

# CHRISTIANITY & CIVILIZATION

Published by Geneva Ministries

ISSN 0278-8187

ISBN 0-939404 -11-7

EDITOR:

James B. Jordan

ASSOCIATE EDITORS:

Gary North

Lewis E. Bulkeley

Ray R. Sutton

James Michael Peters

David Chilton

Michael R. Gilstrap

No. 4 1985

James B. Jordan, Editor

The Reconstruction of the Church

Tyler, Texas

Geneva Ministries

1985

# The Reconstruction of the Church

A Symposium Edited by James B. Jordan



TYLER, TEXAS  
GENEVA MINISTRIES  
1985

Copyright © 1985 except where otherwise noted by Geneva Ministries. Permission to reprint any essay, in part or in whole, must be obtained from the author. Any reprints must credit *Christianity and Civilization*.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION	
<i>By James B. Jordan</i> . . . . .	vii
PART I: THE CHURCH IN DISARRAY	
THE CHURCH: AN OVERVIEW	
<i>By James B. Jordan</i> . . . . .	1
CHURCH RENEWAL: THE REAL STORY	
<i>By Lewis E. Bulkeley</i> . . . . .	22
REVIVALISM AND AMERICAN PROTESTANTISM	
<i>By Peter J. Leithart</i> . . . . .	46
PART II: RECONSTRUCTING CHURCH GOVERNMENT	
THE CHURCH IN AN A GEOFDEMOCRACY	
<i>By Ray R. Sutton</i> . . . . .	85
TWO-TIERED CHURCH MEMBERSHIP	
<i>By Gary North</i> . . . . .	120
SUBSTITUTES FOR CHURCH DISCIPLINE	
<i>By Jim West</i> . . . . .	132
PART III: RECONSTRUCTING WORSHIP	
CONVERSATIONS WITH NATHAN	
<i>By David Chilton</i> . . . . .	163
THE SATURDAY NIGHT CHURCH AND THE LITURGICAL NATURE OF MAN	
<i>By Ray R. Sutton</i> . . . . .	177
THE MARRIAGE SUPPER OF THE LAMB	
<i>By Gary North</i> . . . . .	209
CLOTHING AND CALLING	
<i>By Ray R. Sutton</i> . . . . .	227
CHURCH MUSIC IN CHAOS	
<i>By James B. Jordan</i> . . . . .	241

(Continued on next page)

**CHURCH ARCHITECTURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT  
OF WORSHIP: REVALORIZATION IN THE  
PROTESTANT GHETTO**

*By Janus Michael Peters . . . . .266*

**PART IV: RECONSTRUCTING MISSION**

**THE RECLAMATION OF BIBLICAL CHARITY**

*By George Grant . . . . .299*

**CULTURE, CONTEXTUALIZATION, AND  
THE KINGDOM OF GOD**

*By Marion Luther McFarland . . . . .326*

*About Christianity and Civilization. . . . . 338*

**Publication Schedule . . . . .342**

## INTRODUCTION

James B. Jordan

**T**HE first volume in this annual series of symposia attempted to analyze the fundamental problem of individualism as it infects the Christian culture of one of the most apparently Christian nations in the world today, the United States of America. In our next two volumes, we probed the current problem of statist attacks on the faith and on the Church, which attacks are a direct result of the secular individualism of American culture. In this fourth volume, we probe more deeply into the religious problems which infect Western Culture as a whole and American Culture in particular. We intend to continue this probing in the fifth volume (1986), which will be on the topic of "Piety and Pietism."

To say that the root of our problems is religious is to say a great deal, but also to say rather little. Compared with the heredity and environmental reductionism popular in modern (and in ancient) thought, a confession that human nature and its problems are fundamentally religious is quite radical and immeasurably important. If, however, this confession only amounts to the notion that religious *ideas* underlie any given culture, then the affirmation is far less radical. For to discuss religion only in terms of ideas or doctrine is to reduce religion to an ideology. For the Christian there is an equal ultimacy of thought and practice, of saying and doing, of lip and life, of preaching and sacramental practice. As a result, any discussion of the restoration of Christian civilization may not simply consist of how Christian doctrine differs from its challenging counterfeits and antithetical adversaries in the areas of theology and understanding — be it dogmatics, economics, politics, or aesthetics; it must also include an examination of *practice*.

The practice of the Christian faith is most concentrated in the activity of the Church. This is for the obvious reason that it is in the Church that men devote themselves most rigorously

to the practice of the faith. To put it another way, while men are to serve God in all of life, it is in the special activities of worship and charity that they are to devote attention *exclusively* to God and redemptive concerns.

The so-called "Reconstructionist Movement," to which most of the authors in this symposium in some sense "belong," has to this point utterly failed to deal with this fact. I should like to extract some statements from R. J. Rushdoony's book *Law and Society* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House, 1982) to illustrate this. I need not remind any reader who knows me that I hold the thought of R. J. Rushdoony in the highest regard, and view him as one of the most important thinkers in Christendom today. At the same time, however, I believe it is absolutely necessary for us at Geneva Ministries to deal openly and forthrightly with this extremely important area of disagreement. The following are extracts from pages 115-117 of Dr. Rushdoony's book. All italics are his.

After citing Deuteronomy 4:5-10 and 6:4-7, Rushdoony writes, "Very plainly, God here does *not* establish the church as the companion institution to the civil government. The function God requires as *the necessary concomitant* to a godly law order is *teaching*. According to Abramsky, at the time of the giving of the law 'The Levites were also assigned instructional responsibilities, and it was they who bore the Ark of the Covenant (Deut. 10:8; 31:9).' Moses made clear *this teaching function of the Levites*: 'They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law' (Deut. 33:10). The scattering of Levites throughout Israel, *away* from the sanctuary, makes clear the importance of their teaching function over sanctuary duties. Temple duty had dignity and prestige, but teaching was the normal activity of the Levites."

Rushdoony continues, "Moreover, in Old Testament times, both the excellent Hebrew schools and the synagogues were developments of the Levitical function, as was the church in the New Testament. The Eastern rite churches and Rome continue the priestly and Temple approach to worship, and hence the closeness of the eucharist to the old sacrificial system, whereas some or most aspects of Protestantism normally have been in continuity with the teaching ministry of the synagogue. The Protestant emphasis must thus in essence be educational, and instruction must be the prelude to true worship." In the next paragraph, Rushdoony summarizes by

writing, "Knowledge is basic to worship ."

Making application, Rushdoony states, "Thus, we are plainly *required* to have Christian schools to teach every covenant child the word of the Lord and to study every area of life and thought in terms of Christian presuppositions. It is also our duty to '*teach* all nations' (Matt. 28:19), and all the inhabitants thereof. The Great Commission is a commission *to teach* and to *baptize*: it has reference to education as well as to worship, to the establishment of schools as well as churches. *Teaching* is cited before *baptizing*. It is *teaching* which alone can create a godly civil government and a faithful church ." Thus, Rushdoony summarizes by writing, "The *primacy* of *teaching* before church worship and national discipleship are asserted by Scripture. The great missionary requirement of the days ahead is Christian schools and institutions ."

Rushdoony makes the same assertion on pages 130-131: "Thus, while *worship* has a very high place in God's plan, priority belongs to *instruction*. The school is more essential to Christian society than the church, although both are necessary institutions."

There are a number of observations to be made on this. First, Rushdoony is right to call attention to the importance of teaching, but he errs in making it more important than worship. In fact, the reality is quite the reverse. Adam was not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge until after he had eaten of the Tree of Life. <sup>1</sup> An affirmation of God's supremacy, an act of worship, is the precondition of all true learning. "The fear of the Lord is the first part of wisdom" (Ps. 111:10; Prov. 1:7; 9:10).

Second, given the prominence of the whole sacrificial worship system instituted at Mount Sinai, it is hardly credible to maintain that it is not equal in importance to teaching as a "necessary concomitant to a godly law order."

Third, I do not see how the fact that many of the Levites were scattered in Israel away from the sanctuary "makes clear the importance of their teaching function over sanctuary duties ." I could assert the opposite: The fact that there was only one central sanctuary *proves* that it was more important than

---

1. See my essay, "Rebellion, Tyranny, and Dominion in the Book of Genesis," in Gary North, ed., *Tactics of Christian Resistance*. Christianity and Civilization No. 3 (Tyler, TX: Geneva Ministries, 1983).

the local synagogues set up in Leviticus 23:3. I should prefer, however, to say that the weekly service of the Word in the local synagogue was equally ultimate in importance with the daily and festival services of the Sacrament at the central sanctuary.<sup>2</sup>

Fourth, since the New Testament repeatedly calls the Church the Temple of God, it is no surprise that the ancient Church drew its ideas of worship from the “priestly and Temple approach.” What in fact happened in the New Covenant was that synogogal *synaxis* and templar *eucharist* flowed together into one. Preaching and sacrament are equally ultimate in importance. There is no need for reductionism here.

Fifth, Rushdoony is simply wrong in what he says about Matthew 28:19-20. The fundamental command is to “disciple” all nations, by two methods: baptizing and teaching. Notice that baptism is mentioned first. It is those who are baptized who are to be taught. Nothing could be clearer from the text.

Sixth, by saying that the solution to our national ills is “the primacy of teaching,” Rushdoony not only falls from Van-tillianism into the Greek error of the primacy of the intellect, he is also guilty of advocating a messianic concept of education. Since throughout his writings Rushdoony is always a great opponent of these two errors, we are safe in taking this statement as a grossly uncharacteristic lapse.

My point, thus, is that this belief in the primacy of ideology and instruction is so much a part of the warp and woof of our culture that even one of our profoundest critics has occasionally fallen into it.

What in fact did happen at Mount Sinai? What provisions did God set up to form His Church, and by extension all of life? There are three, and no one aspect is primary.

---

2. On page 127, Rushdoony asserts that “Numbers 18:21-28 makes clear that only one-tenth of the tithe went for worship, to the priests, whereas nine-tenths went to the Levites, whose function was instruction essentially. Only a handful of Levites were engaged in temple service, as against the vast numbers whose work was instruction (Deut. 33:10). At best, the levitical contribution to worship equalled another one-tenth of the tithe, meaning that eight-tenths of the tithe went towards instruction.” What Rushdoony fails to take note of is that the Levites were pastors of the local churches (synagogues) of Israel. They were not schoolteachers. Thus, all the tithe went to the Church. On the disposition of the tithe, see James B. Jordan, *The Law of the Covenant* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984), pp. 207ff.

First was the pedagogy of court-enforced boundary. God threatened to kill anyone who got too far out of line. He established authorities in Church and in state with real power to enforce this. Fear is a very real factor in Christianizing a people, for fear shapes the minds and attitudes of people. This is obvious in child rearing. It is external confrontations that promote the development of inner restraint. Children whose parents avoid confrontation and use the “nice” approach, coaxing them into good behavior, never learn to handle frustration and do not develop inner restraint. Thus, in terms of a Biblical view of how to transform society, the threat of the sword (and, first, of Church discipline) is important. Reconstruction does not come about merely through the communication of data to the mind. That is why to each sphere of society God commits a real boundary-enforcing power: to the parents the rod, to the state the sword, and to the Church the power of excommunication.<sup>3</sup>

Second, God set up a pedagogy of liturgy. The performance of ritual actions by our whole persons restructures our lives. Such ritual creates a context for understanding truth when we hear it. A minimal liturgy, a mere bare bones, provides a minimal context for understanding; and an erroneous liturgy sidetracks understanding. Because, however, the Biblical view of man is wholistic, and not merely intellectualistic, the performance of ritual acts to God’s glory, even without fully understanding them, is extremely important. A study of the ritual laws in Leviticus, for example, will readily demonstrate that God almost never in context explained the meaning of these rites. The performance of such ritual generates a psychological context for receiving teaching, just as proper and sound teaching is the proper context of any meaningful ritual. The lack of ritual and of whole-personed worship is one of the greatest roadblocks to understanding present in the

---

3. William Kirk Kilpatrick makes this point with an illustration when he writes, “I think there can be little doubt that civil rights legislation in this country has had the same [pedagogic] effect. Laws granting equality of access to blacks in the South may have been hated and grudgingly obeyed at first. Nevertheless, in obeying the law over a long period of time certain habits are induced which eventually alter attitudes and even bring about a change of heart. The law has an educative function as well as a judicial one. . .” *The Emperor’s New Clothes. The Naked Truth about the New Psychology* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1985), pp. 105f.

evangelical Church of today. The discipline of liturgy in the Church molds an army, while mere teaching at best can produce only a group of opinionated scholars.

Third, God set up a pedagogy of instruction. Rushdoony has called attention to this, so I need say nothing more about it.

An analogy may help. The military shapes men by means of fear (threat of real punishment), drill (ceremonial acts, such as marching), and instruction. The fact that the Bible repeatedly compares the Church to an army only makes the analogy obvious.

The perspective of the organizers of this symposium is that the reconstruction of the Church requires the reestablishment of all three of these pedagogues. There must be a reestablishment of true government in the Church, setting the boundaries of her Yield .“ There must be a reestablishment of true liturgical discipline around the sacrament, organizing the actions of her “wave .“ And there must be a reestablishment of sound teaching, communicating “particles” of true information.<sup>4</sup> When these things are recovered by the Church, since judgment begins at the house of God, they will also be recovered by society at large. The Church is the nursery of the Kingdom, and there can be no reformation in state, school, or family, until there is reformation in the Church.

Man’s problems are indeed religious, but religion is not just theology, and man’s problem is not just bad theology. Religion is also the discipline of ritual and the restraining virtue of court-enforced boundaries. There must be recovery in all three areas, or there will be recovery in none. It is to that recovery that this symposium is dedicated.

\* \* \* \* \*

This symposium was originally scheduled for publication in 1984. Financial considerations caused its postponement, but in the process, the book grew to an unmanageable size. Being good American evangelical, such matters as ecclesiology and worship were “new” areas for most of us. New ideas

---

4. On this field-wave-particle triplex, see my essay on “The Sociology of the Church,” in my book, *The Sociology of the Church: Essays in Reconstruction* (Tyler, TX: Geneva Ministries, 1986).

and insights kept turning up. We have to draw the line somewhere, however, and so the reader should keep in mind that the essays in this symposium reflect "work in progress."

As editor, I was commissioned to write up several essays that would reflect the common research, thinking, discussion, and experience of the community of scholars around Geneva Ministries. Because of the growth of this project, those essays have now been removed from this symposium and are being published in 1986 as a separate book: *The Sociology of the Church: Essays in Christian Reconstruction*, by James B. Jordan. This should be regarded as a companion volume to this edition of *Christianity and Civilization*.

Several churches and individuals have made contributions to assist in the publication of these two volumes. We wish here to thank Believers Fellowship: Reformed Bible Church of Humble, Texas; Cherokee Presbyterian Church of Woodstock, Georgia; and Lehigh Valley Presbyterian Church of Allentown, Pennsylvania. Their assistance in getting this material out should not be taken to mean that they are in agreement with every position advocated in this volume.

*Christianity and Civilization* draws on authors from numerous denominational backgrounds, not to mention religious traditions. The essays contained herein have been published in good faith by all parties, but neither the editors nor the authors agree on all points with each of the essays in this volume.

Part I of the symposium concerns the present mess the American protestant church is in. My essay is designed as an overview of the doctrine of the Church, dealing with the anti-ecclesiastical piety of American Christianity. Lewis E. Bulkeley, an elder in the Association of Reformation Churches, provides a provocative discussion of Church renewal, calling for a more realistic and Biblical assessment of the condition of the local church. Peter J. Leithart, a doctoral candidate in Church History at Westminster Theological Seminary, gives an historical overview of revivalism and its effects in undermining the Biblical conception of the Church.

Part II deals with Church government. Using the book of I Corinthians as a guide, Ray R. Sutton, pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church of Tyler, Texas, discusses the nature of Church government and the causes of schism. Gary North, director of the Institute for Christian Economics, argues that the local church can and should protect its integrity while

maximizing its catholicity by distinguishing between voting and non-voting members. North goes on to apply this concept to the social problems caused by immigration. Jim West, a pastor in the Reformed Church in the United States, argues that the Church needs to return to the practice of excommunicating apostates and rebels, and eschew all compromising substitutes.

Part 111 deals with worship. David Chilton, a scholar in residence at the Institute for Christian Economics, provides a humorous introduction to this section in the form of a dialogue between himself and his young son, who was amazed at the circus-like atmosphere of worship he found at an evangelical Church his family visited a while back. Ray Sutton uses his experiences in Dallas at an experimental hyper-informal Church to discuss the inevitability of formality and liturgy in worship. Sutton's other essay in this section argues that clergymen should wear distinctive garb, thus setting a pattern that affirms the sanctity of every calling under God. Gary North's essay here deals with the Lord's Supper as a sign of Christ's marriage to His bride. My contribution to this section concerns the present abominable state of music in the Church. And James M. Peters, a computer consultant and student of art and symbolism living in Tyler, Texas, provides a challenging essay on the need to "revaporize," that is, "reinvest with proper symbolism" the architecture of our churches.

Part IV deals briefly with the outflow of the worship of the Church. George Grant, director of The Christian Worldview, Humble, Texas, argues that just as God feeds and clothes us in worship, so we must be actively involved in helping the poor in our midst. Marion Luther McFarland, pastor of the Ogemaw Reformed Presbyterian Church of West Branch, Michigan, argues that the mission of the Church is to transform all of culture, but not in the way "liberation theology" would have us do it.

## I. THE CHURCH IN DISARRAY

### THE CHURCH: AN OVERVIEW

James B. Jordan

**A**MERICANS in general have virtually no understanding of the Biblical doctrine of the Church. The reason for this has largely to do with the way American culture has developed.<sup>1</sup> Whatever the cause of this, however, it behooves us to try and get a general overview of what the Church is, or is supposed to be, and that is the purpose of the present essay.

#### *A Religion or a Way of Life?*

It is very common in America to be told that “Christianity is not a religion; it is a way of life.” This catchy statement has an attractive ring to it, but it is not true. This statement commits a logical error known technically as bifurcation or false antithesis. The fact is that Christianity is both a religion and also a way of life.

We are also commonly told that what we need is “real Christianity, not just ‘Churchianity.’” This is also a false antithesis, because real “Churchianity” is Christianity, and real Christianity is “Churchianity.”

Why are these slogans so popular in American Christianity? Why do we hear them on the lips of mass evangelists, television preachers, evangelistic workers, and theologians alike? The reason is that so many American Christians have a false view of the nature of God’s Church, and American Christians have created many substitutes for the Church. Traveling evangelists with their soul-winning campaigns are

---

1. A study of the decline of ecclesial consciousness in America might be pursued from a number of angles. The reader is directed to James B. Jordan, ed., *The Failure of the American Baptist Culture*. Christianity & Civilization No. 1 (Tyler, TX: Geneva Ministries, 1982); Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1977); and the chapters on revivalism in Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Knopf, 1969).

a substitute for the Church. Evangelistic organizations directed at students, nurses, military personnel, etc., are a substitute for the Church. Television ministries are a substitute for the Church. Theological seminaries and Christian “think-tanks” function outside the Church, and are often a substitute for it.

There is one thing all these groups have in common: They never perform the sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. American Christians by and large have no conception of the centrality of the sacraments in the Christian life, and Christians in America suffer accordingly. The sacraments are the special, God-appointed signs of His Presence. While no magical transformation takes place in the water of baptism, or in the bread and wine of communion, yet God is especially present *with* the sacraments. God commands all men to live faithfully before Him, but He also commands them to draw into His special presence weekly and offer Him special worship. Sacramental worship is not an option; nor is it secondary to faithful Christian living in all the rest of life. Indeed, it is primary, because life flows from the center, and the center of life is where God manifests His special presence in the sacraments.

