, namely the Great De-commission. Under the influence of this individualistic, privatised, dualistic understanding of the faith, the Church has engaged in the decommissioning of the nations.

The dominant contemporary view of the Christian faith as a subjective, private, devotional faith that does not engage with the world is not biblical. The Bible does not see the faith in terms of a personal worship hobby, but rather as a religion that overcomes and transforms the world. The Christian faith is a *public* truth, and public truth is *religion*. Very many Christians today, however, deny that Christianity is a religion. And it has to be recognised that for these people it is not a religion. It is merely a worship hobby. An important hobby no doubt, with eternal consequences. It comes with a good hell-fire insurance policy, nonetheless it is essentially a hobby. But in denying that Christianity is a religion Chris-

tians have unwittingly denied it the status of public truth, with dire consequences for the life of the nation. The purpose of the Christian life is not merely to transform our personal lives and make us more holy. It is to glorify God by transforming the world, by bringing the world under the discipline of Jesus Christ and his word. The Christian faith is a political and social faith as well as a personal faith; its mission does not terminate on the individual but on the whole world, which is to be brought into subjection to the will of Christ.

If we are to win the world for Christ we must take the Great Commission seriously as a commission to bring the *nations* of the earth under the discipline of Christ, not only by preaching the gospel of personal salvation through faith in Christ but also by baptising the nations and teaching the law of God to the nations. Do not expect to see the return of Christ before this happens. Why not? Because the Bible tells us what the world will be like when the Great Commission has been fulfilled: "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many peoples shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Is. 2:2–4). And this picture of the fulfilment of the Great Commission is confirmed in the New Testament. "And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 11:15).

Excursus

In the first part of the Great Commission in Mt. 28:19a the command is to disciple *ἐθνῶν*, "nations," which is accusative plural *neuter*; subsequently in vv. 19b and 20 the command is to baptise and teach "them," *αὐτοὺς*, accusative plural *masculine*. Much has been made of this gender disagreement between the word *nations* and the subsequent pronoun *them* by Baptists, since a command to baptise nations poses a problem for Baptist theology. For example John Gill's commentary states: ". . . the antecedent to the relative 'them,' cannot be 'all nations'; since (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη) the words for 'all nations', are of the neuter gender, whereas (αὐτοὺς) 'them' is of the masculine . . ." According to John Gill, therefore, the direct object of the second and third parts of the Great Commission is different from that of the first part and understood—i.e. only implied, not stated. The word "them" cannot refer to the nations, but must instead refer only to those disciplined from among the nations. Why? According to the Baptist view simply because the pronoun uses a masculine case while its antecedent, the "nations," is in the neuter. Some other antecedent must be supplied mentally therefore to make the Greek genders agree. Of course this is very convenient for Baptist theology, which would face considerable problems if this were not so. But is this a valid argument?

The rationale for the Baptist argument is that the Greek

is grammatically incorrect unless we assume some antecedent other than the noun to which the pronoun most naturally refers, i.e. “nations.” But the Greek does not require this grammatical strictness and the New Testament is consistent with Greek grammar in using a masculine plural pronoun to refer back to a neuter plural noun. According to Blass and Debrunner’s *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* “The so-called *constructio ad sensum*, without following any fixed rules, was very widespread in Greek from early times and is found in the N[ew] T[estament] as in the papyri . . . Feminine or neuter personal collectives standing in the plural may be continued by a masculine plural.”¹⁴ They then give an example from Gal. 1:22–23 where Paul says “and [I] was unknown by face unto the churches of Judaea which were in Christ: but they had heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed.” In v. 22 the noun ἐκκλησίας, “churches,” which is feminine plural, is continued in the following verse by ἀκούοντες ἦσαν, “they were hearing.” But ἀκούοντες is a masculine plural present active participle. According to the strict rule of agreement demanded by those who insist that at Mt. 28:19–20 αὐτοὺς cannot refer back to ἐθνῇ because of the gender disagreement, the construction in Gal. 1:22–23 is also ungrammatical and for the same reason ἀκούοντες in v. 23 cannot refer back to the noun ἐκκλησίας in v. 22. Some other antecedent therefore must be understood. But of course this is unnecessary. The phrase “they had heard” (lit. “they were hearing”) in Gal. 1:23 quite naturally refers to the “churches” of v. 22, even though the participle ἀκούοντες is masculine. This shows therefore that such a strict rule of agreement is neither required by Greek grammar nor practised by Greek writers.

Furthermore, the New Testament was written in the vulgar language of the people, not in the high prose of classical Greek literature. The New Testament is ungrammatical in a number of places. Spoken language does not always follow the strict rules of grammar and the New Testament is the kind of language spoken by the people. Suppose for the sake of argument, however, that strict agreement must be maintained and that any departure from it in such cases indicates something other than the plain meaning of the text. In John 16:13 we are told “When *he*, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth.” The word “he,” ἐκεῖνος, a masculine demonstrative pronoun, is here continued by the word “Spirit,” πνεῦμα, which is neuter. In other words there is no gender agreement between the noun and the pronoun. How are we to interpret this verse if “he” cannot refer to the Holy Spirit? And what does this say of the gender of the Holy Spirit? The theory requiring strict gender agreement fails here. The neuter “Spirit” and the masculine pronoun must refer to each other no matter how ungrammatical this is. To complicate things still further,

sometimes strict grammar is adhered to, showing that such grammatical points cannot determine the sense of the text merely on their own merits. For example, John 14:17 speaks of “the Spirit of truth; *whom* the world cannot receive, because it seeth *him* [lit. *it*] not.” πνεῦμα, “Spirit,” is neuter, and the pronouns ὃ, “whom,” and αὐτό, “him” (i.e. “it”), are neuter also. Likewise in Rom. 8:16 we are told “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.” The Greek term πνεῦμα, “spirit,” which is neuter, is here followed by a neuter pronoun, αὐτό, “itself” (likewise in v. 26). Does this mean the Holy Spirit is not a person but a force? Some would argue that way. But in John 16:13, as we have seen, the demonstrative pronoun is used in the masculine to refer to the Spirit, which is neuter. What does all this prove then? Precisely nothing! No great theological weight can be laid upon the gender agreement or disagreement between a pronoun and its referent in such cases without the risk of distorting the overall teaching of the Bible (e.g. if we insist that the Spirit is not a person but a force because the term is neuter we distort the witness of Scripture elsewhere).

Likewise in Mt. 28:19–20. To insist that “them” cannot refer to “nations” is to make the grammar of the ordinary spoken Greek of the New Testament bear a weight it was never intended to bear. Furthermore such a strict rule is not required by Greek grammar and evidence from the New Testament elsewhere demonstrates that such a strict rule is in fact not observed. Indeed, according to Blass and Debrunner, as we have seen, it was not even observed in classical Greek from early times.

This being the case, an argument for not taking “them” to refer back to “nations” in Mt. 28:19–20 would need to be demonstrated from other passages in Scripture. But the Bible bears witness that the result of the Great Commission is emphatically *not* that mere individuals from among the nations will be disciplined to Christ; rather it is that the kingdoms of *this* world will become the kingdom of Christ (Rev. 11:15). These two texts, Mt. 28:19–20 and Rev. 11:15, represent the Alpha and Omega of eschatology. If we wish to know what Mt. 28:19–20 means, what its purpose and end result is, we have it spelled out clearly in Rev. 11:15, namely the conversion of the *nations*, the kingdoms of *this* world, to Christ, since “the *nations* of them which are saved shall walk the light of it [i.e. the city of God]: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it” (Rev. 21:24, cf. Is. 2:2ff.).

In the light of these considerations the argument for taking “them” to refer not to the “nations” but to some other understood antecedent has little to commend it and appears to be driven rather by a prior theological commitment. In other words, it appears to be an attempt to explain away the plain meaning of Scripture and import into the text a reading more amenable to Baptist theology. To introduce into the text a different antecedent, understood rather than expressed, is neither necessary grammatically nor natural to the plain meaning of the words. All three parts of the command relate to the nations. C&S

14. F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *op. cit.*, §134, p. 74*af.* (cf. §282, p. 147*b*).

THE IMPULSE OF POWER: FORMATIVE IDEALS OF WESTERN CIVILISATION[†]

by Michael W. Kelley

PREFACE

We cannot combat the errors of our time if we cannot recognize kindred errors in the past . . . In every era, the modernisms of the day have reshaped men's views of the Bible when in fact the Bible requires us to reshape our world, our times, and ourselves in terms of the word of God.—R. J. Rushdoony

IN his thought-provoking book, *Christ the Meaning of History*, Hendrikus Berkhof remarked: “History is the study of man’s actions and decisions. It is the terrain on which man’s cultural mission is realized; along with this it is also the terrain of his self-realization” (p. 17).

As the title indicates, Berkhof thinks it necessary to evaluate the “terrain of man’s cultural mission” in terms of Christ. Is this conceivable? What can Christ possibly have to do with man’s “cultural mission?” In our modern, secular age this scarcely seems plausible. For some time now mankind has been busy fashioning culture without the least reference to Christ. We could even say that, at the present, mankind shows a decided aversion to Christ, and not least in his cultural efforts. For most people, Christ means religion, and they dismiss religion as irrelevant to man’s life, his culture especially. Perhaps we should qualify this. Most people object to any religion that presents the demands of Christ, but not to a religion where their own interests receive top priority. Thus, in claiming that religion is irrelevant for culture, they do not mean *all* religion, only the Christian religion.

Berkhof’s assertion that Christ is the meaning of history might not make much of an impact on the thinking of the secular men of today—the elites who control the agenda of the institutions in which culture is discussed and fostered most especially—but what effect does this thought have on those who call themselves *Christians*? Do Christians even imagine that there is any connection between Christ and history? Mind, we are not asking what role Christ played in

history, as if our concern were merely with the person of Jesus and his effect on the people of his day two thousand years ago. Nor are we asking what impact the Christian religion has made on human history in the two thousand years of its existence, although this is not irrelevant. That Jesus had a following in history, that he engaged the devotion and beliefs of many throughout these two millennia, is not in question. Rather, what we are asking, as does Berkhof, is what is the meaning of Christ *for* history—history being the terrain of man’s “cultural mission?” Does Christ have any meaning for the unfolding of man’s cultural mission? If so, do we have an obligation to evaluate man’s cultural mission in terms of Christ who is its meaning? Most especially, how do we understand Western culture in the light of Christ, since Western culture is hardly thinkable without considering that Christianity was essential to its formation and development?

Many, if not most, Christians do not even consider that man has been given a cultural mission. Or if, perhaps, man does have such a task to perform, they can scarcely imagine that God had anything to do with it. For most Christians there is little, if any, connection between what they profess to believe and the need to work out their faith in cultural form. In one sense this is understandable, since central to the Christian religion, as Scripture indicates, is its concern for the redemption of man from sin. The chief intent of God’s revelation in Christ would seem to have no other interest, so far as man is concerned, than this. But is this true? Does the sin of man have no impact on culture? And is the redemption of man from sin not intended to have an impact on his culture as well? Can we assume that man’s cultural labours are neutral so far as sin and righteousness are concerned? If not, then what bearing does Christ have on man’s cultural mission? Does not redemption in Christ also possess a relevance for the cultural labours of man?

History, indeed, is the terrain of man’s cultural mission.

[†] This is the first part of a serialisation of Michael Kelley’s book by the same title published by Contra Mundum Books in 1998. It is reproduced here by kind permission of the author and publisher. A Spanish version of this book is also available on the Contra Mundum website (www.contra-mundum.org/libros.html).

If Christ is the meaning of history, then he is the key to the evaluation of man's cultural mission. As Christians, therefore, we are compelled to scrutinise the cultural labours of man from the standpoint of Christ, who must have the central significance in all the work that man does under the sun. Our concern in what follows is to offer an evaluation of Western culture, for, as we mentioned, that is the cultural context in which Christianity has had the greatest impact. Has the Christianity embodied in that culture upheld the claims of Christ as it should have, or have other motives been at work, motives which have sought to drive Christ from the lordship of man's cultural mission? Have Christians been faithful in struggling on Christ's behalf against the intrusion of those other influences? If those other, non-Christian, ideals have gained ascendancy, what has been their effect on Western culture? We cannot answer these questions unless we examine the legacy of Western cultural ideals in detail. Only then will it be possible to see if Christ has truly been at the center of that civilisation.

For many Christians these questions and concerns will likely seem irrelevant. With the arrival of the year 2000, there is perhaps little interest in looking into the past. Rather, all eyes are turned upon the immediate future when many Christians fervently expect Christ will come and finally set up his promised millennial kingdom. History, the past, the record of man's cultural mission, are of little concern. At the very least, their perspective on Christianity is one that is shaped by a need to save *souls* and a *go-to-heaven* theology. Nothing else, they suppose, really matters. Thus, when it comes to man's cultural mission, most do not see the church's missionary task to have any bearing upon it.

Everything depends, however, on what we understand by the word *Christ*. Is it merely a name, or is it a title? If it is the latter, what does it say about him who is the bearer of it? The Christian faith is *Christian*, after all, because it derives from Christ, not just Jesus. Consequently, all that pertains to the Christian faith has Christ, and all that that title means, at its centre. We as Christians ought not simply to confess Jesus Christ, but that Jesus *is* the Christ, the one anointed to be the heir of all Creation. *Christ* bespeaks not simply the person of Jesus, but his kingdom and lordship of the whole earth as well. It is the term that designates his replacement of Adam as the head of the human race. All that God determined for mankind at Creation now has its redemptive

ground and purpose in him. Nothing summarises better the meaning of the word *Christ* than these words of the apostle Paul to the Colossian Christians: "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy" (1:15–18). Not only is Christ the meaning of history, but nothing and no one else possibly can be. And if of history, then he is the meaning of man's cultural mission as well.

Paul's words strongly suggest that Christ is now as he describes and will not merely become so in the future. After all, he wrote these words nearly two millennia ago. If they were true then, they have remained true, and continue to be true today. Since Christ is at the same time the "firstborn over all creation," and the "firstborn from among the dead," then all that pertains to Creation, man's cultural mission included, must have both its foundation and redemption in him. Consequently, as Christians, we must evaluate the work of man in the light of Christ who now has the *supremacy* over all things. Nothing that is part of man's life in this world is outside of Christ. But we shall return to this thought in the conclusion.

The end of the second millennium is a good time to look back on our cultural heritage and take stock. What value has Christ had within that culture? How do we assess man's activity in terms of Christ as the Lord of history, the Lord of man's cultural mission? This is what we propose to do in the following pages. We will not cover everything. We shall merely highlight those areas of Western culture which have stood out prominently in the ideals of the makers and producers of that culture. That is, we shall but touch upon those various domains which have received such great emphasis in the studies done on Western man. Some may find this not to be worthwhile or, at the least, tedious and not immediately practical. But, apart from the intrinsic need to appraise all that men do in terms of Christ who will one day bring all the works of man into judgment, so long as history continues, we, as Christians especially, must seek to understand what is involved in the phrase, Christ the meaning of history.

PART I: ANCIENT MAN: "THE FIRST ENLIGHTENMENT"

I. HOMER: THE HEROIC IDEAL

THE name *Western Civilisation* is more than a term of geography. It refers to a cultural idea—a total civilisational project by which a portion of mankind endeavoured over the course of centuries to construct a viable philosophy of life and existence, and thereby gradually to propound a suitable concept of rational, social and ethical order. It was *Western* because of where it sprang up and the nations which first embraced its ideals, but it was not a vision of life and reality

that was territorially limited. In time it came to be regarded, at least by those within it, as the best that men anywhere were capable of achieving. Western civilisation offered man an ordered concept of life that uniquely enabled him to realise his greatest potential and so give the highest positive significance to his essential humanity. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Western civilisation has gained such a commanding influence throughout the world and achieved so

widespread a benefit for larger numbers of people everywhere.

By contrast, in nearly all non-Western civilisations, past and present, the principal feature has been, and remains, that they are cultures designed for, and limited in their usefulness to, ruling elites. By-and-large a powerful few chart the course and enjoy the benefits of culture and civilisation, and nearly always at the expense of the weak and passive many. In these cultures knowledge, that essential stock of a civilisation's ideas about itself and the world, has been controlled by, and restricted to, an *aristocratic* cadre who view it as a way to promote themselves and dominate others. Often their goal has been to preserve the people's ignorance and subordination by the superstitions of *noble* character and superiority of inherited virtue of the rulers. Such civilisations necessarily insist upon a sharp distinction between the special few who have access to the *gods* and the unenlightened many who must submit to the superior wisdom and understanding of the privileged. This cultural mentality maintains the fiction that only these specially high-bred persons are fully human for the reason that they are by nature and education more god-like in their capacities and abilities. Cultures like these are, and always have been, stagnant and moribund, neither developing nor progressing in any beneficial way for the people as a whole. The elites who dominate them have a strong interest in maintaining the status quo. With their superiority in the social scheme being, in their minds, a necessity of nature and not merely the flattery of custom, naturally, they would stoutly resist all forms of change, regardless of whether or not it improves the moral and material condition of their alleged inferiors. Cultures and civilisations like these, being tightly dominated from the top, tend to languish under the oppressive weight of semi-barbaric conditions, regardless of how stable or appealing they may appear to the outside observer. They constrict the human spirit and prevent man's natural talents and interests from being fully realised.

Compared to these non-Western cultural traits, Western civilisation came eventually to embody the belief that no men are innately superior to others. Though some possess outstanding abilities and talents and may, for that reason, contribute more to the cultural edifice, this does not make them inherently more human, nor are other, less gifted persons incapable of appropriating the culture or of contributing to its progressive unfolding in history. This, in no small measure, is attributable to the influence of Christianity which saw in man a miniature reflection of his Maker and therefore a creature upon whom his Creator possessed a pre-eminent claim. It was man's duty to develop his inner nature including his talents and abilities so as to mirror the God who gave him life and all things besides. Under God all men stood on an equal footing regardless of their place in society. This encouraged a respect for human life and accomplishment on a broad scale, and helped to reduce the deep impress of elitist superiority and aristocratic self-exaltation. Its effect was to open up culture to a wider participation than just for those who occupied the top rung of the social and moral ladder.

What is more, only in the West did the notion of history, as the record of a civilisation's advance or regression, self-consciously shape the way a people viewed itself and its accomplishments. Western man, for the most part, has not thought of his culture as a finished product, but as an on-

going enterprise in which present achievements, although built on the accumulated deeds of past generations, furnish but the opportunities for greater benefits for tomorrow. Western culture was no static ideal, but a dynamic and growing vision for future generations. In this sense, Western culture is still an ideal to be achieved, still in process of formation.

However, as we arrive at the end of the twentieth century, thoughtful persons everywhere generally acknowledge that Western civilisation appears to be mired in a profound crisis of identity. The cherished belief that Western culture stands superior to other forms of culture has come under sustained and venomous attack. Its fortress walls are crumbling under intensifying assaults, and, most seriously, not so much from those on the outside as from those within! Faith in Western culture has been eroded in the minds of the offspring whose ancestors were its builders. Those who lead this attack have in mind not amendment, but replacement; often theirs is a simplistic belief that *somehow* out of the whirlwind of destruction something better will arise. Yet it is noteworthy that what appears to be the emerging alternative looks suspiciously like all non-Western types of cultures with which history and the present are replete. Elitism in the name of Man is once again making a vicious bid for control of the cultural agenda, not to advance a new principle of civilisation, but in a sheer drive for power in order to compel the multitudes to submit to the orders of the few who, self-assertedly, are possessed of superior moral vision and understanding.

Has Nietzsche triumphed? Has the "will to power" replaced belief in principled order and civility? These questions elicit others that require reflection. Has Western civilisation ever been devoid of elitist notions of its own? Has it been entirely free from the types of attitudes that have found expression throughout history in all non-Western cultures and civilisations?

There is in man a strong sense that life means more than mere animal existence; that man ought to shape and develop his life so as to achieve an enduring quality, one that should result from systematic and thoughtful effort. In the biblical view, man was created by God to "have dominion" over the earth and to serve his Creator by building a kingdom that would come to expression as a culture and civilisation. By erecting civilisation man would build himself up and bring to its fullest realisation the very essence of his manhood under God. By doing so, he would accomplish God's purpose for himself and, at the same time, honour and glorify the God who gave him life and culture and every good thing in the first place.

Into this depiction of man's purpose in God's world a deep shade intrudes. If Scripture speaks of man being given a cultural task to perform, it also asserts that man was created to be God's obedient servant, that he was to go about his civilisational labours in *ethical* submission to God's will. Because man rebelled against this moral requirement, God cursed man with death and his cultural endeavours with vanity. By acting in ethical disobedience against God man forfeited all claims to whatever benefits God intended that man should reap in kingdom service to him.

God brought light to bear on this darkness by establishing a new foundation upon which men could hope once again to realise a kingdom purpose. He would provide *salvation* for man from his moral corruption and disobedi-

ence and thereby grant the basis of a new effort at a complete culture and civilisation. At the same time, it was made clear that morality and culture were inextricably intertwined, that the former would always be the basis of the latter. God created man for a kingdom purpose, and man will be bound by this fact. Man in rebellion insists that, rather than God's will standing at the ethical center of his cultural effort, it should be man's moral self-interpretation that is to prevail. He will try to ignore or redefine God's curse on his endeavours in order to explain it away. There lies at the heart of man's effort at civilisation a conflict between those who recognise the essential sinful nature of man as biblically defined and those who do not, between those who recognise that only God's method of redemption can avail man and his culture, and those who persistently refuse to reckon with God and who reject his salvation plan in the vain belief that man can realise his own *salvation* project. This ethical division of mankind inevitably affects culture and civilisation, for man cannot cease to be a kingdom creature.

Today Western culture stands perilously close to the brink of collapse. If we should wish to know the reasons, we shall have to reckon with the ethical-religious dichotomy that lies at the centre of Western man's endeavour. Moreover, it has long been present at the core of Western culture. The terms which best describe these antithetical viewpoints have been and remain *Christianity* and *Humanism*. No others adequately explain the clash of viewpoints that lie at the root of Western civilisation and can account for the strong polarity between what men today have come to value or detest in Western civilisation.

(1) *The Roots of the West*

It is difficult to say exactly when Western culture and civilisation began. Since the humanist side of Western culture long preceded the Christian side, scholars and students of Western culture in recent centuries, especially in the nineteenth century, have not hesitated to claim that Western civilisation began with the Greeks. Their reasons may vary: some are led by a desire to justify an anti-Christian *enlightenment* faith in man and human progress initially unfolded in Greek ideas; others by a romantic longing for a cultural past unaffected by modern industrialism and impersonal mass society. But recently open fissures have appeared in Humanism. For the past three centuries Humanism has been successful in eclipsing the Christian dimension of Western culture. But while still very much in control, Humanism is now in process of breaking into opposing and irreconcilable points of view. Rather than constituting a unified agenda, Humanism has degenerated into an internecine struggle which in the twentieth century, beginning first in Europe—the geographical centre of the West—but expanding into every region of the globe, has led to wars, revolutions, and brutalities on a scale not seen before in history. The very idea of Western civilisation has been called into question, for many have come to believe that the cherished ideals of Western culture, far from acting as a barrier against these devastating upheavals, are chiefly responsible for them. As a result, humanist elites, who took charge of culture in order to expel Christianity and substitute a totally humanist concept of order, have themselves lost faith in their own agenda. In fact, they can no longer even define what that agenda is. A fierce dispute has arisen between the older traditionalists

who believe in the goodness of Western culture and the newer multiculturalists who revile it as evil and oppressive. While the former seek to rejuvenate its core beliefs, the latter wish only to destroy it. For this reason, those who pay homage to the story of the West have made an effort to recall and re-establish the core ideals of Western civilisation and to recapture the essential vision of order as first conceived and advanced in the classical Greek world of thought. If Western civilisation is to rediscover its pristine values, it is alleged, we must return to the fountainhead in ancient Greece. We can no longer merely attempt to patch up the cracks, we must clear away the rubble down to the groundwork and begin anew. There in the Greek mind we shall discover the solid foundations upon which the architectural upper stories of Western culture and civilisation had once been and may again be laboriously and painstakingly constructed.

Those who espouse this rediscovery of classicism are mainly the more *conservative* among humanists who still retain respect and adherence for Christianity in a cultural sense. However, they are not alone in defending this classical revival; they are joined by many Christians as well. Both are concerned to reconstruct a classical model in education, since this has been the area of culture in which the breakdown of Humanism has appeared to be the most devastating and the anti-Western onslaught has made its greatest gains. Christians, especially, fondly recall those mediaeval centuries when *Christianity* dominated the cultural agenda and when, as they read history, *faith* and *reason* were willing and congenial partners in a common enterprise. They point to this era as a time when order prevailed and God and Church combined to hold in check the degenerative impulses of man's irrational and *sinful* tendencies. Cultural order was viewed as divinely inspired, and while men might still act here and there with a crude lawlessness, nevertheless a general conception of good and evil predominated to hold down man's barbarous cupidity and bridle his passions so as to prevent an overthrow of civilisation. Christianity was not a needless impediment, still less an affront, to civilisation, as it has come to be viewed by most contemporary humanists, but a necessary moral barrier to the innate savagery and capriciousness of men for whom conquest, plunder, and ruinous blood-letting would otherwise comprise the means to attain their goals of temporal advantage. Conservative humanists, on the other hand, wish to return to the models of ancient Greece only to re-discover the basic ideas which gave birth to the modern Enlightenment when, as they see it, men organised their world on the principles of unbiased reason and natural law, and science, democracy, and economic rationality were the result. Culture and civilisation which sprang therefrom, having lost their appeal in recent times, must be revived. Christianity may help in so far as it encourages those ideals thought by some humanists to be necessary to the revival of rational civilisation: open intellectual and scientific procedures and methods, suppression of fanatical tendencies, and the fostering of manners and tastes considered to be inseparable from civilised behavior and discourse, i.e. the code of the gentleman.

The problem with this more conservative brand of thinking, especially in Christian circles, is its failure to understand that while Christianity may have in the past acquired a tenuous dominance in questions of ethical behavior it was scarcely tied to a uniquely biblical cultural agenda. In fact, Christians imbibed many of their ideas of culture and

civilisation from the classical thinking of Greece and Rome. Thus, the idea of culture proved to be a hybrid of Christianity with Humanism. Christianity was viewed as merely supplying what was lacking in the humanist outlook, namely, a vision of the true God and faith in his salvation. Salvation in this conception, however, was reduced to one of escape, an effective denial of a total kingdom ideal. Men were not taught that Scripture provides a cultural agenda of its own and, if men are again to live properly in terms of God's *dominion* purpose for man, they must learn it uncontaminated from that source. Many at that time could not see that ancient classical thought was a product of man's *covenant* rebellion and served to further a total anti-God programme for man. As a result, genuine biblical Christianity was compromised and could not sustain its dominance in the West once men, attracted to humanism, gradually became aware that they could fashion the cultural agenda on entirely Humanist grounds and declined to submit to what, to them, was an alien and culturally irrelevant ethico-religious mind-set.

Today the confident faith of Humanism can be seen to be a transparent delusion. Humanism's control of the cultural agenda is proving the death of culture and civilisation. Western man is morally rudderless on a vast ocean that is being swept by fierce gales, and the leaky vessel that constitutes his civilisation shows alarming signs of breaking apart. All the while a struggle is being waged between the occupants over who is best fitted to pilot the ship as well as where it should sail for the good of all. Should they be heeded who suggest that the ideals of classical man need to be recovered in order to revive the lost vision of culture that made the West what it is in the first place? Should we accept the argument of those who wish to restore the displaced ideals represented by the mediaeval synthesis of Christianity and Humanism? Can such salvage operations succeed? Is it possible to remake Western civilisation on the same basis from which it first sprang up? If so, why should one accept that it will turn out better the second time?

It is essential to re-think the entire project of Western civilisation, not because Western culture is irretrievably lost and ought to be replaced by something else. Man cannot simply invent cultures and civilisations at his will, for these unfold as products of history which, in the final analysis, is sovereignly determined by God. However, man is responsible for his use of the materials given him to shape into culture and for the choice of the proper ideals which should guide his endeavour. How has Western man developed culture? Upon what standard has he sought to erect it? There are but two options available: that which comes from God in his revealed Word, or that which arises from man's sin-darkened imagination. No mixture or confusion is possible at any time. All man's attempts at synthesis have inevitably led him to reject the *former* for the exclusive sake of the *latter*. At the outset, these were, we readily admit, the ideals of ancient Greek thinkers. Thus, in order to re-examine the main ideals which have contributed to make Western culture what it is and have helped to contribute to its present state of decline, it is necessary to start with the Greeks.

turned to a study of Greek culture and civilisation in search of the roots of our own past and culture, it has become commonplace to speak of something called "the distinctive character of the Greek mind . . ."¹ In other words, at any moment in the Greek past we shall be presented with a common set of assumptions about life, the world and what constitutes man's place in it that formed the basis upon which a unique people passed from the stage of migratory primitiveness to a settled and permanent way of living. It was "Greek" because it differed from other cultural ideals, and it was "mind" because it resulted from reflective self-consciousness. The Greeks, allegedly, were the first to think of culture and civilisation as a product of thought, more than mere accident, the result of rational inventiveness. The Greeks, we are told, came to see themselves as possessing the capacity to make culture after the pattern of ideas—ideas which, because they supposedly represented the nature of things, possessed immutability and authority. This capacity for mental self-reflection, it is argued, has enabled the Greeks to become the founders of European, or Western, civilisation. Bruno Snell, for example, averred that "European thinking begins with the Greeks. They have made it what it is: our only way of thinking; its authority, in the Western world, is undisputed . . . we use this thought . . . to focus upon . . . truth . . . with its help we hope to grasp the unchanging principles of this life."²

It is doubtless true that Greek ideals appear to us as a self-conscious cultural and civilisational identity. In general and throughout Greek history we can recognise a common society which shares the same values and outlook on life. This Greek cultural self-recognition and adherence reached its highest articulation with the formation of philosophy. Consequently, when we think of Greek ideals, we think of Plato and Aristotle. There were others, but these two men far exceed them in notoriety and influence. If philosophy forms the pinnacle of Greek cultural self-reflection, then Plato and Aristotle are the principal minds in the formation of philosophy. Other thinkers are always judged by the canons of thought defined by these two surpassing geniuses.

The reason for the ascendancy of philosophy in the world of Greek ideals can be found in the chief characteristic of Greek philosophy, the belief that a true social and civilisational order was conceivable as a "scientific" validity for all men.³ Man could construct a total culture that reflected a rationality inherent in his mind. The Greek mind believed passionately in man's inborn capacity to comprehend the total nature of reality, including both its form and the processes which animate it. Such a comprehensive understanding of reality was necessary in order to express fully the total life of man within the framework of that reality, to shape life in accordance with an ordered civilisational programme. It was in the development of philosophy that this Greek faith in the ability of the mind of man to attain to such a "comprehensive understanding" had reached its greatest intellectual focus. In Western civilisation to this day the belief in a totally scientifically constructed culture and society has remained a cardinal article of faith.

1. W. K. C. Guthrie, *The Greeks and Their Gods*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), p. xii.

2. Bruno Snell, *The Discovery of the Mind in Greek Philosophy and Literature*, (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1982), p. vi.

3. Eric Voegelin, *The World of the Polis: Order and History*, vol. II, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), p. 28.

(2) *The Legacy of Greece*

In the world of scholarship that has, since the Renaissance certainly, but more especially in the past two centuries,

Still, though it is easily arguable that Greek ideals acquired their most systematically intelligible conceptual and verbal form with the arrival of philosophy, it is far from true that those ideals were without expression outside philosophy proper. They are to be found in poetry, drama, sculpture and architecture as well. Any form in which Greek thought could take shape in verbal or visual composition can be seen as an apt vehicle for Greek ideals. Each area contributed in its own way to sustain the Greek vision of life. Each cultural feature sprang from generally accepted values and served to further a total common agenda. In every sense the Greek mind sought to give expression to a uniquely Greek civilisational and cultural ideal. It is in this notion of a total “*paideia*” that the Greeks, as Werner Jaeger characterised it, “constitute a fundamental advance on the great peoples of the Orient, a new stage in the development of society.”⁴ By this he meant that the Greeks, in distinction from ancient Babylon or Egypt, viewed culture as the product of a deliberate effort by man himself rather than as a creation of the gods that required of man unquestioned acceptance and submission. Here we arrive at the religious and ethical centre of Greek ideals which have meant so much to Western thinkers, namely, the emergence of an autonomous man, freed from superstition and in charge of his own destiny. It is a vision of man who seeks to know the reason of things and from whom irrational forces and powers, dark designs of nature and abstract and inaccessible deities slowly recede driven away by the light of human self-purpose and creative energies. For the Greeks culture and civilisation are not things to be taken on authority, but should be the end-results of consciously applied human thought-process. Only then, they assumed, can man be confident they belong to him and lift his essential humanity above a fawning servility and degrading self-abasement, elevate him, indeed, to the level of deity itself!

The essence, then, of what we take to be “the Greek legacy” is to be found in this man-centered and man-originated cultural ideal. This central *religious* starting-point is the connecting link between every expression of Greek culture. In epic or lyric poetry, tragic or comic drama, with philosophers from the Presocratics to Plotinus, or with the building of cities, their art and temples, we are confronted with man’s endeavour to define himself and his world by drawing from the depths of his own psychological resources. While the outward appearance in each of these aspects of their culture seems to suggest that the Greeks were merely indulging a natural human propensity to understand the nature of reality or to find pleasure in artistic creation, in fact, they were passionately motivated by an intense desire to articulate the meaning of man and to justify his existence, bounded as it is by finiteness and death, in a world in which human life is a struggle against an inscrutable and ultimately inexplicable Fate. To them it seemed that precisely because he must live his life against the background of an ultimate Fate, man alone can and must provide a definition of himself and his endeavours, for no other source of purpose and meaning was available but what he himself, out of his own inner resources, determined upon. The Greeks did not accept that man was created by a supernatural Being or God and thus derived the justification of his existence from the

Deity. Consequently, man was left to himself, and the Greeks were confident that they had discovered the true ideal of man.

Now the knowledgeable student of Greek history and literature will at this point, no doubt, voice an objection. He will, understandably, insist that the ancient Greeks were, like their neighbors to the East, deeply attached to a whole world of gods and goddesses, and that Greeks everywhere, in the clear record of their architectural remains (temples, statues, pottery), demonstrated a willing and eager devotion to divinities whose control of their lives and livelihoods seemed not to have the slightest connection whatever to anything rational. He will detect in the darker recesses of the Greek consciousness a superstitious attachment to *chthonic* powers whose presence they imagined to lie hidden in every occurrence of nature and whose appeasement was required in order to insure the regular prosperity of crops, herds and flocks. For many Greeks, ignorant of the forces and laws of nature as understood by modern science, their experience seemed to be actuated by mysterious spiritual beings to whom man must give due satisfaction if he hoped to gain the favour of their power and beneficence. How, it will be asked, can it be said that the Greeks felt any sense of freedom and self-determination as against the necessity to grovel before what we clearly know was nothing more than credulous superstitions and primitive fantasies?

One need not suppose that such an objection is misplaced. We do not suggest that Greek ideals “sprang full blown from the head of Zeus,” that is, were always present in mature form. Nor do we claim that certain Greeks, whose endeavour to shape the ideals in a self-conscious manner, did not have to strive against the popular religious assumptions of the people in general. Indeed, the Greeks were a deeply religious people and were as full of error in the object and content of their religious expression as were any peoples in the ancient world. Nevertheless, the Greeks were most deeply concerned to make even this most vulnerable area of their outlook as subject to a total cultural vision as possible; the place of the gods was recognised, but man was elevated alongside them. That is why the Greek mind invented the Olympian religion. It was developed precisely in order to bring man’s encounter with the greater powers of life and nature into a framework of rational order and so to justify man’s place in the scheme of things. Fate might continue to have the ultimate say, but man need not feel that his own limited existence was any the less important for the fact that he must die than that of the gods who knew not death and who presumably treated man, as in the East, as a mere object of utter indifference or condescending arbitrariness. For the Olympian gods were conceived to be in need of man as much as man was dependent upon them. The Greek ideal of culture was to bring the gods and men into closer relationship in order ultimately to bring about a merging of the two.

The Greek mind is marked by the search for total cosmic order. Such a vision of order was necessary to the Greek conception of culture and civilisation, for they did not imagine, as does our modern age, that human life could make sense against the background of an ultimately random meaninglessness. At the same time, the Greeks were not satisfied merely to assume the existence of order; theirs was a passionate desire to comprehend it conceptually, and thereby to bring it within the grip of man’s intellectual control. To do so meant to set man himself at the centre of

4. Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, vol. I, trans. by Gilbert Highet, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945), p. xiv.

that cosmic order, as the one for whom, in the last analysis, that order existed.

In two significant ways the Greek mind contrasted with modern views. First, the Greeks had a deep fear of chaos, of a surrounding nature that was threatening and out of control. Unlike modern men who view chaos as a *generative* power in and of itself, the Greeks saw chaos only as *de-generative* and destructive. Second, while the Greeks sought to achieve a rational comprehension of order, the causes and nature of order were not, as with modern thinkers, an absolute creation of human reason. Order was largely a given, a product of forces and factors outside complete human control. Man, for the Greeks, was dependent upon an order not altogether of his own making. The Greeks, initially at least, did not think of the nature of order as impersonal, but as personal, a work of the gods, who were not conceived as the creators of order, but merely regarded as necessary to its continued existence. The gods did not stand above, but belonged with men within the same cosmic order, within the same conception of culture and civilisation. Resort to the gods was necessary where man felt himself not totally capable of thinking and acting on his own. Moreover, even the gods were not entirely above the threat of chaos, for they, too, exhibited dark passions which often set one against another in a contest of wills. It must have reminded the Greeks how fragile was the nature of the order that they so desperately hoped would serve the interests of man.

Greek ideals, like others that appear in human history, follow the pattern of historical emergence, maturation, and decay. They do not simply unfold in accordance with a uniform principle of development. There is an inner struggle between different points of view for domination of the cultural heritage. Nevertheless, while there are significant discontinuities, it is possible to highlight the essential themes in their development in such a way as to disclose their interconnections. We begin with Homer and the Homeric contribution to Greek ideals. This is no arbitrary starting-point, but the one that was recognised by the Greeks themselves.

(3) *Homer, the Theologian*

Homer, the name that stands for the author of those great works of epic poetry, *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, is universally regarded as the founding-father of Greek cultural ideals. This was because Greek cultural ideals were, more than anything, the product of mind. To be Greek meant not so much to belong to a particular ethnic group as it did to be educated in terms of a given and rationally constructed set of ideas. A culture that views itself as the result of thought and learning necessarily places a great emphasis upon literary education as the chief means by which that culture is transmitted to its members. For Greeks, Homer was the basis of their literature and thus their education. This was not simply because Homer was the oldest extant literature in the Greek system of learning, but because the Homeric poems were the canon of orthodoxy for every learned Greek. H. I. Marrou observed: "[T]hroughout its history Greek literary education kept Homer as its basic text, the focus of all its studies."⁵ R. R. Bolgar has asserted no less by averring that

"throughout Greek history, but in particular during the golden age of Athens, they [the Homeric poems] played the same role as the Authorised Version later did in England."⁶ Quite simply, Homer was the *Bible* of Greek education. He provided the authoritative *word* for Greek culture as a whole, and not simply at the beginning or as one part of Greek ideals. "Homer dominated Greek education much more absolutely than Shakespeare did the English or Dante the Italians."⁷ Generations of cultivated Greeks could not imagine that one could be educated—could therefore even be Greek!—without a thorough grounding in Homer. Nor did they assume that Homer was useful simply for a period of formal studies, but they regarded him as a *living* word, to be continuously consulted and meditated upon. "There are many testimonies to the fact that every cultivated Greek had a copy of Homer's works at his bedside...."⁸ Clearly, for Greeks, Homer was no passing fancy, nor a dead intellectual past. He stood at the heart of what Greeks thought and believed. If Homer represented for Greeks the foundation of their thinking then he must constitute the starting-point in any study of their ideals.

It would be a mistake, however, to think that Homer's value in the Greek idea of education lay in the aesthetic quality of his poetic constructions. We moderns would place Homer in our category of *literature*. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* would interest us, then, principally as characteristic pieces of literary genius. We would examine them for their poetic form and artistic inventiveness. The elegant simplicity of verbal rhythm and cadence, the word-play, the metaphors and stylistic devices are the sorts of things that might occupy our attention. Otherwise, Homer is but one more example of primitive mythological story-telling.

However, if we are to understand the fundamental assumptions of Greek cultural and civilisational ideals, we must view Homer as "something much more than a figure in the parade of literary history."⁹ The long favour he enjoyed in the ancient classical world was far more than literary-aesthetic. Value inhered in content. "It was not primarily as a literary masterpiece," comments Marrou, "that the epic was studied, but because its content was ethical, a treatise on the ideal."¹⁰ Homer's importance to the Greeks lay in the fact that he was "the greatest creator and shaper of Greek life and Greek character." It was an attempt by a man without the true knowledge of God to fashion a true explanation of man. In this respect, then, "The Homeric epics contain the germs of all Greek philosophy. In them we can clearly see the anthropocentric tendency of Greek thought, the tendency which contrasts so strongly with the theomorphic philosophy of the Oriental who sees God as the sole actor and man as merely the instrument or object of that divine activity."¹¹ What Homer taught, not how he taught it, was the main concern of the Greeks.

Homer's role as educator of the Greeks can be best described as that of *theologian*. Although Greek ideals were to possess an "anthropocentric tendency," nevertheless, they emerged as the product of a theological point of view. Greeks, as was true of all men in ancient cultures, could not

5. H. I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, trans. by George Lamb, (New York: A Mentor Book, 1964), p. 29.

6. R. R. Bolgar, *The Classical Heritage and Its Beginnings*, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1954), p. 17.

7. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, p. 29.

8. Marrou, p. 29.

9. Jaeger, *Paideia*, p. 36.

10. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, p. 30.

11. Jaeger, pp. 36, 53.

think of man without reference to the divine world. The modern mind condescendingly attributes this to ancient man's primitive stage in the evolutionary process. Thus, it is said that "Homeric man has not yet awakened to the fact that he possesses in his own soul the source of his powers . . . he receives them as a natural and fitting donation from the gods."¹² Modern enlightenment secularism asserts that "primitive man feels that he is bound to the gods; he has not yet aroused himself to an awareness of his own freedom."¹³ But, putting the matter this way distorts Homer's thinking. While it is true that in the epic the actions of men are regularly mixed together with the actions of gods, it is not simply because Homer lacked what modern man thinks is the essence of man, namely, *freedom*. What ancient man sought—Homer and the Greeks especially—was an explanation of human existence that would elevate him to god-like status. Freedom, as an abstract quality, was not what mattered, but an ordered ideal of living that integrated man into the total cosmic harmony. Simply to get rid of the gods was inconceivable, but to imagine a world of gods and men arranged together in mutual dependence was of the utmost importance. And for the Greeks Homer is the one who, more than anyone else, satisfied this yearning.

While the gods figure prominently in Homer, the main emphasis in his poetry is on the actions of men. In this he (and the Greeks) differs from the theomorphic cultures to the East where the stories all speak of gods and almost nothing but gods. Homer is concerned to stress the importance of man in the scheme of things, but not *man-in-general*; Homer's world was filled with great men, with warriors and heroes. Homer was no egalitarian. Not the equality of man, but the glory of man was his chief interest. He lived in an aristocratic world, a world characterised by a king and his retinue. Naturally, his idea of man centered on the notion that some men are by nature and ability—not to mention social necessity—simply superior to other men. The primary feature of this world was not one of the mind and contemplation, but one of activity, and especially competitive activity. The ideal of man which Homer envisaged was achieved by prowess, courage, and physical triumph in combat or games. It was also a world run by a noble code of honour and self-glorification. Two aspects of this knightly ideal appear: the ideal man must be all-surpassing in the great contest of war, and he must also exhibit great qualities of strategy and oratory. He must possess the ability to inspire confidence in his fellow warriors with words and speech. Needless to say, it was a world for whom youth and vigour represented the best that life had to offer.

We should not imagine, however, that Homer's heroes simply conform to what in our understanding would be described as a romantic tale of adventure. Homer's heroes are not romantic figures on a chivalrous escapade. When Homer, in the *Iliad* especially, chooses as his subject matter an episode of war he does so with the intention of placing man's life within a compelling context of agonising suffering and cruel hardship that exposes him to the terrors of painful and violent death and dying. It is a depiction of the life of man against the background of total chaos and disorder in which the failure to honour men and gods is presented as the

essential root of the problem in the cosmos. Here it might be added that it was principally the *Iliad* that attracted the ancient's attention to Homer, and not so much the *Odyssey*. For it was here that Homer's concern to define the problem of disorder,—rather, to what extent order and disorder interpenetrated one another—a problem that so deeply disturbed the Greek mind in general, was to be expressed with such acute anxiety. What is the source of evil? Is evil more ultimate than the good? These are the underlying questions that Homer's heroes are keenly desirous of resolving.

In Homer, then, to discover the key to disorder is to find the solution to order. Perhaps the word "solution" is too strong a word, for any resolution to man's problem—indeed, to the basic disturbance in the cosmos—is not finally resolved in Homer. At best, Homer seeks for a *modus vivendi* for man in the midst of an existence that teeters on a precarious brink. For if honour and self-glory constitute the core ethical ideals of gods and men and are the only motives from which their actions can aspire to any productive significance, then gods and men alike will be quick to take offence whenever they feel the least bit slighted in such weighty matters. When that happens war and its attendant consequences are the inevitable result. Ironically, at the same time, Homer regards experience of the misery and cruelty of war as precisely necessary in order to offer the means by which heroic deeds can be given opportunity to triumph over the dissolving powers of chaos and disorder. The war is a metaphor for the life of man as a whole, for man's life is necessarily one of hardship, suffering, and all too quickly of old age and death. If man is to achieve lasting value for himself he must hero-like confront his experience and leave a name and example to follow. He must muster courage, strength, and fearless resolve and not show weakness or timidity, which would be dishonourable and shameful cowardice. He must deny death its true meaning as the curse of God for sin and rebellion and view it with defiance and scorn.

From the theological point of view in Homer it is not a simple matter to say that order resides in the Olympian deities, and disorder in man. Both alike are faced with the dissolving factor of disorder and chaos. However, the greater power of the gods gives them a greater advantage in the maintenance of total order in the threatening face of cosmic disorder. Not being threatened by death or old age, they are less compelled to consider the problem than is man. It is this certainty of death that raises so intensely the problem of order for man. What purpose does life possess if it must end or man must experience during his brief existence such intensity of suffering and sorrow? Homer's solution to this problem is the *hero*. In the hero a more than ordinary human quality can be seen to emerge and provide guidance and a model in reaching for the sense of meaning to the life of man. As Voegelin comments, "[t]he hero in the Homeric sense can be defined as the man in whose actions a more-than-human order of being becomes manifest."¹⁴ Man must learn to live in terms of an ideal of man that man must achieve for himself. The gods may assist, but they cannot replace the necessity of man to act on his own behalf.

12. Snell, *The Discovery of the Mind*, p. 21.

13. Snell, p. 31.

14. Voegelin, *The World of the Polis*, p. 104.

(4) *A World Fit for Heroes*

For Homer, as for Greeks in general, disorder, suffering, and finally death were the fundamental problems confronting man in the cosmos. If man wishes to find the key to order he must seek for it in the causes of disorder. For Homer an explanation must be found that implicates man in the causes of disorder, but only in such a way that leaves man free of complete responsibility. Moreover, the causes of order must be such that man can be regarded as having the resources and ability, as much as any god, in its ultimate realisation. Man must be seen as necessary to both the breakdown as well as the re-establishment of true order. In this way, man will be seen to be as essential to his own well-being in the cosmos as are the gods, for his creative powers and moral self-definition are as indispensable as theirs.

In Homer, the problem of disorder is defined on three levels: first, as it arises between men and gods; second, as it confronts man on the social level; and, last, as it originates between individuals. In the *Iliad* all three aspects of the problem appear. What is more, all of them are seen to be interrelated; the problem at one level gives rise to the problem on the other two levels. The war attests to the existence of the problem, for the war results from the breakdown of order. Had there been no disturbance in cosmic order, the war would not have arisen. However, what seems to concern Homer the most is that the war itself, the behavior it gives rise to, occasions the most serious dimension of the problem. For in the *Iliad*, as Havelock mentions, “a grand quarrel, a major feud . . . is to provide the controlling theme for his whole story . . .” It is Homer’s purpose to speak of “a conflict between two men of power, in whose passions and decisions the fate of the whole group is involved . . . Their acts and thoughts disturb the conduct and affect the fate of the society in which they move.”¹⁵ The *Iliad* is about the dissension between two heroes, their respective claims to the honour they believe is their due and the dishonour each has done to the other. This failure to give proper honour has led to disaster and is the cause for which they have gone to war, and the war which in turn was also a matter of honour, is imperiled with total loss. Unless the equal honour due to both can be properly restored disorder and destruction threatens to engulf the whole of society.

Here, Homer is able to say, is a human problem of divine proportions, but one in which the only solution available is somehow to be found in man alone. It is a story intended to point a moral: a failure to give proper honour to man is as much at the root of man’s problem as to dishonour the gods. Gods are not the only beings who have a claim to be honoured. In Homer’s mind, man has an equal claim. Man’s esteem is thereby lifted to the level of divinity so far as any ethical scope of reality is concerned, for to dishonour men is of no less an offense than to dishonour gods. And if indignity to men is the moral equivalent of the indignity to gods then man is at least the ethical equal of the gods. Such a moral imperative is grounded in the fabric of existence which embraces both gods and men. Gods have no claim to either priority or superiority over men in ethical terms.

It has been necessary to emphasise this point as most of us have learned to think of the story of the *Iliad* as having simply to do with the fight for a woman, Helen, whom Paris,

a prince of Troy, has *stolen* (with Helen’s eager complicity) from her husband Menelaus, an Achæan noble. While this aspect of the story is alluded to in the *Iliad*, Homer’s concern with this dimension of the problem is incidental. What is more, the alleged “trial of Paris,” in which three goddesses, Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite, compel him to choose which of them is the most desirable, while also alluded to in the *Iliad*, is never actually mentioned. The principal issue of the epic is the clash of honour between Achilles and Agamemnon. Other incidents have importance only to the extent that they permit Homer to place what he believes is the central problem in a larger moral context.

However, in spite of not being mentioned, the “trial of Paris” does represent the transcending moral dilemma in which man symbolically appears in the background of the story as victim. In the trial Paris is confronted with a choice of goods. Each good is represented by a single divinity. Each particular good conformed to what in the mind of most men would be deemed a worthy possession for man. When Paris is approached by the divinities we are given to understand that, on a symbolic level, man is necessarily bound to choose between ultimate goods, that he cannot not choose, and that, finally, whatever choice he makes will inevitably involve him in negative consequences. For the choice for one will bring down on him the wrath of the others. Simply put “Paris had to choose between warlike discipline, a life devoted to love, and sovereignty [*sic*]; the first was Athene’s gift, the last Hera’s.” Each of the goddesses offered a specific gift: “Athena victory and heroism, Hera empire over Asia and Europe, Aphrodite the possession of Helen, daughter of Zeus.”¹⁶ The gift he received depended upon which goddess he judged to be the most beautiful. In prosaic terms, they offered him cultural superiority (Athena), political power and domination (Hera), or a life of pleasure, leisure, and material satisfaction (Aphrodite).

In Greek ethical estimation such a choice of goods was bound to lead to conflict since no one could possess all three types of goods at once. Furthermore, it will not do to claim that a hierarchy of values emerges from this choice, for there is no intrinsic reason why one should be viewed as superior to another. Paris could not have avoided conflict by choosing a different good, since the wrath of the other two would always arise against him. The world of divinities was inevitably a source of trouble for man because the jealousy of prerogative was built into the very fabric of the cosmos. Gods, the highest beings, were no less in opposition to one another than was the experience among men. The darker forces of chaos are necessarily let loose on man regardless what ethical decision he makes. This is simply to say that Homer’s *Iliad* presents a tragedy. Men collide with men because men collide with gods (man’s symbol for ultimate goods). War, or chaos, is not merely a breakdown of community and amicability on a purely human level; it is an inevitable part of cosmic experience. Paris chose Aphrodite’s gift. He angered Hera and Athena. This brought the next level of the problem into existence, the confrontation between Achæans and Trojans.