What I am getting at can be put in other words as well. The Bible presents us with a view of the world which is bipolar; that is, it has two complementary aspects. Both aspects are necessary. We call these the “special aspect” and the “general aspect .” Some examples will help: Every day of the week is to be generally devoted to God, but the Lord’s Day is to be specially devoted to Him; thus, we are to rest and to gather for special worship on the Lord’s Day.

Second, every Christian is a priest and king before God. Each Christian is to pray to God, to consecrate himself and his works to God. Each Christian is to act as king or queen over the matters entrusted to his or her stewardship. But, at the same time, there are special officers in the Church, who engage in the special priestly work of administering the sacraments, and who engage in the special kingly work of settling disputes between Christians in Church court. Thus, there are special officers in the Church, and also general officers (sometimes called “laymen”).

A third example: Christians are to pray to God and worship Him daily. At the same time, however, God commands

all to draw into His presence on the Lord's Day for special worship, worship organized according to the patterns laid down in Holy Scripture. Similarly, Christians fellowship with Christ at every meal, by saying grace before eating. At the same time, however, Christ commands our attendance at His special meal in the weekly celebration of the Holy Communion. Christ is generally present with us at all times; but He is specially present on the Lord's Day during sacramental worship.

Fourth, we are to be faithful to God in everything we do, in all of life. Christianity is more than just Church-going. Thus, Christianity is not just a religion, but also a way of life. At the same time, however, there is a special kind of faithfulness which we are to demonstrate in the Church, an active faithfulness which consists in throwing ourselves into public worship, in paying tithes, in submitting to Church officers. While we can study the Bible at any time, and gain much from various Bible teachers, there is special power and responsibility attached to the special proclamation that takes place on the special day in connection with the special meal.

So, we can begin to see what is meant by this hi-polar view of the world, the special and the general. Now, which has primacy, the special or the general? This question has to be answered carefully, because from one point of view, both are equally important. There is, however, an order which must be observed. <sup>2</sup> When God created man, He made him on the sixth day of creation week, according to Genesis 1. On the seventh day, God rested. Thus, man's first full day was the day of God's rest, the sabbath day. This was the special time of worship. Man was supposed to take time to affirm God's superiority, His rule, His grace, His law.

On that first special day, man was supposed to go to the center of the garden, where there were two trees which formed a double witness to God's holiness and truth: "The tree of life was also in the midst [middle] of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Genesis 2:9). God had said that every tree was for man eat (Genesis 1:29), but that man was supposed to postpone eating from the tree of knowledge until he was ready for it (Genesis 2:16, 17). God thus en-

---

2. This can be compared to the Trinity, The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are equally ultimate, each wholly God, equal in power and glory. Yet, there is an order in the Trinity: Father, Son, and Spirit.

couraged man to eat of the tree of life.

The tree of life was a sign or token that man does not have life in himself. All life comes to man from outside. It was a sign that man is not a self-sufficient god, but a creature, dependent on God. This is the meaning of food in the Bible, and this is why when we read the Bible we find time after time that people are hungry or thirsty, and that God provides food and drink for them.

The sabbath day was the day of rest and worship. Adam and Eve were not going to work on that day. Instead, God was going to come and meet with them (Genesis 3:8), and they were going to have special sacramental fellowship at the tree of life. Of course, Adam and Eve spurned God's offer of life, and rebelled, eating of the forbidden tree. Thus, they were cast out, and barred from the sacramental fruit by the flaming sword of the cherubim (Genesis 3:22-24).

What if they had not sinned? Adam and Eve would have had special fellowship with God on their first day, and then they would have gone to work the next day, following the four rivers out of Eden to the four corners of the earth, extending the principles of the central sanctuary (Genesis 1: 28; 2:10-14). Periodically, they would return to the garden for special fellowship with God.<sup>3</sup>

Life flows from the center. The river arose in Eden, and from there went out to water the whole earth (Genesis 2:10). Adam and Eve were to eat of the special tree on the first day, and then eat of general trees on the other days. They were to have special sacramental fellowship with God at the center, and general fellowship with Him downstream from Eden. From this we see that the special aspect of life has a certain primacy over the general aspect.

### *What is the Church?*

When we read the Bible, we find sometimes that the word "Church" is used to refer to all the people of God in all that

---

3. It is my guess that they would have returned weekly. As the years went by, and men moved out from the Garden of Eden, they could have carried with them seeds from the tree of life, and set up new garden-sanctuaries in other places. In my opinion, the separation of annual sacramental worship from weekly sabbath-synagogue worship, which characterized the period from the fall of man to resurrection of Christ, was a result of the exclusion of man from Eden.

they do. This is the general aspect of the Church. More often, however, the word “Church” is used to refer to the special aspect, the institutional Church, which is concerned with special worship.

Biblically speaking, the Church is seen in three dimensions. One dimension is the Church as the people of God. As the people of God, the Church stands in contrast to the world. The book of Ephesians focuses on this dimension of the Church, so that after a discussion of the nature of the Church in chapters 1-3, applications are made to all of life in chapters 4-6.

The Church is the people of God in all that they do (general aspect) and preeminently gathered for worship (special aspect). Thus, a second dimension is the Church as a gathered assembly before God’s Throne, and this stands in contrast to all other, cultural, activities. Thus, we speak of “going to Church,” and by this we don’t mean going to a particular building, but going to worship. The book of 1 *Corinthians* focuses attention on the Church as a gathered assembly.

The third dimension of the Church is that it is a governmental institution, and as such stands in contrast to other governmental institutions (state and family). The books of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus focus attention on this dimension of the Church.<sup>4</sup>

The Church in America today is in disarray. Apart from the evil influence of secular humanism and theological liberalism (which are the same thing), the problem is due to two factors: an ambiguous attitude toward public worship, and the development of parachurch organizations.

### *The Decline of Public Worship*

The first factor is that the institutional Church has not stressed the importance of “command performance worship” and the sacraments. As a result, people are not sure why the

---

4. A study of the Greek New Testament term *ekklesia* can be confusing until we realize that it is used for three different Hebrew concepts. The Hebrew phrase “people of God” speaks of the Church in the broad sense of God’s people in all that they do. The Hebrew term *qahal* speaks of God’s people gathered for the purpose of worship (or gathered for any other reason). The Hebrew term *edah* denotes the governmental, organizational structure of the Church (or any other organization). These three Old Testament ideas lie behind the use of *ekklesia* in the New Testament.

Church is important. They can hear good preaching over the radio or television. They can read good Christian books, and get guidance for life. Home Bible studies frequently provide better fellowship. Often the Church seems kind of dead compared to other Christian works. Thus, the institutional Church seems relatively unimportant. We have to say that this is the Church's own fault, for failing to make its purpose clear to the people.

It is important for us to see briefly how this came about. During the Middle Ages, because of a superstitious view of the sacrament, people stopped partaking of it. They removed it from their children, and stopped drinking the wine.<sup>5</sup> Toward the end of the Middle Ages, the Italo-papal nationalization of the Church was pretty much complete, and the Church was almost wholly corrupt in its ministry. Lay preachers, monks, and other types of reformers conducted ministry outside the boundaries of the institutional Church, though they always directed people to engage in formal command performance worship on Sunday. At this time it was still understood that public worship was as important as private worship.

With the Reformation, the preachers triumphed, and took over the Churches. The political hold of the Italo-papal court over the rest of Europe was broken. Since the Reformation grew out of a preaching movement, it was natural for protestants to emphasize preaching in their worship services. At the same time, people were not used to taking communion more than once or twice a year, if that often. Though the major Reformers, such as Luther, Calvin, and Bucer, greatly desired weekly (even daily) communion, they were completely unable to persuade the people to go along. Quarterly communion was the most they could get.

As a result of all this, protestant people came to think of preaching as the most important aspect of the institutional Church. This was a mistake, because God has not given many gifted orators to the Church. (St. Paul was ridiculed for his lack of oratorical skill, and Moses had the same problem;

---

5. It was the laity, not the clergy, who rejected the cup, out of fear of spilling it. It was also the laity who stopped bringing their children for communion, for the same reason. Until the later Middle Ages, children were welcomed at Jesus' house for a weekly dinner with Him. All baptized children, from infancy on, were present at the Table.

see Exodus 4:10ff. and Acts 20:7-9; 1 Corinthians 2:1-5; 2 Corinthians 10:10. ) The proclamation of the gospel needs the pastoral context of the whole “body life” of the Church, and particularly needs the seal of the sacraments. By its exaltation of preaching as a charismatic art, the Reformation moved in the direction, subtly and unintentionally to be sure, of undermining the Church itself.

As time went along, this unhealthy opposition of preaching to sacramental pastoral ministry became more pronounced. The Puritan opposition to prayerbook worship wound up, in practice, often pitting preaching against a more wholistic view of the Church.<sup>6</sup> This opposition broke out into the open, in America, during the Great Awakening. Roaming preachers caused tremendous disruption in the normal pastoral life of the Church. As Hofstadter has written, “In truth, the established ministers found it difficult to cope with the challenge of the awakeners. The regular ministers, living with their congregations year in and year out under conditions devoid of special religious excitement, were faced with the task of keeping alive the spiritual awareness of their flocks under sober everyday circumstances. Confronted by flaming evangelists of Whitefield’s caliber, and even by such lesser tub-thumpers and foot-stampers as Gilbert Tennent and Davenport, they were at somewhat the same disadvantage as an aging housewife whose husband has taken up with a young hussy from the front line of the chorus.”<sup>7</sup>

Because this is so important, and because there is so much mythology about how wonderful the Great Awakening and subsequent revivals were, I want to insert here some comments on George Whitefield; but since I dare not criticize him myself, I shall let the eminent Charles Hedge do it for me:<sup>8</sup>

“It is impossible to open the journals of Whitefield without being painfully struck on the one hand with the familiar confidence with which he speaks of his own religious experience,

---

6. It should be noted that *all* the Reformers had been favorable to prayerbook worship. The more radical Puritans departed completely from the Reformation at this point.

7. Hofstadter, *Anti-intellectualism*, p. 67.

8. Hedge was one of the greatest 19th century presbyterian theologians. He taught at Princeton, which seminary had actually developed in part out of the Awakenings. Thus, he had some sympathy for revivals, but he was first and foremost a catholic churchman.

and on the other with the carelessness with which he pronounces others to be godly or graceless, on the slightest acquaintance or report. Had these journals been the private record of his feelings and opinions, this conduct would be hard to excuse; but as they were intended for the public, and actually given to the world almost as soon as written, it constitutes a far more serious offence. Thus he tells us, he called on a clergyman, (giving the initials of his name, which, under the circumstances completely identified him, ) and was kindly received, but found 'he had no experimental knowledge of the new birth.' Such intimations are slipped off, as though they were matters of indifference. On equally slight grounds he passed judgment on whole classes of men. After his rapid journey through New England, he published to the world his apprehension 'lest many, nay most that preach do not experimentally know Christ .'. . . White field was much in the habit of speaking of ministers as being unconverted; so that the consequence was, that in a country where 'the preaching and conversation of far the bigger part of the ministers were undeniably as became the gospel, such a spirit of jealousy and evil surmising was raised by the influence and example of a young foreigner, that perhaps there was not a single town,' either in Massachusetts or Connecticut, in which many of the people were not so prejudiced against their pastors, as to be rendered very unlikely to be benefited by them (from a Letter to Whitefield from Edward Wigglesworth, in the name of the faculty of Harvard College, 1745). This is the testimony of men who had received Mr. Whitefield, on his first visit, with open arms."<sup>9</sup>

Hedge also comments on the belief, new at the time, that anyone had the right to set himself up as a gospel preacher, over against the ministry of the Church. The perspective which Hedge sets out here, which has been the universal catholic view of the Church of all ages, is almost completely lost today, and seems very odd to the modern reader: "White field . . . assumed the right, in virtue of his ordination, to preach the gospel wherever he had an opportunity, 'even though it should be in a place where officers were already settled, and

---

9. Charles Hedge, *The Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (n. p.: American Presbyterian Press, [1851] 1983), II:89f. A copy of this 655 page hardcover edition can be obtained for \$25.00 from Trinity Book Semite, Box 8376, Tyler, Texas 75711.

the gospel was fully and faithfully preached. This, I humbly apprehend,' he adds, 'is every gospel minister's indisputable privilege.' It mattered not whether the pastors who thus fully and faithfully preached the gospel, were willing to consent to the intrusion of the itinerant evangelist or not. 'If pulpits should be shut,' he says, 'blessed be God, the fields are open, and I can go without the camp, bearing the Redeemer's reproach. This I glory in; believing if I suffer for it, I suffer for righteousness' sake.' If Whitefield had the right here claimed, then of course Davenport had it, and so every fanatic and errorist has it. This doctrine is entirely inconsistent with what the Bible teaches of the nature of the pastoral relation, and with every form of ecclesiastical government, episcopal, presbyterian, or congregational. Whatever plausible pretences may be urged in its favor, it has never been acted upon without producing the greatest practical evils."<sup>10</sup>

Thus, the Great Awakening went far toward breaking down the historic connection between the wholistic ministry of the local Church and the preaching of the gospel.<sup>11</sup> Subsequent revivals have only worked to further the disaster. Piety came to be seen exclusively in individualistic terms — individual souls responding to the ministry of the preacher — and corporate piety as the public performance of worship visibly on the earth before the throne of God for His glory, was increasingly lost from view.

#### *The Growth of Parachurch Organizations*

The second factor in the disarray of the Church today is the growth of independent Christian organizations, called "parachurch" organizations. Here I am talking about radio and television ministries, evangelistic associations, and independent theological seminaries. All of these parachurch groups do good work, but they do it outside the context of the Church and sacramental worship. The result is twofold. First, an impression is created that the Church is unnecessary, or at

---

10. *Ibid.*, II:98.

11. For extended discussions of the Great Awakening, by scholars of a Calvinistic persuasion who have some sympathy for its context, see C. Gregg Singer, *A Theological Interpretation of American History* (Phillipsburg, NJ: The Craig Press, 1964); and Rousas J. Rushdoony, *This Independent Republic* (Phillipsburg, NJ: The Craig Press, 1964).

least secondary. Many of you reading this book were converted through a ministry outside the Church. You were then told to join a Church and get involved, but you still continued to look for guidance primarily to the parachurch group that converted you. Secondly, because the sacramental worship of the Church is not of concern to the parachurch groups, they have constructed theological systems which say absolutely nothing about the sacraments and the importance of special worship. All the emphasis is on evangelism, or scholarship, or whatever the particular group specializes in.

Let's take an example. In Revelation 3:20, Jesus says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me." This is a clear and obvious reference to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Parachurch theology, however, never notices the reference to the sacrament. Instead, this verse is used in soul-winning as an invitation to accept Christ as Lord and Savior. This is an entirely proper *application* of the verse, but it is not the *primary* meaning of the verse.

Similarly, academic theologians, writing in independent seminaries and "think tanks," fail to see the reference to the Church and her sacraments. Of the thirteen commentaries on Revelation in my library, not one calls attention to the Lord's Supper when discussing Revelation 3:20. Two of them indirectly hint at a reference to Holy Communion, but that's all. The rest talk about how this verse is addressed to the individual ("any *one*"), and how meals in the orient were times of special fellowship. They do not notice that the meal referred to takes place *only* during special worship in the Church. Individuals partake of it, but only in Church. We live in a strange time, when theologians ignore the Church. This is not so strange when we realize that theologians do their work in the context of schools, not in the context of the Church.

Now, the problems we have just discussed are sociological factors. I am not saying that all parachurch groups should just shut down and cease operating, or that independent theological seminaries are *per se* sinful. I am saying, however, that we need to rehabilitate the doctrine of the Church, to get back to a proper balance between the special and the general.

Belonging to a Christian Church is not an option in the Christian life. God commands us to draw into His presence for special worship: command performance worship. God

commands us to submit to some particular body of elders in a local Church, so that we are accountable to some body of shepherds over us. God instructs us that special fellowship with Him at His Table is a primary source of life and blessing for us. Yet, many Christian people are not members of any particular Church. They attend Church, but are accountable to nobody. Indeed, many churches maintain no roll, and exercise no government. Reformation is sorely needed.

All the same, these problems are no excuse for not becoming actively involved in a local Church. The Church today is weak, but God commands each of us to join with her and strengthen her as best we can, for it is in the Church as nowhere else that we will find real power for living.

A brief note on parachurch organizations: The Church has always had specialized “parachurch” ministries. When the Church was united, these ministries (generally monastic) cooperated with the local churches, but were organized differently. A study of the Levites in the Old Testament will show that many served as pastors of local churches, but many also served in “parachurch” orders as lawyers, musicians, and the like. The problem for protestants is that we do not have a unified Church. Parachurch ministries, thus, are not accountable to the sacramental Church at any level. This creates tension, but that tension is no different from the tension created by the multitude of denominations of sacramental churches.

#### *What are the Powers of the Church?*

As the “people of God,” the power of the Church is its ethical influence as it transforms a fallen world into the Kingdom of God in all areas of life. As an institution, the Church historically is said to have two powers, called the “power of order” and the “power of jurisdiction.” Let us look first of all at the power of order.

The *power of order* is the power to shepherd. It is the Church’s *kingly power*. It includes such things as communicating the gospel, visiting the sick and those imprisoned for the faith, comforting the afflicted, encouraging the saints, reproving the wayward, and the like. These kinds of things are done by all Christians, all “general officers” of the Church, the royal priesthood. Special weight is attached to these duties, however, when they are performed by special officers,

the servant priesthood.

An example of this special weight is seen in James 5:14-15: "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven." Any Christian may visit the sick and pray for him, but only elders are empowered to anoint with oil. This is not medicine, for the Bible clearly distinguishes between the ministry of physicians (such as Luke) and the ministry of special Church officers. The Christian who tries to go it alone, outside the Church, is cutting himself off from the possibility of special healing at the hands of the elders.

The particular power of the Church, however, is the *power of jurisdiction*. This is the *priestly power*, the power to judge and to make binding decisions on how the Church is to be run. Ordinarily this power is exercised solely by ordained elders (called in some churches presbyters, vestrymen, priests, pastors, etc.). The elders exercise this power jointly, acting together as a court. This is the governmental power.

God has distributed special powers to three institutions in life, and has given a special symbol to each. To the parents is given the power to inflict physical pain upon the children, for their correction. The symbol of special (priestly, judgmental) parental power is the rod (Proverbs 13:24, etc.). To the state is given the power to put men to death for capital crimes, and to punish men in lesser ways for lesser crimes. The symbol of special state power is the sword (Romans 13:4). To the Church is given the power to admit or restrain men from the Table of the Lord. The special symbol of that power is the sacraments.

Jesus said to Simon Peter, "And I also say to you that you are Peter [a man of rock], and on this rock [the great rock of the whole body of converted men] I will build My Church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven." The Church is only to bind on earth what she knows has been bound in heaven. How can she know? From studying the Bible, and governing strictly in accord with its laws.

The *power of the keys is the power of the sacraments*. The sacra-

ment of Holy Baptism places a person into the Church. It is a sovereign act of God. When a baby is baptized, he does not know what is happening to himself, but God is placing him in His Church. We are to count and treat him as a Christian from that day forward. The Bible tells the Church whom to baptize, and the Church binds men to God on earth in accordance with the heavenly revelation of the Bible.