Paris’s reward for choosing Aphrodite was Helen. But Helen already belonged to another. In order for her to become Paris’s possession she must be taken from someone

15. Eric A. Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), pp. 65, 66.

16. C. Kerenyi, *The Heroes of The Greeks* (Thames & Hudson, 1981), pp. 316, 317.

else. The moral symbolism is apparent. Not only must men choose between ultimate *divine* goods, but the possession of those goods in earthly terms was bound to lead to conflict among men, since in the Homeric (and Greek) economics, for one to possess an ultimate good meant to deprive another of it at the same time. The fact that Helen was already one man's possession emphasises the point that the value offered by Aphrodite was not of a lower order than those offered by the other goddesses. It underscores the moral dilemma, namely, that men are necessarily bound to conflict with one another over ultimate goods. In order for one to possess a particular good, another must be deprived of it. But men, no less than gods, do not take kindly to deprivation. They, too, will view it as a matter of honour and likewise demand vengeance.

Thus, what appears as a trivial matter—a war over a woman—is misleading unless we grasp the moral lesson which the episode is intended to symbolise. For Homer that lesson is that man is impelled to live in a world in which honour, the highest moral requirement, inescapably drives men into confrontation with one another. But it is not entirely man's fault; the gods, those representatives of the goods man requires in order to live the best life possible, force him to choose. Whichever *god* he chooses will rouse the anger of those he rejects. Disorder is the unavoidable result. Life is altogether a great tragedy, the necessary playing out of contradictions on a cosmic level.

This, then, is the background to Homer's actual interest in his narrative: the breakdown of order and the mounting disaster which impends within the ranks of the Achæans (Homer's preferred winners) when on an issue of honour its two greatest men have come into confrontation with one another. It is a clash that derives from the fact of the larger problem, the war itself, for it emerges in the context of the proper division of the spoils of war. Here, again, a dispute arises over possessions which leads to a moral predicament.

The problem begins when Agamemnon, the *king* of the Achæan contingent, claims as a prize of war a woman taken in the successful capture of a Trojan-controlled city. She is the daughter of a revered priest of the shrine of Apollo, who in his grief dares to request of Agamemnon that his only daughter be returned to him upon the payment of ransom. Agamemnon with furious resentment refuses and, when the priest persists in his request, threatens him with condign punishment. The priest takes his case to Apollo with a prayer for vengeance upon the Achæan leader. He is answered with divine wrath upon the Achæans in the form of a deadly disease that ravages the army. As such a disaster promises to undo the gains of the war and perhaps even lead to defeat, someone must persuade Agamemnon, king though he is, to reconsider his foolish decision to insult the god by treating his priest with contempt. But as kings rule by the authority of Zeus Most High it is a risky business to tell them that they are in the wrong. Undaunted, Achilles, the Achæan's greatest warrior, steps forward and denounces Agamemnon's actions to his face and in the presence of the other nobles. Agamemnon immediately senses his honour as king and the one who has the first choice in the rewards of fighting to be at stake. In bitter anger he agrees to release the girl, but in exchange for another who has become some other man's prize. And since Achilles has insulted him he demands that Achilles be the one to give him his greatest prize, a lovely girl who had been awarded to him on a previous occasion. This

compounds the problem, for now Achilles feels that he has been defrauded of his honour, and he withdraws from the fighting and refuses to take part further. With the loss of their greatest warrior the Achæans begin to lose the war. In battle after battle on the plains in front of the city of Troy, the Trojans, under the leadership of Hector, force the Achæans back unto their ships. Unless Achilles can be persuaded to rejoin his companions they are threatened with defeat at the hands of the Trojans. Achilles remains adamant, his wrath is unappeasable. He even induces his mother, the goddess Thetis, to persuade Zeus to bring defeat on the Achæans until they remove the dishonour that Agamemnon has brought upon him. Agamemnon, in his pride, refuses to give in to him until Achilles recognises that the authority and privilege of kings, who hold scepter from Zeus, are non-negotiable. He prefers to carry on the war without Achilles, but he soon learns that his decision is a fatal one. The war, so far as Achæans are concerned, takes a turn for the worse.

Homer offers no real resolution to this problem except, perhaps, to say that the dark forces of chaos and wrath must simply exhaust themselves before order can be restored. For the problem of disorder is not merely an affair in the external realm, but encompasses the very nature of man himself. It seems to rise up from the very depths of his being. Moreover, it is in the nature of the moral imperative, the demand of honour, to require vengeance on all who violate its code. But vengeance, not being founded on any principle other than honour *per se*, easily and quickly takes on an uncontrollable nature of its own. It boils up as an unquenchable *wrath!* Nothing exists to assure that such anger is in accordance with any standard of justice, so that whenever an injustice has been rectified wrath no longer has any just reason to compel the behaviour of men. In Homer's world men can live with any disparity or limitation but dishonour. Honour is the supreme due of gods and men alike.

Homer did not intend to say that when wrath is unleashed it is the wickedness of man that is responsible. Man's conduct in wrath is not characterised as guilt but insanity, which comes from the gods. Homer calls it *ate*, and the god who brings it he terms "Folly." In a sense, a man's actions are his own. Thus, when wise old Nestor upbraids Agamemnon by telling him that he gave way to his pride and, in consequence, dishonoured a great prince (IX. 116f) Agamemnon replies that he did indeed lose his head and yield to black anger (IX. 130).¹⁷ But Agamemnon also has his self-justification—"I am not to blame. Zeus and Fate and a nightmare Fury are, for putting savage Folly [*ate*] in my mind in the assembly that day, when I wrested Akhilleus' prize of war from him" (XIX. 89–93). Still, wrath unleashed is not easily recalled, especially when honour is at stake. The problem is how to achieve the latter and at the same time overcome the former. Nor is the problem only Agamemnon's; Achilles, too, has his *ate*—he is proud, contentious, obdurate, given to haughtiness and shows a contumacious attitude towards established authority and to his fellow nobles. Achilles' action in withdrawing from the fight is intended to prove to the Achæans that they cannot win without him, that unless he gets his honour restored he will not help them. His wrath, however, soon proves to be a force beyond his control for it leads to the situation that destroys his cherished friend,

17. All references to the *Iliad* are from the Robert Fitzgerald translation, (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1974).

Patroclus. This serves only to arouse his wrath to a hotter flame. He is moved to war in total cosmic fury against every cosmic force that opposes him. Far from condemning such action, Homer views it as the epitome of god-like behaviour and heroic ambition. It is Homer's only way of saying that man can, despite the overwhelming threat of chaos, raise himself to his rightful place in the order of reality.

Here is the difficulty for heroes, men filled with great passions for glory and achievement, yearning to be superior to all others and to have that superiority publicly recognised. On the one hand, "to be robbed of a prize is to be dishonoured," and on the other, "to have great possessions is to have what a king must have in order to be a king."¹⁸ A world fit for heroes must somehow reconcile these disparities, and yet, according to Homer, it is precisely when these occur that the desired opportunities for heroic actions are made possible. Men need order, but just as equally men need chaos in order to compel them to exert their powers to achieve greatness and "leave a name" (Gen. 11:4).

Much of the problem lies in Homer's definition of the character of man and the reason for his behaviour. In Homer man functions in terms of essentially non-rational qualities: *thumos*, *phrene*, *kradie* (desire/wrath, gut instinct/wisdom, heart/ambition). No rational moral order was available to man to clarify right or wrong behavior. Nor did the gods possess such an order. If man seeks his own glory, on his own terms, it is only because he must. It is the only moral order he can truly know in a cosmos where disorder is the only alternative. And while disorder will ultimately win out, it is possible by glorious deeds to acquire everlasting fame, and so, in some sense, triumph in spite of all. A world fit for heroes is a world they have made for themselves.

(5) *God-like Men and Men-like Gods*

With Homer man strives to emerge as more than merely a pawn in a larger cosmic framework. Although the forces of the cosmos, including the dark depths of his own inner nature, would seem to overwhelm and destroy him, nevertheless, according to the Homeric moral vision, he need not suffer abjectly or passively. He believes man possesses the requisite ability to confront his experience and, mortal though he be, accomplish a permanent glory for himself. With the example of heroic deeds as exhibited in Homer's *Iliad*, man is encouraged to see that, despite how utterly threatening the power of chaos appears to be, he can reach inside himself for those moral qualities that will permit him to fashion a culture and civilisation that has lasting importance for human purpose. Even if human existence is an ultimate tragedy, there is in man a *power* to transcend his limitations and show that human self-determination can acquire god-like worthiness. Jasper Griffin has ably summed up the Homeric contribution:

The Homeric poems do not tell us that the world was made for man, or that our natural state in it is one of happiness. They do say that it can be comprehended in human terms, and that human life can be more than an insignificant or ignoble struggle in the dark. The human soul can rise to the height of the challenges and the suffering which are the lot of all mankind. That spirit, chastened but not despairing, which sees the world without illusion and confronts

it without self-pity or evasion, was the gift of Greece to the world, and it is the deepest element in the thought of Homer.¹⁹

However, as we have already indicated, Homer's thought world was full of deities. How could man be so necessarily independent in a world in which the capriciousness and interference of gods was so commonplace a feature? Once again, Homer's answer is to be found in his concept of the hero. In the hero men and gods find their point of contact. The lowly and pitiable life of man is elevated to the divine level by means of the mediation of the hero whose extraordinary qualities are manifestations of god-like powers and attributes. Certain choice individuals, not men-in-general, because they possess greatness from the higher powers and favours of the gods, must be seen as the natural leaders in the struggle for ordered existence on earth. It is through them that the divine order in the cosmos extends to the life of man. The Olympian order of Zeus is a cultural order and the basis of civilisation. Unless he can persuade us that gods and men are bound together in one complex society and that a means exists by which man can tap into the greater supernatural powers which alone are able to check the destructive forces of chaos towards which all things tend, Homer would have failed in his attempt to show that human existence can rise above fated mortality and achieve an eternal glory. Heroic virtues are the proof of the presence of a divine ordering power among men.

But in Homer's thought world it is not so much that man reaches up as that the gods reach down to him. Homer's legendary heroes lived in a time when "gods intervened openly in human affairs, and it is their passionate concern and personal participation which marks heroic events as possessing significance."²⁰ Unlike the theomorphic cultures of the East where the gods are distant and, for the most part, disinterested in puny man except to be served by him in slave-like self-abasement, Homer imagines a cosmos in which men are of great and direct concern to the gods. Far from being unmindful of human goings-on, they are described as those who "watch" the feeble doings of man. Most especially, men, in Homer's perspective, are "loved" by the gods. But they do not love men in general, only great men, men of heroic quality. That is why in Greek mythology the gods come near to humans and have intimate relations with them. The gods mate with mortals and produce offspring which are said to be "god-born," and "god-nurtured." Hence, the gods are seen as "the source of specific gifts to certain individuals . . . good looks . . . graces of speech . . . size, strength . . . good sense . . . prophetic power . . . technical skill . . . inspiration of the poet . . ." etc.²¹ By this reaching down to man, man is endowed with extraordinary qualities that, in turn, lift him up and enable him to confront the sinister power of fate and death. His mortal existence is suffused with those characteristics which are the endowment of the immortal ones. Thus, "throughout his poems Homer has his gods appear in such a manner that they do not force man down into the dust; on the contrary, when a god associates with a man, he elevates him, and makes him free, strong, courageous, certain of himself."²²

19. Jasper Griffin, *Homer*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), p. 78.

20. Griffin, *Homer on Life and Death*, p. 81.

21. Mark W. Edwards, *Homer: Poet of the Iliad*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), p. 129.

22. Snell, *The Discovery of the Mind*, p. 32.

18. Jasper Griffin, *Homer On Life and Death*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 27.

For Homer the powers of the Beyond were essential to the realisation of human purposes, but only to the extent that they enabled man to think of himself as in possession of the necessary means to manage on his own. In the ideal of the hero there appeared the god-like qualities needed to imbue human goals with eternal value. While man must eventually die, his cultural creations will achieve everlasting glory. Through heroic struggle with the forces of chaos man can realise an ordered life for the good of man. Man, in Homer, begins to think of himself and his deeds as the product of the divine within himself, and although Homer still thought of those god-like features as coming to man from without, nevertheless he regarded them as innately human. As a result, a humanistic vision of life was opened up to the Greeks

which, as its cultural ideals began to take on a more rational (i.e. philosophical) character, led to an increasingly man-centered definition of life and purpose. In time, Plato will seek to replace the hero with the philosopher. The latter, although he plays the same role as the hero, as the cultural leader, will do so with less need to think of his powers as the product of an external divine source. The gods will recede farther into the background, if not disappear altogether, and man will emerge to think and act in accordance with abstract and impersonal *ideas*. Reason in man will assume the role of the divine in man and become the power needed to order his life and world. Thus begins the emergence of “the Greek legacy” and with it the humanistic aspect of Western civilisation. *C&S*

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FRIDAY 18th to MONDAY 21st JULY 2008

at

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ISLAM, SECULAR HUMANISM AND THE NEW WORLD DISORDER

Speakers and full programme to be announced later

Please note that this is advanced notice of the dates for the 2008 Fellowship Weekend (there will be no Fellowship Weekend in 2007). The weekend will include talks and presentations on the Friday and Saturday evenings and on the Saturday morning. There will also be a soirée on the Saturday evening with a string quartet or other similar group, a Sunday morning worship service, and a panel discussion on the Sunday evening.

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THE ANTITHESIS

by Stephen C. Perks

THE gospel, we are told, is a mystery to non-believers. This does not mean that non-believers cannot understand intellectually the propositions in terms of which the gospel is preached. Nor is it that non-believers do not have access to the gospel, that they have not heard it. In most Western societies the majority of people will have heard the gospel preached or explained in some form. The gospel is not a mystery in the Gnostic sense, i.e. a doctrine revealed only to the initiated few and kept secret from those who are not initiated into the sect. The gospel is not a mystery in the sense that nobody or very few people know what it teaches. Christians do not come along to non-believers and say “I cannot reveal the mysteries of the gospel to you until you have agreed to join our sect and have gone through the initiation ceremonies,” which was the process by which the Gnostic sects and certain cults in the ancient world propagated their teachings and gained new converts. Rather, the gospel is a *revealed* mystery that is to be preached to all men everywhere. The non-believers who criticise Christianity know what it teaches. They are not seeking to expose some doctrine that has been kept secret by the Church. The doctrines of the Christian faith are preached throughout the whole world and those who want to know or examine what the Bible and the Church teach about the faith have no difficulty in getting access to it. They know that the gospel teaches that the second person of the Trinity became incarnate in Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, who lived, died and rose again for the redemption of the world. The gospel is not a mystery in the sense that non-believers cannot understand the gospel propositionally, i.e. understand formally or intellectually what it teaches. They can. The gospel is a mystery to them in the sense that they do not accept it as the truth and believe it because it is *foolishness* to them.

This is what Paul says in the first chapter of 1 Corinthians: “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness” (1 Cor. 1:18); and again in chapter two: “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14). The non-believer does not understand the gospel in the sense that his mind has not been opened by the Holy Spirit and therefore although he can understand intellectually the meaning of the propositions in terms of which the gospel is explained, he does not accept it, does not submit to it as God’s word and *acknowledge* it as the truth. The non-believer’s whole life is built on the denial of what the gospel teaches

and therefore it is foolishness to him, a contradiction of what he believes gives meaning to his life. Anything that contradicts what a person believes gives meaning to life, to his understanding of reality, will appear as foolishness to him, because it contradicts his whole worldview, which is the basis of his understanding of all things.

Before the non-believer will accept the truth of the gospel and acknowledge Christ as his Saviour, the whole basis of his life, of his understanding of the meaning and purpose of life, must be turned upside down. Therefore the gospel is a mystery to him in the sense that it does not make sense in terms of his own understanding of life, his own worldview. It is foolishness to him. His mind is veiled by sin; he cannot see the gospel as the wisdom of God because sin blinds him to its truth. Therefore it is a mystery to him until his mind is enlightened, renewed by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 12:2).

But to those who believe, the gospel is *wisdom*, the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 2:7). It is the only rational and meaningful explanation of the whole of reality, the only rational and meaningful explanation of the human condition, and the only hope for mankind.

Here, therefore, we have an antithesis, a complete contrast or polarisation between two different worldviews, two different approaches to the whole of life. On the one hand there is the non-believer, who can understand the gospel propositionally, but who rejects it as foolishness and refuses to submit to its teachings because for him it does not make any sense of or give meaning to his life. On the other hand we have the Christian, who says that the gospel is the only thing that makes sense of reality, the only thing that gives meaning and purpose to life. Only by believing that the gospel is true can the Christian make sense of the world and his own life. The non-believer makes sense of the world and of his own life by denying the gospel and seeking the meaning of life in something else.

The nature of the antithesis that exists *in principle* between the believer and the non-believer, therefore, is absolute. The principles of understanding and wisdom espoused by the world are the polar opposites of the principles of understanding and wisdom upon which the Christian faith is based. It is not just that the believer and the non-believer disagree about a few things such as whether Jesus was a historical character, whether he is actually the Son of God or whether the resurrection was an historical event. The antithesis between belief and unbelief is much deeper than this; it

is an antithesis that exists at a much more profound level. If the believer and the non-believer were to be absolutely consistent with their beliefs there would be *nothing* upon which they could agree. Abraham Kuyper made this point clearly in his lecture on “Calvinism and Science” in his *Lectures on Calvinism*:

Not faith and science therefore, but *two scientific systems* or if you choose, two scientific elaborations, are opposed to each other, *each having its own faith*. Nor may it be said that it is here *science* which opposes *theology*, for we have to do with two absolute forms of science, *both* of which claim the whole domain of human knowledge, and both of which have a suggestion about the supreme Being of their own as the point of departure for their world-view . . . [T]hese two . . . systems . . . are not relative opponents, walking together half way, and, further on, peaceably suffering one another to choose different paths, but they are both in earnest, disputing with one another *the whole domain of life*, and they cannot desist from the constant endeavor to pull down to the ground *the entire edifice* of their respective controverted assertions, all the supports included, upon which their assertions rest. If they did not try this, they would thereby show on both sides that they did not honestly believe in their point of departure, that they were no serious combatants, and that they did not understand the primordial demand of science, which of course claims *unity of conception*.¹

There is an antithesis, a complete divide, a total contrast or opposition, between Christianity and non-belief *in principle* at all levels and in all things, starting with the very foundations of our understanding of all things.

For example, if it is true that God did not create the universe and that life is the product of evolution, we could not, if we were to be totally consistent with this idea, say anything intelligible about anything in the whole universe. Nothing in such a universe would make sense because there is nothing there to give it any sense. Everything would be the product of a blind evolutionary process. In other words everything would be a mere chance occurrence and there is no meaningful connection between events or things that are the product of chance. Meaning and purpose do not play any role in such a universe.

The problem, however, is that non-believers are not totally consistent with their principles. If we were to take the idea of evolution to its ultimate conclusions nothing would have any meaning and therefore the evolutionist would not be able to make sense of the world. Indeed there would be no such thing as sense, just random evolutionary occurrences that have no real meaning. The ideas of purpose and meaning are foreign to the evolutionary cosmos. But the atheist cannot think and live in a way that is ultimately consistent with the principles of atheism and evolution. To do so would be to deny all meaning and purpose to his own life, and man always seeks for meaning and purpose in life. Just because a man denies that life finds its meaning and purpose in terms of the creative act of the God of Scripture does not mean that he no longer seeks to understand the meaning of life and no longer seeks purpose to his existence. He still seeks these things but he seeks them instead in some aspect of the created order itself; that is to say, he puts something else in the place of God as an ultimate explanation of life. The Bible calls this idolatry. Belief in evolution,

therefore, is a form of idolatry. But in order to commit this idolatry the evolutionist has to posit the ideas of intelligibility, meaning and purpose. Such ideas are inconsistent with the idea of evolution, but man cannot live without seeking for purpose and meaning, without trying to make sense of his life and the world around him. The atheistic evolutionist therefore is inconsistent with his own beliefs about evolution. Evolutionists who use words and concepts like “meaning,” “purpose” and “reason” are being inconsistent with their evolutionary principles. And it is interesting to note just how often evolutionists do use words like “purpose,” “meaning” and “reason”; indeed the words “belief” and “believe” are also very common in the vocabulary of evolutionary “science.” The use of such words and concepts, however, reveals not only the schizophrenic nature of the evolutionary position; it reveals also the *religious* nature of the evolutionary worldview. But the evolutionist never thinks and acts consistently in terms of his belief in the process of evolution. Why?

The evolutionist is made in God’s image just as the Christian is. He is made to function in the world that God made, a world that is rational and meaningful, a world that makes sense to man because he was put here with the purpose of understanding and developing it. Man has a purpose, and that purpose is explained in the Bible in what Christians call the cultural mandate (Gen. 1:28). Man’s denial of God does not render that purpose null and void; rather it corrupts the way in which man goes about fulfilling it. But in order to fulfil it man must assume a world of rationality, meaning and purpose in some form, no matter how corrupt these ideas become due to man’s sin and rejection of God. Therefore men find it impossible to be totally consistent with their denial of God. This is why we say that there is *in principle* a complete and absolute antithesis between belief and non-belief. The operative words are “in principle.” Men find it well-nigh impossible to be totally consistent with their atheism. They deny the God who made the world but they want to keep hold of the world he made. They want a world of logic, order, rationality, meaning and purpose, but not the God whose creative act gave the world all these things and in terms of which alone such concepts have validity.

But if there is no God and everything exists as a result of blind evolutionary processes—chance—then nothing has any meaning and we cannot say anything intelligible about anything in the universe. As we have already seen, atheists cannot live consistently in terms of such a philosophy, so they smuggle the world God made back into their worldview dressed up as something else. They presuppose the concepts of order, meaning and rationality, but insist that these things come from some aspect of the cosmos itself, not from the creative will of God, who is not part of the cosmos. In other words they make some aspect of the created order, some idea, person or thing, the ultimate principle of explanation for life. This principle of explanation takes the place of God in their system and they attribute to it all that belongs by right to God, i.e. the attributes of God, whether in a highly cultic form as with ancient idolatry, or in a secularised form as with modern intellectual idols such as evolution and socialism.

The non-believer therefore lives intellectually and spiritually on borrowed capital that he puts to bad use. This is the wisdom of the world. It is idolatry and it comes in the end to *nothing*, as the apostle Paul says (1 Cor. 1:2). Even the good things of this world, including the very ideas of rationality,

1. Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1931), p. 133, emphasis in original.

meaning, order and purpose, are perverted by the non-believer and put to the service of idols. Why? Because in principle, at the very foundation of the non-believer's worldview, his understanding is corrupted by sin, by the rejection of God's word as the definitive and authoritative interpretation of reality. In *principle* there is an absolute dichotomy, an absolute antithesis, between the whole world of faith in Christ and the whole world of non-belief. Men are inconsistent with their principles, as we have seen, but even those things that they accept as valid and meaningful are put to use in the service of idols. So the evolutionist uses his reason, a God-given ability, to deny God. He uses the concepts of order and purpose to deny that the universe has order or purpose because a universe of order and purpose points to God, and by denying that the universe has order and purpose he denies the God who created it. He perverts even the good things that he inconsistently borrows from the world God created to deny that God created it and to deny God's rights.

You will find therefore, as you argue with the non-believer about his views and about the Christian faith, that it is difficult to get him to be consistent with his atheistic and evolutionary principles. The non-believer will advance one argument against the Christian faith and then when challenged about the validity of this argument he will jump off onto some other argument that is completely contradictory and inconsistent with the first argument. This is because the whole understanding of the non-believer is radically split between what he says is the principle in which he believes and the fact that he cannot consistently think, argue and ultimately live in terms of that principle. The non-believer wants a world of order, rationality, purpose and meaning, but he does not want the God whose creative will is necessary for the existence of such a world. He uses the good things of God's creation to deny that God created it. Cornelius Van Til said that this is like a child who has to sit on his father's lap in order to slap him in the face.

Interestingly, this principle of non-belief does sometimes work itself out more consistently in art. In the world of art we often see more clearly where atheism leads, the kind of ultimate conclusions that are involved in the denial of God. The denial of God ultimately implies the denial of all meaning. And whereas in their everyday lives men find it difficult to live in terms of this principle, in art sometimes this principle is worked out more consistently, though perhaps unselfconsciously. If one looks at much of modern art there is bewildering meaningfulness to it. This can be seen in the visual arts where paintings seem to have no logic. One part of the painting might have absolutely no relation to another part; indeed the whole painting might seem utterly meaningless, a conglomeration of colours and shapes that appear to have no purpose. The world represented by such art is radically shattered, broken, disjointed, dysfunctional, meaningless. The various parts of the pictures may seem to have no meaningful relationship to each other in the way that items on a rubbish tip have no meaningful relationship to each other. And indeed the casual lay observer may well describe such pictures as rubbish, a description that is often reasonable given this lack of meaningful integration in the overall scheme of the work because it is precisely the lack of meaningful relationships between individual things that defines a rubbish tip. It is often said that such art is not meant to be representational and therefore that such criticism is not

valid, but I doubt this is a valid argument. Such art is in a sense representational, only what it represents is the utter meaningfulness and randomness of a world without God, a world without order, reason, meaning or purpose. The same is true of much modern atonal music. The sounds produced by the musical instruments do not have any meaningful relationship to each other. They represent a random, unordered and meaningless universe, a universe without God, who alone gives order and meaning to the universe by his creative will. In his television series *Leaving Home: Orchestral Music in the Twentieth Century* the conductor Simon Rattle spoke about the development of this modern music in the twentieth century. He said that Richard Strauss, one of the most progressive composers of his time when he was young, walked up and looked over the precipice of this new development in music when he wrote his opera *Elektra* (1909), an opera that seemed to foreshadow these developments in atonality, but shrank back from the precipice and returned to traditional tonal music in his opera *Der Rosenkavalier* (1911).² But this is to miss the point of *Elektra* altogether. Strauss's musical language was always tonal. His great ability as a composer was to depict the world musically. What he depicted in *Elektra* was a woman who is deranged, insane. The music in *Elektra*, therefore, is the music of insanity. This was entirely consistent with Strauss's musical genius. What Rattle missed, and this can only be explained by his being steeped in the atheistic worldview of the age, is that the modern music of atonality is the music of insanity,³ just as the paintings and sculptures of modern art so often exhibit the same spirit of insanity, the insanity of a world where nothing has any meaningful relationship to anything else and everything happens randomly. This is the godless world of chance on which the theory of evolution is based. (It is no accident that the modern age of godless secularism has been supremely the age of "mental illness" compared with other periods of Western history.) Such art and music demonstrate more consistently the principle of the antithesis, the gulf that exists between the godless worldview of atheism and the ordered, rational and meaningful worldview of the Christian faith, than do philosophy and science, because in these latter disciplines men find it so much more difficult to abandon the concepts of reason, meaning and purpose. Of course it is certainly not the case that all non-believers listen to the music of Harrison Birtwistle *et al.* while Christians listen to Bach and Strauss. The non-believer finds it virtually impossible to live consistently in terms of his principle of non-belief.