The other sacrament is the Holy Eucharist (Thanksgiving), also called the Lord's Supper, or Holy Communion, in various churches. Christ is specially present at His Supper, and He expects us to attend weekly. Sadly, most churches no longer have weekly communion, though this is beginning to change today. Special blessing and curse attach to the observance of the Lord's Supper, for Paul says that those who eat and drink in an unworthy manner (with self-conscious, unrepentant sin), bring judgment to themselves (1 Corinthians 11: 29-32). People who continue in unrepentant sin are to be excommunicated from the Table, loosed from the bonds of the Church, and regarded as heathen (1 Corinthians 5:9-13).

This, then, is the heart of the special power of the Church. It is the power to determine who is to be counted as a Christian, by determining membership in the Church. It is the power to baptize, to administer communion, and to excommunicate. God promises to honor the decisions of His appointed officers, when they act in accordance with His revealed Word. Indeed, in the Old Testament, God commanded anyone who would not submit to the decisions of the court to be put to death (Deuteronomy 17:12). This shows us how seriously He takes His earthly courts. Human government is never absolute, for there is a Last Judgment which will right all wrongs, but human government under God is still a very serious thing.

One of the special powers of the Church officers is to form a court to judge in matters of dispute between Christians (1 Corinthians 6:1-8). As we have just seen, even if the court renders what we think is the wrong decision, we are still to submit, awaiting God's perfect judgment at the last day.

Church government is not magical, as if only certain special persons are empowered to perform the rites of baptism and of the administration of the Supper. Rather, the special power is governmental: These things may only be done under

the *oversight* of elders, who are called overseers (bishops) in Scripture. If all the elders are sick one Sunday, they can appoint someone else to administer the Holy Communion, for instance.

The government of the Church has real authority. It is not merely administrative. The analogy used in Scripture and throughout history is that the Church, as the Bride of Christ, is the Mother of believers. The authority of the mother is not as great as that of the father, but mothers have real authority all the same. Moreover, the child who spits in the eye of his mother will certainly have to answer to his father! Even if we dads don't always agree with the decisions and rulings made by mom, we always back her up in front of the kids. That is how God deals with Christians as well. Even if the leadership in the Church makes a mistake, the Father will always backup the Mother to the children, unless the Mother turns into a Whore (as in the Book of Revelation). We'd better be pretty sure, however, before accusing any particular body of elders of having turned the mother into a whore. If that is what we suspect, it is better to transfer in peace, and let God deal with the situation in His way.

Submission to this government is not optional. The Bible says, "Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you. . . . Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you" (Hebrews 13:7, 17). In other words, if we want God to bless us, then for the sake of our own Spiritual wellbeing, we need to have *an attitude of cheerful and willing submission to the elders of the Church* we are members of. Persons who refuse to come under the government of some specific church must not be served the Lord's Supper.

The Church today is weak. Its officers are often weak. Rash and rebellious men within the Church can often find reasons to cause trouble, to revolt against the appointed leadership. There is never any excuse for this, "for rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft" (1 Samuel 15:23). If for some reason we cannot in good conscience remain members of some particular church, we should leave in peace, and lawfully transfer our membership to another church.

*The Life of the Church*

We have spoken thus far of two special powers of jurisdiction exercised by Church officers: the power to determine membership, and the power to adjudicate matters brought before Church court. There is a third zone of authority entrusted to the special officers, which is their power to appoint special occasions. Somebody has to decide what time meetings are to take place, and what will go on in the meetings. That somebody is the body of elders of the local Church.

There are three kinds of occasions or ministries conducted by the Church, which are overseen by the elders. They are liturgical (worship), koinonial (fellowship), and diaconal (service). In this section, we shall be concerned with the last two, saving our discussion of worship until the end of this essay.

Fellowship is one of the most important aspects of the Church. Repeatedly throughout the New Testament we are told to do things for "one another." Getting along with one another is one of the most important things any person can learn, and the Church provides the best environment for learning it. There are all kinds of people in the Church, something which is not the case in the specialized parachurch groups. There are old people and children, educated and uneducated people, wealthy and poor people, people with quirks and odd temperaments, and if the Church is strong and growing, there may even be black and white people in the same Church.

In the Church we learn practically about love, for "love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). Love puts up with the frailties of other people, and builds character. Why is the Church weak today? Perhaps it is because Christians don't know enough about love. Maybe we all need to learn better how to put up with each other, instead of fighting and dividing over every thing that comes along.

The Bible establishes common *meals and festivals* as a way of expressing fellowship. In the Old Testament, people were to

leave their homes three times a year and attend feasts in Jerusalem. At the Feast of Tabernacles, they built little tents to live in, grouped around the Temple. Similarly, the New Testament speaks of "love feasts" in Jude 12. Christians came together for a common meal, usually connected with the sacrament, as we see in 1 Corinthians 11:33. In the early Church, the love feast, or "agape" (ah-GAH-pay) as it was called, was a big covered dish supper or breakfast. Churches today still have such suppers, though they usually are not called "love feasts."

It is important to attend all such fellowship functions in the Church. Of course, some large churches have so many different fellowship functions that one cannot attend them all. But where possible, it is important to get together with other Christians at the fellowship functions appointed by the elders. And it is important that the poorer members of the congregation be sponsored by the Church, so that they also can attend (Deuteronomy 14:29).

The second kind of occasion which is appointed and overseen by the elders is diaconal. Here we place the various works of mercy and practical matters which the Church is concerned with. There are two kinds of diaconal labors that we as Church members need to throw ourselves into. One is *working on the Church property* at workdays set up by the elders (or their assistants, called deacons in many churches). There is real Spiritual value in coming out for workdays. I, for instance, am a real fumble-finger when it comes to driving nails, or doing just about any type of handyman work. All the same, I find it of real value to come out and do whatever work I can when we have workdays at our Church. Similarly, your Church may ask the men to sign up to take turns mowing the grass, or the ladies to sign up to take meals to the sick or to new mothers. Be sure you jump in and do your part. Don't think your time is too limited, or that you are too important, and don't try to get out of it by paying someone else to take your part; for you will only cheat yourself. Ministering with the hands, especially in serving the Church, is of real Spiritual benefit.

The second kind of diaconal service is *ministry to the poor and to the sick*. Traditionally, the Church has tried to remember the poor in a special way at Christmas and at Easter. This is a wonderful thing to help with. Churches should of course

endeavor to help the poor during the rest of the year. There are also other kinds of diaconal services you might be asked to help with, such as taking a turn in a picket line at a murder store (abortion chamber), or writing a letter to government officials protesting new laws which tax the Church, and the like. We don't have time to do everything, but we should endeavor to help with the diaconal ministries of the Church, for there is great reward in it, as Matthew 25:31-46 makes clear.

### *Worship*

As important as fellowship and service are, they are in the general area of the Church's life. The special aspect of the Church's ministry is worship. Mainstream evangelicalism is particularly weak in the area of worship, though this is beginning to change. It is the job of the elders to appoint the times and the format of formal worship.

People in our culture tend to view Church services as something which they "attend." They may sing a few hymns, but for the rest they sit quietly while the pastor does all the talking and all the praying. They don't like it when new hymns are picked, because they have to work at getting the tune right. Worship is a time to sit passively and drink it in, they think. This tendency in worship is called "quietism."

The Bible is not quietistic in its view of worship, and in its days of greatest strength, the Church has not been either. The Bible commands us to praise God with musical instruments and with the dance (Psalm 150). A good deal of effort is needed to learn how to do this, and more effort is needed actually to do it.

We can call this "command performance worship." Whether the worship service is sparse and plain or rich and ornate, the purpose of worship is not the entertainment of man, but the entertainment of God. God is the Audience; we are the performers in worship. We direct prayer and praise to Him. We listen carefully when He speaks to us through His Word, as explained by the preacher. Too often, however, a self-centered attitude is found in the man in the pew. He comes to Church to get something, rather than to give of himself to God. With that attitude, he always goes away unsatisfied. This is because man's highest privilege and

greatest joy is found in the praise of God, but praising God means throwing yourself out of yourself. It means throwing yourself wholeheartedly into the activity of worship. It entails effort, and we live in an age pervaded by the false notion that worship should be effortless.

Active worship is not anarchic worship. The rules in 1 Corinthians 14, as well as the teaching of the rest of Scripture, show us that worship should be “organized and liturgical,” not “free and spontaneous.” Worship is like a dance. A bunch of people jumping up and down and running all over a room is not a dance. Dancing requires organization. Thus, while spontaneous “share meetings” and other more “charismatic” occasions may help people appreciate worship more fully, this kind of thing should be kept away from public, command performance worship.

Coming to worship on the Lord’s Day is not optional. God commands us to do Him worship. Neither you nor I have anything else to do on the Lord’s Day. The Lord’s Day is the Christian sabbath, and we are to allow nothing to interfere with our assembling together. (Such meetings as Sunday School and other secondary meetings are not in the same mandatory category, and it is possible that if you attend all such meetings, you will have not have enough time for rest. As a general rule, however, it is best to gather with God’s people whenever possible.)

The consequences of spotty attendance at worship are horrible. Historically, the Church has excommunicated any person who did not attend worship on the Lord’s Day, and who did not have a good excuse. This is because *worship is man’s highest privilege*. To stay away for any reason other than sickness or dire emergency is to *spit in the face of God*.

Nowadays the Church is weak, and people lapse from Church attendance without being dealt with. God, however, sees it all. The Bible says that we are to be involved actively in the Church, “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries” (Hebrews 10:25-27). Here we see that the primary cause of apostasy (falling away from the faith,

and never returning) is failure to attend worship regularly. Similarly, the Bible says that "since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:28-29).

God does not take it well when we despise His invitation to worship Him. "Again, he sent out other servants, saying 'Tell those who are invited, 'See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding [feast] . . . ' But they made light of it and went their ways. . . . But when the king heard, he was furious. And he sent out his armies . . . and burned up their city" (Matthew 22: 4-7).

God's worship is formal. We should approach Him in awe, realizing that we are surrounded by angels, though we do not see them. The Bible says that in formal Lord's Day worship we draw into the presence of "an innumerable company of angels in festival array, and to the assembly of the firstborn ones whose names are registered in heaven [that is, Christians on the earth], and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect [that is, the Christians in heaven]" (Hebrews 12:22,23, literally). We present ourselves before the throne of the King, in the presence of all His retainers. When we come into the King's presence, we dress in good clothing. We act with sobriety. We are quiet when we arrive for worship. Hopefully, we kneel or stand to address our petitions to Him.<sup>12</sup>

### *The Church as a Whole Burnt Sacrifice*

The Church has always limped in history, and it always will. People look at the manifest weaknesses of God's Bride, and they spit on her. Yet, while God avenges His saints, He still keeps them limping.

God told Satan in the beginning that the righteous One, Jesus Christ, would crush his head, but that in the process, the heel of the Lord would be bruised (Genesis 3:15). Thus,

---

12. Sitting for prayer, along with the complete disregard of the psalter in worship, is one of the weirdest features of the 20th century Church. At no other time in the entire history of the Church have people ever addressed God sitting down during formal public worship.

Jacob, the father of Israel's twelve tribes, wrestled with God and prevailed, but limped ever after (Genesis 32: 31). The limp was a sign of his victory in righteousness! The apostle Paul, father of the gentile Church, was given a thorn in his flesh (and since thorns grow on the ground, it was symbolically in his foot), which kept him limping in the eyes of men (2 Corinthians 12: 7). Thus, in union with her Lord Jesus Christ, the Church limps through history, in apparent weakness, so that it is "with a scornful wonder, men see her sore oppressed, by schisms rent asunder, by heresies distressed." Yet her victory is assured. How can that be? Because her enemies have had their heads crushed, and thus their resistance is short-lived.

We can understand the weakness of the Church in another light also. The Bible uses the analogy of the *threshing floor* to describe history. God grabs the threshing pan of the world, and throws all humanity into the air. The heavy, righteous seeds fall back into the pan, while the chaff are driven away by the wind (see Psalm 1:3 ,4; Luke 3:17). Note that all are tossed up into the air. All go through the tribulations, but the Godly survive and become stronger. Indeed, God built His Temple on a threshing floor (2 Samuel 24:18-25; 2 Chronicles 3:1). It is through the threshing process that God's House is built up in history. Since judgment begins at the House of God, proceeding from the special to the general, we can expect to see more threshing in the Church than in the world. This apparent weakness, however, is simply God's way of building His people. Thus, Paul could say, "when I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10; see also Hebrews 12:3-11).

Finally, the Church is like a *whole burnt sacrifice*. Into her, according to 1 Corinthians 3 :10-17, God puts both good people (gold, silver, precious stones — the building material for His Temple) and wicked people (wood, hay, stubble — the material to burn the sacrifice with). From time to time, the wicked catch fire, described in James 3 as the proclamation of false doctrine and of evil gossip and rumor. The righteous get burned, yes, but the only effect on them is that their impurities are smelted away, and they are better for it. The wicked, however, are burned up totally, being made of wood and straw. The whole book of 1 Corinthians is addressed to a Church on fire, on fire in the sense of suffering from the activities of wicked men.

Yet it is God Who brings this to pass. Before the eyes of

the world it looks as if the Church is a farce and a joke, because of all the problems it has. Yes, that's the way she looks to the eye of the wicked, but in the eye of God, she is the spotless Bride, being prepared for the return of her Husband in glory. Thus, as the hymn "The Church's One Foundation" (which we quoted above also) says:

The Church shall never perish.  
Her dear Lord, to defend,  
To guide, sustain, and cherish,  
Is with her to the end.  
Though there be those that hate her,  
And false sons in her pale,  
Against both foe and traitor  
She ever shall prevail.

## CHURCH RENEWAL: THE REAL STORY

Lewis Edwards Bulkeley

SEVERAL years ago, a bright young seminary graduate began to seek a place in the ministry. He applied to the missions arm of a fairly large denomination, and he was accepted as a mission pastor. The board looked over his credentials and qualifications, and then sought a place of service. Soon the young pastor found himself in a small town in the mid-south, ministering to a church of fifteen members averaging age sixty.

Within the first year the pastor buried three members of his congregation. It was a severe loss. The church had been in existence for two decades and could hardly afford to lose any of its precious remaining members.

During the first few years, the church gained several new members, all by transfer and none by conversion. Even now, the outlook is not promising. A few more years, and the entire congregation will be gone. The pastor will be back on the street, or back at the mission board taking responsibility for having failed to work renewal miracles in this dying white-  
elephant of a church.

### *A Typical Case*

The story is typical. Across America are hundreds of small, dying congregations in search of renewal. Most of them have been around for ten, twenty, or even thirty years. They have seen the good times and the bad. They reached their zeniths years ago. Perhaps they hit membership of three or four hundred under the leadership of the founding pastor. Then the pastor moved on to higher ground (more money, prestige), or got in trouble with members of the board (usually the big givers). Perhaps the pastor just moved on.

Then came the splits (check your small, dying church-with-a-history, and you are bound to find a bad case of the

splits). By tens and twenties families departed, probably over the obnoxious character of one or more loud-mouthed members, or over just which side of the church does the piano belong on. Something important.

The faithful few held on. It was their church. They would stay to the end. Others, with little or no conviction, went on to more fertile territory, usually with lower doctrinal standards. And so it went, year after year.

Then there was the time no one could agree on which man to call as pastor. So the church went without one for several years. During this period, half the remaining members went elsewhere.

Of course, the older people stayed. They held the positions of influence (?) in the church, and, as the saying goes, the tenacious shall inherit the property. And then there were those folks who could not bear to see the work that they had supported for so many years fall apart. The witness had to be maintained.

In desperation, the leaders of the church appealed to the national missions organization. Send us a White Knight, they cried. Send us a young man "on fire for the Lord" who will revive our church through his Spirit-guided, single-handed efforts in the community. In short, send us a miracle.

The missions board did its best to meet the plea of the congregation. Surely this work had to be preserved at all costs. Let us find a committed young pastor in search of a flock and send him out into the fields white unto harvest. This church will be renewed, if only he will follow the right course.

So the board sent out a man. A sound man. A man with a family and a zeal to serve the people of God. This man was new in the ministry and still laboring under an idealistic altruism. The board had judged this work to be of importance and a work worth salvaging. If he would pursue the building of the congregation with vigor, God would certainly bless his labors and resurrect this church. The young man became committed to the work. He looked at all the factors, emphasizing the positive in his own mind as grounds for hope (there are already some members), and suppressing the negative (they are close to death) as unworthy of consideration in light of the truth that God is able to do all things, to overcome all obstacles.

Whenever doubts entered his mind in the course of pre-

paring his family for the task ahead, this young pastor would mentally flagellate himself for his lack of faith. The family moved to the dying church. Throughout the months, or even years that the pastor labored to revive the work, his attitude began to change. He began to recognize not only the realities of the ministry through fiery trial, but also the realities of a congregation in limbo. Eventually he moved on, either to a more promising work, or to a job that paid a living wage.

The scenario is familiar. The pattern is regular and, seemingly, everlasting. Attempts to rejuvenate gutted churches are endemic in both evangelical and reformed movements. The diseased church is like the perennial counselee – always eager for progress but never making any.

Time never seems to change either the churches or the approaches. The best the board can do, is send another man. Perhaps this one will have a better program. Perhaps he will be more dynamic. Perhaps pigs fly.

#### *Are There Answers?*

Are there? There are for those who have ears to hear and eyes to see. There are answers for churches, missions boards, and mission pastors who sincerely want answers and will recognize them when they appear. For those who want to continue in the old pattern – business-as-usual — there are no answers, only holding patterns. But for the few who have the courage to break with some old traditions and take a new look at church renewal and the task set before the church by the Lord Jesus Christ, there are some simple but powerful principles. The willingness to hear and to change must be present in all parties — the churches, the boards, and the pastors. A closer look at each of the three parties to this perpetual drama reveals a provocative picture.

#### *Shall We Renew This Church?*

Good question. It is one we seldom ask about any particular work. When is the last time we looked at a particular floundering ministry and said: Should we spend our time, personnel, money, and effort to rebuild this church? Is it worth it?

The historic answer to these questions is an unequivocal

“yes .“ Deep in our convictions is the presumption that every church is worth saving. It is the church of Christ. The gates of Hell shall not prevail against it. Yet the question remains, all the same. And it is a legitimate question. Is this church worth saving? If this church folds, will the community of pagans out there have lost the witness of Jesus Christ, our Lord? Will it make a difference?

Probably not. If the church has been around for twenty years and cannot even support one man without help from the national board, something is terribly, terribly wrong. This church is *not* prevailing against the gates of Hell. Hell has already passed through and is now on the other side looking for a real opponent.

The church in trouble usually suffers from a comprehensive set of maladies, each designed to counteract effectively both witness and growth. In addition, certain external features such as geography and history weigh heavily in retarding the forward progress of this church. For true renewal to take place, all of the problems have to be solved effectively. All of the problems will not disappear, but they must be countered in a practical manner for practical regeneration to take place.

*Internal problems* are probably the most critical. Solve the internal problems, and the external problems become inconveniences. What are the internal problems? There is really only one: the leadership of the church. The church leaders are just that – leaders – whether by accomplishment or by default. As the leadership, so the congregation.