2. The book based on the television series makes the same claim: "Strauss was one of the first to make use of bitonality, but he was too committed to Romanticism to make any further contribution to the development of the ideas unfolding during the radical years before the First World War. The next opera he and Hofmannsthal produced, *Der Rosenkavalier*, turned away from the problems raised in *Elektra* and found refuge again in the past" (Michael Hall, *Leaving Home: A conducted tour of twentieth-century music with Simon Rattle* [London: Faber and Faber, 1996], p. 39).

3. In his book, based on the television series, Michael Hall seems almost to recognise this when he describes *Elektra* as "afflicted with the classic symptoms of hysteria" and goes on to say that *Elektra* "is undoubtedly Strauss's most radical and dissonant work, and, as in Schoenberg's quartet, there are passages that are virtually atonal. The most extreme occur in the scene between *Elektra* and *Clytemnestra*, notably when *Clytemnestra* tells her daughter about the monsters that haunt her dreams. The episode concludes with a tonal cadence . . . but before this the discords are as harsh and the harmony as rootless as the images *Clytemnestra* conjures up" (Michael Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 38).

The wisdom of the world is the polar opposite of the wisdom of God. Therefore the two belief systems produce completely different worldviews, different cultures, different art, different political philosophies, different educational goals, different social aspirations, different societies. We should not let the fact that in the West we are currently living in a period of transition from one culture to the other deceive us. In a period of transition it is easy to think that these two worldviews are not totally incompatible because the long established practice of the Christian faith leaves a legacy that takes time to disappear and the non-believer makes use of the borrowed intellectual and cultural capital while it is available. But this capital will not be available indefinitely and the Christian heritage will disappear eventually unless there is a resurgence of Christian faith in society and unless the Church under the influence of such a resurgent faith engages culturally and politically with the nation, i.e. unless there is a commitment to converting the *nation* to the Christian faith, not mere soul winning, which is sadly what characterised the Church's understanding of the Great Commission during the second half of the twentieth century. The philosophy of the non-believing world is a never-ending quest for truth because it has denied at the outset the foundation upon which truth rests. The wisdom of this world dooms its practitioners and followers to an endless frustration with false "truth"—i.e. idolatry. In the end the "wisdom" of the world produces death. False gods always fail their devotees.

For the Christian, however, things are very different. The Christian does not know everything, nor is his understanding perfect in every respect. He makes mistakes in his thinking and understanding; often he lacks knowledge, especially knowledge of details. No man is omniscient. Nevertheless, *in principle*, the Christian has a foundation for his understanding that makes *complete* sense of the whole of reality. For the Christian the world makes *ultimate* sense and is imbued with meaning. He has already found *the* truth, and has acknowledged it and submitted his mind to it, so that his whole philosophy of life is based on the truth.

The words "mind" and "submitted" are important here. The Christian is one whose *mind* is *submitted* to God and therefore to the truth *in principle*. He is one whose *mind* has been renewed by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 12:2). He has the *mind* of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16). In other words his *mind* is conformed to the truth.

It is important that we recognise the importance of the *mind* in the Christian life. Scripture does not tell us that the Christian is one whose *emotions* or *feelings* have been renewed by the Holy Spirit, but rather one whose *mind* has been renewed by the Holy Spirit. He is described as having the *mind* of Christ. Of course this does not mean that the emotions are excluded from the life of faith. According to the biblical view of man, the heart and the mind form a unity. Heart and mind should not be abstracted from each other. The heart, biblically speaking, includes the intellectual function as well as the emotional. Thus the Proverb says "For as [a man] thinketh in his heart, so he is" (Pr. 23:7). Nevertheless, the *mind* is the controlling function in the life of faith, or at least should be. It is the mind that is renewed by the Holy Spirit. Our service of worship therefore should be *rational*, as Paul makes clear when he writes: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1). The word translated here as

"reasonable" (*λογικός*) is the word from which we derive our English words *logic* and *logical*. John Murray makes the following interesting comments on this verse: "The service here in view is worshipful service and the apostle characterizes it as 'rational' because it is worship that derives its character as acceptable to God from the fact that it enlists our *mind*, our *reason*, our *intellect*. It is rational in contrast with what is mechanical and automatic. A great many of our bodily functions do not enlist volition on our part. But the worshipful service here enjoined must constrain intelligent volition. The lesson to be derived from the term 'rational' is that we are not 'Spiritual' in the biblical sense except as the use of our bodies is characterized by conscious, *intelligent*, consecrated devotion to the service of God."⁴ Our lives are to be a rational sacrifice of service to God.

However, it is important that we do not misunderstand what is being said here. The Christian understands the wisdom of God *not* because he has made a rational enquiry into the evidence and has come to a balanced judgement about the veracity of the gospel. He does not believe because he has subjected the claims of the gospel to be the truth to his own autonomous judgement. Often that is how the gospel is presented. If only men would consider the evidence impartially and rationally they would have to accept the gospel as true. But this is not how the gospel is presented in Scripture. Rather, understanding is the *fruit* of faith, not the cause of it. St Augustine stated the matter in this way: "If thou hast not understood, said I, believe. For understanding is the reward of faith. Therefore do not seek to understand in order to believe, but believe that thou mayest understand."⁵

We believe in order that we might understand. Men will never understand the gospel, the truth, until they submit their *minds* to God. It is *belief* that drives understanding, not understanding that drives belief.

This is also the case for the non-believer as well. The atheist starts from a position of belief, a faith commitment, namely the belief that there is no God and that the universe exists and can be understood and explained completely in terms of itself without reference to God or his creative will. This is a universal negative religious presupposition that underpins and drives the atheist's worldview, i.e. his understanding of all things. This belief directs his reasoning about the origin, nature, meaning, value and purpose of life. In his understanding the atheist starts with disbelief and his reasoning endorses his disbelief. As a result he uses his intellectual powers, his reason, to deny the veracity of the gospel. His belief that there is no God and that the universe explains itself drives and guides his understanding. The only way for this cycle of disbelief to be broken is by means of the renewing work of the Holy Spirit in the mind of the non-believer.

The Bible teaches this truth, i.e. that faith drives understanding, in the most categorical terms: "Through *faith* we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear" (Heb. 11:3). We do not understand that the universe was created by God because the evidence points to

4. John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Eerdmans, 1959), Vol. II, p. 112; my emphasis.

5. Augustine, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St John*, Tractate XXIX.6 in Philip Schaff, ed., *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark), First Series, Vol. VII (trans. John Gibb and James Innes), p. 184b.

this, i.e. because the facts speak for themselves. We understand that God created all things from nothing *because* we believe and it is in terms of the worldview generated by this faith that we then go on to interpret the evidence. The same is true for the atheist. He does not deny the existence of God because the evidence points to this conclusion. He starts with a faith position, a belief that there is no God and that the universe explains itself, and it is in terms of the worldview generated by this faith commitment that he then goes on to interpret the evidence. Faith always drives understanding, not understanding faith. Therefore Paul says “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:13–14).

The antithesis is absolute and complete. We believe that we might understand, and it is faith that enables us to judge all things rightly (1 Cor. 2:15), i.e. understand the truth. The believer, by faith, is liberated *in principle* from the false judgements of the world; he is no longer a slave to the faulty judgements of the “wisdom” of this world—i.e. the idolatry of the world. Therefore he must not subject himself to the idolatrous “wisdom” of the world. He is not to be under the controlling influence of the world’s philosophy. This is why it is so tragic to see believers prostrating themselves before the idols of the world, e.g. submitting to the false reasoning of doctrines such as evolution and socialism. These are the idols of a false religion. And what do Christians who put themselves into the service of these idols gain? A little of the world’s intellectual respectability. It is even more tragic to see Christians sending their children to be educated in the schools of such an idolatrous religion. Christians who believe

and do such things are denying their Lord, even though they may not be fully aware of what they are doing.

We must maintain the antithesis. It is the principle as foundation that is so important. If you wait until you understand before you believe, you will never believe, and you will never understand the gospel. If you believe, submit your mind to God’s word, you will understand because belief drives understanding. Belief, therefore, determines culture, the whole way we understand and live our lives as individuals and as a society.

The Christian is not to be under the controlling influence of the world’s philosophy of life. Again I stress the antithesis. The *principle* upon which the believer is to base his thought, work and life, is the antithesis of that upon which the non-believer bases his thought, work and life. These two antithetical worldviews must produce, therefore, radically different cultures, and if the Church does not produce a culture that is different from that of the world, but instead one that merely follows the cultural developments of the world, something is seriously wrong. The Christian culture cannot compromise itself with the non-Christian culture, but must be forever at war with it, seeking, as Abraham Kuyper said, to pull down to the ground its whole edifice, including all its supports. If Christians do not seek to do this they show by their compromise that they do not honestly believe in their point of departure and that they are not serious combatants in the spiritual warfare to which God calls his elect. The task to which the Christian is called is one that can only end in complete victory, in the total overthrow of the kingdoms of this world and the subjection of the *nations* to the discipline of Jesus Christ. This is what Christ has called us to in the Great Commission. There will be no Parousia until this happens because, as the Bible clearly states, on that day it will be declared in heaven that “the kingdoms of *this* world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever” (Rev. 11:15). *C&S*

AUTHORITY NOT MAJORITY

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF FRIEDRICH JULIUS STAHL

by RUBEN ALVARADO

134 pages • www.wordbridge.net

Netherland: WordBridge Publishing, 2007 • ISBN-10: 90-76660-04-2/ISBN-13: 978-90-76660-04-02

Virtually unknown apart from specialist scholars, Friedrich Julius Stahl was a leading German philosopher, professor of constitutional law, and statesman in nineteenth century Germany. His Christian political philosophy both impacted practical politics in a time of upheaval in Germany (around and after 1848), and influenced anti-revolutionary thinkers of subsequent generations. His work is a monument to a Germany that was overwhelmed and subsumed by the Bismarck revolution, which substituted Realpolitik for Christian tradition. His biography in English is long overdue. Stahl followed in the footsteps of Edmund Burke in England and Friedrich Carl von Savigny in Germany. He was a leading opponent of the French Revolution and its influence on politics, law, religion, and indeed society as a whole. Nevertheless, he sought to appropriate those elements of Revolution doctrine, such as constitutionalism and civil rights, which served to advance the social order, making him a true conservative rather than a mere reactionary. Furthermore, he sought to maintain the Christian basis of the social order by recognizing Christianity as the pillar of national as well as personal existence even while according political rights to non-Christians. For him, the church must be recognized as the public ministry of ethics; otherwise, the nation itself would lose its moorings in absolute values, leaving itself wide open to a renewed paganism. And, as this biography of his demonstrates, it was the abandonment of this Christian conviction by Otto von Bismarck which opened the door to the conscienceless power-state which Germany became. This biography is the first ever to appear in English of this important figure in the history of political thought. It accompanies the multi-volume translation of Stahl’s magnum opus, the *Philosophy of Law*.

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SCHLEIERMACHER AND ROMANTICISM IGNORED ANTECEDENT OF POSTMODERNISM?

by S. Alan Corlew

INTRODUCTION

MANY have written on postmodernism, assessing its relationship to biblical Christianity, touching on the historical developments that have converged, creating this pervasive system of thought. Any thorough understanding of how the world thinks today requires that one grasp the seminal ideas underlying postmodernism's conceptual framework. The observation that understanding the present necessitates that one first have a grasp on the past is a primary reason for the study of history. Whether political tensions, trends in art, or ideas in theology and philosophy, being conversant with what has preceded the present necessitates that people understand the world in which they live; otherwise, how might they avoid their predecessors' errors?¹ Whether heeding the oft-cited phrase of G. Santayana that, "Those who do not learn from history, are doomed to repeat it;"² or the Apostle Paul's admonition that, "these things happened to them as an example,"³ it remains inescapable that events in the past have influenced the present.

Not infrequently, commentators reference Romanticism as an antecedent to postmodernism.⁴ F. Schaeffer prophetically anticipated postmodernism's advent via existentialism's contribution to the late twentieth century's sense of meaninglessness.⁵ Others have correctly identified pivotal thinkers such as Kierkegaard and Nietzsche as shapers of what we now label postmodern thought. Many note Kierkegaard's emphasis upon subjectified experience as a

new basis for epistemology.⁶ Similarly, Nietzsche's jettisoning of any objective sense of meaning, truth, or value prepared the way for postmodernists such as Rorty, Lyotard, Derrida, and Foucault.⁷ Others have recognized an ongoing interplay between parallel developments in European theology and philosophy during the nineteenth century, much of this coming in a backlash against the excesses that occurred in Enlightenment rationalism. M. Erickson and D. Groothuis have both made observations of this dynamic.⁸ Perhaps the most succinct articulation of this phenomenon comes from K. Jones, who observes that in light of the influence of the Enlightenment, much of the nineteenth century's liberal theology attempted to correlate faith and reason in a new epistemological paradigm leading to an "... ascendance of subjectivism and secularism in Western thought and culture, and has culminated in the recent fragmentation of modernity."⁹

The preceding ideas are significant tributaries of thought that have converged to form the fluidity known as postmodernism. However, this work advances the proposal that much of the thought currently associated with postmodernism finds its first cogent expression in the writings of the German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834). Widely hailed as the *Father of Modern Theology*, his influences in the areas of thought that would eventually combine to produce postmodernism have been ignored by both Christian and non-Christian scholars.¹⁰ Consider the

1. Not dissimilar to the observation of first century BC Roman philosopher, author, and politician, Marcus Tullius Cicero that "To be ignorant of what happened before you were born is to remain ever a child . . . If no use is made of the labors of past ages, the world must remain always in the infancy of knowledge;" available at <http://www.quotationspage.com/quotes/Cicero/31>, accessed 12 December 2001.

2. George Santayana, *The Life of Reason* (New York: Scribners, 1905), p. 284.

3. 1 Cor 10:11; unless noted, scriptural references are from the NASB (La Habra, CA: Lockman, 1995).

4. Representative treatments include Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture* (Wheaton: Crossway 1994), pp. 35–38; and Roger Lundin, "The Pragmatics of Postmodernity," in *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World*, Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm, eds, (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity, 1995), pp. 26–30.

5. Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity, 1968), p. 22.

6. Arthur F. Holmes, *Christianity and Philosophy* (Chicago: Inter Varsity, 1963), p. 19. John Warwick Montgomery, *Faith Founded on Fact: Essays in Evidential Apologetics* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1978), p. 45. Gordon H. Clark, *A Christian Philosophy of Education* (Jefferson, MD: The Trinity Foundation, 1988), p. 27, 132.

7. Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against The Challenges of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity, 2000) pp. 29, 37–38. Also, see his *Nietzsche and Postmodernist Nihilism*, accessed 4 December 2000, available at <http://www.gospelcom.net/ivpress/groothuis/nietzsch.html>; William E. Brown, "Theology in a Postmodern Culture: Implications of a Video-Dependent Society," in *The Challenge of Postmodernism*, ed. David S. Dockery (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), p. 315f.

8. Millard Erickson, *Truth or Consequences: the Promise and Perils of Postmodernism*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Inter Varsity, 2001), pp. 75–109; Groothuis, *Truth Decay*, pp. 39–42.

9. Kelvin Jones, "The Formal Foundation: Toward an Evangelical Epistemology in the Postmodern Context," in *The Challenge of Postmodernism*, p. 344.

10. Schleiermacher shows more points of affinity with postmodernism, and predates both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, though, curi-

following characteristics of postmodernism that emerge in Schleiermacher's work:

- The rejection of the possibility of objective truth
- A subjective "feeling" as the determinant of "truth"
- A hermeneutics that foreshadowed postmodernism's "word play"
- The concept of "truth" only being valid within a community
- The rejection of exclusivism/metanarratives in favour of a fluid view of truth as ever changing within communities

This paper shall examine Schleiermacher's teachings in each of the above areas, showing how his views might form an antecedent paradigm for postmodernism. Many see Christianity needing massive reformulation in order to make it palatable for postmoderns.¹¹ Typical is the suggestion to scuttle any notion of objective truth. Consider P. Kenneson's passionate plea: "I am asking you to . . . try on a different model of truth . . . truth claims are inseparably bound up with human language and are, therefore, inextricably linked to matters of discernment and judgment . . . they are irreducibly social or communal affairs."¹² While all instances of calls to re-conceptualise do not necessarily begin with, or even focus on epistemological concerns, Kenneson's remarks are certainly within the pale of those calling for radical change. Commonly, those sympathetic believe such efforts are the most urgent task for mainline Churches in a postmodern revision of theology; they are driven by the conviction that all claims for the universality of Christian belief are archaic.¹³ Thus, Christianity "must either give up a pretension of universality, or theological statements must be translated into statements about ourselves and our world."¹⁴ Nonetheless, attempts to contextualise Christianity within a postmodern paradigm will no more succeed than did their ideological antecedent: Schleiermacher's attempt to contextualise Christianity within the framework of Romanticism. C. Brown offers a concise, yet thorough demon-

ously, few see a connection between Schleiermacher and postmodernism. I am greatly indebted to Andrew Hofferger of Reformed Theological Seminary as it was from my reading of a Schleiermacher anthology for his "Church and the World" course that I concluded one might consider him a "Father" figure for postmodernism. Dr. Hofferger concurred that this observation had merit, noting that he had also seen Schleiermacher in this role, subsequently providing me with the impetus for this present work.

11. Letty M. Russell, *Church in the Round* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), p. 11–15; George R. Hunsberger, "Cultivating Ways of Christ for People in the Postmodern Transition," Scott Holland, "Theology is a Kind of Writing: the Emergence of Theopoetics," *Cross Currents* 47:3 (Fall 1997), pp. 317–341; Burke O. Long, "Ambitions of Dissent: Biblical Theology in a Postmodern Future," *JR* 76:2 (April 1996), pp. 276–289; Richard Eslinger, "Imagination in Postmodern Homiletics," *Homiletic* 19:1 (1994), pp. 7–10; Stanley Grenz, "Beyond Foundationalism: Is a Nonfoundationalist Evangelical Theology Possible?" *Christian Scholars' Review* 30 (2000), pp. 57–66; Carl Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), especially pp. 11–33; Brad Kallenberg, *Live to Tell: Evangelicalism for a Postmodern Age* (Grand Rapids, Brazos Press, 2002), especially pp. 15–30; Stanley Grenz and John Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), especially pp. 3–54.

12. Philip Kenneson, "There's No Such Thing as Objective Truth, and it's a Good Thing Too," in *Christian Apologetics*, p. 159.

13. Marcus Borg, "Postmodern Revisioning," *ChristCen* 114:31 (Nov 1997), p. 1011.

14. Jens Glebe-Moeller, "The Possibility of Theology in a Postmodern World," *ST* 46:1 (1992), p. 33.

stration of Schleiermacher's influence on the nineteenth century's paradigm shift in thought, elucidating that this period ushered in a shift away from modernism's commitments to objective truth constructed upon a foundational underpinning, the belief that truth was the same for everyone, and that reality rested upon a structure that was rational.¹⁵

The Historical Background

Schleiermacher entered history during the latter part of the Enlightenment, a time typified by an unqualified trust in mankind's reason as an autonomous source for truth. It largely discredited the supernatural, and those who held onto the existence of a supreme being cloaked him in the transcendent terminology of deism. It was this movement that firmly established modernity. The scholasticism of the late Middle Ages and the humanism of the Renaissance had laid its foundation as each placed increased emphasis on the importance of humans and their cognitive abilities. One might see the Enlightenment as a further progression of these earlier ideologies. It was a shift in worldview for the average person as the new era was, ". . . largely secular, scientific, and optimistic in outlook, confronted Christian faith with a challenge of major proportions."¹⁶ Enlightenment rationalists eschewed the Christian doctrine of original sin, asserting its antithesis: the perfectibility of man. What society had previously called "sin" they now labeled (at worst) as socially deviant behavior, which they optimistically believed themselves capable of overcoming by such "cures" as the creation of a better human environment, or new scientific advancements that would remove any possible physiological causes.¹⁷ This milieu produced the belief that humanity was progressing toward a utopian society. Present-minded practicality over against the promise of future reward was its guiding principle. "Progress proved the ultimate Enlightenment gospel . . . God had become a distant cause of causes; what counted was man acting in Nature."¹⁸ However, by the 1790s the reactionary movement of Romanticism had risen to challenge its assumptions.¹⁹

One may view Schleiermacher as a central figure in the clash between these worldviews. Born in 1768 in the latter half of the Enlightenment, he reached adulthood as Roman-

15. Colin Brown, *Philosophy and the Christian Faith* (London: Tyndale, 1973), p. 107f.

16. C. W. Christian, *Friedrich Schleiermacher* (Waco: Word Books, 1979), p. 19f.

17. Hugh Ross Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology: Schleiermacher to Barth* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1939), p. 16f.

18. Roy Porter, "Matrix of Modernity," *History Today* 51:4 (Spring 2001), p. 31–32.

19. Richard V. Pierard, "Romanticism," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, second ed., ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), p. 1040. The dating of Romanticism is somewhat problematic. As with the Enlightenment, there were German, French and English variants. Some see Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), the disillusioned French Enlightenment thinker, as a Romanticist, while others view him as a significant precursor to the movement. For a view of Rousseau as a transitional figure, see C. Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 81–84. For Rousseau as a father figure to the movement see Bernard Reardon, *Religion in the Age of Romanticism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 2; Karl Barth, *From Rousseau to Ritschl: The Library of Philosophy and Theology*, eds. Alasdair MacIntyre and John MacIntyre (London: SCM, 1959), p. 58; and J.M. Garland, "The Source of Our Misfortunes," *ExpTim* 111:2 (Nov 1999), p. 49.

ticism erupted upon Europe's intellectual horizon. He became the nexus of a complete reworking of Christianity's central doctrines amidst this shift in worldviews.²⁰ The period represents the first in a series of shifts in intellectual topography leading to the marginalisation of Christianity. How should it respond to the Enlightenment's harsh denunciations of biblical faith? The Enlightenment did not rule all religious belief out of bounds; it accepted naturalistic and deistic views as valid for they tended to elevate the import of humanity while rejecting any significant concept of supernatural immanence. Furthermore, it posited revealed truth as contrary to the supremacy of human reason.²¹ Gone were presuppositions about the nature of man, God, and the universe that had dominated European thought during the preceding centuries. Christianity faced a crossroads: how was it to make itself relevant in this "world turned upside-down?" Could Christians communicate the message of the gospel in the same manner as previously, or would these changes force Christianity to adopt a new paradigm? It was amidst this setting that Schleiermacher reached his adult years. These shifting tides would have a profound influence on the construction of his thought. Ironically, one finds many of the aforementioned factors cited by those who have by-passed Schleiermacher's role in their tracing of postmodernism's lineage.²²

The Influence of Romanticism

Discussion of the forces shaping Schleiermacher cannot overlook Romanticism's influence. Seeing confidence in human reason as an obstacle to effectively communicating the gospel, he contrastingly saw Romanticism as an ally; it emphasised passion over reason—imagination and inspiration over logic. Enshrining autonomous human reason as the sole source of truth, the Enlightenment had advanced naturalistic rationalism. Its ascendancy brought depreciation of other avenues of knowledge. This produced a climate that "starved the soul . . . minimized and derided feeling . . . suppressed emotion . . . [and] had made men oblivious of the element of the divine."²³ Those who valued the creative spirit could not endure such conditions;²⁴ the period was "absolutely uncreative."²⁵ Reacting to extreme rationalism, Romanticism stressed mystery, imagination, feeling, and freedom, seeking a "complete and deep-seated reorientation, not to say revolution, in the manners of thought, perception and consequently of expression too."²⁶

In the Romanticists Schleiermacher found others who shared his vision of the value of inward feeling and the

importance of the growth of the individual.²⁷ His emphasis on inner feeling emerged in his view on the doctrine of grace—for even this concept was subjectified, for he held that the individual essentially defined grace by virtue of the fact that he had to existentially awaken to their consciousness of it.²⁸ Consequently, grace was experiential as opposed to some externally existing quality extended by God to the regenerate.²⁹ Romanticism embraced a subjectivism, depreciating "fixed universal moral laws or rules in favour of the free development of the self in accordance with values rooted in and corresponding to the individual personality,"³⁰ reviving the notion of *the ideal*. This made room for the non-physical properties of humanness that enlightened thought had dismissed for lack of empirical verification. Romanticists employed the language of religion to convey a renewed commitment to emotion. As a reactionary movement it "saw morals and religion, language and society, along with art . . . as the free and unconscious product . . . of the vitality of the human spirit."³¹

The Inward Turn to "Feeling"

The Romanticist tenet most notable in Schleiermacher (and an essential postmodern attribute) was to deny any objective basis for truth and embrace experience as ultimate metaphysical validator.³² Postmodernists such as Rorty claim that everyone's reality is nothing more than a perceptual interpretation of the world, which does not exist outside of them in any real sense, but only subjectively as they interact with the "out there" that is not ultimately "there" for anyone but themselves.³³ Schleiermacher asserted that the intellect was incapable of a connection with the divine; it would always fall short, for "men imagine they have actually grasped the Deity, a thing they never can do."³⁴ He proffered that the manner in which one encounters the infinite was via an unmediated awareness of the divine, observing that one should "become conscious of our immediate relations to the Infinite and Eternal."³⁵ He saw attempts to teach doctrine as objectively existing facts as efforts to grasp the unattainable, for "instruction in religion . . . is absurd and unmeaning . . . only shadows of our religious emotions."³⁶ His reaction to the Enlightenment's dependence on human reason was to contextualise Christianity within the emerging Romanticist movement of the late eighteenth century, a worldview that would achieve ideological dominance in the early nineteenth century. To make Christianity more appealing to his

20. Karl Barth gives a succinct elucidation of Schleiermacher as a product of his time; see *Rousseau to Ritschl*, p. 307ff.