Here is a reality in today's troubled church. The leadership is corrupt (I am not paid by a congregation or leadership, so I can say it right out). And the corruption runs long and deep. The board is composed of men who have little spiritual awareness, pathetic knowledge of the Bible, virtually no time commitment to the work, and carefully concealed hostility to scriptural teachings on doctrine and holiness. As James Jordan puts it, the troubled church is the ‘business-as-usual’ church. This leadership is annoyed by any real (read “concrete”) attempt to implement Reformed doctrinal standards in the church. This leader sees the standards, as one elder put it, “sort of like the pledge of allegiance to the flag” — something to which you assent mechanically with critical faculties fully disengaged.

*Minimal time commitment* is another weakness. The elder who does not have the time to minister to the members of the congregation is an elder wrongly elected and ordained. It is just that simple. Long and tortured discussion on this point is fruitless.

Elders of this sort suffer from another weakness. They believe in their *divine right to office*. Oh yes. It may come as a surprise, but six out of six ruling elders from troubled churches recently interviewed stated that were their congregations to ask them to step down from office, they would leave their churches. The rule is: if I can't be an elder, I won't be a member. A similar rule is: if I can't make the rules, I won't play the game; or, if you won't do it my way, I'm taking my ball home.

*Money* also plays a big part in the drama of the historically troubled church. The big givers call the shots either because they hold office (almost always) or because they have the power to make church life uncomfortable for the plain folks. More churches and seminary institutions have been perverted by the pious sugar daddy than can be named in one article. "So-and-so said he'd pull out his big bucks if we let T. Ruly Reformed into our congregation or take him on as pastor." A familiar refrain.

Is this church a candidate for renewal? Is there life after corruption? It is doubtful, at best. For it is into the situation outlined above that the new pastor enters.

#### *Suckering the Super-Pastor*

Play-acting reaches dizzying heights when the troubled church courts a pastoral candidate. Elder board and pulpit committee become veritable hot beds of fervor for the faith during interviews with ministerial prospects. Without a few years of experience under his belt, the target pastor usually succumbs to the earnest pleas of the committee. The situation is reminiscent of the Massachusetts seal, where the Indian is pictured saying, "Come over and help us ." Right. Can't you just picture the Indians asking the settlers to come over and help? *Just* what they had been hoping and waiting for all this time !

Committee members picture a dedicated but forlorn crew for the candidate. Our folks are real committed. They have

stuck with the church all this time. They are ready to go; they are ready for a dynamic program of outreach. Have you got the vision, that kind of a program?

Providentially, the neophyte falls for this aggressive ploy. He begins to see himself in the role of the seller, rather than the buyer. He is the one to be proven, the one who must meet the qualifications. And being mostly messianic in his outlook, he fails to take a hard look at the history and status of this congregation so apparently eager to propagate the message of Jesus Christ. It must have been the former pastors, he reasons. And he gets plenty of help here. Members are only too glad to catalogue the weaknesses and failings of virtually every man that has taken their church. The candidate suppresses the suspicion that his ministry will soon take its place on the same chopping block.

So he tries to measure up. He details his visions for an expanded ministry. He talks about home Bible studies and evangelistic visitation — all the things the committee wants to hear. He wants the job.

What does the committee want?

### *The Mechanized Ministry*

Perhaps the most devastating blow to the Protestant church in modern America has been the gradual Womanizing of ministerial functions. Rome teaches the doctrine of “*ex opere operato*” — the sacraments operate by themselves. It is a sort of magic. Like an antibiotic for sin.

Applied to the Protestant minister, it means that he becomes an impersonal *functionary*, placed in the ministry to marry and bury and hold hands generally. He is a lot like the county clerk.

Ask any pastor that has been in the ministry for a few years, and he will tell you an amazing story. He will tell you of the many phone calls he has received from people he has never met, people who think his job is to marry people who call in off the street. For a fee, of course. He regularly gets requests from assorted Remans, divorcees, and fornicators looking for a quick, convenient service in a nice little church. Some are horrified and offended to find that he doesn't consider himself a Justice-of-the-Peace, but a minister of the Gospel. These folks just cannot understand the difference.

Neither do many of his church members.

Within the congregation the preacher marries and buries and performs functions. They are his job. Night and day. He is paid for it.

Congregations and boards of troubled churches get a lot of mileage out of the messianic character of the modern pastor. He is to give his absolute everything for the church – time, money, family, future — everything, without complaint. But just ask the typical board member to go that extra mile at his job without overtime or other compensation. The response is predictable.

The board expects the pastor to perform his paid functions. If he does them well without intruding on their spiritual siestas, he gets periodic praises and raises. But let him suggest in the mildest way that the board get off its duff and get to work, and attitudes reverse quickly. Let the pastor suggest that the board members are to be more than decision-makers, more than executives, and the waters are deeply stirred. Here is a man who threatens our entire rationale for existence. This man is dangerous. How did he get in here, anyway?

The pastor has made the fatal mistake in the chronically troubled church. He has taken away the rock and let the light shine in. One way or another, the problem is solved. Either the pastor leaves after many sleepless nights and examinations of his own soul, or he capitulates to the system.

His doctrinal position softens. Distinctive he once held dear have now become negotiable. Beliefs he once envisioned himself dying for in the face of pagan persecution have now been effectively amputated by his nominal brethren. He has become, for all intents and purposes, prophetically hamstrung. He has become the lowest of all men – the spokesman for God who refuses to speak.

*The board wants a puppet.* The board gets what they want. Either that or they lose their pastor entirely. They did not want renewal, at least not at such expense. They wanted to hire renewal. They wanted to buy it with money. They wanted a bargain.

Renewal is expensive. It comes neither cheaply nor easily. It takes sacrifice, personal sacrifice. And these people have proven that they are no longer willing to sacrifice to build the church. The new pastor may not have a track record, but the troubled church does. Who must bear scrutiny? Who is on trial here?

The church that seeks a mechanized ministry has already chosen mediocrity and irrelevance. *The automated pastor has already assented to the hopelessness of renewal.* He has settled into a pattern of ministry that gets the gold-plated watch and the traces of what was once considered a pension. It is a heavy price to pay for permanent retreat.

### *The Flock of Innocents*

Characterizing pastors and boards is easy enough work. But when it comes to evaluating a congregation in general, we enter into the great myth of Innocence. In the eyes of higher courts and even individual fellow pastors, the congregation-at-large can do no wrong. The regular member is the pure element of the church, for he of all parties is assumed to have no personal interest in political sin. In the eyes of the initiated (the ordained), the ordinary member is both ignorant and naive. He is the Noble Christian Savage. Teaching him will spoil his idyllic spiritual lifestyle much as Christian civilization has ruined the pure innocents of many a pagan society. Immerse these untainted believers in picnics and revival meetings, but never expect them to digest spiritual meat.

The presupposed purity of the congregation is reflected in any conflicts between members of the congregation and the pastor. Few church courts will discipline ordinary members or find them at fault. It must be the pastor who is causing all the trouble. He is presumed to have a whole horde of ulterior motives, usually attributed to an indefinable hunger for 'power.'

Pastors are always suspect. And for the pastor of the troubled church, it is invariably so. Some troubled churches change pastors regularly every two years or so. Each one is credited with having added to the woes that went before, and rarely with having improved the situation. The congregation has always been wronged. The flock has always been fleeced by the undershepherd.

One specific weakness of the troubled congregation is finances. Pastors are, without exception, the most underpaid professionals today, given the time and money invested in preparation. The typical pastor averages \$10,000 to \$15,000 a year. Compared with the plumber, he is not even on the economic horizon. He cannot even compete with the garbage

man. On the other hand, he has invested thousands of after-tax dollars in outgo, and tens of thousands in foregone income to prepare for this meager fare. And rarely has the church financed this preparation. It has been family, friends, wives, and midnight jobs at motels that have kept the seminary student in school. The congregation has invested nothing in the preparation of the pastor and, frankly, invests nothing in his future.

The troubled congregation seeking renewal knows deep in its heart-of-hearts that *the work is not really worth saving*. The prevailing attitude is just this: let us invest a minimal amount in this marginal operation and see if it goes. If nothing important happens, at least we keep our services going and we have our functionary in case we need him. And how can he complain? We pay him for preaching a couple of times a week. And we hardly need to pay much, since he really doesn't do much. And if he gets on the ball and builds a church for us, so much the better. Then we will be able to pay him more. We believe in paying for performance.

But God requires more. *The whole church must be working if the pastor is to be effective*. Here is a fact. A good pastor can bring the people in, but a poor board and congregation will drive them right back out. The effective pastor can preach commitment to the new ones and they will respond. But if the leaders of the church do not have that commitment, the pastor is quickly seen as a chauvinist hero. The committed ones begin to drift away in disgust, and the would-be church builder is left with the crumbling foundation he began with. It is too much. The preacher either is dismissed or quits.

Why? Because the finances simply will not hold out through another couple of years of rebuilding. Neither will the wife and kids. After two years of building, in which the congregation increased by fifty percent, one pastor was offered a raise of fifteen dollars a week. In the meantime, inflation had stolen 25% of his earning power. *The pastor could no longer subsidize the congregation*.

Church congregations are notorious cheapskates. Since the pastor is paid out of general income, the lower the giving, the lower the salary, and the giving is not much. Most troubled churches barely survive on the contributions of their members. And it isn't that the average member is struggling financially. He simply has a low view of the prospects of the

church, along with a negative view of tithing. He lives by the non-principle of “grace-giving” — give what you are led to give. Since, by this non-rule, one might be led to give nothing, the giving of anything at all becomes meritorious (in a non-meritorious sort of way, of course).

Those who are not normally privy to information about who-gives-what might be interested to know that giving as a percentage of annual income ranges from zero to a high of about six percent. Few members of troubled churches give over six percent. And those are the big givers. Two to three percent is standard.

No wonder the pastor is poorly paid. When asked why the church couldn't pay the pastor more, one deacon replied, ‘We just don't have the money.’ Being interpreted, this means, “we have the money in our pockets, but we won't put it in the plate; therefore, we don't have it.” A supreme example of sleight-of-wallet.

On the other hand, the pastor does little to correct abuse of the tithe. He is so economically depressed that he is thankful for any giving at all. He has entered into *the mentality of the chronically poor*, an attitude of hopelessness about his financial future that saps his strength to conquer the problem. Believing that it would be unspiritual to ask for more money, he waits for other parties to promote his economic welfare before the board. He waits and waits.

Hearing no complaints (and expecting none), the board reasons that all is well with the pastor. After all, the pastor cannot be expected to drive a new car or wear the extensive wardrobe of the businessman who must impress his contemporaries. He's working for God. God doesn't need His man in fancy clothes to do the work of the ministry. Let us increase our missions budget for Paraguay. Let us put the money where it'll do some *real* good.

Perhaps the above is a caricature of the troubled congregation. But it really makes no difference. The pastor and his family are no better off if the intentions are innocent and the income the same.

Many Reformed churches enter into covenant with their pastors to pay them a specified annual salary. In the wording of the covenants, the phrase “that the pastor may be without worldly care or concern” is included when specifying the amount of the salary. The pastor is not to have financial wor-

ries, so he can prosecute the work of the ministry with a single mind. In reality the pastor's mind is often occupied with worldly cares and concerns. Providentially, it is just the troubled church in need of renewal that pays the pastor least while placing upon him the heaviest burden.

*Fighting the Historical Factor*

Because of strong undercurrents of pietism in the Protestant church at large, the question of "whether" in church renewal has rarely been asked. The church has taken a positive but unconsidered approach to the renewal question. The cost has been paid but not counted. Too often the bottom line is red, and, like the demon-possessed man, the church is in sevenfold more trouble after expensive but fruitless attempts at regeneration. The blame is laid at the feet of the pastor, the boards, or the congregation. And certainly persons are to blame somewhere along the line of historical development of the church.

But there is more. It is not a simple question of personnel or programs. Commitment is important. Finances are important. Leadership is crucial. All these ingredients are necessary for the renewal process to occur. But they are not enough. Some other practical, concrete realities in renewal must be faced.

For instance, history. A look at the history of church development in relation to community development is instructive. What is the history of the community, and how does church growth relate to it?

It ought to be axiomatic that the community began small and grew large. When the town was small, the denominations began their respective churches. These churches, barring other problems, grew normally with the community. The older downtown churches fared well, since they were the first. Unless their internal problems overcame their outward thrusts, they prospered with the growth of the community, growing to tremendous sizes. They were popular. First Baptist. First Methodist. First Presbyterian. Names to be reckoned with. Names to be identified with, if you wanted to get into the right clubs and pocketbooks.

Then came white-flight. The downtown churches went one of three directions — they survived where they were, they

moved, or they died. Not many other alternatives. If they were truly prestigious, they continued to attract the crowds in spite of the neighborhood. If their ministries were marginal, and they stayed where they were, they died. The churches with foresight moved to more appealing locations. They survived right along with their television services.

The small city grew into a large one. As the city grew geographically, newcomers found it more difficult to drive downtown to church. So new churches formed and grew along with the pattern of population growth. As the community spread farther out, even newer churches arose to meet the needs of the growing population. The pattern of development was practical and obvious. So obvious that the church fathers never planned for the inevitable.

But the inevitable came, as it always does. Property values went up between the rotten fringe (the inner city) and the outlying areas. Families that started the *in-between churches* grew older. Their children, who once populated the Sunday schools and teen groups, grew up. Few could afford to live in the parents' neighborhood, so they moved to the edges of the city where they could afford to buy. Fewer young families moved into the old neighborhoods to repopulate the inner suburban churches. And unlike the highly-moneyed "First" churches, the suburban churches either *could* not or *would* not produce the dollars necessary to make the move outward.

As the average age of the membership rose, even the few younger families in the area found the fellowship relatively unattractive. They sought families in their own age group with similar interests. Few older members of the local community could be persuaded to come into the church, since they had made their commitments to local churches years before.

Probably the most devastating factor from demographic considerations has been the apartment boom in suburbia. Families do not live in apartments. Singles, childless couples, divorcees, widows, swingers, addicts, and other assorted nomadic types live in apartments. They are neither churchgoers, givers, nor long-term prospects. Popular apartments can change occupants completely in less than one year.

Add to these external difficulties some organic weaknesses in the church itself, and doom is spelled. Here is a case in point. The young pastor begins door-to-door evangelism. His

church is fifteen years old, and has been plagued with internal strife and splitting for years. The membership has been reduced to twenty. The church is located in what has become a commercial district. Not too many blocks away is an older residential area. It is to the residential area that the pastor goes, hoping to attract some families to the church. He rings a bell and an older lady answers the door.

"Hello. My name is Pastor Eager and I'm here to invite you to our church just four convenient blocks away." He smiles a fresh smile.

"My, how nice," she replies, "but we attend First Anesthetized and we're really happy where we are. How many members did you say you have?" She is being conversational now.

"We have twenty, Ma'am," says Pastor Eager, feeling just a little ashamed at the small number. But the lady is delighted. A baby church. Women like babies.

'And where is your church again?"

"It's at the corner of Blank and Dash." Now he is a little proud. The church has some property. "We're that nice white church with the six acres," he beams.

"Amazing!" She cries. "You have gotten so much property in such a short time!"

"Oh, no Ma'am. We've been there fifteen years."

"I see." And she does, she really does. Red lights flash everywhere. The facts scream out, and there's no perfuming over the smell of death with new programs, revivals, and campaigns. *Nobody wants to associate with a loser*, and there simply is no excuse for a fifteen-year-old church having only twenty members. No excuse at all.

Other people in the community are more aware. Word gets around in fifteen years. So when it comes to friendship evangelism, the folks in the church have exhausted that route years ago.

Countless other troubled churches sit and wait across the country. They wait for another pastor, another program, another chance. The hope of renewal glimmers in the breasts of the few who really care, and these continue to take tired steps toward improving the situation. The others are about business-as-usual. They are waiting for the rest to give it up or become resigned, as they have become, to their interminable private Bible studies every Sabbath mom at 11:00 A.M.

National home missions boards dutifully work toward the rescue of these ecclesiastical waifs every few years — more money, new pastors, continued encouragement through these brief periods of testing. No one wants to face the original question: Is this church worth saving?

*Reassessing Renewal*

If the student of Scripture reviews his Old Testament history, he finds the story of renewal writ large. God's chosen people rose to heights of glory when they obeyed God. The people were established in the land. They prospered and thrived. But decadence was not far behind. Success bred complacency, and complacency, rebellion. God disciplined His people, but He never abandoned them. He saved a remnant for Himself and raised up a nation from them. The Lord God, by the power of His Holy Spirit, renewed His church. He even promised future renewal through a New Covenant (Jer. 31: 31ff). God guaranteed the future success of His church.

But not all of it. Isaac multiplied and was blessed, while Ishmael disappeared. Jacob conquered while Esau was obliterated. Judah lived, Israel died. The history of Israel is the history of a purged people, purified by the sovereign will of God through a sovereignly ordained repentance.

Throughout the history of the covenant people, God cast out faithless members and groups. Ishmael was a covenant child (he had the sign), as well as Esau and all of the Northern Kingdom. It was not nominal pagans that God rejected, but those within the historic kingdom who broke or failed to keep covenant.

The same is true today. The Lord God is effectively rejecting those churches that fail to keep covenant, just as surely as He rejected the practical atheists of the Older Covenant. No church today has the right to expect that His discipline has slackened in the least, especially in light of the greater task before the covenant community. Every church is equally liable for the demands of the covenant, and no church can voluntarily excuse itself from moment-by-moment obedience to its duties, regardless of eschatological rationale.

Abandoning the terms of the covenant means becoming historically impotent and irrelevant. Having abandoned the covenant, the troubled churches in need of renewal have

abandoned the means to recovery. Only a return to explicit obedience opens the mouth and creates the voice that the God of covenant mercy hears. Let us not be surprised, then, that the Lord has rejected many unfaithful local churches in our day. He is under no obligation to renew the unfaithful.

The fundamental question remains: Shall we work toward the renewal of this church? And the second question is like unto it: If not, what shall we do with it, and if so, how shall we renew it? No formula answer can be given to the first question, but some guidelines for evaluation are possible. If the troubled church has had a chronic performance problem, if its leadership is uniformly incompetent, if its local fields are black unto destruction (Rome has not been white in centuries), then it probably needs to be razed to the ground. Or better yet, sold to a newer congregation which has an excuse for not having filled the building.

On the other hand, if the problems are immediate, if the leadership is committed and willing to sacrifice, willing to change or be replaced, if the greater community is composed of young families (without which the building of a stable local church is impossible), then renewal is a realistic option.

#### *Renewal by Re-Creation*

The greatest hindrance to the creation of a thriving work, all other things being equal, is *demographics*. Churches in older, inaccessible areas have an uphill road even if all other areas of weakness are dramatically improved. The church must move. A pastor of an inner city church in its terminal stage asked members of the congregation if, knowing the importance of its distinctive teachings, they would be willing to travel an extra ten or fifteen miles to attend services. They were overwhelmingly unified in their unwillingness (unity at last). Why, then, the pastor asked, should prospective members, not yet embracing the doctrinal position of the church, be willing to drive the extra miles in the other direction? If you, who know the truth, are unwilling to go the extra miles, why should the ignorant make the sacrifice?

A local church cannot be built on narrow strata of society. The evangelical Arminian ideal of the teenage church is untenable. The hopes of building a local congregation on young singles, apartment dwellers, the childless, divorcees,

the elderly, and other minor strands of our social fabric, are largely illusory. To be sure, all these are a part of the church, but they cannot and do not provide a center for long-term stability and growth. If the troubled church insists on working primarily with these people, it must understand that it is taking on a halfway-house mission project. It cannot expect to grow stronger.