21. Gerhard E. Spiegler, "On Defining Movements: Shifting Patterns of Religious Authority," *TMC* 29 (Winter 1995), p. 63.

22. Representative examples include: Glenn Ward, *Postmodernism* (Chicago, Contemporary Books, 1997), pp. 3–15; Christian Quendler, *From Romantic Irony to Postmodernist Metafiction* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2001), pp. 103–118.

23. Edward Caldwell Moore, *An Outline of the History of Christian Thought Since Kant* (London: Duckworth, 1912), 34.

24. Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy* (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1964), Vol. 7, *Fichte to Nietzsche*, p. 13.

25. Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 34, wherein he lists Rousseau, Shelley, and Keats as critics of the Enlightenment.

26. Lillian Furst, *Romanticism in Perspective* (New York: Humanities, 1970), p. 27.

27. Keith Clements, *Friedrich Schleiermacher: Pioneer of Modern Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1991), 19; C. Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

28. George N. Boyd, "The Medium is the Message: A Revisionist Reading of Augustine's Experience of Grace According to Schleiermacher and McLuhan," *ATR* 45:2 (1974), p. 192.

29. Boyd, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

30. Copleston, *op. cit.*, Vol. 7, p. 14.

31. Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 34f.

32. Mary Ann Glendon, "Rousseau and the Revolt Against Reason," *First Things* (October 1999), p. 42.

33. Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), xiii–10.

34. Schleiermacher, *Soliloquies*, (Chicago: Open Court, 1957; trans. Horace L. Friess), p. 24.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

36. Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* (New York: Torchbooks, 1958; trans. John Oman), p. 122; hereafter referenced as *Speeches*, 1958 ed. to distinguish it from the 1994 edition.

contemporaries, Schleiermacher revisioned the Christian faith such that it was no longer defined by, nor dependent upon, propositional doctrines, but rather by more subjective parameters.³⁷ Doctrines would not be the arbiter of true faith, but rather the inverse: true faith would discern the proper content of doctrine, which existed to give expression to Christian self-consciousness.³⁸ He asserted that, “true religion is sense and taste for the Infinite.”³⁹ Evidencing further affinities for Romanticism, he emphasised an almost mystical experience of the “Infinite.” Reardon suggests that for Schleiermacher, religion’s essence was an “inexpugnable feeling that the finite is not self-explanatory and self-justifying, but that behind it and within it—shinning, as it were, through it—there is always an infinite ‘beyond.’”⁴⁰

Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* undermined confidence in the truthfulness of the Christian faith by questioning of the validity of the traditional proofs for God’s existence. He argued that such proofs were insufficient to support the argument for God as a necessary being, stating: “I cannot even make the assumption—as the practical interests of morality require—of God, freedom, and immortality, if I do not deprive speculative reason of its pretensions to transcendent insight. For to arrive at these, it must make use of principles which, in fact, extend only to the objects of possible experience, and which cannot be applied to objects beyond this sphere without converting them into phenomena, and thus rendering the practical extension of pure reason impossible.”⁴¹ To summarize, Kant centered his criticism of Christianity on its dependence upon both reason and natural evidences. In as much as Kant claimed that one could not sense the thing in itself, Christian faith would have fared better had it rather rested upon revelation alone. In support of his rejection of natural theology, Kant declared that God was, “an object . . . which never can be an object of intuition to us.”⁴²

The Enlightenment undermined any basis for Christianity’s belief that it possessed actual knowledge about God. This followed from the Enlightenment’s presuppositions, particularly its commitment to empiricism.⁴³ This left no room for a faith that owed its authority to the self-revelation of the infinite God. Schleiermacher understood Enlightenment humanism as a formidable barrier to the communication of the redemptive message of Christianity. By emphasizing introspection, intuition, feelings, and imagination, Romanticism negated any need for cognitively seeking reality through any type of rational investigation, or from the application of technical science. Reality was accessible only through an apprehension of wonder; this resonated with

Schleiermacher who placed great value on inward feeling and the importance of the growth of the individual.⁴⁴ Religious self-consciousness could not secure any “metaphysical knowledge of God as God knows himself through himself” though it could enable one to “acknowledge the givenness of God as he discloses himself in his relation to human beings in the world.”⁴⁵ By employing religious consciousness, humanity could not know anything “of God except his preserving activity (in which creation has been absorbed).”⁴⁶ In consequence, what a person knows derives from an epistemological dialectic that distinguishes between a thought and that to which the thought refers. This follows in that the construction of one’s thought is more than simply one’s consciousness of it, for also present in that thought is that which is not the thought itself.⁴⁷

Schleiermacher confidently contextualised Christianity within Romanticism, believing he had saved it from the Enlightenment critique while making it acceptable to Romantics. However, at what costs did he succeed, and what might one learn from his efforts at contextualisation? Additionally, what lessons might be gleaned from this experiment that might benefit in guiding present day believers as they respond to the postmodern challenge to a faith anchored in the grandest of all metanarratives—the Bible? As a whole, were his efforts at contextualisation useful, or should they serve as warnings for those seeking to subsume Christianity within the paradigm of postmodernism in order to make it appealing to the cultural sensibilities of the twenty-first century? Influenced by Romanticism, Schleiermacher declared as tertiary to religion the age-old arguments about God’s existence, miracles, the inspiration, and the inerrancy of Scripture, etc.; he sought refuge in his claim that the centre of religion had forever been located in feeling, as opposed to human reason.⁴⁸ Similarly, postmoderns assert that all reality is nothing more than a social construct and that this equally applies in the realm of religion. If one were to assert reason as part of the mental furniture of religion, postmodernists would judge him guilty of attempting to impose Enlightenment rationalism. One might argue that as Kant had claimed to embark upon a “Copernican revolution” in philosophy, Schleiermacher set out to establish a “Copernican revolution” in theology. As Kant had shifted the “orbit” of thought and perception from the objects themselves to the mind in which they were subjectively perceived, so too Schleiermacher moved theological thought from the notion of external and eternally existing propositional

37. In this regard, one might see Stanley Grenz’ views on revisioning Christianity as parallel to Schleiermacher’s; see in particular Grenz’ *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1993), especially pp. 61–85.

38. Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline on the Study of Theology* (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1964; trans. Terrence N. Tice), pp. 67f., 78f.

39. *Speeches*, 1958 ed., p. 39.

40. Reardon, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

41. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, online version available at http://www.ilt.columbia.edu/academic/digitexts/kant/pure_reason/pure_reason.txt, accessed 28 March 2003.

42. *Ibid.*

43. Representative examples include: Gotthold Lessing, *Lessing’s Theological Writings*, trans. Henry Chadwick (London: Black, 1956), pp. 51–56; Voltaire’s comments on the soul in his *Philosophical Dictionary*, trans. Theodore Besterman (New York: Penguin, 1984), pp. 22, 28.

44. Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, rev. ed., trans. John Oman (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1994), pp. 151f., 189; hereafter referenced as *Speeches*, 1994 ed.

45. Bennie Dale Craver, “The Divine Government of the World: The Function of Providence in the Theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher” (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1994), p. 54.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 59. It is via this nexus that Schleiermacher seems to connect the infinite and the finite, though as stated, the finite would be contained in the infinite; however, at other times Schleiermacher seems to construct his reality in the inverse of this proposition, for, he states that religion is, “in itself . . . an affection, a revelation of the Infinite in the finite.” *Speeches*, 1994 ed., p. 36.

47. Schleiermacher, *Dialectic, or The Art of Doing Philosophy: A Study Edition of the 1811 Notes*, trans. by Terrence N. Tice (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), pp. 67–72.

48. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (New York: Torchbooks, 1963; trans. H. R. MacKintosh and J. S. Stewart), Vol. 1, p. 11f.; hereafter referenced as *CF*.

truths about God grounded in God's objective existence, to internalised criteria for determining religious truth.

Insisting that there was a feeling of utter dependence that all humanity experienced, Schleiermacher asserted that this was a constituted feature of humanity. However, in making this observation he was not echoing the text of Rom. 1:18ff.—that humanity knows of God's existence because God has made his existence obvious through his creation (though man's fallenness causes him to repress such knowledge). Rather, he asserted that this compelling sense of absolute dependence was an emergent quality in humans, positing that everyone has this tendency—an innate disposition, toward *God-consciousness*.⁴⁹ However, this perspective collides with the aforementioned dynamic of Romans chapter one.⁵⁰

Schleiermacher's motivations for contextualising Christianity within Romanticism emerge in *Speeches*. His defence of religious belief employed language reflecting Romantic sensibilities: "Considered from the centre outwards, that is according to its inner quality, it is an expression of human nature, based in one of its necessary modes of acting or impulses or whatever else you like to call it."⁵¹ He further pleads, "Why do you not regard the religious life itself, and first those pious exaltations of the mind in which all other known activities are set aside . . . the whole soul is dissolved in the immediate feeling of the Infinite and Eternal."⁵² In this reflection of the Romantic values of feeling over facts, inward passion over outward restraint and freedom over obedience⁵³ one also senses an appeal to a sublime quality in religion—a concept permeating Romantic thought.⁵⁴ These views from *Speeches* are not anomalies, but consistent with the pervasively Romantic perspective found throughout Schleiermacher's work; even in his dogmatic work he opined in Romantic fashion that "the self-identical essence of piety is this: the consciousness of being absolutely dependent, or, which is the same thing, of being in relation with God."⁵⁵ God relationally reveals himself via God-consciousness, which is inseparable from the self-consciousness universally given to everyone; he asserted that to feel absolutely dependent and "to be conscious of being in relation with God are one and the same thing . . . absolute dependence is the fundamental relation which must include all others in itself. This last expression includes the God-consciousness in the self-consciousness . . . the two cannot be separated from each other."⁵⁶

This locates piety in feeling versus activity, or acquisition of knowledge. A corollary concept to his view of God-consciousness within self-consciousness is his reference of

God as "the Infinite."⁵⁷ Thinking the term indescribable nevertheless he asserted the infinite was "that which is in contrast to the finite, i.e., to that which is co-determined by other things."⁵⁸ The idea of an indescribable God parallels Romanticism's emphasis on the "mystery of the universe."⁵⁹

Schleiermacher denied that Christian doctrines were propositional. Hence, they did not correspond to truths external of them; they were verbal expressions of inner feelings born of relationship to God, lying at the intersection of God-consciousness and self-consciousness.⁶⁰ He asserted that one lies "directly on the bosom of the infinite world. In that moment, you are its soul. Through one part of your nature you feel, as your own, all its powers and its endless life."⁶¹ This "sound-bite" captures the essence of Romanticism, leaving Schleiermacher vulnerable to the charge of pantheism, for, "the pantheistic tendency of all romanticism is undeniable."⁶²

Schleiermacher confronted two dominant views that stood as alternatives to his own. The first view was the idea that religion was based upon thinking or knowing; the second saw religion as "doing." He asserted that religion was neither knowing nor doing, but could only truly be found in "feeling."⁶³ Here we find a parallel between his ideas and those expressed in postmodernism, since postmodernism rejects any notion of propositional truth, asserting that religious "truth" is found within, not without; that is, it repudiates any notion of objectively existing religious truth.⁶⁴ In subjectifying Christian faith Schleiermacher unwittingly played to the strength of the skeptic, who could now dismiss Christianity as an individual choice, nothing more than a private matter without any actually existent referent independent of the mind that entertained its thought.⁶⁵ One might posit that the Enlightenment forced this response as it asserted knowledge had some point of reference existing external to it, whereas feelings did not. However, a subjectivist does have facts about a feeling, but the feeling itself cannot be adequately expressed since its only existence is an internal and subjective one.⁶⁶ Consider Schleiermacher's observation that "All attributes which we ascribe to God are to be taken as denoting not something special in God, but only something special in the manner in which the feeling of absolute dependence is to be related to him."⁶⁷ His intent emerges even more clearly in his *Autobiography and Letters*, wherein he stated, "... this is my vocation, to represent more clearly that which dwells in all true human beings, and to

49. Robert Williams, *Schleiermacher The Theologian* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, n.d.), p. 44. See *CF*, Vol. 1, pp. 12–18.

50. Schleiermacher's problematic view of human nature vis-à-vis the fall is recognized by both critics and supporters, the latter offering various defences to extract Schleiermacher from such tension. For sympathetic views see David Nelson Duke, "Schleiermacher: Theology Without a Fall," *PRS* 9:1 (Spring 1982), pp. 21–37; Robert V. Vance, "Sin and Consciousness of Sin in Schleiermacher," *PRS* 13:3 (Fall 1986), pp. 241–262.

51. *Speeches*, 1958 ed., p. 13.

52. Schleiermacher, *Speeches*, 1994 ed., p. 15f.

53. Robert M. Wernier, *The Romantic School in Germany* (New York: Appleton, 1910), pp. 1–7.

54. William Vaughan, "From Sublimity to Indeterminacy," in *Romanticism and Postmodernism*, ed. Edward Larrissy (Cambridge: UK, Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 13.

55. *CF*, Vol. 1, p. 12.

56. *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 17.

57. For examples see *Soliloquies*, p. 12; *Speeches*, 1958 ed., p. 39; *Speeches*, 1994 ed., p. 15f.

58. *CF* Vol. 1, p. 230f.

59. Reardon, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

60. *CF*, Vol. 1, p. 76ff.

61. *Speeches*, 1994 ed., p. 43.

62. Reardon, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

63. *Speeches*, 1958 ed., pp. 77–80.

64. Erickson, *Truth or Consequences*, pp. 127–131, wherein he demonstrates how religion emerged in Derrida's thought; though Derrida claimed he was an atheist, he held that religion is fully subjective. Derrida noted that "I call myself God . . . God is in me, he is the absolute 'me' or 'self,' he is that structure of invisible interiority that is called, in Kierkegaard's sense, subjectivity." See Derrida's "Faith and Knowledge: Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone," in *Religion*, ed. Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 17. See also, Ian Almond, "How Not to Deconstruct a Dominican: Derrida on God and 'Hypertruth,'" *JAAAR* 68:2 (June 2000), pp. 329–344, wherein Derrida's subjectivity and religion are discussed within the context of his interaction with the thought of Meister Eckhart.

65. C. E. M. Joad, *The Recovery of Belief* (London: Faber and Farber Ltd., 1952), p. 96f.

66. *Ibid.*, p. 97f.

67. *CF*, Vol. 1, p. 194.

bring it home to their consciences.”⁶⁸ Note that the “truth” he seeks to represent more clearly to the individual is already present inside them prior to it arising in their conscious thought; they are simply awakened to conscious knowledge of what they already possessed unwittingly.⁶⁹ “Truth,” in Schleiermacher becomes something that is subjective and mind-dependent. Elsewhere, speaking of the nature of these subjective feelings, Schleiermacher observed that, “Each expression of feeling bears on it immediately this peculiar impress. It cannot show itself without it, nor be comprehended without it. Everything is to be found immediately, and not proved from something else.”⁷⁰ In this statement, Schleiermacher ties the concept of “feeling” to comprehension; further asserting that knowledge is gained immediately through such feeling, and that one cannot know it with certainty, nor apart from such subjectivism.

Postmodernism mirrors Schleiermacher for it too asserts that “truth” is mind dependent. It denies any truth “out there,” reducing it to no more than the creation of the individual as he interacts with the various “texts” of life. Postmodernism has elevated the “true for you, but not for me” mantra to new levels of respectability. Grenz (whose work evidenced great affinities for postmodernism⁷¹) observed that postmodern minds view truth as, “. . . relative, indeterminate and participatory.”⁷² He also claimed only postmodern-friendly theological methodologies that valued becoming over being⁷³ could equip Christians to function Christianly. In his view (one common among postmodernists), language shapes reality; thus, language is central to (what Grenz terms) the “world constructing” essential to effecting becoming over being. It is this process that produces knowledge and identity within the Christian community.⁷⁴

Not dissimilarly, Schleiermacher equivocated feeling

and intellect, seeing the latter as “intuitive piety, and reflective belief,”⁷⁵ positing that in the realm of religious truth experience has supremacy over words, as “communication of religion is not like the communication of ideas and perceptions to be sought in books. In this medium, too much of the pure impression of the original production is lost.”⁷⁶ This undermines his own position, for if so much is lost in an attempt to recount religious experience via language, it follows that his attempts to do so would be inadequate to their task too. This position is ultimately self-referentially absurd. Schleiermacher proposed the elevation of mind-dependent, subjective truth over against mind-independent, objective truth. Thus, his system does not allow for the existence of true/false propositions outside the internal conceptual capacities of individuals. If it did, then a proposition would be true whether or not anyone experienced it. Similarly, postmoderns assert that words lack the ability to communicate substantive messages that contain ultimate meaning for everyone; they are simply symbols people manipulate according to their unique experiences to construct their own realities.⁷⁷ Foucault postmodernly asserts, “words are as deliberately absent as things themselves.”⁷⁸ M. Kallenberg evidences sympathy for Foucault’s assertion, decrying the inherently faulty notion of language as corresponding to, or descriptive of, the world as it is.⁷⁹ He posits that language is an inherently social enterprise that functions to construct new realities that previously did not exist.⁸⁰

J. Franke discusses the role of language in theology, noting that a theology that takes seriously the situatedness and interpretive nature of knowledge must also consider “. . . the socially constructed nature of reality, [and] the limitations of language.”⁸¹ He also notes that in the effort to participate as co-labourers with God in the present construction of a world reflective of God’s eschatological will for Creation, that Christians should recognise that such efforts entail a “. . . strongly linguistic dimension, due to the role of language in the task of world construction. Through the constructive power of language, the Christian community anticipates the divine eschatological world that stands at the climax of the biblical narrative.”⁸²

there is no essential nature to what it means to be human that humans possess at birth—the essence of one’s humanness is shaped by one’s experiences.

75. Clements, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

76. *Speeches*, 1958 ed., p. 150.

77. See “Linguistics and Grammatology,” chapter 2 of Jacques Derrida’s *Of Grammatology*, available at <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/fr/derrida.htm>, accessed 12 December 2000.

78. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, available at <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/fr/foucault.htm>, accessed 15 December 2000. Emphasis in original.

79. Kallenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 23ff.

80. *Ibid.*, 24.

81. John R. Franke, “The Nature of Theology: Culture, Language, and Truth,” in *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn*, ed. Myron B. Penner (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2005), p. 211.

82. *Ibid.*, 213. This echoes Grenz’ Moltmannesque “theology of hope.” While it might seem that postmodernism’s rejection of metanarratives would place it at odds with eschatological concepts, Grenz posited that the on-going process, and gradual unfolding associated with the eschaton resonates with central postmodern themes. Grenz viewed Moltmann’s non-foundationalist theology as readily adaptable to postmodernism, for he claimed that foundationalism simply yields a generically oriented universal human reality that

68. Schleiermacher, *The Life of Schleiermacher as Unfolded in his Autobiography and Letters* (London: Smith, Elder and Co, 1860; trans. Fredrica Rowan), Vol. 1, p. 125.

69. This evidences Romanticism’s influence on the development of Schleiermacher’s ideas, paralleling Rousseau’s concept of knowledge and its acquisition. Rousseau held that in educating children, one had only to awaken in them their already existing knowledge—knowledge that was simply latent. In this model the role of the teacher was nothing more than that of a facilitator. This is an idea that is widely popular in education presently, as it empowers the students and removes the threat of a power authority external to them; consequently we find a postmodern influence alive and well in the classroom. See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile* (New York: Basic Books, 1979; trans. Alan Bloom).

70. *Speeches*, 1958 ed., p. 54.

71. For the most fully developed expression of this, see Stanley Grenz and John Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2001).

72. Grenz, “Star Trek and the Next Generation,” in *The Challenge of Postmodernism*, p. 94.

73. This line of thought—emphasising becoming over being evidences more affinity for Heidegger’s existentialism than for a biblically informed view of metaphysics and anthropology. See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, SUNY Series in Contemporary Continental Philosophy (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1996; trans. Joan Stambaugh), pp. 260–268.

74. Grenz, “Toward A Baptist Theological Method for the Postmodern Context,” *Baptist History and Heritage* 35:1 (Winter 2000), p. 100; cf. Grenz, *Created for Community: Connecting Christian Belief with Christian Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, second ed., 1999), pp. 210–213. As many see existentialism as one of the antecedents of postmodern thought, it is significant that this emphasis on becoming over being has affinities for a central theme in existential thought, particularly in the work of both Sartre and Heidegger, wherein one’s existence precedes their essence. Or, to employ different terminology,

Language and Community

Schleiermacher's hermeneutic methodology necessitated elucidating meaning within the context of community, ultimately making the subjective views of individuals the final arbiter of interpretive meaning. Positing language as incapable of communicating transcendent truth, he limited it to communicating only the intentions of the human who formulated the words. He asserted that words had no meaning apart from their relationship to a sentence, which in turn had no meaning apart from other sentences.⁸³ Prefiguring postmodernism's view that words only refer to other words,⁸⁴ he claimed language was incapable of completely communicating an individual's thought, as some part of the intentionality of the writer/speaker was always lost in the act of communication.⁸⁵ In his *Brief Outline on the Study of Theology*, Schleiermacher succinctly delineated the dynamic existing between the individual and the community of believers regarding the formulation of doctrine.⁸⁶ Elsewhere he reinforced this dynamic; from the context of the development of dogmatics, he stated that, "... if we look at individual cases, the proving of a proposition by exhibiting its relation to the other propositions already proved in another way is a merely subordinate matter."⁸⁷

Schleiermacher insisted that one could not separate language and knowledge—that language was the vehicle by which a community of faith constructed doctrine as people interacted with the text of Scripture and their ever-changing experiences.⁸⁸ He further proffered that outside of a particular community language was essentially without meaning.⁸⁹ If this were true, how could there ever be an objective meaning for any written passage from the past? Scripture is not exempt from this critique, as the person seeking meaning by engaging in hermeneutics is not a member of the same community as the author. This would hold even if the author and the interpreter were both Christians, since for Schleiermacher the community was ever changing.⁹⁰ If this

is the case, the Christian community of the author is not the same as the one to which the reader belongs, but belongs to a different time and place than the interpreter.⁹¹ Thus, he saw language as incapable of communicating across points of cultural origin; similarly, postmodernism views language as incapable of bridging the cultural divide.⁹²

Representative of this view, S. Fish sees language as culturally bound; meaning emerges only within interpretive communities, which are made of those who share interpretive strategies.⁹³ Fish takes his theories further, deducing that if language does not correspond to truth "out there" and objectively does not exist outside communities of interpretation, then the things the words refer to have no actual reality either. This leads him to conclude that even such things as morality are culturally constructed.⁹⁴ However, for postmoderns the term "text" goes beyond the written word. Anything that communicates is a text; thus all of life becomes a text. Schleiermacher likewise did not limit his hermeneutical model to written texts, applying it to oral means as well, noting that he often made "... use of hermeneutics in personal conversation."⁹⁵ Speaking with postmodern sensibilities before anyone had "constructed" the existence of such things, he extended the tools of hermeneutics to include non-verbal aspects of communication.⁹⁶

Postmodernism's views on the nature of truth ensure that it will embrace some form of religious pluralism. This follows from its distrust of metanarratives due to their inherently oppressive nature. This necessitates that religious metanarratives suffer the same consequence; as they exclude other religious perspectives they must be rejected as oppressive to, and marginalising of, the faith commitments of other religions. Hence, Christianity cannot claim religious monopoly regarding access to knowledge of God, or how persons might obtain eternal life (this assumes that such things are possible—however, the assertion that they are would itself be a totalising metanarrative). Schleiermacher

cannot offer genuine hope for individuals. See Grenz, "Eschatological Theology: Contours of a Postmodern Theology of Hope," *RevExp* 97:3 (Summer 2000), pp. 339–354.

83. Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism and Other Writings*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998; trans. Andrew Bowie), p. 98f.

84. Hermeneutical affinities in Schleiermacher for postmodernism notwithstanding, in his "The Father of Modern Hermeneutics in a Postmodern Age," *Philosophy Today* 40:2 (1996), p. 251, Yong Huang chooses to ignore them. He seeks the "rescue" of Schleiermacher from postmodernist rejection as a "modernist." Huang's goal is the redemption of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics in order to employ elements he finds useful free from postmodern critique. With great care he shows affinity between Hans-George Gadamer and Schleiermacher (despite Gadamer's sometimes harsh criticism of Schleiermacher's hermeneutic in his "The Problem of Language in Schleiermacher's Hermeneutics," in *Schleiermacher as Contemporary*, ed. Robert W. Funk [New York: Herder and Herder, 1970], pp. 68–84). Huang stresses that Gadamer's "fusion of horizons" finds fuller expression in Schleiermacher's system than Gadamer's since the latter ignores the message of the original text and is left with one horizon; but by giving consideration of the author, Schleiermacher allows for a genuine fusion more consistent with postmodern concerns.

85. *Hermeneutics and Criticism*, pp. 274–275.

86. Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline*, pp. 71–82.

87. *CF*, Vol. 1, p. 113.

88. Kenneth Hamilton, "Schleiermacher and Relational Theology," *JR* 44 (Jan 1964), pp. 36–39.

89. *CF*, Vol. 1, p. 265, Vol. 2, p. 594.

90. John Murphy, "Modernism and the Teaching of Schleiermacher," *AER* 145 (June 1961), p. 25f.

91. Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts*, trans. James Duke and Jack Forstman (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977), 70; Schleiermacher, *On the Different Methods of Translation*, trans. Andre Lefevere, *German Romantic Criticism*, ed. A. Leslie Willson (New York: Continuum, 1982), p. 10.

92. Michael Devitt, "Incommensurability and the Priority of Metaphysics," *Incommensurability and Related Matters*, eds. P. Hoyningen-Huene and H. Sankey (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 2001), p. 147f. Other examples include: Neil Levy, *Being Up-To-Date: Foucault, Sartre, and Postmodernity* (New York: Lang, 2001), pp. 1–15; Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 22–29; Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. 15–19; and Frederick Jameson, *The Prison House of Language* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), a defining work in the development of postmodern literary theory, which has as its unifying theme the obstacle of language to communication. Two journal articles appeared in 1999 that linked Schleiermacher's hermeneutics with the shift towards post-liberal, post-foundational, and irrational elements in theology. See Gregory Thornbury, "A Revelation of the Inward: Schleiermacher's Theology and the Hermeneutics of Interiority," *SBJT* 3:1 (Spring 1999), pp. 4–26; and Paul Fisher, "The Triumph of the Irrational in Postenlightenment Theology," *AUSS* 37:1 (Spring 1999), pp. 5–22.

93. Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 49.

94. *Ibid.*, pp. 97–100, 174.

95. *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts*, p. 181.

96. *Ibid.*, p. 182.

rejected the prevailing religious views of his time, going so far as to question Christianity's exclusive truth claims, which led to continual redefining of the theological terms he employed in his writings and public discourses.⁹⁷ This was due to his conviction that the status quo of Christian belief (and its buttressing theology) was insufficient to the challenges raised by the Enlightenment. This revisioning motif parallels the language games of postmodernism.

Community and Religious Belief

While emphasising the individual's religious experience, Schleiermacher insisted on the import of relationship within communities, asserting the cultivation of Christianity outside the context of community was a misnomer.⁹⁸ Though postmodernism empowers individuals with great freedoms, it subsumes them within the group. Ultimately, individuals have no real meaning except that which their community gives them. The irony is that as the "category of the individual person fades from view, consciousness of social construction becomes focal. We realize increasingly that who and what we are, is not so much the result of our 'personal essence' (real feelings, deep beliefs, and the like), but how we are constructed in various social groups."⁹⁹ When Schleiermacher wrote, "If there is religion at all, it must be social, for that is the nature of man, and it is quite peculiarly the nature of religion,"¹⁰⁰ it was not simply the cultivation of Christianity within the context of the community he had in view; he was implying one could not even be a Christian apart from the context of the community. Consequently, there emerges a communal subjectification of truth, and though the community might be in agreement about what constituted a "Christian experience" that experience still would not possess any objectively true, mind-independent referent, and thus would only be true within that particular community. Resonating with postmodernism's view of identity as emergent from community, he posited that the "Christian experience" could only be grasped within a community.¹⁰¹ The importance of community as the vehicle by which people might construct (what are for them) valid beliefs, is an idea central to Schleiermacher's teaching. Postmodernism echoes Schleiermacher by removing the possibility of knowledge of any real meaning beyond the boundaries of one's own community. Similarly, for postmodernists, "truth" is nothing more than a social construct that is only meaningful to individuals within the context of some particular cultural paradigm.

Combining Schleiermacher's claim that at their most basic level of existence, individuals are essentially constituted to feel an absolute dependency on God with his idea of the community as the loci of man's essential elements, it seems difficult to escape the conclusion that the form of Christian belief espoused by Schleiermacher is not possible

apart from its functioning within a community of believers. As individuals come to understand religious truth, they do so as members of a community that is circumscribed by the use of a common language.¹⁰² One can therefore conclude that since cognitive thought occurs using language, but language only has meaning within a community, that one could not arrive at the belief of the "truthfulness" of any proposition about Christianity outside of the setting of one's faith community. This would appear a serious obstacle to one outside the community coming to faith in Christ, for it would seem to follow that one could not communicate Christian truth to those outside of the community. Schleiermacher's views become problematic in the light of Scripture as well, for Psalm 19 and Romans 1 are but two of the more prominent passages that speak about God's physical Creation testifying of his objective, mind independent existence and the nature of his character. Yet, despite the truths contained in these two passages, Schleiermacher denied that the universe provided evidence for belief in God.¹⁰³

Schleiermacher's position faces the following challenge: if the only knowledge we may have of God is dependent upon our God-consciousness, it would seem that we then have no objective standard by which to evaluate one religious belief over against our feeling of absolute dependence. It seems to follow that anyone belonging to any number of diverse religious groups could sense a feeling of absolute dependence and claim that it was from God.¹⁰⁴ Having ruled out cognitive knowledge about God, Schleiermacher and his followers would be left with no ultimate authoritative platform from which to argue against the legitimacy of any non-Christian's claim of a valid, and salvific (in terms of God-consciousness) religious experience. He never claimed that truth developed within the context of the Christian community was truth for those in other religious communities, allowing for redemption to come ultimately to all human souls.¹⁰⁵ The truths espoused about Christ were only true for the Christian community; it was the Christians' narrative—the story that gave their faith meaning. Postmodernism echoes this in its embrace of unmitigated pluralism. One can only assert one's religious story is true within the tradition of one's own faith community; anything more would create an overarching view, which would become totalising, legitimizing some but marginalising and excluding others.¹⁰⁶

In this same pluralist vein, Schleiermacher insisted that the communities in which truth emerged were those that were in process, re-examining doctrinal formulations and restating them in innovatively new ways to resonate with the ever-changing experiences of the community; thus, even Scripture becomes an evolving source of truth.¹⁰⁷ Taken to its logical conclusion, no doctrines are sacrosanct. What a community asserts as doctrinally true from its interaction with the text of Scripture will be fluid—today's truth can be

97. J. Murphy, *op. cit.*, p. 25f.

98. *Speeches*, 1958 ed., pp. 147–180; see especially pp. 148–152. The elusiveness/fluidity of meaning typifies postmodernism, at times seemingly annoying its own proponents' attempts to elucidate its particular features; see David Shumway, "Jameson / Hermeneutics / Postmodernism," in *Postmodern Jameson Critique* ed. Douglas Kellner (Washington: Mazonneuve, 1989), pp. 172–181.

99. Jim Fideblibus, "Postmodernism and You: Psychology," available at <http://www.crossrds.org/dotpsy.htm>, accessed 9 November 2000.

100. *Speeches*, 1958 ed., p. 148.

101. *CF*, Vol. 1, p. 56f.

102. Winfried Corduan, "Schleiermacher's Test for Truth: Dialogue in the Church," *JETS* 26:3 (1983), p. 326.

103. Norman Hook, "God and the World," *ExpTim* 79:2 (1967), p. 50.

104. Murphy, *op. cit.*, p. 16f.

105. *CF*, Vol. 2, p. 502; see also Diogenes Allen, *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World: The Full Wealth of Conviction* (Louisville, Westminster/John Knox, 1989), pp. 185–189.

106. J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, "Facing the Postmodern Scalpel," in *Christian Apologetics*, p. 138f.

107. *Hermeneutics: the Handwritten Manuscripts*, p. 70.

set aside tomorrow. If doctrines are bound to particular times and places, claims about their continued validity are suspect. This is even true of Scripture, as Schleiermacher saw it as the first in a series “. . . of presentations of the Christian Faith.”¹⁰⁸ But, if in the historical development of the Christian Church redemption is being ever more completely realised in time, and the Holy Spirit is thus pervading the whole ever more perfectly, it follows that the first of this, or any other series cannot be the norm for succeeding members.¹⁰⁹

Postmodernism reacts against the Enlightenment's arrogance of certainty in attaining all knowledge, rejecting its presuppositions and, with a broad sweep of its deconstructivist brush, all metanarratives. This is most clearly articulated in Lyotard's oft-quoted remark that postmodernism is an “incredulity towards metanarratives.”¹¹⁰ This applies to all metanarratives, for postmodernism does not distinguish between the “modern progress myth or the Christian account of redemptive history in Jesus Christ.”¹¹¹ Similarly, Schleiermacher rejected objective, mind-independent truth as necessary to sustain Christian belief and doctrines. Whether Christ is co-eternal with the Father was of no import to his Christology; Christ was equal to God in that he was the only one other than God who had achieved perfect God-consciousness.¹¹² Prefiguring the deconstructionist perspective employed by postmodernists such as Derrida, Schleiermacher deconstructed the fall, removing it from the realm of metanarrative and placing it in the category of a local narrative *a la* postmodernism. He posited that “original sin” was ultimately a guilt that must be borne by the whole, as it was a social corruption.¹¹³ Over against his obvious focus on the individual, he placed great emphasis on the community of faith. That he superimposed over the whole community the responsibility for original sin should not be surprising, for as has previously been demonstrated, Schleiermacher asserted that the community was the only place in which one might effectively live out Christianity. Speaking about this corporate view, he postulated that “in each the work of all, and in all the work of each.”¹¹⁴ Postmodernism similarly holds individuals guilty for the wrongs committed by their community as well as condemning the community for the wrongs of its individuals.¹¹⁵

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

This essay has examined Schleiermacher's efforts to gain a hearing among his contemporaries by contextualising the Christian faith within the paradigm of Romanticism, bringing about the emergence of a movement to embrace a subjectified view of truth. Furthermore, it has demonstrated how that shift in turn yielded an anthropocentric (over against a theocentric) focus in theology leading to the demise

of traditional doctrinal formulations, and laid a foundation for variant expressions of postmodern theology. However, is it the case that the traditional formulations were found wanting in the aftermath of the Enlightenment, or rather is it that believers allowed the prevailing thought patterns of culture to influence their thoughts and values, such influences then being manifested in their lives? When believers do not live in faithful accord with the truth of God's revealed word the effects are devastating. In 1 Cor 6:1–11, Paul chastises the litigious attitude of the Corinthian church. The thrust of his message is that in hauling fellow believers before the government's judges over frivolous matters they portray a negative example of Christianity to the unbelieving culture. When Christians do not live before the world as Christians, they bring disrepute upon the name of Christ and his gospel. In Mt. 5:13–16, Jesus asserts that believers are to be the salt of the earth, however, if salt becomes “tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown . . . You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”

Consequently, one should ask if the rejection of the gospel within a particular historical and cultural setting is necessarily due to the inability of the gospel to transcend the prevailing cultural setting; or, are there other factors offering equally valid explanations for rejection, not the least of which is the faithlessness of the Christian witness to that culture? Culpability, however, does not rest solely with those believers whose witness lacks integrity, but also must be shared by the receptors of the message. Behind legitimate difficulties that might arise due to cultural differences¹¹⁶ lies a universal commonality among all the particular humans comprising any culture, namely their fallenness. Sin has created an inescapable flaw in all humans. This is the ultimate source of conflict between the message of the gospel and any culture. Rom. 1:21–23 indicates that all cultures have been (and still are) populated by people who, despite the fact that they knew God “they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible

108. *CF*, Vol. 2, p. 594f.

109. *Ibid.*

110. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, p. xxiv.

111. Middleton and Walsh, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

112. *CF*, Vol. 2, p. 385f.

113. *CF*, Vol. 1, pp. 285–288; Rousseau similarly posited that society was the causation of humanity's problems.

114. Hoeffcker, course lecture, “Church and the World” (Charlotte, NC, 21 June 2000).

115. Veith, *op. cit.*, pp. 71, 76ff.

116. For example, historically, Christians have viewed the heart as the seat of the will and emotive decision-making. This view is grounded in various scriptural passages, e.g., Ps 119:9–11; 2 Chr. 15:15; Is. 29:13; Mt. 5:28, 6:21, 15:19; Jn 14:1, and Rom. 10:10. Consequently, many evangelically oriented Christians describe the moment of one's coming to faith in Christ as asking Jesus into one's heart. However, imagine a culture that sees the seat of will and emotive decision making as residing in the liver. How effective might missionaries be in proclaiming that the people of this culture need to receive Christ into their “heart” as Lord and saviour? However, if the missionaries engaged in a soft form of contextualisation and understood some of the cultural traits of the people in question, they would discover that the association of the heart with receiving Christ as Lord and savior was nonsensical within that culture. In contrast, receiving Christ as Lord and saviour into one's liver would make sense to this theoretical people. It is important to note that in this example, it was not the message of the gospel that changed. The contextualisation that occurred was minimal, for it simply substituted the locale of the will and emotive decision-making processes to the internal organ that paralleled the Hebraic (and thus biblical) association of the same with the heart (over against the liver).

God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.”

The claim that one must contextualise the gospel message for each generation and culture is problematic. Various models of this view all make an assumption that ultimately undermines their claims. Each assumes that the revelation of God contained in the Old and New Testaments is the benchmark from which contextualisation should occur. Nonetheless, if all people are culturally bound by language and time, then the message of God’s self-revelation in Scripture is also bound by language and time, for it was spoken to particular people within the flow of actual time and space. Consequently, one should not presume that the biblical revelation is the starting point for all contextual efforts. Proponents of such models must address how they might discover the revelatory word of God that has not been “spoiled” by cultural context. If the inscripturated revelation is such a message and yet has been understood by the people of other cultures, times, and places as recorded in the gospel’s proclamation in the New Testament (particularly in Acts¹¹⁷), then it cannot be that the message of God’s special revelation must be contextualised in order for people of other cultures, times, and places to understand and embrace its message.

Nonetheless, over the past few decades theology has taken a contextual turn positing “all of human inquiry occurs within contexts . . . that each of us thinks and moves within certain social, linguistic, and epistemic contexts.”¹¹⁸ However, how far should one press this claim? Those insisting on a disconnection between communities bracket off the possibility of meaningful communication between them, if not making such communication impossible. In the present discussion, the term *hard contextualisation* will designate this model. The more extreme proponents of this perspective seemingly eschew claims of exclusive truth.¹¹⁹ Donald Bosch, a more moderate voice speaking of the need for contextualisation notes, “In one sense, the gospel is foreign to every culture.”¹²⁰

Contrastingly, *soft contextualisation* describes those models acknowledging the existence of time, place, history and

culture as inevitable settings for communicating truth, yet also assert the communication of objective truth between communities is nonetheless still possible.¹²¹ This assertion is grounded in the text of scripture which contains a “plot line from universal curse to an abiding hope” that is trans-cultural in its scope. J. Kennington further notes that the “writers of the New Testament had an understanding of the gospel that came directly from Jesus. Jesus saw himself in the Old Testament. He made a point of relating his person, his mission and the Kingdom of God to the Old Testament . . . God chose to form the culture of the Old Testament so that we can correctly understand the message of Jesus.”¹²² Discussing contextualisation and the proclamation of the gospel within the setting of colonial Latin America, he notes that despite large numbers of conversions reported by the various missionaries, by the early sixteenth century “the Catholicism that resulted [was] a syncretism” wherein all the symbols of the indigenous peoples’ mother goddess were “hidden in the ‘miracle’ painting of the Virgin of Guadalupe . . . Effective contextualisation was not done.”¹²³ He observes that in the rush to be culturally relevant, evangelical Christians might also be engaging in an improperly conceived and executed model of contextualisation. He issues this caution in light of the observation that though the Spanish missionaries had “millions of converts . . . few knew Christ.”¹²⁴

Acts 17 locates Paul in the agora atop the acropolis of Athens; observing the myriad of idols present in the city, Paul’s spirit is provoked (v. 1). He proclaims Christ to the Athenian philosophers who oft engaged in open-air discourse and debate in the Areopagus.¹²⁵ Paul’s proclamation of “strange deities” (v. 18) puzzled the Epicureans and Stoics with whom he interacted. Subsequently, they brought him before the highest tribunal of Athens—the Areopagus (v. 19). In this setting Paul employs elements of soft contextualisation. First, he notes their religious activity, that they even have a statue to “an unknown God” (v. 23); Paul employs this as a point of contact between their culture and the truth he was about to proclaim—that the God they worship in ignorance is known by Paul and can be known to them (vv. 23–27). Paul shows cultural insight in an appeal to two Stoic writers,¹²⁶ offering that, “in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we also are His children’” (v. 27). He then uses this appeal to claim that if humans are the children of the divine, how could it be the case that the divine image could be expressed in “an image formed by the art and thought of man” (v. 29)?

117. For example, consider the case of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:25–40), who was a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. In this instance, the issues of race and gender identity are at play, yet no contextualization is evident within the text concerning Philip’s presentation of the Gospel via his interpretation of the suffering servant passage from Isaiah 53.

118. William A. Dembski, “The Fallacy of Contextualism,” *PTR* (Oct. 1994), online version available at http://www.arn.org/docs/dembski/wd_contextism.htm, accessed 15 Dec 2000. From a favourable view see David J. Hesselgraves, “Contextualization that is Authentic and Relevant,” *IJFM* 12:3 (July–Sept. 1995), p. 115.

119. Representative of this view is Sri Lankan S. W. Ariarajah who attempts to contextualise the gospel into Hindu and Buddhist traditions. In his view, the best one can say of any Scripture is that it is simply material for the faith of the one who composed it, asserting that, “Scriptures should not become the walls that limit theological reflection and divide one community from another . . . No one Scripture is more valid or true than another. . . There is no reason why the Hindu Scriptures should not be meaningful and provide the context of faith in Jesus Christ for the Indian Christian.” “Towards a Theology of Dialogue,” *Ecumenical Review* 29 (Jan 1977), p. 9.

120. Donald Bosch, “Toward a New Paradigm Of Mission,” *Mission In The 1990’s*, G. H. Anderson *et al.* eds. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), p. 61. I suggest that this derives from a commonality among all the particular humans comprising any culture: the fact of their fallenness. Sin has created an inescapable flaw in all humans; this is the ultimate source of conflict between the message of the Gospel and any culture.

121. Dembski, “Fallacy.” Dembski employs the comparable terminology of “hard-core” contextualism and “moderate” contextualism; my indebtedness to him in the coining and use of my terminology, I herein freely acknowledge.

122. John C. Kennington, “Biblical Hermeneutics and Ethnography: Methodologies Bringing Cross-Cultural Ministry Closer to Scripture and to People” (D.Miss. diss. Western Seminary, 2001), p. 8f.

123. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

124. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

125. The use of the word *Areopagus*, or Mars Hill in the passage at this point designates a physical location on the acropolis, later Luke will employ it in its other sense, to describe the council before which Paul appeared. See Lea, *op. cit.*, p. 315.

126. Nash, *Gospel and the Greeks*, (Richardson, TX: Probe Books, 1992), p. 74. Nash identifies the sources as a hymn by Cleanthes, and a poem by Aratus, both Stoic thinkers: the subject of their observations was Zeus. Paul employs their praise of Zeus to demonstrate that if the claims of these Stoic thinkers are true, then those on Mars Hill face a dilemma concerning their views of the gods.

At this point in the narrative Paul digresses from any position one might validly consider as hard contextualisation. Having engaged the Athenians culturally (evidencing his knowledge of, and sensitivity to their culture), he makes proclamation of what he knew would be culturally offensive to the sensibilities of the various schools of Greek thought. Standing in the midst of the intellectual capital of the ancient world, Paul states that God in his mercy overlooks “times of ignorance” (v. 30); if this were not cause enough for offence, he declares a future resurrection from the dead and a definite end to the time space dimension of physical existence (v. 31). This is highly confrontational and lacking the cultural sensitivity valued by hard contextualisation. The Stoics denied the existence of the spiritual realm; consequently, they would reject out of hand the resurrection from the dead spoken of by Paul. Secondly, the majority of Greek philosophies embraced a cyclical pattern to history, a never-ending loop where the world recreated itself in the aftermath of a great conflagration. In the “new” universe, the same people and events would repeat themselves in exactly the same manner. The cycle was thought to have always existed, and so would continue on in an infinite pattern of repetition (the participants being ignorant thereof). The Stoics thought an impersonal force drove the universe towards this inevitable future.¹²⁷ Yet, Paul proclaimed God as personal—another point of cultural conflict.¹²⁸

Any attempt to force Paul’s efforts into hard contextualisation requires one to ignore all the points of sharp disagreement his presentation had with the prevailing cultural sensibilities of first century Athenians. If Paul were attempting a proto-hard contextualisation, he would have continued on in the same vein as he had in his use of Stoic sources, completely fleshing out an explanation of the gospel within that context.¹²⁹ That Paul does not continue in this vein evidences that he is aware of the incompatibility of a full contextualisation of the gospel that would subsume it to the worldview of the Greek philosophers. At the points where he sees truth, Paul does not hesitate to use them as points of traction for his proclamation of truth but, at the points of contradiction, he insists upon the universality of his message to speak truth across cultural divides.

In the end, does it matter whether it is Schleiermacher or some other antecedent figure such as Kierkegaard or Nietzsche whom people envision as the origin of the spiral

towards a postmodern crisis of faith? If the arguments presented in this work concerning Schleiermacher are valid, there is much for Christians to learn regarding how to respond to the problematic aspects of postmodernism. Schleiermacher’s example reveals the dangers inherent in losing Christian distinctives within the framework of any prevailing cultural paradigm. Yet, this is the very strategy that many have employed in attempting to reach present-day cultures for Christ. In the area of religious belief, many have embraced Schleiermacher’s idea that everyone in any religion can have a sense of absolute dependence—that they experience God. Religious pluralism is the politically correct view.¹³⁰ Among Americans, 53 percent have indicated that they believe all religions are really praying to the same God, and are simply using different names for him.¹³¹ Similarly, 44 percent believe that the Bible and the Koran are different expressions of the same spiritual truths.¹³² Perhaps an even more alarming trend for biblical Christians is the ever-increasing number of people who believe that Jesus committed sins (just as they do) while living on earth in human form. Polls reveal that 42 percent of Americans hold this view.¹³³ They have redefined Jesus according to their community’s sensate perspective.

The “re-inventing” of Jesus to make him palatable to the prevailing views of society has been an on-going process since Schleiermacher. It is but symptomatic of a larger problem within Christianity: the willingness to capitulate doctrine to current views. Schleiermacher himself spoke out against those within the Church who were willing to give in to the attacks of the Enlightenment rationalists, and yet his attempt at reworking Christianity within a model that embraced Romanticism was far from successful. Attempting to free Christianity from what he perceived as a negative influence, Schleiermacher only succeeded in entangling it in another worldview, creating a situation that proved problematic. One could argue that Schleiermacher’s actions were the first step in a long process of deconstructing Christianity that continues today as Christians seek to make the message of the gospel relevant to their surrounding postmodern culture. The challenge is this: how might one communicate Christianity to a world dominated by postmodern word games? Can one communicate the truths

127. *Ibid.*, pp. 68–72.

128. One might claim that, “Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer,” shows Paul failed *because* he did not engage in HCM. However to sustain this argument requires one to “cut and paste” verses since the second half of the verse notes the willingness of some to give Paul another hearing at some future time, and that there were both men and women who came to faith at that time.

129. This statement presupposes that Paul’s *modus operandi* was compatible with hard contextualisation. Any attempt at thoughtful reflection would likely lead the inquirer to conclude that Paul was, from the outset, operating from a model consistent with soft contextualization. The proclamation that he knows the identity of the unknown God early on in the exchange would have been a point of cultural offence. Nonetheless, D. Flemming says, “The concern for contextualising the Christian gospel is, of course, nothing new. Many precedents for contextualisation can be found within the Bible itself.” He then offers Acts 17 as supporting hard contextualisation. However, as demonstrated above, this passage models soft contextualisation as opposed to the hard model favored by Flemming. See his “The Third Horizon: A Wesleyan Contribution to the Contextualisation Debate,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 31:1 (Spring, 1996), p. 139.

130. John Hick has led the charge in popularising this view over the last thirty-plus years. In this regard one may view him as a modern day ideological heir of Schleiermacher’s views. In a Schleiermacherian manner he has advanced the view that Jesus’ divinity lay not in his essential nature but rather in the intensity of his encounter with the divine—that he was so attuned to the divine and its moral nature that he was able to manifest attribution of the same, empowering him with the ability to heal the sick and evoke other miraculous signs. Hick posits that this is the divine encounter in Christianity, and that this encounter with the divine might be manifest in innumerable expressions within other religions. For representative expressions of these ideas see his *God and the Universe of Faiths* (London: Macmillan Press, 1988), pp. 120–132; *The Myth of God Incarnate* (London: SCM Press, 1977), pp. 172–178.

131. George Barna, *The Index of Leading Spiritual Indicators* (Dallas: World, 1996), p. 63. See also, the *Newsweek/Beliefnet* Poll on religious belief in *Newsweek*, 5 September 2005, which reported that 80% of Americans, and 68% of evangelicals, believe there is more than one faith that leads to salvation.

132. Barna, “Americans Draw Theological Beliefs from Diverse Points of View,” *Barna Research Online*, available at <http://www.barna.org/cgibin/PagePressRelease.asp?PressReleaseID=122&Reference=E&Key=Jesus%20sin>, accessed 30 March 2003.

133. *Ibid.*

of Christianity without collapsing them into a local narrative in which believers invite others to participate? If such efforts result in an individual coming to faith in Christ, what is the next step for the believing community? Having invited postmoderns to participate in the Christian community of faith, do Christians then decide that it is time to let them in

on the “little secret”—that they actually believe their local narrative transcends all cultures and eras—that is, that they believe the gospel is in fact the elusive grand metanarrative? Such deception seems incompatible with the truth entrusted to believers—a truth that is *the truth* that sets the captives free. *C&S*

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NATURE AND THE SUPERNATURAL

by Michael W. Kelley

It is a settled conviction of our modern secular culture that nature is the only reality. This belief of modern man, a belief by now of the masses in general and no longer a supposition exclusively of scientists and philosophers, is all but universal in Western culture. Correlative to this belief in the sole reality of the natural is disbelief in the existence of the supernatural. Simply put, modern secular man has excluded God from his thinking about life and the world altogether. Man, the world, indeed, the universe itself is all there is, and above, beyond or apart from it there is nothing. Corresponding to this claim is the belief that that is natural and real which has material existence only. The idea of a *spiritual* or supernatural reality is the product of mythology and primitive ignorance. Thus, by the term *nature*, modern man means whatever he comes into contact with by means of one or other, or all, of his five physical senses. If he cannot see it, taste it, touch it, etc., it is not real, it therefore does not exist. In short, we live in a closed universe.

This unquestioned absolutism of (material) nature, along with the dismissal of any belief in a supernatural or transcendent reality, we should not doubt, is the corollary of modern man's deep-seated antipathy towards Christianity, especially the Christian God. By claiming that only nature has reality, he is able to dismiss from serious consideration not only that which Christianity has historically taught concerning God in general, but in particular what it has alleged as God's sometimes intrusion into the realm of nature. Scripture speaks repeatedly of God revealing himself through actions that counteract or alter nature's usual course. Many of these events are familiar even to secular minds, who either believe they never happened or that a perfectly natural explanation behind the apparent façade of miracle can be found. The issue with secular man is not that strange and occasionally inexplicable things cannot occur in nature; he is willing to allow for the odd and unusual. It is simply that, when it comes to the workings of nature, he will not allow the concept of *possibility* to be taken from his own sovereign control. With regard to nature man is the infallible determiner of what is or is not possible. If modern man alleges that nature cannot possibly have been affected by some supernatural agency, this is because man takes for

granted that his mind is the source of the possible. When the modern philosopher affirms that nature is governed by something called the *laws of nature*, he has something much more in mind than merely to assert that nature has regularity and order in it, for in his mind this order of nature is the product of the discovery of the human mind. This leads him to believe that the reasoning power of human thinking is somehow the basis of order in nature. All natural possibility, having been discovered by the mind of man, is, so he imagines, controlled by the mind of man. He denies that God is the true source of order and regularity in nature. If God is not the source of the regularity of nature, then neither is he the source of the possible in nature. Nature stands independent of God and gets its meaning from the reason of man, which imposes order and meaning on what otherwise is bare or abstract existence. Man has found a clever way to eliminate the presence of God from his world.