The church looking for new life must move. *It must go where the young families have gone*— the outer suburbs of the city – not to substandard housing projects scheduled for perpetual transiency and poverty, but to new middle-class areas. The church must recruit young families with children. Such families provide a growing financial base and a growing group of covenantal children so necessary to the future development of the church and the lawful dominion of the greater community.

But relocation is not enough. *The leadership must be changed.* Men who have consistently failed to lead the church must recognize that stepping down is the only hope. It will not do to use the leadership positions of the church as training slots. Paul lays down for Timothy and Titus (1 Tim. 3 and Titus 1) the actual qualifications for actual elders, not the potential qualifications for actual elders.

The idea of resignation is not popular in troubled churches, especially among the leaders. But it is the price that must be paid for healthy change. Providentially, the marketplace tells the businessman when he has failed by driving him out of business. Church leaderships fail to read the ecclesiastical handwriting. They are like the businessman who refuses to believe he has failed, and continues to pour good money after bad. Often the real pain of bankruptcy is necessary to get the point across. Perhaps church leaders ought to have their entire financial futures tied up in the success or failure of their churches. They would quickly make room for the competent.

Can the entire board resign? Where does this leave the church? If a congregation is serious about renewal, it ought to be able to trust its pastor to make minor decisions (and even some major ones) during the period that new leaders are being raised up. Pastors *do* have their personal and financial futures bound up in the success of the church, and usually do everything possible to promote its success. Godly pastors (and you *must* have one of these) do not intend to “take over”

churches. On the contrary, they long for qualified men to stand with them and share the responsibility for decision-making and passing judgment. And besides, what is there, pray tell, to take over? Here is a pathetic shell of a church that is barely making it on any front, and some members are deathly afraid that the pastor will gain too much power. Power over what? In today's voluntary church, no one is in submission to his brethren anyway, whether they be one or many. So where is the power? From the standpoint of the pastor, there is only duty and responsibility. He has a hard time seeing great personal advantages in church leadership. And so it was with Moses, was it not? Remember how Moses coveted the leadership of Israel? Remember how Moses besought God to destroy the people and raise up a new nation from his own seed?

No, not revolution, but regeneration. Drastic? Remember, we are in the emergency room trying to save a dying patient. Radical injuries require radical treatment. The real question for the leadership is just this: Do you want to see this *church* renewed, or do you simply want to retain your *position* in the existing bureaucracy? Ask this question in the troubled church. Take the answer with a pound of salt.

The historical failures of the troubled church can be dealt with, too. Put new wine in new wineskins, not old ones. Dismantle the former church and create a new one in a new location. The problem of history, virtually inescapable under the former management and in the old, worn out location, disappears. The new church is a future winner, not an old loser. Renewal by re-creation is the most radical of steps, but the most effective. How long have you been in existence? Six months. I see, and how big are you? We have twenty attending. Not bad for a new work.

Everything changes. The new church has every reason for smallness. It has every excuse for lack of officers, large facilities, youth groups, and all other types of specialized ministries attending the successful work. The new church may be, in the eyes of the community, an untested commodity, but then it is not one with a poor record. Newness *is a tonic*. It gives the frustrated faithful in the new location an opportunity to get in on the ground floor of a church that has an open horizon. Past stigmata are not seen.

The older members of the previous church can fit easily

into the new church. And the extra effort required to get out to the new location will flush out the lazy and other assorted deadwood.

The above strategies are external. Changing the composition and the structure of the troubled church is absolutely necessary. But it is not enough. Were the changes merely outward, the church would soon drift into its former infamy.

### *Wine and Grapejuice*

Grapejuice needs no new skin. It is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. It will never have the aroma, the flavor, and the invigorating effect of wine. Grapejuice can be safely put in old wineskins because it does not threaten to burst them. But it is just this expanding, effecting quality that must characterize the church seeking regeneration. Without it, the church will be living death, all dressed up for the undertaker.

A young pastor in a derelict church sat talking with one of the matriarchs (another problem) of his congregation. She complained that the church did not seem to be reaching out into the local community to evangelize the neighbors. What, she asked, could the congregation do to bring in new members, and what plan did the pastor have to remedy this long-term ailment?

The pastor asked the lady to play roles with him for a moment. Suppose, said the pastor, that I am a local resident and you are a member of this church. I call you on the phone and ask just why I ought to attend your church. What do you say? Well, she said, the church is nearby. But nearness, the pastor said, was not really a factor in his choice of a church, since many churches were nearby. Was there, perhaps, another reason?

The woman reconsidered and then suggested that the reason for attending her church was that the Bible was taught there. Very interesting, said the pastor, but down the street is a 'Bible Church.' They think so much of the Bible that they've even named their church after it. It seems that a number of churches in the area claim to teach the Bible. That still does not recommend *your* particular church. Is there any special reason that I should attend your church and not another?

There is another reason, she said. "Our church is Presbyterian." That is a good reason for coming. The pastor replied

that, indeed, he had noticed that fact, but in a conversation with a local Baptist advocate, he had been told that the Baptists were right and the Presbyterians wrong in their teaching concerning baptism. Was this true, the pastor inquired?

In a fit of frustration the woman said, "Well, then, I guess we'll just have to go after the Presbyterians."

In a local community dominated by Baptists this statement was a death rattle. There were no Presbyterians.

Church renewal will take place only when there is *doctrinal renewal* and a return to an emphasis on *doctrinal distinctives*. Often it is the very refusal to emphasize and teach distinctive that has invited rottenness and decay. If it is a matter of nearness, or general Bible teaching, or nominal affiliation, the troubled church will simply take its place alongside dozens of other churches offering no greater distinctive. As long as doctrine is not central, facilities, size, programs, revivals, and all other externals become the basis for the family's decision about which church to attend. In these respects, the troubled church cannot begin to compete.

Be not misled. The Baptists have built their churches on the doctrinal distinctive of professor's baptism by immersion — nothing more, and nothing less. Only when competing with one another have the Baptist churches emphasized externals, and then only in the later stages of local dominion.

Of all conservative churches, the Reformed have been quickest to retreat from distinctive in their attempts to capture part of the evangelical Arminian market. They have switched and not fought, and are now amazed to find that instead of bringing more members into the Reformed churches, they have opened up non-Reformed options for once-faithful members. After all, if there really is no difference, why should we waste our time with a struggling Arminian church when we can attend a thriving one? Good question.

*Doctrinal polarization* is critical. Not only must the "healthy" Reformed church promote it, but the troubled church must press it with a vengeance. The five points, the application of the law, covenant baptism, dominion post-millennialism — all these must be proclaimed clearly and relentlessly if there is to be hope for the troubled church. Rather than driving the saints away, the highlighting of distinctive surfaces the committed, the ones that build churches, face struggles, and never look back. The Reformed church needs these people in gen-

eral, and the church striving for renewal in particular.

*Cementing the Covenant*

*Polarization, relocation, reorganization* – we are talking about a completely new church, of course, and the essential abolition of the old. With basic changes come hopes of renewal. Many of the necessary ingredients are present, but, like the Rich Young Ruler, one thing is yet lacking: – *the institution of true covenant.*

Never has any institution committed to conquering the world with its ideology fallen so low in its demands upon its members. The practical out-working of the Covenant has been replaced by a *pietistic voluntarism* from start to finish. Attendance is voluntary, giving is voluntary, church work is voluntary, everything is voluntary and, thus, meritorious. The choir wants to be thanked (“Right after the announcements, Pastor, if possible”); the women who made that delicious church supper want to be thanked; the tireless (and tiresome) deacon board wants to be thanked. Thanks, all, for a wonderful church. You have your reward.

Conflicts within the membership are resolved, not by church courts operating under Covenantal law, with all parties submitting to the discipline, but by the retreat of the weaker party (to another congregation). Petty differences become far more important than the mission of the church. Like the political conservative, the member of the troubled church does not have the word “subordination” in his glossary.

Nowhere is the weakness of the institution of the Covenant more clearly expressed than in the membership “vows” of the local Reformed church (non-Reformed churches are omitted here, since they have no official covenant). To become a member, one must promise to “study the peace and purity of the church,” “be in submission to the Elders,” and “support the worship and work of the church to the best of your ability,” all of which may be summed up in one word: — *nothing*. The vows are purposely vague to avoid specific commitments. For who can decide, without particulars, whether one is studying the peace and purity of the church? How does the board determine who is supporting the worship and work of the church to the best of his ability? Church discipline is impossible without clear guidelines, and the troubled church has seen to it that no

guidelines are discernible. "No law, no offense." No offense, no discipline. Simple, but effective.

What are some non-negotiable specifics of the Covenant? Two examples are tithing and attendance. If the norm of member giving is three percent, God's church is being robbed of two-thirds-plus of its working capital. Adequate staff salaries, promotional literature, all forms of local outreach, building facilities: all are sacrificed when there is no compulsion to give. When giving is voluntary, giving becomes meritorious, a fact clearly attested by endless memorials on the premises — "The Minnie G. Dudley Memorial Sacrament Table," "The Walter L. Winsome Memorial Fellowship Hall," and "The Pearl B. Pious Memorial Pew."

As Peter Drucker points out in *The New Society*, business enterprise can not continue to exist without surplus (profit) because of the high cost of growing and changing with a dynamic market. So goes the church. Without an adequate financial base, the church can neither prosper in the present nor prepare for the future. God has provided the tithe for His work. It is a Covenant obligation. And seeing the tithe as a covenant *duty* removes merit. And so it should be. There is no super-erogation in the Protestant church.

Another Covenant obligation is attendance. Israel had to attend the feasts and had to sacrifice. Neither was voluntary. Where there are no people, there is no church. A minimum obligation of the Covenant should be consistent attendance. Even the Rotary Club puts the church to shame here.

But woe to the man who demands these two basics in the troubled church today! He is interfering with our free will! The reactionaries have lost sight of the character of the Covenant and the demands that God so clearly places upon His people. Troubled church leaders have not learned the lesson of the committed: — demand little, receive little; demand much, receive much. In spheres outside the institutional church, members will forfeit lives and fortunes for politics, business, and sports. Each demands and receives. The world understands that men respond to ultimate demands, and in response achieve momentous results. Yes, the children of darkness are wiser in their generation. Douglas Hyde's *Dedication and Leadership* is adequate testimony to the strength of the unilateral demand for performance.

The Covenant is not voluntary in any sense of the word.

Those who are sovereignly called must visibly enter into it by the command of God. Others are not fit to enter it. No ground is neutral, and no decisions concerning the Covenant are autonomous. Each prospective member is faced with a decision. Submit to the Covenant or deny it. To demure is to deny.

Tithing and attendance are only two of many Covenant obligations that must be recognized by the troubled church longing for renewal. No less important are Sabbath-keeping, restricted communion, and church discipline (the return to concrete spiritual sanctions). All work together in God's ordained plan for the dominion church of the Lord Jesus Christ. No particular maybe deleted without marring the whole, and the concept of the Covenant may not be deftly abstracted from its concrete particulars without making a mockery of the Word of God.

### *Reality in Renewal*

As long as the church in trouble demands so little in terms of time and money from its members, it can continue on almost indefinitely without making any real progress. Those members with pessimistic outlooks can see their dreams come true, as the church, unlike the state, withers away. It has served them well in the limited sphere they have graciously granted it. They have expected little from the church and have gotten even less.

It is not the current members who will suffer for the failure of the church, but the children and those afar off. With few exceptions, the children of members of troubled churches depart from the church, if not the faith itself. There really is no continuing covenant community, just a sterile remnant frozen in the history of the past three decades. For these terminal churches it is the last remnant.

The reality of renewal is that *everyone is to blame* – pastors, congregations, boards, and mission organizations. Preachers accept intolerable situations and tolerate them. Boards are self-satisfied searchers for the magic men who will put their churches back on the local map. Congregations sell the work short by refusing to invest, and missions boards . . . well, missions boards seem content to hold the same meetings, give the same speeches, and shift the same people from church to church, year after year.

The church needs more than a new face; it needs a new heart, a new soul, a new mind, and a new strength. And it will be hard for veteran supporters of desolate churches to accept the fact that the glory has departed. The younger members of the church learn the ways of their elders or depart for other congregations where the leadership is positive. The dedicated Christian is dynamic, not static. Without positive leadership, the committed will not stay; without the committed, the church expires. With the proper external and internal changes the church can keep her young and prosper. Without the necessary changes, the young see only hypocrisy in stagnation.

*Diagnosis in the Dock*

The indictment of the troubled church is merely an indictment of the church in general. The problems that have become acute in the decimated church are often present in germ form in churches less suspect. Eventually the erosion of doctrinal standards and practices reflects itself in the worship and work of the church. Demography and theology work together for the ill of the church without solid biblical moorings.

History is filled with stories of successful men, written by those men, purporting to reveal the secrets of their success. Each thinks he has discovered his own prosperity formula. But the physician hesitates to diagnose his own illness, and the lawyer says that the man who represents himself has a fool for a client. Discerning the ills of the church is, likewise, rarely the forte of its leadership. Self-reformation by the entrenched is a scarce commodity, and the leadership willing to take criticism to heart and transmit it into action is, indeed, a diamond in the rough. Ironically, leaderships of high quality are not normally found in distressed works.

The church leader, not the church member, must be the reformer. Whatever sort of board administers the affairs of the church can change pastors. Recalcitrant members of the congregation may be disciplined out. The leaders can change the location of the church, they can even create a new one to replace it. But unless they themselves change or replace themselves with men who will commit their time, lives, and fortunes to the work, little else of substance will be accomplished.

Pastors must wrestle with the central issue presented here:

Shall I commit myself and my family to the restoration of this work? Will my efforts, unlike the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, be a sacrifice without redemption? Am I willing to pay the price of an unequivocal stand on doctrinal issues? Will I go so far as to uproot three tares through the pure preaching of the Gospel to plant a single stalk of wheat?

Church members must ask themselves similar questions. Is the church worth renewing, or have I been hanging on all these years merely out of convenience? Am I willing to pay the price of Wednesday night bowling to support the work and worship of the Prayer Meeting and Bible study? Am I obligated?

None of these questions has neutral answers. They are being answered now in every floundering church across the country, regardless of affiliation. Daily the church diagnoses itself through its policies and actions (or inactions). Each diagnosis is in the dock. The Lord Jesus Christ will come to reward each one according to his works.

Time is running out for the American church. Either renewal will come through self-motivated reformation, or the Lord God will bring it, through persecution unknown in American history. The golden age of the 'Fifties is over, and we are now bearing the fruit of the existential 'Sixties and the decadent 'Seventies. There is no longer any time to argue about whether the choir robes will be red or black, or whether to have the cake sale instead of the car-wash.

Renewal is possible through transformation of doctrine, leadership, membership, and location. It will not come through extended prayer meetings and Youth Sundays.

The troubled church must repent of its institutional evil or die.

## REVIVALISM AND AMERICAN PROTESTANTISM

Peter J. Leithart

A heavy rain was falling outside Rev. Peter Thacher's Congregationalist church in Middleborough, Massachusetts, in mid-November, 1741. Inside, Thacher was to write later, many of those who had braved the chilling weather to hear his sermon were "melting." Only a few months before, Thacher, discouraged by the coldness of his congregation and fearful that God had forever turned His face from them, was planning to leave the people he had served for almost thirty-three years. In early 1741 William Tennent (1673-1745), a Presbyterian revivalist, had visited Middleborough. Thacher's heart had been stirred by the famous evangelist's message and his hope renewed by Tennent's observation that "Oft-times 'tis darkest a little before day." Though Tennent's presence had little immediate effect on the size of the Middleborough church, Thacher noted that "from that day my people were more inclined to hear." A few scattered 'awakenings' occurred during the summer and early autumn, and in November a spectacular revival began to stir. On November 23 seventy-six were "struck." In the few days following "above two hundred" were converted. By December a significant moral improvement was evident. The "drinking match," apparently popular before the revival, became a rarity. Thacher lectured twice a week, and people filled his house after public worship for further instruction. Almost 170 new members were added to the church in eighteen months. Middleborough, regarded by some as 'one of the deadest places for religion in the land,' was transformed into a "heaven on earth."<sup>1</sup>

The above episode is in no way unique. The same basic pattern was repeated in scores of congregations and towns throughout America during the Great Awakening. Indeed,

---

1. John Gillies, *Historical Collection of Accounts of Revival* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, [1754] 1981), pp. 401-402.

for more than one hundred years thereafter, the revival was the most important phenomenon in the religious life of America. Countless individuals had “life-changing experiences” in the revival setting. Churches and entire towns were transformed. The major revivalists – George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Grandison Finney, Dwight L. Moody, and others — were regarded as the most important men of their eras by many contemporaries. American politics was likewise deeply influenced by revivalism. The correlation of the American War of Independence, the rise of Jacksonian democracy, and early abolitionism with eruptions of religious enthusiasm is hardly coincidental. Moreover, social egalitarianism, manifested in the feminist and civil rights movements, was supported in its early stages by revivalism. Sentimentalism and anti-intellectualism, phenomena which still play a major role in American cultural life, were likewise molded in the crucible of the revival. In short, American culture, politics, and society, as well as American religion, are to a remarkable degree outworkings of revivalist presuppositions.<sup>2</sup>

The critical nature of this study should not obscure the fact that revivals, especially in the eighteenth century, made a very positive impact. The effects of revivals have been neither uniformly positive nor uniformly negative. Probably the most striking illustration of the paradoxical results of revivalism is in the area of education. Antipathy to “book learning” has rightly been traced to early revivals.<sup>3</sup> Yet, the First Great Awakening directly or indirectly inspired the founding of six colleges.<sup>4</sup> Fundamentalism, which grew out of revivalism, though often depicted as militantly anti-intellectual, has developed elaborate diagrams of the millennium that challenge the most careful students, and fundamentalist apologetics

---

2. A central presupposition of this study is that the political, economic, and social structures of a given nation are concrete manifestations of an underlying religious faith. Philosophy follows trends of religious thought; society, politics, and economics flow from philosophy. Ideas, religious ideas in particular, determine action.

3. See Richard Ho fstadter, *Anti-intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), ch. 3-5.

4. William Warren Sweet, *Revivalism in America* (New York: Abingdon, [1944] 1965), p. 147. The colleges were Pennsylvania, Princeton, Columbia, Rutgers, Brown, and Dartmouth. The Great Awakening also produced a grassroots interest in education.

have relied heavily on scientific evidence to defend inerrancy.<sup>5</sup> This ambivalent attitude toward the intellect is just one of the many paradoxes of revivalism, all of which grow out of a basic theological contradiction at the very core of revivalistic Christianity.

### *The Logic of Revivalism*<sup>6</sup>

Words are tools of dominion. Christ is said, for example, to defeat His enemies with the sword that comes out of His mouth (Rev. 19: 15). The power of words can be explained on two levels. In a theological sense, the words of the Gospel are empowered by the Holy Spirit. The church's success in subduing the earth through the preaching of the Gospel depends upon the correlative working of the Holy Spirit. On another level, words are powerful because they embody the basic faith of a culture. A civilization's language tells us much about the history and character of that civilization. Thus, in order to trace the history of an idea, it is useful to examine the language used to express that idea. Scripture must be our final reference point in the study of words, as it is in every other study. One must always examine the meaning of an idea or word in the light of its Biblical meaning.<sup>7</sup>

---

5. George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980). See also Gary North, "The Intellectual Schizophrenia of the New Christian Right," in James B. Jordan, ed., *The Failure of the American Baptist Culture*, Christianity and Civilization No. 1 (Tyler, TX: Geneva Ministries, 1982). North takes issue with the fundamentalist and evangelical reliance on "neutral" science.