Western man, let us repeat, not only is anti-God as God is understood in traditional Christian discourse, he is, at the same time, exclusively pro-man. It is not simply that God has become inconvenient, which is certainly true; it is that the idea of God (again, as traditionally understood in Christian thought and belief) has become positively contemptible, for the existence of God is a threat to the autonomy of man. At best, modern man treats the existence of God as optional, as perhaps a useful psychological sop, especially to weaker and more sentimental souls, but whose existence, at least for the self-assured, is intrusive in what man thinks of as his own reality. Therefore, in order to advertise his lordship of his declared realm, man arrogates to himself the sole prerogative of deciding what is, and is not, possible in his domain. So far as he is concerned, what Christians have believed as taught in Scripture, is absolutely impossible, to be dismissed from having any truth-claims whatsoever.

Christians have responded to this removal of the supernatural from any contact with the natural in a starkly fundamental way. Modern liberal theology, for example, has made it quite clear that if we wish to retain any Christianity at all for modern men, then a religion of morality is all we can expect to glean from it. Modern science has said there is no room for the supernatural, therefore, supposedly, we

should eliminate all references to it in the Bible and keep only those parts that show us how to live virtuously or ethically in this life. Apart from its teaching on moral behaviour, the Bible's stories of miracles and other Divine interventions are to be seen as fables of a pre-scientific age, and unfortunately many ostensible Christians have, for the most part, accepted their faith as a type of moralism. After all, for some, the issues that matter most have more to do with practical experience than with truth or doctrine. What bearing can seeking to know from Scripture the truth about God, man and the world possibly have upon the immediate concerns of everyday affairs? By adopting this sort of pietistic outlook, many Christians have become susceptible to accepting the rationalised closed nature of modern non-Christian man, or, where they retain some notion of the supernatural, they often isolate it from the natural world in which they live and accept its importance as more or less of *spiritual* significance. Christians sometimes accept the reality of the supernatural, but see it in an artificial relationship to the natural world. They (often unknowingly) adopt the secular view of nature, and then try to graft a kind of supernatural *spirituality* on to it. The Divine element makes contact with the soul, perhaps, but the body and the whole of material reality are mainly viewed as governed by an inviolable closed order of mechanical causation.

Anyone who would take the view of Scripture, must reject this bifurcated way of thinking that has come to dominate so much of even the Christian outlook. Christianity is not a spiritual (supernatural) domain merely tacked onto a natural domain, which is then allowed from the outset to be defined by the non-Christian, whose thinking is based upon his anti-God presuppositions. We ought not to accept that the Christian faith is merely a matter for the supernatural, or the *spiritual*, while nature is allowed to be interpreted by man who is in rebellion against God, as if he could interpret nature correctly without reference to God at all. There is a Christian, or more particularly, a biblical view of nature, as well as a biblical view of the supernatural. And in the biblical view, nature is not for one moment set over against, or seen as independent of, the supernatural. Rather, they are seen as involved in one another. God, to put it plainly, is at the root of both. Without God, there would be no natural order or existence whatever. Therefore, the realm of nature, for those who think biblically, has no meaning apart from the supernatural, which created it and maintains it in its course.

The great problem is how we think of man, in particular of his connection to the Creation as a whole and the impact that sin has had upon him. In the first place, it is only the Christian who thinks of man as a sinner. But, in the second place, under the influence of modern ideas and humanistic sentiments, many Christians tend to see the sinfulness of man primarily as a kind of tragedy, as something that has more or less happened to him, not entirely through some fault of his own. This makes them tend to fix their attention more on the condition of man in sin (what Scripture terms the *curse*) than to focus on the irresponsible and rebellious actions that man freely and consciously took, and continues to take, against the God who made him. Consequently, many Christians are often moved more by pity and sentiment about the human condition than they are ready to see man as the cunning and vicious outlaw that Scripture says he is, one who always thinks and acts in opposition to God. Many are easily

persuaded that most people are not so bad as all that. To claim that the non-Christian uses every fibre of his conscious existence to silence the voice of God that speaks to him in his consciousness seems just a bit extreme and, perhaps, a little unfair. To maintain that all non-Christians employ the whole of their waking lives, as well as every cultural artifact and product at their disposal, to deny God seems too judgmental, if not altogether unrealistic. Sure, there are bad people in the world, but most people are normal and decent, inclined to abide by civilised modes of conduct, as well as to conform to morally approved standards of behavior. They are not totally anti-God. They may even speak of him with some reverence and solemnity on occasion. It would be unjust to claim that such people are motivated in everything they think, say, or do by an abiding hostility to the God of Scripture! As a result, Christians have generally become incapable of what Scripture calls "discerning the spirits" (1 Jn 4), that is, of recognising what is and what is not opposed to the self-substantiating Christ of Scripture. It is not surprising, then, that many Christians do not entirely think of man as Scripture, and therefore as God, thinks of him, but often they start with assumptions that man has about himself and the world around him.

According to Scripture, God is the Creator of both man and the world he inhabits. Originally, man was created to be like God, only on a finite scale. Even so, this finitude of man, compared with the infinity of God, was no hindrance to the effective communication between God and man. Because man was made in God's image, he was at the beginning perfectly capable of knowing God, just as God was able to make himself known to man. In fact, man's knowledge of God came from God who purposely made himself known to man. Being made in God's image, man possessed the capacity to know his Maker, and to have communion with him, but it was not because man possessed some innate intellectual power to discover God, as if God happened to be one of those objects that man, by a process of reasoned insight, simply turned up. Man was imbued with the knowledge of God by God himself. That is, God *revealed* himself to man, and such a revelation was an act of condescension on his part. If God had not done so, man would have searched in vain to find God. The very idea of God would never even have entered his head. In order that man might know God, God deliberately planted the knowledge of his person in the consciousness of man. Man was capable therefore of knowing God because he was created with the idea of God embedded in his consciousness. His awareness of God was naturally tied up and intermingled with his self-awareness. He could not think of himself, or reflect upon himself in the world around him, without reflecting on the person of God who made him and to whom he knew he belonged. Man at the beginning was never cognizant of being anything but a creature of God. Moreover, he was never aware that the natural world was anything other than the handiwork of God. Man, in this situation, had no animosity toward God, nor found God to be an obstacle in his way.

Man, of course, was created a natural being, and the world he was placed in also had a natural order to it. We could say that man and the world, because they both contain the same materials (man's body being taken from the dust of the earth) would therefore be ordered and governed by the same system of natural existence. From the outset, the laws of nature were meant to act as the regulating forces of all

created life. Man never doubted or questioned this, nor did he, because the laws of nature were created by God, originally see them as forces outside his sovereign control. That is, they were not viewed as something independent of God or his plan for the world and man; rather, they were the means he used to affect his purpose. Most importantly, man did not regard the laws of nature as some sort of ordering power for the world, which somehow arose from nature itself, or from the autonomous mind of man. Finally, before man rebelled against God, it never occurred to him that the laws of nature constituted some barrier against the intrusion of God into his world. As we know from Genesis, man was very much aware of the presence of God in the midst of his world, and had no difficulty whatever with this. He did not mistake or confuse the presence of God with anything in the world. He knew perfectly well the difference between the natural world he lived in from that of the supernatural existence represented by the presence of God.

It needs to be stressed that the revelation of God to man was not only rooted in man's consciousness, it also was on display in the world outside him. In fact, the two—inner and outer—go together. When God created the world he left the imprint of his person on everything he made. Man originally possessed a God-awareness in his self-awareness; so, too, he possessed a God-awareness in his world-awareness. God, man, and the world were intermingled in man's thinking and outlook on life; nothing intruded to break up their connection. However, as a personality, man was not fully developed at the beginning. He needed to progress intellectually and acquire knowledge in all three areas. He should learn about God, the world and himself as necessary to becoming effective as God's dominion servant. No field of learning could be left unattended, for man's knowledge and, hence, his accomplishment as God's servant, would remain incomplete. Yet, for man to increase in knowledge in any one area also meant for him to increase in knowledge in all three areas. At least as things stood at the beginning, man could not gain knowledge in one area without gaining knowledge in all three areas at once. We might say that when man studied the world—its properties and functions (physics, chemistry, mathematics, etc.)—he would gain further insight into himself and God; when he studied himself (biology, psychology, sociology, anthropology, history, etc.) he would increase in knowledge of the world and God; and when he studied God (theology, philosophy), he would learn more about himself and the world. Before sin entered into man's conscious thinking, his knowledge of nature could not develop without there being a correlative increase in his knowledge of God, of that which, in other words, belongs to the supernatural. For God had revealed himself in nature and, therefore, to know nature was to know nature's God. And the reverse was true—to know God was truly to know nature.

So far, we have merely drawn out the implications of what in Reformed doctrine is meant by *natural revelation*. At this juncture, a couple of misconceptions need to be avoided. In the first place, when it comes to the doctrine of God's revelation in nature, many Christians tend to think of it as something God *added* to nature after he first created it. That is, they think of the matter in two stages: first, God created the world and man; afterwards he tacked a revelation of himself onto his creation. In this way, revelation is viewed as distinct from Creation. Consequently, revelation (super-

natural) and Creation (nature) are two concepts that must be kept analytically apart. In conjunction with this notion is another in which revelation, it is often maintained, is always to be thought of as the communication of intellectually expressed thought-content. In other words, revelation must always be thought of as propositional in nature. Not until God spoke to Adam did God reveal himself, and revelation only occurred at the moment God spoke, and not before or after. However, Reformed theology correctly objects to this understanding of revelation. Instead of regarding revelation as something added to Creation, it considers Creation itself to be a revelation of God. Revelation is, so to speak, built into Creation, because the act of creating and the act of revealing are one and the same. Now, since man is himself a product of Creation, he is, therefore, in his very nature a revelation of God. As we said before, man could not be conscious of himself, of his own existence, without at the same moment being aware of God, of his existence. This being the case, revelation is more than merely propositional in nature. The awareness of God in his works of Creation runs deeper than mere words or intellectually explicit concepts can convey. This is not to suggest that no revelation of God is propositional in nature, or that it is not conveyed in intellectually expressed thought content; it is merely to state that non-propositional revelation first underlies all revelation of a propositional nature. The latter is based upon the former as its presupposition. Without a non-propositional communication of God in his Creation, man would not be able to receive revelation in its propositional form, for he would have no pre-existing awareness of God whatever, and the break-in of the supernatural into his world of thought would not be recognised for what it is. There would be a mental and spiritual disconnection between his experience of himself and his world and his experience of God. The two sides of his orientation—natural and supernatural—would stand in absolute contrast to one another. At the very least, they would possess no intrinsic connection. However, God never meant for man to have knowledge of him in a vacuum. He created man and placed him in the context of nature, and intended that man should know him precisely in this realm and not apart from or independently of it. Thus, nature itself conveys the knowledge of God; it is not a mute something awaiting a revelation of God to be imparted to it.

This brings us to the second misconception we must avoid, and that is that we must distinguish between revelation in nature and special revelation. At the same time we must always think of revelation as a unit. There is but one revelation of God, which, however, is communicated in two different forms. To the non-propositional revelation in nature and in man there is added a special communication of God. This special communication of God to man entails knowledge that man could not, and was not intended, to get from his study of nature. To be sure, the revelation of God that man had in nature was perfectly clear and unmistakable. Man could learn a great deal about God from the study of nature and himself. However, some things he could not learn. Revelation in nature was of limited value to man without a further special communication to man, this time in propositional form. This was because God was not simply the creator of man; he was, at the same time, his Lord and Benefactor. When God made man in his own image, he intended that man should act freely and consciously towards God as God acts towards him, only as a servant rather than

as a lord. God created man especially as an act of love and expected man to love and serve him in return. This entailed that man should wish to do so, for God wanted a creature similar to himself, who would respond to God with a willing devotion, who would find God to be his highest good, and would, therefore, give himself freely and consciously to the interests and purposes of God above his own. Or, rather, man would willingly make God's interests and purposes his own interests and purposes exclusively. He would possess, in his thinking and acting in the world, none other than God's. To clarify this matter, God revealed himself to man in a special way in order to establish the terms that would define man's relationship to God and God's relationship to man. That is, he set man in covenant with himself and made it plain that man had both obligations and expectations connected with it. The obligations addressed his responsibility towards God while the expectations addressed the benefits he could count on receiving from God for the fulfillment of his responsibility. God never meant that man should serve him for nothing. In the pre-Fall context this whole matter was made plain in the sacrament represented by both the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Tree of Life. By these means the whole purpose and destiny of man's life was made plain to him. If he hoped to eat of the Tree of Life (symbol of eternal life) then he must refrain from eating of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. If he disobeyed, if he ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, man was told that he would die. These truths he did not learn from nature, nor could he. He must be told directly by God, so that God's word becomes the authoritative foundation upon which man then endeavours to carry out his dominion task, which was also specifically given him by propositional revelation from God. By obeying God's word, man was trusting that God's word was his absolute good, although nothing in either nature or his own experience could confirm this with certainty. He simply had to act on faith that God knew the truth and it was enough that man put all his trust in his God. Of course, we know how all this turned out. Adam not only did not continue in his obligation in the covenant he stood in with God, but he positively rebelled against God, by putting his trust in the word of an alternative voice than that of God. And the consequences we know as well: instead of achieving the destiny of eternal life, man was instead cursed with death. What is more, the world God had created for man to inhabit, as the place for him to exercise his dominion task, became cursed as well. We might say that nature no longer remained natural, but became *unnatural*, full of distortion and corruption, which touched everything. Above all, a great and unnatural hostility came between man and God. Man fell away into sin, and God's wrath came upon him. Instead of love for God his Maker, and instead of recognising his dependence upon God, man declared his independence and, despite the curse and the threat of death, set the whole course of his life and endeavours as one of doing all in his power to drive God from his world and assume that divine role for himself. The history of mankind up to the present has been the account of man's vain attempts to accomplish this goal.

Sin, then, is the great factor that now colours man's understanding of himself and his world, even as it has affected his understanding of God. Sin is not simply a tragedy that has come upon man; it is a consciously chosen path. Man has declared his independence from God and has

set out to make himself and all his endeavours the centre of his life and thought. Consequently, he must drive a wedge between nature and God, he must deny that God created the realm of nature, that he upholds it by his providence, and that he reveals himself in every detail of it. The original bond between God, the world, and the self-consciousness of man must be broken. The Christian, however, would maintain that sin and the curse does not wholly prevent the awareness of God from being manifest in the things he has made. This especially includes in the consciousness of man. In his rebellion, man cannot get rid of the revelation of God to him in his own self-awareness. And, because of sin, that revelation now speaks to him of guilt, wrath, and the justice of God. Man, therefore, must find the means to protect himself, to shield himself against the voice of God. In the West, the history of philosophy is, for the most part, the history of the rationalisations that man has invented to explain himself and his world in isolation from God. Where God nevertheless continues to seep through his defences, he struggles to justify himself, to say that his reason demands some sort of principle of origins, and that there must be some power that explains the existence of all things. As much as possible, man seeks to make God fit into his thinking in a subordinate manner, to drag him down to his level, thereby to reduce his importance vis-à-vis man. If he retains God in his thinking, it is only at the insistence of his reason, which makes God dependent upon man as much as man might be dependent upon God. Space prevents us from examining the history of philosophy beginning with the Greeks in order to see how this is so. Our concern is primarily with the thinking of modern man, man since the time of the Enlightenment. For it has been especially in this modern period that man has waged such relentless struggle against the Christian God and the idea of the supernatural that is associated with him. By declaring that nature alone is real and explanatory in terms of itself, man is confident that he has finally succeeded in silencing the niggling awareness of God that speaks to him in his consciousness and in the world around him.

Corresponding to sinful man's need to get rid of God, whose presence in his consciousness is a source of his continuing guilt and shame, is the need to reorient his thinking to a new ground of meaning or purpose. This new ground of meaning is the new sacred that replaces the old sacred that God previously occupied. In the modern world, this new sacred (at least one of the more important of them) has become science, for science means knowledge of the world and man, and knowledge means lordship over all man's environment. To know is to explain, which is the same as to declare the purpose of. In the biblical view, it is the Logos (Jn 1) that occupies the centre of the Creation's purpose and meaning. It is by the Logos that the universe was created, and by which it was established in meaning and truth. What man hopes to accomplish is to replace the Logos with his own mind, to declare himself to be his own Logos, therefore his own source of meaning and purpose. And to achieve this new sacred status is to transfer all power to man.

It has been especially from the time of the Enlightenment that modern man has become supremely conscious that he possesses power by and through science. His knowledge of the workings of nature has given him the sense of being lifted above nature and of having the power to make nature serve him almost at will. This power, however, is not merely the power to do or accomplish things due to the

ability that science gives modern man for technologically mastering the secrets of nature. More importantly, it is the power to know as the power to comprehend and explain everything. Modern science has changed the epistemological landscape so far as man is concerned, for science puts man as the fount of truth in the place of God. For one thing, this changed view has given man the confidence to believe that the universe is no longer mysterious, that he can know its secrets utterly. Man thereby feels himself to be no longer at the mercy of the unknown; and it was due to this fact that religion and God popped up in his conscious thought processes in the first place! His science, so he believes, has not only supplied him with the knowledge he previously lacked; it promises to supply all knowledge that man will ever need. In fact, his science has become for him the only criteria by which all knowledge is defined. If it does not accord with the methods of science as he regards it, it does not meet the truth criterion of knowledge. Corresponding to this attitude is the belief that man is the highest knower so far discovered in the universe. If anything can be known, it is man who possesses the intellectual capability to achieve knowledge, whatever it may be. And what man cannot know simply cannot be known. In other words, man not only believes supremely in the methods of modern science to acquire knowledge of all there is to know, he also believes he possesses, subjectively and innately, the intellectual capability to determine what is and what is not knowable. Modern man believes that the human mind is the sole judge of what can or cannot be known. Of course, to decide what is knowable is also to decide what can exist, for only that is knowable that has existence and the reverse, only that exists that can possibly be knowable to the mind of man. If man decides something is unknowable, as that which is supposedly supernatural, then it does not exist, it is merely a product of the deceptive imagination of man.

The non-Christian thinks of his mind as normal, that his intellectual powers and processes are not in the least affected by what the Christian calls the fall into sin. He, therefore, thinks that his approach to the raw data of his knowledge is not *a priori* tainted by his need to see the world of facts according to what he wants them to be, namely, silent so far as any revelation of God is concerned. He thinks his powers to interpret the world around him are not distorted by an ingrained hostility to the God who created the world and imbued it with meaning and purpose from the beginning. Consequently, the non-Christian thinker, intellectual or scientist, simply assumes that when it comes to interpreting reality he only needs to marshal the facts, and the facts will speak for themselves. He is a man who simply applies his natural mental powers to gathering the data of physics, chemistry, biology, etc., and in these and other areas no truth about God can be discovered. Naturally, he puts great store by the facts he gathers. They are mere *givens* in nature, information readily available to any unbiased mind, such as he imagines his own to be. He will assert with perfect confidence that no fact he has ever collected in his study of nature has ever pointed to anything beyond nature. Nature is a closed system of order. It is not that there is nothing besides nature, it is that there is no possibility of there being anything else. In other words, there are no facts that would prove that a supernatural reality could possibly exist. It is not simply that the non-Christian has not yet discovered the fact or facts that might eventually prove otherwise, it is that he is

absolutely certain that no fact, now or in the future, will ever be found that will be sufficient to say that science has discovered the existence of God or of a supernatural reality.

The Christian, however, is not concerned about secular man's multiplication of facts. The controversy between them is never exclusively a matter of this or that particular fact. It is much more about the meaning of facts in general. No scientist or thinker *per se* ever interprets the facts he works with in the void. He always brings to his study of the facts a whole set of presuppositions about them. He always looks at the facts of nature from the standpoint of a general philosophy of fact. If the facts do not reveal God or speak in and through them of his creative power, this is not because of what man learns from the facts as such, it is due to the anti-God prejudice he brings with him to his study. He is determined at the outset not to see the facts of nature as God-created facts and, therefore, as God-revealing facts. More importantly, he is predisposed not to accept that man is God's creature and, therefore, subordinate and accountable to God. Even in his approach to the study of nature, man is always engaged in his rebellion against God. Indeed, man uses his study of nature to assist him in his rebellion. He uses the order especially that he finds in nature to say that nature produced its own order and, therefore, cannot be the product of an ordering mind above and outside of it. And his assertion that the facts of nature just happen to be there, that they are mere raw or brute in nature, having no *a priori* meaning in them until the mind of man imparts meaning to them, is simply man's boast arising from his need to stop the revelation of God from speaking to him in the facts of nature.

Besides his approach to the facts of nature from the standpoint of a philosophy of fact in general, the modern non-Christian thinker brings with him to the study of the facts a whole set of assumptions about the logic with which the knowing mind is enabled theoretically to organize and interpret the facts. After all, for knowledge to be rational it must be logical. However, to the non-Christian thinker, logic is not viewed merely as an instrument (and a limited instrument at that), which was meant to assist man to see and understand the rational order that God had, prior to the mind of man, created in the natural world. Rather, he thought of his logic as absolute. He came to think of it not as a medium by which the Logos principle already in Creation was then reflected in the mind of man, so that man could then understand this principle; instead, he regarded the power of thought, the logic the mind worked with, as a supreme and unconditional power in the cosmos. This power had unqualified sway over any and every possible rational being, whether God or man. The way this works is as follows: in every non-Christian theory of knowledge, and therefore in all his scientific and philosophical reasoning, time and eternity are viewed as aspects of one another. There is no clear distinction or differentiation between them, for in the non-Christian mind there is only one reality. The implication is that if there is a God, or something like a God, he must be thought of as on the same plane as man, a being who participates with man in a common reality. This, furthermore, implies that man and God both work under a common system of logic that is higher than both, and which is equally determinative of the intellectual operations of both. This system of logic is not only above both God and man, but it is independent of both, and therefore it imposes itself necessarily upon both alike. Both are required to

submit to the rules of right thinking as dictated by an abstract power of thought that stands back of the mind of God and man together. For the rational mind of the non-Christian, whose scientific method is absolute, this exalted power of logic implies that the central feature of this system of logic, namely, the iron law of non-contradiction, somehow exists independently not only of the human mind, but of the divine mind as well, and that God is required to submit his thinking to its authority, if he hopes to prove to be a rational being, as much as man. It is logic that is the only absolute. Such a God, as Scripture depicts him, who plans the end from the beginning, who calls the things that are not as if they are, who simply speaks the world into existence, and who has the power to give life or take it away, is regarded as an utter impossibility. Such a God, whom no man can call to account, who can question what he does, is an offense to the non-Christian mind. An absolute God would stand in the way of the would-be autonomous man who seeks to make himself absolute by means of replacing the absolute God with an absolute logic. For if God is not the absolute God that Scripture says he is, then he cannot reveal himself in every fact of Creation, nor can he speak to man with absolute authority regarding any fact in the universe. Since man's mind operates according to the same laws of logic as that of God, then man is free to discover and interpret the facts of the world and his experience for himself, that is, without reference to God whatever. He will even claim to possess the ability to discover the facts about God, whether he even exists or not, and what he can or cannot do.

Thus, man is not simply and unqualifiedly some innocent victim weighed down by the burdens of this world, merely a piteous creature struggling somehow to survive in a cold and indifferent universe, thrown upon his own resources in order to make sense of the workings of his world, thereby to get life under his control. His science, which, by opening the secrets of nature has doubtless brought him much relief in his living conditions, has also become the means by which man declares his freedom from God. Man has become very proud of his accomplishments, and this has only fed his wish to be absolutely independent of God. Everywhere, and in every endeavour, man is constantly engaged in a dispute with God. Therefore, in his labours, physical or mental, he acts in the world as if the realm of nature is all there is, as if the very idea of the supernatural is an utter impossibility.

Now we need not doubt that it was the Apostle Paul who

first made this all very clear. It is his depiction of the sinful character of man in Romans chapter one that should stand as the only truly acceptable biblical definition of the problem. It is when Christians do not begin here that they become confused on the issue of nature and the supernatural.

According to Paul, all men in Adam have become suppressors of the truth (1:18). Here the truth does not mean the truth of the gospel or the truth of religion, but the truth concerning God, man and the world. Ever since the rebellion in the Garden of Eden, man has been eager to deny that he is a creature of God, or that the world is both a creation of God and a revelation of his person. However, Paul says that man engages in this act of suppression of the truth against his better knowledge, for the truth of God (including the truth of man and his world) is something that God has made plain to man (v. 19). This truth of God is clearly understood *from what has been made* (v. 20). That which man in his rebellion calls merely nature was from the beginning and still is a conduit of the revelation of the true God, which man can clearly see from the created things themselves. And when man engages in a study of this created world, he is confronted more and more with the truth of the knowledge of God.