6. Men normally act in logical accord with their religious presuppositions. The modern sneering at arguments which warn of the logical tendencies of ideas is based on an unbiblical, Freudian view of man. The assertion that "ideas have consequences" may seem a truism, but it is implicitly denied by many. Behavior conforms to faith and the history of ideas shows a growing logical consistency with pre-theoretical assumptions (see Matthew 13). Thus, to speak of the logic of revivalism is to predict its development. In the following discussion, I have benefitted greatly from Sidney Mead's admirably concise discussion of revivalism in *The Lively Experiment: The Shaping of Christianity in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), pp. 121-127. Ray R. Sutton argues along much the same lines in "The Baptist Failure," in Jordan, ed. *Failure*, *op. cit.*

7. See James B. Jordan, "Groping for Absolutes in Language and Music," (unpublished paper, n d.).

“Revive” and its various forms are used infrequently in Scripture. Where it is used, it means to make alive again.<sup>8</sup> It could be used to refer to regeneration, a work of the Holy Spirit (John 3:5). Revival is therefore a necessary prelude to a life of glorifying and enjoying God. On a cultural level, it is a prelude to reconstruction. When revival becomes revivalism, however, the implication is that regeneration is the sole aim of religion. The subjective state of man, rather than the glory of God, becomes the focus of the church, and a form of humanism is introduced into the heart of Christianity.

When man becomes the measure of all things, a single faculty of man tends to dominate. Thus, subjectivistic theology leads basically in two directions: rationalist and pietistic. In theology, revivalistic presuppositions lead to Arminianism or Pelagianism. The Incarnation is virtually denied for its irrationality or reduced to sentimentality. Eschatology becomes either a rationalist belief in the perfectibility of man, or a morbid fascination with death. Neoplatonic preoccupation with the other-worldly flourishes in this pietistic environment. Ethics becomes humanitarian, rather than theonomic, and, because ethics is concerned with man’s relationship to man, it takes precedence over doctrinal purity. Discussions of social ethics are cast in democratic, human rights terms. Finally, the church may become an association little different from the local country club, its ‘simple’ message limited to pious gush, and its mission sharply contracted. On the other hand, the church may immerse itself in the surrounding culture and adapt its message to current intellectual trends in order to remain relevant. The grim and confused landscape of American Protestantism, in short, whether we gaze left or right, has resulted from the logical extension of revivalist tendencies.

Prior to the rise of revivalistic Christianity, American religion, not only in New England, but in the Middle and Southern Colonies as well, was overwhelmingly Puritan in character. Puritanism was, in essence, a religious way of looking at life. It was not, however, religious in the sense of being

---

8. “In some of the examples of ‘revive’ in [the] Authorized] V[ersion] it is evident that the meaning is literally to come back to life from the dead. . . And, even when this is not the meaning, the word carries greater force than it now bears to us .” James Hastings, ed., *A Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1903), IV:266. ‘Revivalism’ and “revivalist” seem to have entered the language in the late eighteenth century.

other-worldly, but was a development of the tough and realistic theocentric world view of John Calving Salvation was seen by the Puritans as an act of Almighty God. Philosophically, Puritanism maintained the medieval concept of wholeness: The various spheres of life could be distinguished, but not separated. Puritanism harmonized the apparently conflicting concepts of reason and faith, piety and intellect, science and religion, God's sovereignty and human responsibility.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, the Puritans, especially in New England, strove to erect all institutions, relationships, and philosophies on the foundation of Biblical religion. Theological doctrines such as sovereignty, sin, salvation, and authority and specific Old Testament laws were not abstractions, but provided the basis for Puritan social, political, familial, as well as religious life and thought. Puritanism was, in short, the fullest development of the Calvinist wing of the Reformation. The unity of the Puritan world view began to break down in the late seventeenth century, illustrated by the Halfway covenant, the growing chasm between religion and civil government, a cooling of theocratic zeal, and the rise of Neoplatonism.<sup>11</sup>

---

9. Terrill Irwin Elniff describes Puritanism as "a spiritual view of life." Elniff, *The Guise of Every Graceless Heart: Human Autonomy in Puritan Thought and Experience* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1981), pp. 117-118.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 108.

11. See C. Gregg Singer, *A Theological Interpretation of American History* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, [1964] 1978), ch. 1. A great deal of very fine work has been done on the New England Puritans. The works of Perry Miller, especially *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, 1630-1650* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1933); *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962); and *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (New York: Macmillan, 1939), renewed scholarly interest in the American Puritans. Edmund S. Morgan, one of Miller's students, vividly portrays Puritan social life in *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England* (New York: Harper and Row, [1944] 1966). Morgan's *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press [1963] 1975) is a good discussion of Puritan ideas about church membership and their later adoption of the Halfway Covenant. George Lee Haskins, *Law and Authority in Early Massachusetts: A Study in Tradition and Design* (New York: Macmillan, 1960) is a fine study of Puritan political and legal thought and action. R. J. Rushdoony examines the influence of Neoplatonism on Puritanism in *The Flight from Humanity* (Fairfax, VA: Thobum Press, [1973] 1978). Three issues of the *Journal of Christian Reconstruction* deal with Puritanism's view of law, society, and progress (Winter 1978-79; Summer 1979; and Winter 1979-80).

This historical context goes far to explain the origins and nature of early American revivalism. Many historians have explained revivalism as a response to environmental, social, and economic factors. The frontier environment was certainly favorable to rugged individualism, but it hardly made revivalism inevitable. Social and economic factors tended to exaggerate religious enthusiasm. The revival of 1858 was linked even by participants to the panic of 1857. But revivals occurred across America, and were not confined to depressed or lower-class regions. In essence, revivalism was an outgrowth of a theological decline. The Great Awakening was, in fact, not a revival of Puritanism at all. Instead, it was an early phase in the revolutionary shift from a theocentric to an anthropocentric world view. It was not the earliest phase of this shift. Puritanism had been in decline for some time. But revivals increased the rate of change, producing something like a quantum jump from Puritanism to humanism.

Davenport has described in detail the similarities between primitive religious rites and American revivalism. The characteristics of primitivism include the primacy of appeals to emotion, the controlling influence of fear, and the manipulation of crowds.<sup>12</sup> Davenport, however, sees primitivism in evolutionary terms: Underdeveloped cultures exhibit primitive traits. In fact, however, history and the Bible indicate that "primitivism" is degeneracy, an indication of decline. Israel did not display primitive traits as a necessary part of its early development, but only when it had rejected the covenant (see 2 Kings 16:1-4). Revivalism, therefore, is the fruit of the decline of Puritanism, not of its renaissance.

It must not be thought, however, that revivalism was a consistent system, proposed as an alternative to Puritanism and passed as a unit from one generation to the next. Despite its clear inner logic, it was more a tendency than a system and was passed to succeeding generations of revivalists in a variety of ways. First, the internal logic of revivalism's subjectivistic presuppositions pushed many preachers, more or less unconsciously, to extend their assumptions to their logical limits. Second, revivalists adapted and sometimes entirely changed their theology and homiletics to achieve more spectacular

---

12, Frederick Morgan Davenport, *Primitive Traits in Religious Revivals* (New York: Macmillan, 1917), pp. 17-31, 217.

results. Jonathan Edwards's preaching of eternal damnation, Finney's new measures, Moody's pathos, and Billy Sunday's stimulating dramatizations all represent conscious efforts to increase productivity, that is, to win more converts.<sup>13</sup> Finally, revivalists borrowed directly from their predecessors. Finney read Edwards; Moody and Sunday read Finney. Revivalism produced theological change, but possibly more importantly, it created a culture in which more radical democratic and humanistic ideologies could take hold. The effect of revivalism was as much to popularize and support departures from Puritanism as to create them.

*The Great Awakening and its Aftermath*<sup>14</sup>

The first major outbreak of revivalism, known as the First Great Awakening, occurred during the first half of the eight-

---

13. Joseph Tracy wrote that revivalism's "continued regard for practical utility led some to embrace doctrines which they judged to be convenient, instead of doctrines which they had proved to be *true*; or more accurately, perhaps, to take their own opinion of the convenience of a doctrine, for proof of its truth." Tracy, *The Great Awakening: A History of the Revival of Religion in the Time of Edward-s and Whitefield* (Boston: Tappan and Dennet, 1842), p. 414.

The fact that revivalists adapted their theology to improve their productivity should not be construed as an indictment of their character, nor should it cast doubt on their faith. Many, including Edwards, White field, Moody, and others were very great men and many, including Beecher and Dwight, fought the blatant heresies of Unitarianism. Without doubt they believed they were serving the best interests of their listeners.

14. There is no complete modern treatment of the Great Awakening. Tracy's above-mentioned work is the standard; it is still useful because it relies heavily on original sources. *Sweet's* book is commendable for this same reason. Edwin Scott Gaustad, *The Great Awakening in New England* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957) is useful, but, like Tracy's, somewhat outdated. More recent surveys of the revival include Cedric Cowing, *The Great Awakening and the American Revolution: Colonial Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: Rand McNally, [1971] 1972) and Alan Heimert's introduction to *The Great Awakening: Documents Illustrating the Crisis and its Consequences* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967), coedited with Perry Miller. Heimert's interpretive *Religion and the American Mind from the Great Awakening to the Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966) is a provocative work that challenges some of the most cherished opinions of the relationship between the revival and the War of Independence. In addition to Heimert and Miller's collection of documents, Richard Bushman, *The*

eenth century. William Warren Sweet has identified three phases of this revival: Presbyterian, Baptist, and Methodist.<sup>15</sup> In its early stages the awakening generally retained the covenantal structure of Puritan Calvinism. In its later stages, the inner logic of revivalism led to the individualistic theology and piety of the Baptists and Methodists. The pattern of development for later revivals, thus, can be recognized even in the rather conservative context of the Great Awakening.

Preaching was the backbone of revivalistic Christianity. The preachers of the Great Awakening, having been educated in a system still informed by Puritanism, graphically depicted the justice and wrath of God in their sermons. Theodore Frelinghuysen (1691-1748), a Dutch Reformed revivalist in New Jersey, berated his listeners, calling them "impure swine, adulterers and whoremongers," and warned of "a fire hotter than that of Sodom and Gomorrah to all that burn in their lusts."<sup>16</sup> Samuel Davies (1723-1761), a Presbyterian, asked his congregation if they dared "go home this day with this additional guilt upon you, of disobeying a known command of the supreme Lord of heaven and earth? . . . this day repent. If you refuse to repent, let this conviction follow you home, and perpetually haunt you, that you have this day . . . under pretence of worshipping God, knowingly disobeyed the great gospel-command."<sup>17</sup> Jonathan Edwards's (1703-1758) famous "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," with its terrifying image of man as a spider suspended by a thin web over a hell of flames, was not uncharacteristic.<sup>18</sup> This is not to say that the doctrines of salvation were ignored. For Edwards the purpose of the revival was to restore the Reformation doctrine of

---

*Great Awakening: Documents on the Revival of Religion, 1740-1745* (New York: Atheneum, 1970) and J. M. Bumsted, *The Great Awakening: The Beginnings of Evangelical Pietism in America* (Waltham, Mass.: Blaisdell, 1970) are good collections of original documents. Darrett B. Rutman's compilation, *The Great Awakening: Event and Exegesis* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1970) has the added attraction of selections from major historians' interpretations of the era. Also available are numerous biographies of the leading revivalists and several regional monographs.

15. Sweet, pp. 36-39.

16. Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 49.

17. Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 69.

18. Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," *Anthology of American Literature*, ed. George M. McMichael (New York: Macmillan, 1974) I:242-256.

justification to its central place in Christian theology, and George Whitefield (1714-1770), the most popular preacher of the revival, was inclined to preach forgiveness rather than judgment. Sometimes, moreover, the feeling that the revivalists sought to produce was not fear, but ecstasy.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, the preaching was generally designed, in Edwards' words, to "fright people away from hell."<sup>20</sup> Output, expressed in terms of number of converts, was becoming the criterion by which sermons and preachers were judged.

The revivalists' emphasis on the results of preaching was a significant departure from the Puritan view. The Puritans had emphasized the reliability of a sermon's content rather than its effects. If men did not respond to a sermon, it was because the Spirit had not seen fit to use that particular sermon. Furthermore, Puritan preaching was emphatically rational. It aimed not so much to frighten as to reason men from hell. In Edwards's case, the shift was in part a result of his reading of John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690). Locke had replaced the Scholastic compartmentalization of the human mind with a wholistic theory. The whole being of man is involved in the process of understanding. Following Locke's psychology, Edwards "used common words, but words peculiarly rich in emotional and religious connotation . . . and delivered them so solemnly as to shock people."<sup>21</sup> In addition Locke's concept of the mind as a *tabula rasa* opened the way for conditioning. The openly Arminian Methodists were more obvious in their emphasis on psychology. John Wesley (1703-1791) recorded in his journal that many who had cried aloud during his sermons in England could not even remember the experience. Others remembered falling to the ground, but could not explain why they had done so. Some were gripped with fear, but could not describe what they feared.<sup>22</sup> In short, psychology replaced theology as the chief

---

19. Heimert, *Religion*, p. 4; Cowing, p. 60. Some historians have maintained, in fact, that Whitefield's theology and preaching were more characteristic of the revival than Edwards's.

20. Quoted in Sweet, p. 83.

21. Cowing, p. 51; Heimert and Miller, *Documents*, p. xxxix. Cowing argues that Edwards wanted "to shock his auditors out of old, stale associations."

22. Gillies, p. 315. See also R. J. Rushdoony, *Revolt Against Maturity: A Biblical Psychology of Man* (Fairfax, VA: Thobum, 1977), pp. 124-125. Wil-

topic of debate among Christian thinkers.<sup>23</sup>

Ideas concerning the very nature of religion underwent extensive revision in the wake of the new subjective emphasis of preaching. On the one hand, opponents of the revival solidified the rationalistic tendencies of their Puritan forefathers. Presbyterian Jonathan Dickinson (1688-1747), for instance, formulated in 1741 a rationalistic theology of regeneration. "God does no more in the conversion of a sinner," Dickinson wrote, "than to bring him to the right exercise of those rational powers with which he was born." Conversion is essentially "a spiritual Illumination" by which a man comes to "a right View of things upon his Mind" and is enabled "to act reasonably."<sup>24</sup> Edwards opposed this trend, maintaining that "The heart of true religion is holy affection." He believed that his congregation did "not so much need to have their heads stored, as to have their hearts touched."<sup>25</sup> Neither side of the debate viewed religion as a life-wide concern, as the Puritans had.

Edwards also opposed the Arminian tendencies of the rationalists and Edwards's followers, most notably Joseph Bellamy (1719-1790) and Samuel Hopkins (1721-1803), strove to maintain the Calvinistic doctrine of total inability.<sup>26</sup> The

---

liam Sargent quotes Ronald Knox as saying that Wesley imposed a new pattern on English Christianity by "identifying religion with a real or supposed experience." Sargent, *Battle for the Mind* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1957), p. 198.

23. Heimert and Miller, *Documents*, p. xxxix.

24. Dickinson, *Theology of the New Birth*, in Richard L. Bushman, ed., *Documents*, p. 78. Charles Chauncy, a New England Congregationalist who vehemently opposed the revival, believed that the will and the imagination should be controlled by reason, since man is essentially a rational creature. See Heimert and Miller, *Documents*, pp. xl-xli. It maybe necessary here to introduce a note of complexity. True, the revivalists (later called evangelical) stressed emotion and piety. It is self-evident that the rationalists emphasized reason. This distinction becomes blurred when one analyzes the thinking of later revivalists. Curious as it may seem, many nineteenth-century revivalists were more rationalistic than pietistic, Lyman Beecher and Timothy Dwight, for example. The religious situation in America was still more complicated, for many preachers were moderates, rejecting both evangelical and rationalist theology. In this paper, the divisions are simplified and emphasis is placed on the fundamental divisions within Calvinist groups. Still, the various strains of thought become confused, and confusing.

25. Quoted in *Sweet*, p. 30.

26. See Frank Hugh Foster, *A Genetic History of the New England Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1907); Sidney Mead, *Nathaniel Wil-*

Edwardsean or Consistent Calvinists, however, were unable to withstand the inexorable logic of revivalism. Though Edwards stood against Arminianism and strove to balance the objective and subjective elements of Christianity, in practice he had placed man's experience near the center of Christian theology. His disciples retrenched, but often reacted too strongly and leaned toward hyper-Calvinism. It was this tendency that antagonized Timothy Dwight (1752-1817). Dwight opposed the Hopkinsian tendency to emphasize the work of God to the virtual nullification of man's agency, and he fueled the revivals of the 1790's, known as the Second Great Awakening, with a "Calvinism" that minimized God's role in salvation.<sup>27</sup> Dwight's theology was systematized by Nathaniel Taylor (1786-1858), an heir of the Liberal "Calvinists" whose distinguishing feature was their emphasis on the rationality of man and religion.<sup>28</sup> Taylor began at a point precisely opposite that of the Edwardseans. He argued that, if man is punished for sin, then sin must be something he has freely chosen. If he had no choice, it is unjust for God to punish him. Salvation and damnation became contingent on man's decision.<sup>29</sup> Lyman Beecher (1775-1863) was equally forthright in his denial of Calvinism. Men are "entirely free and accountable for all the deeds done in the body" and "none who are not opposed to" God will be sent to hell.<sup>30</sup>

With Taylor and Beecher, "Calvinism" could scarcely be distinguished from Methodist Arminianism. It must be noted, however, that Taylor's Calvinism was a dialectical development from Edwards's.<sup>31</sup> Revivalism by its very nature

---

*liam Taylor, 1786-1858: A Connecticut Liberal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942); Joseph Haroutunian, *Piety Versus Moralism: The Passing of the New England Theology* (New York: Henry Holt, 1932).

27. Foster, p. 363; Mead, *Taylor*, pp. 47-48.

28. Heimert, *Religion*, p. 5; Mead, *Taylor*, p. 223.

29. Foster, p. 370; Mead, *Taylor*, p. 111. The crux of the dispute, Mead argues, was Taylor's and Dwight's demand that religion be rational. Mead, *Taylor*, p. 223. Marsden observes that following the Awakening, "Free will was virtually an American dogma." Marsden, *Fundamentalism*, p. 99.

30. Quoted in Bernard A. Weisberger, *They Gathered at the River: The Story of the Great Revivalists and Their Impact upon Religion in America* (New York: Octagon Books, [1958] 1979) p. 75.

31. Mead argues that Taylor was simply the heir of the Old Calvinist (Puritan) rationalism which continued virtually unaffected throughout the revival. Mead, *Taylor*, p. 101. It seems that Taylor's association with the

emphasized emotion and experience and the excesses of the Awakening produced a countervailing rationalism in its opponents. Taylor and Beecher, it is true, erred in their rationalism, but the Puritan balance between feelings and intellect reason and faith had already been upset by the first revival. The Great Awakening was the catalyst that broke down the already unstable Puritan theological system into its constituent parts and instigated the independent development of rationalist and pietistic traditions. It later became clear that beneath this dialectical relationship between rationalism and pietism was a basic agreement. Both rationalistic and pietistic Christianity are hybrids of Biblical religion and humanism.