The problem with man is not that he cannot see the truth of God in the world around and within him, it is because by reason of sin and rebellion he is determined to get rid of the knowledge of God with which he had been endowed at creation (v. 28). And this knowledge included in it the truth that the world of nature was not self-existing, but dependent upon its Maker and therefore a reflection of his person and attributes. Man in the beginning, Paul means to imply, confronted the supernatural through the medium of the natural. If man today claims to have eliminated the supernatural from his thinking it is not because he has discovered what is true regarding nature, rather it is because he has, as Paul asserts, "exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator" (v. 25). Modern science has become for modern secular man a useful tool in the accomplishment of this agenda. Through science, he declares nature to be abstract and impersonal, a system of closed facts and laws, having no source in anything outside itself. But if Paul speaks the truth in Romans chapter one, then modern man has deceived himself and simply refuses to admit what he clearly knows is the truth, namely, that the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows the work of his hand (Ps. 19:1). C&S

THE ECCLESIASTICAL TEXT: TEXT CRITICISM, BIBLICAL AUTHORITY AND THE POPULAR MIND

by *Theodore P. Letis*

Published by

THE INSTITUTE FOR RENAISSANCE AND REFORMATION BIBLICAL STUDIES
2000 • paperback (Second Edition) • 232 pages • ISBN: 0-9658607-0-1 • \$19.95

Available from in the UK from:

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Book Reviews

RUSSIAN ORTHODOXY ON THE EVE OF THE REVOLUTION

BY VERA SHEVZOV

Oxford University Press, 2004, 358 pages including
bibliography and index, ISBN: 0-19-515465-7

REVIEWED BY ANDREW MUTTITT

SPEAKING in all honesty I must state from the outset that, from the view-point of my own personal fascination with Russian history and culture, and my particular enquiry into the role played by Christianity in the catastrophic series of events culminating in the October Revolution of 1917, this book failed to live up to expectation. I approached the book in the strong hope that it would provide a carefully contextualised assessment of the extent to which the contemporary theology of Russian Orthodoxy assisted or, alternatively, resisted the seemingly inexorable fall of the Russian nation into the arms of Marxist atheism. At the very least, I expected the author to establish a firm nexus between her narrative of the pervading characteristics of pre-Revolutionary Orthodoxy and the competing political, and philosophical ideologies of early twentieth-century Russia. In both respects I was sorely disappointed. Far from being treated to an incisive macro-assessment of the part played by Orthodox theology in the events underpinning what Figes has rightly described as a people's tragedy, the reader is presented with little more than an uncritical micro-analysis of a religious community which just so happens to be Russian during an era which just so happens to precede the single most cataclysmic event in that nation's history. In other words it is an analysis whose subject-matter is unwarrantedly divorced from its political and historical context to the extent that, rather than being pivotal, both Russia and the forces behind the Revolution seem almost to be incidental.

In structural terms the book is built around six major themes which the author considers to be the "sacred centres," both temporal and spiritual, of Russian Orthodoxy in the period immediately prior to the Revolution: the People of God, Temple Dialectics, Chapels, Feasts, Icons and the Message of Mary. Although Shevzov's style is not the most engaging, there is no doubt that the book is generally well-written and, in terms of its pure factual content, meticulously researched. Having said that, I suspect that the key to those questions which I vainly hoped Shevzov's narrative might endeavour to address lies more in what she does not say than in what she does. In her introduction to the work Shevzov

describes the years leading up to the Revolution as marking a period of change in Orthodoxy's conception of its own ecclesiological system and role in the wider community; a change so significant as to be likened in its nature and impact to the Protestant Reformation. One does not have to read much further, nor does one need more than a basic knowledge of what became of Russian society after the Revolution (in actual fact one has only to examine the list of "sacred centres" referred to above) to realise that in making such a comparison Shevzov clearly ignores that the motivating force behind the Protestant Reformation was not the mere tinkering with peripherals but Luther's seismic rediscovery of the Bible as the sole and inerrant source of divine revelation. For, whatever changes were taking place within the Orthodox Church in the first decade of the last century, *Scriptura*, much less the concepts of *Sola Scriptura* or *Sola fides* would, on Shevzov's evidence, seem to have played little if any part in the Church's re-assessment of its identity.

When reading the book against the political background of the Russian Revolution one quickly realises that the essential nature of the above distinction may well have a significance far deeper than its unfortunate omission from Shevzov's introduction might initially suggest. Writing in the decade immediately before the Second World War Eugene Rosenstock-Huussy perceptibly pointed out that, "Luther really saved a world which was going Fascist. About 1500 the decay of the Catholic Church had led to a blind struggle for power in Italy. When Machiavelli jotted down his acute observations on this state of affairs it was a state of affairs only, without the least tincture of Christianity . . . He observes that a world of perfect political freedom is dawning for the mighty, because they need not even pretend to be more than secular despots. That the thirst for power justifies itself is the old teaching renewed by Machiavelli. It was a tremendous hour in the history of human civilization when this masque of death, greed and arbitrary power loomed on the horizon of the Western World. The year 1515, when the *Principe* of Machiavelli was finished, marks the danger of a world which has lost all faith in the Church, and because of that complete loss of seriousness cynically says "yes" to the orgies of any conqueror, dictator or despot . . . In this decisive hour Luther's sermon on the freedom of the Christian broke in like the trumpets of the Last Judgment."

For "Fascism" read "Communism," for "Catholic" read "Russian Orthodox," for "Western World" read "Russia," for "Machiavelli" read "Marx," for "mighty" read "Proletariat" and what we have is the situation prevalent in the Romanov Empire in the years leading up to 1917. What is notably lacking in the Russian experience, however, is any

Churchman remotely reminiscent of Luther and, coupled with that, any event representing the reawakening of a gospel-centred Christian ministry or the attendant rediscovery of that true conception of human liberty which only the Word of God can reveal.

Although Shevzov seems to miss the point herself, it is clear even from the contents page of her book that the word of God is notably absent from the list of “sacred centres” characteristic of pre-Revolutionary Russian Orthodox society. Furthermore, the Bible is scarcely referred to in the book as a whole and never in the sense of having influenced pre-Revolutionary Orthodoxy’s re-assessment of itself. It is clear from Shevzov’s narrative that what we have instead is a religious community at all levels obsessed with obligatory and unscriptural feast days, idolatrous Icon worship and the blasphemous adoration of Mary in the place of Christ, as well as a Church which was being infiltrated and emasculated by the emerging forces of secular humanism (see the chapter on Temple Dialectics). To what extent, then, should we be surprised to learn that whilst 1515 marked the commencement of what would ultimately be a long era of freedom and blessed prosperity for the Western World (and particularly the Protestant West), 1917 marked the blind acquiescence of a majority of Russia’s people in the rise to prominence of a faceless political system which would, for most of the twentieth century, subject them to levels of brutalisation and deprivation unprecedented in the Christian era? To what extent was this triggered by the predominance of a languishing and near apostate Christian community as opposed to that of a vibrant, Gospel-centred one? Anyone looking for a book of secondary-source materials to assist in providing answers to these and other critical questions of cause and effect, which are indeed highly relevant to the current social and political dilemmas of our own spiritually languishing nation, will be well served by *Russian Orthodoxy on the Eve of Revolution*. Those who read it in the hope that it might even address these critical questions will be sorely disappointed. C&S

THE DIVINE CHALLENGE:
ON MIND, MATTER, MATH AND MEANING
BY JOHN BYL

Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2004, 336 pages,
£7.99, ISBN-10: 0851518877/ISBN-13: 978-0851518877

REVIEWED BY RICHARD GUNTON

“I . . . speak the words of truth and reason,” responded the apostle to the Roman governor in Caesarea. Like Paul appealing to Festus’ rationality, I believe there are common standards of reason by which Christians can seek to demonstrate the superiority of a biblical worldview above any competitor. The most vigorous competition for the minds of most of us in the West probably comes from naturalism—a type of worldview that regards nature as the ultimate reality and laws of nature as autonomous. Reading *The Divine Challenge: On mind, matter, math and meaning* helped strengthen my conviction that biblical Christianity is reasonable, and prompted me to think critically about the arguments I may use to try and persuade others of this.

The concept of worldview is an essential tool for apologetics of this sort. A common approach to resolving personal disagreements over beliefs is to try and find a set of beliefs on which both parties agree and from which an answer to the point of disagreement may be derived. However, different religious views are notoriously difficult to reconcile because religious issues are so fundamental that a set of shared beliefs from which progress can be made may be entirely elusive. It is therefore helpful to think of each person as holding a mental network of beliefs, which are related to each other by principles of logic and inference, without privileging any of the beliefs with the status of an incontrovertible fact (even though some are habitually labelled as such). However, people’s behaviour and opinions may be more understandable when a few “basic beliefs” fundamental to their thinking are clarified—whether these are volunteered or unearthed by someone exploring the implications of a person’s professed views. These basic beliefs are predicates for all the rest, and they should include implicit answers to questions like “What is the ultimate (non-dependent) reality?” “What sorts of things are there in the world?” “Who am I?” “How can I know what is true?” “How can I know what is right and wrong?” “What happens at death?” and “What is worth doing in life?” (I found Byl’s synthesis of these questions very helpful). Such questions and their answers are rarely articulated by most people, but to assume that everyone lives more or less in accordance with a subconscious catechism like this—in other words, a worldview—does help interpret people’s behaviour and opinions. It also seems to me to underlie the very notion of rationality. We expect a person’s professed beliefs to be consistent with each other even though no-one has time to check every one against every other. If this seems not to be the case, we may resort to the accusation that someone is irrational.

The starting point for the apologist, then, is to try to sketch out the contours of his opponent’s worldview and compare them to his own. There may well be glaring differences. (I found it rewarding to try formulating concise, biblically-based answers to a set of worldview questions like those above and would recommend the exercise.) Since more-fundamental beliefs on which mutual agreement might be sought are lacking, the next step is to examine the set of basic beliefs that emerge and assess them by three universal criteria. The first one proposed is consistency: do the beliefs cohere with each other and not lead to contradictions? Inconsistencies are often revealed by reflexive tests; for example, does the answer to the epistemology question (“How can I know what is true?”) permit the other basic beliefs to be regarded as “true,” and does it reflect the way in which answers to all the questions (including that one) are obtained? The second test is that of experience: do any of the answers contradict common experience (e.g. denying people’s inner conscious life)? If they do, the worldview is manifestly inadequate. The third test is “livability”: can the worldview be consistently lived out? (For example, a worldview that denies the validity of logical reasoning is almost certainly unlivable in that it cannot be consistently implemented in everyday life.) This is perhaps a practical analogue and extension of the first test; presumably an inconsistent worldview cannot be “livable” either.

There may be some scope to quibble over these criteria. The consistency test seems compelling, given a set of propositions that are supposed to encapsulate the worldview.

However, the experience test may be circumventable with the aid of radical beliefs about certain experiences being deceptive. For example, someone who believed that human brains can produce deceptive notions in the area of morality might thereby argue for the validity of a worldview that made the counter-intuitive claim that there are no moral absolutes. This is reminiscent of conspiracy theories that claim certain “common sense” beliefs to be misguided and due to propaganda from interested parties. More philosophically, Descartes hypothesised about a *daemon* that might account for most of his intuitive beliefs about the world being mistaken. Isn’t it in fact a rather theistic view to assume common sense as a reliable guide to the nature of reality—on the premise that God has made a general revelation to all people? (Recent articles on the Scottish “common-sense” philosophers in *C&S* have raised this issue.) The third criterion, that worldviews should be “livable,” also seems to me to assume too much. At the extreme, the nihilist who claims life is meaningless and then commits suicide may have shown his worldview to be “unlivable,” but how does this entail its falsity? Surely it is another tenet of theism (and maybe some other worldviews) that the truth will turn out to be personally fulfilling?

Ultimately, postmodernism challenges the worldview approach, with its attempt to relativise the roles of language and belief and dispense with “metanarratives” (arguably its own term for worldviews). Power is what counts, not truth. In progressing beyond and dispensing with worldviews (perhaps without people even encountering a plausible Christian one), postmodernity is the life of a mind that claims to live without a need for absolutes. The question is: when faced by a power-playful postmodernist, can the studious apologist still rise to the challenge of discerning and critiquing his unacknowledged worldview? Perhaps so, for *The Divine Challenge* briefly introduces “relativism” as a worldview alongside theism and naturalism. However, extensive discussion of it is avoided here on the simple grounds that in many areas of culture, relativism is still the underdog to scientific naturalism—or maybe even its partner in crime. As Byl astutely says, “The relativism in non-scientific fields only adds weight to the notion that only scientific knowledge counts as valid knowledge.” Naturalism is the real target of the book, and the thesis that this is and will remain the real engine of atheistic rebellion, at least in the Western world, is worth bearing in mind. Indeed, we may expect postmodernists to have little time for arguments that appeal to universal rationality or even logical consistency, whereas a naturalistic worldview turns out to have more in common with a Christian one than one might suppose from hearing its more vociferous proponents. Postmodernism, then, has not really established itself on the same territory as naturalism and theism and it needs challenging in a very different manner.

What of the divine challenge? The drama of the book’s title is a “double challenge, from God to man and from man to God, to establish who will rule.” With the dispute thus framed, we embark on a sustained trial in which the claims of naturalism are tested in the courts of “matter,” “mind” and “math.” These three fundamental concepts represent different claims about the nature of reality, and a puzzling link between them was suggested by the mathematician Roger Penrose. Human minds apparently arise out of the physical world of matter, and maths is conceived within minds, while the material universe seems to reveal an inher-

ent mathematical order, which is not simply imputed to it by human minds. In other words, matter constitutes minds, minds are the seat of maths, and maths is the structuring principle in matter—a sort of three-phase chicken-and-egg paradox. Which came first? The question of what the primary reality is goes to the heart of worldview differences. According to naturalism the answer is “matter.” But someone who thinks matter is ultimately, independently real, says Byl, can give no reason for why the universe exists in the first place. More intriguingly, can a believer in naturalism account for the material universe being orderly, and uniform, and comprehensible to humans, and unified in its diversity, and so often predictable? How could inanimate matter have spontaneously given rise to life, producing human minds that can think about things out there in the world and distinguish truth and falsehood? And can maths be merely a product of human minds, when it seems to be so uncannily good at describing the universe?

These are big questions, and give cause for deep thought. Byl is not the first to challenge naturalism in this way, but he presents the key issues in a very readable style and with meticulous logic. The thoughtful reader ought to pause and ponder, and will perhaps, like me, be encouraged to try challenging the views of atheistic friends. And as can happen when one wades into deep waters with limited experience, I often falter in debate when I try to press home some of the implications of naturalistic commitments. If an atheist isn’t (apparently) surprised at the orderliness and uniformity of the universe, is it merely part of my Christian worldview that insists he should be? (And what if I try to make him uneasy about why the universe exists at all?) If my friend thinks it perfectly mundane that the universe is mathematically comprehensible, how do we press on with the argument that says it shouldn’t be? If I’m told that the origin of life by natural processes is remarkable but by no means miraculous, that consciousness only *feels* special and that purpose is clearly an illusion, what then? It certainly takes more than uneasy surprise to persuade someone to abandon basic beliefs. But this, I suppose, is where persistence may be required, in the apologist’s understanding of the issues as well as in his discernment of what constitutes a valid objection. Christians have developed arguments over these and other issues (some literature from the Intelligent Design movement is cited, for example). The author is in fact rather diligent in responding to explanations and counter-arguments that have been advanced by various non-Christian writers, leaving the reader with a sense of having anticipated at least some of the moves that might be made. It certainly seems that naturalistic worldviews do not pass the consistency and experience tests with flying colours.

The section of the book on naturalism ends with a fascinating chapter about maths. It gives a brief historical sketch, from Pythagoras and Plato to Penrose, of how the philosophical idea that mathematical truths are discovered (realism) was challenged by the idea that they are created by human minds (constructivism). This opposition has a religious aspect, since mathematical realism can best be validated in terms of the mathematical activities that could be carried out by an omniscient, unchanging God. For if mathematical ideas can only exist in minds and yet are true independently of whether any human knows them, what can guarantee their endurance except an eternal mind? (Another starting point is to believe that mathematical objects

are themselves divine, as Roy Clouser shows that the Pythagoreans did, in his book *The Myth of Religious Neutrality*. That is not orthodox naturalism, however.) As Enlightenment natural philosophers came to dispense with a role for God, and as they became increasingly influential, mathematicians were denied the solid foundation they had relied upon.

At this point, Byl gives a succinct account of the fate of Hilbert's programme to show that the whole of maths could be logically deduced from a set of self-evident axioms. This would have restored a non-divine foundation for "realist" maths, but it was later undermined when the mathematician Gödel proved that it was impossible to reduce the branch of maths known as number theory to a satisfactory set of axioms. The profound implications of this are revealed by witnessing some of the alternative theories that have been proposed to restore to maths the foundation of certainty that it intuitively seems to have. However, in making maths a humanistic system, it seems, for example, that the constructivist view cannot endorse the logical law that a statement has to be either true or false—and thus the important method of "proof by contradiction" is invalidated. Mathematical axioms and concepts may even be laid at the feet of evolutionary theory for biological and psychological explanations of how they came to be widespread. The implications of relinquishing realism certainly appear unattractive for mathematicians.

It's one thing to deconstruct a prevailing worldview, but that is only part (though a crucial part) of the apologist's challenge. Having explored the inadequacies of naturalism in the areas of mind, matter and math, we must move on to see how the Christian worldview can provide reasonable answers where naturalism fails. If matter is not the primary

reality, what is? At this juncture in the book there is a chapter discussing the other options (for example, Penrose believes the abstract mathematical realm is primary—rather like the Pythagoreans' view). Postmodern relativism makes another appearance here, where it is presented as the culmination of naturalism; its claims about language and power are effectively summarised in this chapter. In pronouncing a "postmodern post-mortem," the author again makes a compelling case for not taking such ideas too seriously in the forum of rational discourse. We move on, and the option that holds out potential is that mind is primary over matter and maths—but not just the human mind. Enter Christianity!

The chapters on the Christian worldview begin with a helpful introductory one showing how the basic worldview questions may be answered by Christians, and that the tests of consistency, experience and livability are passed. Then the following chapters cover the same broad themes of matter, mind and maths as did the earlier chapters on naturalism. They do so with some key themes: how does God relate to his physical creation? What is human free will? What is the soul, and how does it interact with the body? These issues have perhaps been more widely addressed in the Christian literature already than the shortcomings of naturalism, and I think this part of the book is justifiably the shorter. Such issues as the nature of miracles, the meaning of chance, theories of free will and responsibility and the "mind-body" problem are nevertheless addressed in a refreshing way, with judicious reference to Scripture and plentiful citations of Christian writers of various persuasions. On the other hand, I felt that the final topic of the book—maths in Christian perspective—deserves at least a book of its own (and there seem to be very few around).

THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN *and the Power thereof according to the Word of God*

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So, what is a Christian view of mathematics? Well, for a start it's surely based on the realist view discussed earlier. In exploring the implications of this, Byl makes a number of disparate points. Readers who are mathematicians may be interested in the idea that God's infinite knowledge may validate the mathematical concept of "actual" infinity as well as "potential" infinity. More theological is the discussion of whether God created numbers and what concepts are innate in that of the eternal Trinity. The section on necessary and contingent truths is decidedly philosophical (and left me unclear about some of the distinctions that are made). A Christian worldview may also shed light on how people are able to learn maths and make theoretical advances in its research.

But are we addressing the big question of the foundation of mathematics? Does the Bible itself validate maths, for example? Byl shows what an attempt to mine Scripture for axiomatic principles might look like (e.g. finding verses that demonstrate laws of logic and addition and subtraction) and points out its limitations. One might go further and argue that this approach actually violates the proper (and God-given) nature of mathematical reasoning, since it uses an empirical methodology (searching the Scriptures) to try and validate prior beliefs. Rather than anchoring maths in a form of Bible study, however, Byl gives a further taste (involving set theory, and probably better appreciated by mathematicians) of how the realist approach to maths, coupled with an explicit belief in the biblical God, can rescue its foundations from the mire of humanistic philosophy. Where Gödel's proof exposes gaps in number theory, it seems that the axioms that would shore it up can be validated if one believes in an infinite, omniscient God. Thus it appears that maths as a whole can be justified using axioms and proofs that are consistent with theism but not with naturalism. I write as a non-mathematician, so beg forbearance from those who may wince as I attempt to relate these ideas—and encourage them to read the book.

The final chapter "settles the challenge." It summarises the assessment of each worldview. Then it considers the nature of apologetics and why we believe the Christian message is opposed by naturalists, with reference to the gospel story. There is one more look at the issue of postmodernity—and "the return of the pagans" is a theme that could have been advanced further (connecting with the brief discussions of "Relativism" elsewhere in the book). Finally, there is a survey of the consequences of human rejection of God in favour of man's wisdom. Is a naturalistic worldview actually livable?

After reading the whole book, some of the arguments will stick in my mind. I remain uneasy about the one that says our minds cannot operate by purely physical processes because thought obeys the laws of logic, which are not physical. Deterministic views of the human mind may be dangerous and problematic, but I do not feel they are so easily refuted. Of course, the argument is played out more carefully than I can reproduce here. On the related issue of free will, however, I found myself in enthusiastic agreement with the author and pleased to find a careful presentation of arguments which I had already dimly considered. In an enlightening chapter (appropriately prefaced with Matthew 12:35–37), the "libertarian" and "compatibilist" views of human freedom are presented and discussed. While taking care to distinguish the compatibilist "soft determinism" view from

"hard [physical] determinism," Byl argues that the concept of a power of purely arbitrary, "uncaused" choice in humans is incoherent, entailing as it does that even God cannot certainly know our decisions before we make them.

One sign of trustworthy scholarship is that a message should be backed up by the medium in which it is presented. In this case, the biblical basis of the author's enterprise is reflected throughout. (Having a publisher called "Banner of Truth" also seems propitious.) Each chapter begins with "Crossfire": after a quotation from a naturalist writer expressing an atheistic opinion on the topic of the chapter, there is a biblical quotation addressing the same topic. The aptness of these is often impressive—how about an echo of the liar paradox in Titus 1:12–13? (That is, for someone to declare himself a consistent liar is self-contradictory—which Byl uses to help explain Gödel's discovery that number theory is incomplete.) Throughout the book, the frequent use of Scripture reminds the reader that the Christian worldview is ultimately a biblical one. If a Christian starts to imagine that his basic mental framework reflects his own ingenuity, he forgets that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and that only God's grace allows us to reason soundly and discern truth.

There is an important point to be made here about the basis of sound reasoning. I began this review by affirming the notion that there are common standards of reason for all people, which is a premise of this whole book. However, Christians must also affirm that God is the source of sound reasoning and that fallen man is liable to fallacy and error, especially when he persists in rebellion against his creator. Therefore the basis of rational apologetics must be a conviction that God's common grace toward all the parties involved has endowed them with sufficient ability to discern valid reasoning and the integrity to pursue where it leads. The recognition that Christians as well as unbelievers may easily make mistakes in argument (in the logical, never mind the social aspect!) counsels us to be cautious and circumspect. The *rationalist* fallacy of inferring from the ubiquity and power of reason that it is neutral and independent of God, the Fall and religious commitment has been the mainstay of natural theologians from Aquinas onwards, and the methodology of modern naturalistic philosophy suggests that it has inherited—or is even the very offspring of—this dogma. The bottom line is that we were once dead in sin, with minds coerced by worldly wisdom to see a different reality, and even now we see "through a glass, darkly." The soul may move lightly from death to life when a believer is reborn, but the mind surely has a more tortuous voyage to make as it is renewed in the pattern of Christ.

Returning to the "Crossfire," I do have some reservations about fitting Scriptural passages neatly into other contexts. While there is a place for prophetic application of Scripture to contemporary situations, and notwithstanding its relevance for all people at all times, we should surely seek to understand Bible passages in their own contexts, looking at each passage in relation to the whole. The Bible is a story at many levels, and it is by immersing ourselves in the narratives, from each particular account to the overarching theme of Creation/Fall/Redemption, that we learn to think as God does. Once Christ claims us, our minds must be renewed as we pursue the mind of the Word of God himself. Yet a Christian worldview is not to be found so much in particular biblical statements or doctrines as in the way of

thinking that is required in order to make sense of the Bible—and the world—as a whole. To be fair, Byl helps his readers to do this by developing a consistent framework in Chapters 10 to 13, and his frequent quotation of Scripture in these chapters gives reassurance that he is being a faithful guide. Moreover, the quotations under the chapter headings serve very well to provoke thought and remind the sympathetic reader of where wisdom is to be found. Nevertheless, I would not take them as effectively refuting the atheistic comments they are coupled to, for that is where we seek the author's insights, as presented at length in the chapters of the book themselves.

John Byl is Professor of Mathematics at Trinity Western University, British Columbia. He writes with a logical style that I found persuasive and mostly easy to read. Some of the arguments required careful thought and re-reading, and some mathematical concepts were handled summarily, but this means that the only qualification required to enjoy the book is perseverance. A wide-ranging grasp of the philosophical issues of the book is confirmed by an extensive

bibliography, to which reference is consistently made. I was pleased to find a broad array with some familiar names here, including Augustine, Calvin, C. S. Lewis, Alvin Plantinga, Cornelius van Til, Keith Ward and Roy Clouser among the Christian writers—and many more non-Christians. But the most extensive quotation is from Scripture, and indeed one of the most refreshing aspects of the book is to find the author so conversant with the Bible as well as with academic writings, and adept at handling both. I trust that this feature alone will make it an encouraging read for many believers.

In summary, *The Divine Challenge* took me on a stimulating and unflinching investigation of both the naturalistic and the Christian mindsets. It gave me courage not just to defend my beliefs with reasoned argument but to go on the offensive against the naturalism which exists, latent or paraded, on every side. I hope and pray that others will derive as much benefit from reading this book, and that clear-thinking men and women will continue to speak compelling words of truth and reason as God advances his kingdom, not least in the Western world. C&S

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WHAT is the nature of Christianity? Is it a religion or a cult, i.e. a personal worship hobby? This question goes to the heart of the modern Church's failure to exercise a world-transforming faith. The Church's abandonment of Christianity as a religion, i.e. as a world-view that structures every sphere of human life and society, has exposed the Western world to the religious influences of secular humanism, New Age-ism, the Green and ecology movements, which are all really modern variations of pagan religion, and which have now begun to transform Western society in a direction diametrically opposed to the principles and practice of Christianity. The result has been that while Christians have maintained their faith as a cult, a system of belief that is little more than a personal worship hobby, when it comes to the question of how Christians should affect the world in which they live they have largely fallen back on trying to clean up secular humanism. In this process the Church has become increasingly irrelevant and powerless as society has been first secularised and then repaganised.

The antidote to this failure on the part of the Church to affect the world, which is her mission field, and the present condition of Western society to which this failure has led, is the rediscovery of Christianity as the true religion, i.e. as an overarching structure to human life that anchors both the individual and the society of which he is a part in God's will for man in Christ. This religious structure the Bible calls the covenant, and it embraces the whole of human life, including politics, education, science, art, welfare, health care, marriage, family life, Church, business, economy. Until the Church rediscovers this religious structure for life the Christian faith will continue to decline amidst the rise of other faiths that do provide the individual and society with a religious structure for life, and Christians will continue to have saved souls but live their daily lives as secular humanists without answers for the desperate problems that face the modern world.

These are some of the main issues addressed in this collection of essays, most of which were originally published in *Christianity & Society*.

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