In other areas as well, the first Awakening marked a watershed in the decline of Puritanism. The effect of Neoplatonic thought on Edwards was marked. In a personal journal, entitled *Images or Shadows of Divine Things*, Edwards recorded scores of observations on the topological meaning of natural phenomena. He distinguished between the "carnal," "more external and transitory" portion of the universe which was typical of the "more spiritual, perfect and durable part."<sup>32</sup> Similarly, in the Middle Colonies, Freylinghuysen and the Tennents encouraged an "existential indifference to the things of this world."<sup>33</sup> It is true that evangelical preaching and writing in the immediate prerevolutionary period informed churchgoers of the issues confronting the colonies and that some evangelical preachers actually fought in the war,<sup>34</sup> but Edwards and many of his followers downplayed the Puritan emphasis on political and social involvement. One of the results of the revival, as Niebuhr has intimated, was the

---

revivalism of Dwight and Beecher, his roots in post-Awakening New England, and the rise of a distinctly rationalist theology only after the Awakening suggest that his thinking was not unaffected by the revival. Foster implies by the very structure of his book that Hopkinsianism and Taylorism emerged from the same revivalistic roots, and Whitney Cross traces a line from Edwards through Taylor to Finney. Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1950), p. 27.

32. Edwards, *Images or Shadows of Divine Things*, ed. Perry Miller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), p. 27.

33. Heimert and Miller, *Documents*, p. xxii.

34. See Nathan O. Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty* (New Haven: Yale, 1979).

church's withdrawal from political comment.<sup>35</sup>

Antinomianism, encouraged by the concentrated fervor of the revival atmosphere and given philosophical justification by Neoplatonic denigration of the physical world, often accompanied revivals. Disorder and division followed Whitefield's trail.<sup>36</sup> New England's awakening was haunted by the memory of Joseph Hawley who cut his throat following a revival and urged others to follow his example.<sup>37</sup> Evangelical preachers continued to preach the terrors of the Law and the necessity for obedience, but the content of that law was vaguely defined. Hopkins defined holiness as "disinterested good will" toward "Being in general."<sup>38</sup> Antinomianism led to legalism: Revivalistic preachers replaced Biblical law with restrictions of their own. Thus, the moral reformation of a city was often illustrated by the absence of dancing and card-playing.<sup>39</sup> Edwards retained the optimistic eschatology of the Puritans,<sup>40</sup> but having severed it from Biblical law, he virtually denied its social relevance.

Antinomian revivalism shifted the basis for social theory from the theocratic and authoritarian Puritan emphasis to a democratic one. Democracy is a logical development of individualistic revivalism, for the concern of an individualistic culture is with the common man.<sup>41</sup> Edwards's egalitarian ten-

35. H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (Chicago: Willett, Clark & Company, 1937), p. 119.

36. Cowing, p. 63. Extravagant gestures, rending of clothes, and indecent familiarity with Christ were some of the abuses that occurred during Whitefield's revivals.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

38. Quoted in William G. McLaughlin, *Modern Revivalism: Charles Grandison Firing to Billy Graham* (New York: Ronald Press, 1959), p. 102; Heimert, *Religion*, pp. 133-136.

39. Philip Greven, *The Protestant Temperament: Patterns of Child-Rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America* (New York: New American Library, [1977] 1979), p. 145.

40. Heimert states that historical optimism was the Awakening's "most distinctive legacy." Heimert and Miller, *Documents*, p. xxiii. He expands this point in *Religion and the American Mind*, chapter 2, and links optimistic eschatology with the rise of American nationalism. Niebuhr asserts that the postmillennialism of the early nineteenth-century revivalists was the fruition of the Great Awakening's eschatological optimism. Niebuhr, p. 150.

41. Sweet, p. xii. Heimert states that "with the Great Awakening the 'will of the people' began its steady march to eventual supremacy. . . . What was awakened in 1740 was the spirit of American democracy." Heimert and

dencies were muted. In one sermon, for instance, he denounced rulers who are unashamed "to grind the faces of the poor, and screw their neighbours." Government was implicitly viewed as a restraint upon the rich and powerful, but as a support to the poor and humble.<sup>42</sup> Other evangelical preachers were more explicit, calling for "a condition of perfect *brotherhood*, as becomes beings of the same race, the offspring of one God."<sup>43</sup> Hopkins, following this strain of thought, was an early advocate of abolition.<sup>44</sup> On the other hand, the rationalists maintained a conservative social theory. Charles Chauncy defended as "unalterably right and just" that some should rule and others obey.<sup>45</sup> Even after the Second Great Awakening, rationalist revivalists such as Lyman Beecher were opposing abolitionism.<sup>46</sup> The egalitarianism of the evangelical justified in part their support for American Independence and the increasing assertion of women's rights.<sup>47</sup>

The tendencies of the Great Awakening did not develop fully in the eighteenth century. Theology was still in large measure Calvinistic; an act of God was still considered necessary for salvation. Despite the emotionalism and incipient anti-intellectualism of the revival, it produced a remarkable thirst for education among its converts. Despite their Neo-

---

Miller, *Documents*, p. ix. In *Religion and the American Mind*, Heimert describes Edwardsean thought as a "radical, even democratic, social and political ideology." Heimert, *Religion*, p. viii. One must be careful, however, not to make too much of Edwards's democratic leanings.

42. Quoted in Heimert, *Religion*, p. 302.

43. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 307.

44. Sweet, p. 154.

45. Heirner, *Religion*, p. 261.

46. Gilbert Barnes, *The Antislavery Impulse, 1830-1844* (New York: Appleton, 1933), p. 96.

47. For the relationship between religion and the Revolution, see Archie P. Jones, "The Christian Roots of the War for Independence: *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, Vol. III, no. 1, pp. 33-42. See also Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind*; Alice Baldwin, *The New England Clergy and the American Revolution* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1928); John Wingate Thornton, *The Pulpit of the American Revolution* (New York: Ben Franklin, 1970); Carl Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Sceptre: Transatlantic Faiths, Ideas, Personalities, and Politics, 1689-1775* (New York: Oxford, 1962). Barbara L. Eason concludes that feminism arose as Puritanism declined because there was no firm basis for submission to authority on revivalistic premises. Eason, *Women, Religion, and the Family: Revivalism as an Indicator of Social Change in Early New England* (Berkeley Ph.D. dissertation, 1975), p. 196.

platonian overtones, many evangelical preachers were deeply involved in the issues of the day. The democratic impulse affected church polity, and made inroads into political and social theory, but full egalitarianism was avoided. Absolute ethical standards were retained, though often spoken of in terms of natural, rather than divine law. The direct results of the Awakening were not as significant as the fact that it had created a climate ripe for error. Certainly, Puritanism, tottering on the edge of a precipice, had been given an impolite shove, while the revivalists who hastened its decline paraded themselves as its saviors. In general, however, the first revivals retained much of the older faith. By the time of Finney, sentimental Calvinists must have viewed the earlier revivals with more than a hint of nostalgia.

*Firing and Antebellum Revivalism*

“Religion,” Charles Finney (1792-1875) emphatically declared in 1835, “is the work of man. It is something for man to do. It consists in obeying God. It is man’s duty.”<sup>48</sup> A revival “is not a miracle, or dependent on a miracle, in any sense. It is a purely philosophical result of the right use of the constituted means.”<sup>49</sup> In fairness to Finney, it must be added that he was not always consistent with his central thesis. “God induces” men to obey and conversion is a complex event that involves the confluence of four forces: the minister, God, the truth, and the convert himself.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, Finney’s comments must be

---

48. Charles Grandison Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, ed. William G. McLaughlin (Cambridge: Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, [1835] 1960), p. 1. McLaughlin’s introduction to Finney’s *Lectures* is a superb summary of the revivalist’s thought. Other major works covering this phase of revivalism are William McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism*; Weisberger, *They Gathered at the River*; and Cross, *The Burned-Over District*. Weisberger’s work deals more extensively than the others with the revivals on the Kentucky frontier. Cross’s work is important because it gives a detailed picture of the effects of revivalism in a limited area. Charles C. Cole, *The Social Ideas of Northern Evangelists, 1826-1860* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954) is useful for its portrait of the democratic social ideas that inevitably accompany revivalism. An excellent account of the revivals of the 1840’s and 1850’s is Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (New York: Harper and Row, [1957] 1965).

49. Finney, p. 13.

50. *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 195.

viewed in their historical context. Like Dwight, Finney decried the hyper-Calvinist idea that “there is no connection of the means with the result.”<sup>51</sup> Still, having taken into account these qualifications, Finney’s “anthropocentric and individualistic” philosophy was openly hostile to Calvinism’s “theocentric and organic” system.<sup>52</sup> The chapter titles of Finney’s *Lectures on Revivalism* — “How to Promote a Revival” and “How to Preach the Gospel,” for instance — and sermon titles such as “Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts” (1831) indicate Finney’s Arminian emphasis on method.

Finney rode a wave of religious fervor to regional and national prominence in the mid-1820’s. In Western New York, where Finney began his preaching career, revivalism coincided with anti-Masonic agitation and the rise of various sects such as the Mormons. These factors, allied with distinctive social and economic patterns, helped to produce a religious “ultraism,” or extremism. Behavior of the most bizarre sort was commonplace in this region, which has come to be known as the “burned-over district.”<sup>53</sup> National trends, including geographic expansion, the rise of Jacksonian democracy, increasing technology, and the sense of manifest destiny combined to characterize this period as one of “restless ferment.”<sup>54</sup> Religious enthusiasm flourished in such an environment. Yet, historians generally neglect the intellectual origins of nineteenth-century revivalism. The social and cultural factors that contributed to the rise of Finney’s revivals were to some degree the result of earlier revivals. The sense of manifest destiny, to take but one example, was a secularization of the postmillennial eschatology of the first Awakening. Historians who attribute early nineteenth-century revivalism to social and cultural phenomena have, in other words, failed to trace the roots of these causal factors. Finney and his disciples, following the tradition begun by the first revival, represent a further step toward the total rejection of Puritanism.

The ultimate source of Finney’s thought was practice. He strove to articulate a theology that would be successful in con-

---

51. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

52. McLaughlin, “Introduction” to Finney’s *Lectures*, p. ix.

53. Cross, pp. 113-114.

54. Cole, p. 11. Weisberger also attributes the Finney revivals to social and economic factors and shows how revivalism from 1800 to 1920 closely resembled the larger patterns of American society. Weisberger, pp. 266-274.

verting sinners.<sup>55</sup> His emphasis, therefore, was psychological rather than theological. In his *Lectures* Finney claimed to have discovered certain laws of the mind, a knowledge of which would enable ministers to promote revivals more systematically.<sup>56</sup> Finney encouraged self-examination for its efficacy in preparing the mind for the hearing of the Word. Unless each individual prepares himself for worship, religion will become mechanical and little "deep heart-work" will be accomplished.<sup>57</sup> Preaching, moreover, should be practical, direct, uncontroversial, conversational. "A prime object" of preaching ought to be the conveying of the impression "that sinners are expected to repent NOW."<sup>58</sup> Finney stressed to preachers that "The *manner* of saying it is almost every thing," and cited a case of a young preacher whose "manner of saying some things I have known to move the feelings of a whole congregation."<sup>59</sup> The key was to bring the listener to "the moment he thinks he is willing to do any thing."<sup>60</sup> Various "new measures," including the anxious meeting, the protracted meeting, and the anxious bench were especially effective in bringing sinners to that moment.<sup>61</sup>

Finney's theology was a mass of contradictions. Revival was a work of man, but man must be assisted by God. Man has free choice; his sin is merely a prejudice toward evil that can be entirely overcome. Near the end of his life, however, Finney admitted he had "laid . . . too much stress upon the natural ability of sinners to the neglect of showing them the nature and extent of their dependence upon the grace of God."<sup>62</sup> He came to the rationalistic conclusion that, if God commanded man to do something, man had the power to do it, yet he tended to speak of conversion as an emotional experience. Finney's theology was unsystematic except in its thorough rejection of Calvinism, and his effect upon American theology was basically to shatter the Taylorite and Beecherite pretensions to Calvinism. Open Arminianism was losing its stigma.

---

55. Cross, p. 160.

56. McLaughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, p. 86.

57. Finney, p. 50. See ch. III.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 206.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 212.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 268.

61. *Ibid.*, ch. XIV.

62. McLaughlin, "Introduction: p. 1.

Finney's preaching and theology maintained to some extent the Puritan emphasis on the justice and wrath of God against sin. Trained as a lawyer, Finney tended to think in rigid terms,<sup>63</sup> but the preachers who followed Finney were more sentimentally inclined. Henry Ward Beecher (1813-1887), the most popular preacher of his day, "made conscience and fear secondary." In one sermon, Beecher told a whimsical tale of a man before the Judgment Throne. God condemns the man to hell, but the man objects that he loves Him, and God, moved by the sincerity of the man's confession, allows him to enter heaven.<sup>64</sup> Formal theology was also sentimentalized. In Hosea Ballou's *Treatise on the Atonement*, human feeling became the supreme value and in Noah Worcester's work on the same subject, the atonement, instead of satisfying God's demand for justice, had as its primary purpose a change in man's heart.<sup>65</sup> The thought of Horace Bushnell (1802-1876), whose *Discourses on Christian Nurture* defended the idea that "the child is to grow up a Christian and never know himself as being otherwise,"<sup>66</sup> was the culmination of a number of streams of religious thought. His notions provided a needed corrective to revivalism's exclusive concern with spectacular conversion.<sup>66</sup> In Bushnell's doctrine of the atonement, however, a rationalistic reemphasis on the supernatural was set in uneasy union with a sentimental, almost feminine Christology. Christ is a fellow-traveler with man, at best, an example. As Ann Douglas observes, in Bushnell conversion was more an acceptance of self than of God.<sup>67</sup> While not all of these men were revivalists themselves, their thought was based on the same subjecti-

---

63. McLaughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, p. 90.

64. Weisberger, p. 170.

65. Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), pp. 124-127. In Worcester's scheme, Douglas argues "God is no longer acting out his own drama, but man's." Douglas stresses sources for this sentimentalism other than revivalism, such as disestablishment of the clergy and popular literature, but acknowledges that it was essentially a rejection of Calvinism. Douglas, pp. 6-13.

66. McLaughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, pp. 150-152. Bushnell must be classed with the revivalists, despite his contention that the business of religion was not simply to convert men. His avowed purpose was "to establish a higher and more solid confidence in revivals." McLaughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, p. 150. Moreover, he is a product of revivalism in his subjective emphasis on religious experience. See Cole, pp. 46-51.

67. Douglas, pp. 130, 140.

vistic assumptions which revivalism encouraged. Moreover, they were historically linked with revivalism because revivalism was the major theological and ecclesiastical issue among all Protestant churches. Nearly all theological innovations of this period arose in support of or opposition to revivalism.

The revivalism of the 1820's and 1830's maintained the eschatological optimism of the Great Awakening. In fact, the scope of their vision broadened: The objective of the revival was less to save individual sinners than to save the world.<sup>68</sup> Finney believed that through the gradual spread of the Gospel, the world would eventually reach a state of perfection. Before Christ returned to establish His kingdom fully, there would be an age of universal peace and prosperity.<sup>69</sup> Bushnell likewise awaited a future age of great prosperity.<sup>70</sup> Increasingly, the pietistic strain of the revivals expressed itself in a heaven- and death-oriented eschatology, and William Miller's chiliasm gained some following.<sup>71</sup> But the predominant eschatology before the Civil War was postmillennialism. As one church leader put it in a letter to Finney, "I want to see our State evangelized." He hoped that the state of New York "in its physical, political, moral, commercial and pecuniary resources [w]ould come over to the Lord's side."<sup>72</sup>

The idea that the Gospel, and hence the preacher, could and should speak to all of life, a leftover of the theocentric world view of Puritanism, was held by the revivalists. Finney wrote that a minister's education should be "exclusively theological" in the sense that all disciplines should be studied "in connection with theology."<sup>73</sup> Albert Barnes (1798-1870), a Presbyterian, claimed that "Every subject, whether of business or of morals, comes fairly within the province of the pulpit."<sup>74</sup> More and more, however, the churches advocating a broad application of religious principles were those that had strayed from orthodoxy. On their humanistic presuppositions

68. Cole, p. 77. Douglas writes that antebellum Christianity tended to be either pre- or postmillennial. Douglas, p. 221.

69. McLaughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, p. 105.

70. Cole, p. 232.

71. See Douglas, ch. 6; Cross, ch. 17. Miller predicted that Christ would return to earth around 1843.

72. Quoted in Cole, p. 14.

73. Finney, p. 218.

74. Quoted in Cole, p. 237.

and having denied the validity of Biblical Law, they were unable to avoid the pitfalls of antinomianism and legalism. Few within revivalistic circles approached the antinomianism of John Humphrey Noyes (1811-1886), but the complex marriages and communism of Noyes's Oneida experiment represent "the logical absolute of ultraist assumption."<sup>75</sup> Finney's antinomianism led in the other direction, not toward license, but toward legalism. He asserted that sanctification was simply an "increase in a spirit of conformity to the will of God" which manifested itself in an increasing attachment to God and increasing obedience, reverence, love, humility, delight in fellowship and abhorrence of sin.<sup>76</sup> On the surface, this seems little different from Puritanism. But Finney was also an advocate of a form of perfectionism. Though Finney's perfectionism is difficult to define, and though it was at times viewed as perfect obedience to the Law of God, it was generally defined in terms of an experience of "the fulness of the love of Christ."<sup>77</sup> The vagueness of this concept is significant, for it indicates that perfection was no longer measured by the Creator's standard, but rather by the subjective emotional state of the creature.

Legalism combined with passionate optimism in the social thought of the revivalists. Revivalistic social action involves a fundamental paradox: Revivals are aimed at individuals, but in order to reform society, organization and cooperation must occur. Finney himself largely followed the logic of individualism. In answer to abolitionists and temperance agitators, Finney asserted that all concerns must be secondary to the promotion of revivals.<sup>78</sup> Other revivalists threw themselves into numerous reform movements. Their subjective ethical standard led logically to legalism. Theaters, consumption of alcohol, dancing and similar amusements were targeted for special attack. These distractions were no doubt abused, but their summary condemnation lacks scriptural support.<sup>79</sup> The

---

75. Cross, p. 249. Noyes believed that a new age of "revivalism and socialism, harmonized and working together for the Kingdom of Heaven" was approaching. Smith, p. 162.

76. Finney, pp. 448, 450-457.

77. Smith, pp. 104-111.

78. McLaughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, p. 107; Cross, p. 206.

79. Cole, ch. 6; Cross, pp. 130ff. Indeed, drinking and dancing are sometimes expressly commanded in Scripture. See Ps. 149:3; 150:4; 1 Tim. 5:23.

temperance movement in the burned-over district spread rapidly during the early 1830's. From 1830 to 1833, according to the temperance reformers, 133 of 292 distilleries in one area were closed.<sup>80</sup> Even the temperance movement, however, was used by many to promote revivals. According to the *Rochester Observer*, temperance agitation was nothing more than another of revivalism's "new measures."<sup>81</sup>

When Finney did grapple with contemporary issues, his perspective was democratic. In 1835 he was elected to one of the vice presidencies of the Ohio Antislavery Society and in 1839 submitted nine resolutions to that body concerning abolition. He began his second resolution with the assertion that "whatever is contrary to the law of God, is not law." The Constitution of Ohio, he continued, recognized the axiom that "no human enactment can bend the conscience, or set aside our obligations to God." So far, so good. In further defining that axiom, however, Finney stated that "rights conferred by our Creator as inalienable can never be cancelled or set aside by human enactments." The essence of law, Finney seems to imply, is not justice, but the protection of the rights of man.<sup>82</sup> Social egalitarianism took another form in 1848 at Seneca Falls, New York, where a Declaration of the Rights of Women was formulated.<sup>83</sup> It is highly significant that these two forms of egalitarianism found their strongest early support in regions that had been deeply affected by revivalism and among men who had modified or rejected Calvinism.<sup>84</sup> Lyman Beecher's writings on economics, moreover, show a clear class consciousness and an orientation toward democ-

---

80. Cross, p. 214. Consideration of the source of this data leads one to doubt their accuracy. In spite of the exaggeration, it cannot be denied that the movement had some impact.

81. Cross, p. 169.

82. Quoted in Cole, pp. 209-210. See David Chilton, *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, [1981] 1985), pp. 59-66 for a biblical discussion of slavery. For an enlightening treatment of the pitfalls of human rights theory, see T. Robert Ingram, *What's Wrong with Human Rights?* (Houston, TX: St. Thomas Press, 1978). Despite the radical implications of Finney's assumptions, he was inconsistent in their application. He had once been a member of the New York Anti-Slavery Society, but dropped out when the opposition to abolitionism became violent. McLaughlin, *Mod-m Revivalism*, p. 109.

83. Cross, p. 237.

84. Cole, p. 217.

ratization. "History," Beecher wrote, "teaches us that in all past time the earth has been owned, and knowledge and power have been monopolized, by the few." Beecher was no utopian. Freedom of opportunity alone would achieve a democratization of land. 85 Nevertheless, the egalitarian nature of his goal is noteworthy. Thus, in social, political, and economic affairs, many revivalists, even rationalistic revivalists like Beecher, spoke as democrats. Revivalism in the early nineteenth century was well suited indeed to the era of Jacksonian Democracy. 86

Less radical clergymen contended themselves with speaking on vaguely defined personal and domestic matters and preaching the "simple" gospel. By the mid-nineteenth century, Ann Douglas comments, the Protestant minister was the only professional who did not have to master a body of knowledge.<sup>87</sup> The anti-intellectualism and simplification of theology that was implicit in the First Great Awakening developed more fully in Finney. He had little use for seminary education, claiming that young ministers graduated from seminary "with hearts as hard as the college walls ." But his greatest complaint was that seminary graduates did not know how to use the knowledge they acquired. Their ministries were unproductive. Despite his criticism of education, Finney was sometimes accused of being an "intellectualist" and later became a university president.<sup>88</sup> On this issue, as on most others, Finney stood midway between the rationalists and the enthusiasts. The same could not be said of Peter Cartwright (1785-1872), a Methodist itinerant who revelled in the fact that "illiterate Methodist preachers set the world on fire" while other denominations "were lighting their matches ."<sup>89</sup> He feared Methodism's growing interest in education. Other denominations had experimented with an educated ministry

---

85. Cole, pp. 174-175.

86. Cross point out that "ultraism and Jacksonian Democracy rose and fell together." Cross, p. 271. And Weisberger notes that revivalism was a part of "freedom's ferment." Contrary to the conservative intentions of its earliest advocates, revivalism allied itself with nineteenth-century progressivism. Weisberger, p. 78. Mead argues that in fact democracy itself became the object of veneration. Mead, *The Lively Experiment*, pp. 67-68.

87. Douglas, pp. 165-168.

88. Hofstadter, pp. 93-94.

89. Quoted in Douglas, p. 37.

“and they have proved a perfect failure.” Like Finney, he criticized educated ministers for their low productivity. “What has a learned ministry done for the world?” he asked. 90

After 1850 the revival was “The cutting edge of American Christianity . . . adopted and promoted in one form or another by major segments of all denominations .”<sup>91</sup> The revivals of the 1840’s and 1850’s brought the trends of the earlier revivals — an emphasis on ethics over doctrine, Arminianism, and interdenominational fellowship — to a climax.<sup>92</sup> In some cases, the individualistic emphasis of revivalism did lead to a pietistic faith, but the distinguishing feature of American Protestantism was its social consciousness. Motivated by a vigorous postmillennial eschatology and perfectionism, American Christians worked for reform of labor and the elimination of the liquor traffic, slum housing, and racial conflict.<sup>93</sup> “Liberal” revivalists sought to bring all laws into harmony with Biblical Law, but defined the Law of God in terms of human rights.<sup>94</sup> Radical abolitionism, which had been dormant during the 1840’s, revived after 1850 under the cooperative leadership of evangelical and Unitarians and pushed the nation to the brink of war.<sup>95</sup> It was in this charged atmosphere that the social gospel was born.<sup>96</sup>

---

90. Quoted in Hofstadter, pp. 102-103.

91. Smith, p. 45.

92. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

93. *Ibid.*, pp. 148-151.

94. William Hosmer explicitly identified the Law of God with human rights: “The fact that a law is constitutional amounts to nothing, unless it is also pure; it must harmonize with the law of God, or be set at naught by all upright men. . . . When the fundamental law of the land is proved to be a conspiracy against human rights, law ceases to be law, and becomes a wanton outrage on society.” Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 206.

95. *Ibid.*, p. 204. It was in part the evangelical and Unitarian demand for an immediate solution to the slavery question and their heightened agitation that precluded the possibility of a peaceful settlement. For a discussion of the Unitarian background of abolitionism, see Rushdoony, *The Nature of the American System* (Fairfax, VA: Thoburn, [1964] 1978), pp. 49ff. and 91ff.

96. Smith, chapters 10 and 13. C. Gregg Singer notes that the theological systems of Taylor, Bushnell, and Finney provided the immediate background for the rise of the social gospel. Singer, p. 149. He locates the root of the problem in the “latent Pelagian tendencies” of these theologians. McLaughlin maintains, on the other hand, that it is futile to search for the roots of social Christianity in revivalism. McLaughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, p. 526.

Throughout the nineteenth century a *via media* between rationalism and pietism was forged by the Princeton theologians. Though often accused of rationalistic tendencies themselves, these men recognized the validity and necessity of "religious affection" and attempted to ground experiential religion on the solid foundation of revelation. Archibald Alexander (1772-1851), who had encountered revivalism early in his life, recognized the good and bad aspects of the revival. Without a foundation of Christian truth, one's experience could not be Christian. "Every thought, motive, impulse and emotion" must "be brought to this touchstone," the Word of God.<sup>97</sup> Alexander criticized historic Presbyterianism for its tendency to divorce theology and experience and held that the subjective element of religion was not inherently inferior to the objective. Indeed, at times piety can correct wrong theology.<sup>98</sup> Later Princetonians maintained this same balance. Though Charles Hedge (1797-1878) tended toward rationalism in his *Systematic Theology*, he insisted that feelings and creed were complementary.<sup>99</sup> Hedge judged the validity of revivals by the doctrines preached, the nature of the conversion experience, and the change in the converts' lifestyle.<sup>100</sup> Benjamin Warfield (1851-1921), the last of the great Princeton theologians, recognized that rationalism and mysticism were of the same genus but, judging from his definition of religion as "dependence on God," apparently saw mysticism as the lesser evil.<sup>101</sup> Though the emphases of these three theologians differed as a result of different historical circumstances, they produced a remarkably consistent and well-balanced alternative to the existing condition of American Christianity.<sup>102</sup> Unfortunately, the voices of the Princetonians tended to be as voices crying in the wilderness. After the Civil War, most American Protestants were listening instead to the voices of revivalist Dwight L. Moody and his musical director, Ira Sankey.

---

97. Quoted in W. Andrew Hofferker, *Piety and the Princeton Theologians: Archibald Alexander, Charles Hedge, and Benjamin Warfield* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1981), p. 24. Hofferker demonstrates also that personal piety was a major concern of the Princeton theologians.

98. *Ibid.*, pp. 25, 39.

99. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

100. *Ibid.*, p. 72.

101. *Ibid.*, pp. 126, 111.

102. *Ibid.*, p. 155.

*Revivalism from Moody to Sunday*

After the Civil War a large segment of American evangelicalism began to retreat from its social activism. The origins of this reversal may be partly attributed to the impact of the war itself. The perfectionistic, postmillennial social thought and action of antebellum revivalists was at least partly responsible for the bloody conflict of the '60's and postbellum revivalists hoped to avoid that path. The rise of Darwinism and liberal social Christianity, moreover, produced a fundamentalist reaction. In order to distance themselves from the social gospelers, many fundamentalists, particularly in the early decades of the twentieth century, tended to shun any social involvement.<sup>103</sup> At a deeper level, the retreat from social action was a manifestation of the inner logic of revivalism. Moody and other revivalists of this period were cutting themselves off emphatically from the Puritan roots of American Protestantism.

Dwight Lyman Moody (1837-1899) was the most important evangelist — some would say the most important man — of the postwar period. According to Weisberger's interpretation, Moody brought revivalism into the Age of Grant, an urban, industrial, materialistic age.<sup>104</sup> Moody's revivals made use of an impressive public relations machinery. Prior to Moody's arrival in a city, advertisements were displayed on broadsides and in newspapers, and announcements were made in churches. Moody often drew upon the resources of local businessmen, and sometimes gained the financial backing of such nationally renowned magnates as J. P. Morgan and Cornelius Vanderbilt H. For the London campaign alone the expenses totalled \$140,000.<sup>105</sup> Billy Sunday (1862-1935), whose revivals

---

103. Marsden, pp. 85-91. McLaughlin's *Modern Revivalism* and Weisberger's *They Gathered at the River* both present excellent surveys of the postwar revivals. There are, moreover, many biographies of Moody and Sunday, many of them in a hagiographic mold. The best study of Sunday is McLaughlin, *Billy Sunday Was His Real Name* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955). James F. Findlay, Jr., *Dwight L. Moody: American Evangelist, 1837-1899* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969) is a sympathetic, yet scholarly study of Moody's life and thought. Marsden's *Fundamentalism is* unsurpassed as a study of the fundamentalist offshoot of revivalistic religion.

104. Weisberger, p. 270.

105. McLaughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, chapter 5; Hofstadter, p. 110. The expenses for the London campaign were unusually high.

flourished in the first two decades of the twentieth century, became a millionaire, defending his success with the famous retort that he earned only "two dollars a soul."<sup>106</sup> Post-Civil War revivalism was, as William McLaughlin has said, big business.<sup>107</sup>

Moody's techniques conformed to the postwar cultural environment. While Finney had emphasized the moral government and the justice of God, Moody dwelt almost exclusively on the love of God. Moody's sentimental preaching was calculated to cause no discomfort. His sermons constantly repeated a single simple question: "Where will you spend eternity?"<sup>108</sup> Also like Finney, Moody believed that sermons should be parabolic. Moody's sermons were full of sentimental illustrations designed to bring his listeners to an emotional high. Tragic stories of infant deaths were used alongside paraphrases of Biblical stories.<sup>109</sup> By the time of Billy Sunday, revivalists, reacting to a decline in respectability, were ready to do almost anything to get results. The athletic Sunday, a former professional baseball player, preached a "muscular" brand of Christianity. His tone was militant, often bordering on the irreverent. In one sermon he stated that tangling with Jesus "was no dough-faced, lick-spittle proposition" because "Jesus was the greatest scrapper that ever lived."<sup>110</sup> His defiant tone and breathtaking pulpit antics brought revivalism from the general realm of big business to the specific realm of entertainment.<sup>111</sup>

Moody's most innovative and successful tool was his use of hymns. Finney had recognized that music could put his listeners into a frame of mind conducive to the emotional experience of conversion, and Moody institutionalized Finney's insight by employing a fulltime song leader, Ira D. Sankey (1840-1908). The sentimental lyrics and comforting tone of Sankey's hymns complemented the pathos of Moody's sermons. In late nineteenth-century hymns, refuge and retreat

---

106. Quoted in Hofstadter, p. 115.

107. McLaughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, p. 166.

108. *Ibid.*, pp. 248-250, 244-245.

109. *Ibid.*, pp. 239-240; Findlay, p. 224.

110. Quoted in Hofstadter, p. 116; McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, p. 445.

111. Weisberger writes that with Sunday revivalism "put on the trappings of vaudeville." Weisberger, p. 219.

were emphasized. Men were depicted as victims of sin, rather than as rebels against God. Jesus was portrayed as passive, and submission to Him was depicted in almost blasphemously intimate language. Surrender, emotion, and passivity characterized the Savior and His people. The church, with the notable exception of "Onward, Christian Soldiers,"<sup>112</sup> was depicted as defensive, apparently unable to escape the dogged pursuit of the gates of hell, waiting to be raptured from certain catastrophe.<sup>113</sup> This pietistic tone was coupled with a theological simplicity in such songs as "Free from the law, oh, happy condition."<sup>114</sup> Sunday's innovation in this area was predictable: Jazz replaced traditional hymnology in early twentieth-century revivals.<sup>115</sup>

When asked about his theology, Moody replied, "My theology! I didn't know I had any."<sup>116</sup> A survey of Moody's thought reveals that this assessment was not inaccurate. His writings and sermons lack so fundamental an element as a definition of faith.<sup>117</sup> In practice, Moody's theology was openly Arminian. The doctrines of election and total depravity were nonsensical. He reduced nearly 2000 years of Christian theology to a simple formula: All men can obtain eternal life with God simply by believing the Biblical account of Christ's substitutionary atonement. The individual had only to decide that he would believe. Moody's revivals became, in McLaughlin's appropriate phrase, "electioneering for God's party."<sup>118</sup> Despite his shortcomings, Moody held the Bible in high esteem. Criticizing those who "get their religious food by ecclesiastical spoon-feeding," he exhorted his listeners to "Take, read, feed on the whole word of God" and warned them not to "throw this and that passage in the book aside."

112. By the Anglican Sabine Baring-Gould, who was surely no revivalist!

113. Sandra S. Sizer, *Gospel Hymns and Social Religion* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), pp. 29-41.

114. Quoted in McLaughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, p. 237.

115. *Ibid.*, p. 422; *Billy Sunday*, p. 83.

116. Quoted in Hofstadter, p. 108.

117. Findlay, p. 227.

118. McLaughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, p. 248. Marsden includes a picture of an undated Moody Bible Institute tract in the format of a ballot. God has cast His vote for man's salvation, Satan against, and man is given the deciding vote. Marsden, p. 100.

The Bible is God's Word and must not be tampered with.<sup>119</sup> At times, moreover, Moody asserted that salvation was a work of God.<sup>120</sup> At best, Moody's theology was unsystematic. His emphasis was not theology, but technique.

Many less popular revivalists followed Moody's example. B. Fay Mills, for instance, made the decision card a standard item in the revivalist's kit.<sup>121</sup> Others, like Sam P. Jones, reacted against the pietistic sentimentality of Moody's revivalism. Jones declared that mere belief in Christ's death for sinners "doesn't amount to much" because "When you come into heaven your entering depends upon what you've been doing down there; there's nothing said about the blood of Christ."<sup>122</sup>

Sunday's theology differed from Moody's only in tone. Whereas the businesslike Moody used a soft-sell method, Sunday employed aggressive hard-sell techniques. "Don't you feel ashamed?" he asked apathetic churchgoers. "You are robbing God when you spend time doing something that don't [sic] amount to anything when you might do something for Christ."<sup>123</sup> Like Moody, however, his focus was on the choice of the sinner: "You are going to live forever in heaven or you are going to live forever in hell. There's no other place — just the two. It is for you to decide."<sup>124</sup>

At the other end of the theological spectrum, the social gospel, which peaked during the same decades as Sunday's revivalism, focused on the doctrine of the kingdom and looked forward to the utopian consummation of the kingdom of God. The leaders of the movement held to no unified ideology; instead, the movement was thoroughly oriented toward action. Concern for the plight of the workingman and for injustice were its unifying elements.<sup>125</sup> Some social gospelers, notably Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918), sought to give their move-

---

119. Quoted in Findlay, p. 258.

120. Moody states, for example, that "You are not to try to serve God until you are born of God, until you are born again, born from above . . . born of the spirit ." Quoted in Weisberger, p. 224. See McLaughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, pp. 248-249.

121. McLaughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, p. 334.

122. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 291.

123. Quoted in McLaughlin, *Billy Sunday*, p. 187.

124. Quoted in McLaughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, p. 409.

125. Winthrop S. Hudson, *Religion in America* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), pp. 310-315.

ment a theological foundation and the doctrine of the kingdom became the hinge of the theology of social Christianity. In order to maintain a relevant Christian vision, the kingdom must be a dynamic force, molding and being molded by the society in which it exists. <sup>126</sup> Man “must reconstruct [his] moral and religious synthesis whenever it passes from one era to another.” The Gospel is “one and immutable,” yet it also “must be the highest expression of the moral and religious truths” in every age. <sup>127</sup>

In keeping with the critical spirit of the age, social gospelers were skeptical concerning fundamental Christian doctrines. Christ, according to Washington Gladden (1836-1918), could not be understood until the ancient dualism between God and man is eradicated: “We have got rid of the dualism which insists on putting humanity and deity into two separate categories.” Gladden’s Christology is implicitly statist. <sup>128</sup> Thus, the state was described in a rather mild American Economic Association statement, to which Gladden contributed, as ‘an agency whose positive assistance is one of the indispensable conditions of human progress.’<sup>129</sup> Rauschenbusch was more consistent and honest, claiming explicitly that the highest expression of the kingdom of God would be socialism. <sup>130</sup>

By 1908 the Methodist Episcopal Church had composed and adopted a “Social Creed” which pledged the denomination’s commitment to defend the “rights of men, women, children, youth and the aging” and in particular enumerated the rights to work, to own property, to bargain collectively, and to be free of economic and social distress as moral imperatives. This creed was later adopted by the Federal Council of Churches. <sup>131</sup> Labor conditions, racial strife, women’s rights,

---

126. Robert T. Handy, *The Social Gospel in America, 1870-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 3, 10.

127. Rauschenbusch, “The New Evangelism,” in Handy, p. 324.

128. Gladden, “The Incarnation,” in Handy, p. 164. See Rushdoony, *Foundations of Social Order: Studies in the Creeds and Councils of the Early Church* (Fairfax, VA: Thoburn, [1968] 1978) for a study of the social consequences of heretical beliefs like Gladden’s.

129. Quoted in Handy, p. 179.

130. Singer, p. 160.

131. Hudson, p. 314. My copy of the Social Creed of the Churches is a mimeographed sheet.

poverty, and a host of other social concerns would be resolved by legislative and administrative action. Social gospelers stressed, it must be added, that the church and individual Christians bear responsibility to alleviate injustice and poverty, but their assumptions were statist, as the subsequent history of liberal Christianity in America indicates. The social gospel movement was not entirely negative in its impact. It rightly stressed the wholeness of man and the dynamic nature of the kingdom of God, but, because its foundations were humanistic to the core, its effects on American Christianity have been largely evil.

Fundamentalism, which originated from the revivalism of Moody and Sunday, stood fast against the social gospel. Fundamentalism was distinguished theologically by its unwavering stance for inerrancy and its premillennial eschatology. Socially, it may be defined as a reaction to the influence of modernism and Darwinism in American life. From the outset, therefore, it was a defensive movement.<sup>132</sup> Pessimistic premillennialism colored the fundamentalist world view. The world is growing worse and worse and the only hope is for an imminent rapture. In such a system, the only reasonable role for the church is to save individual souls. Reconstruction of society is a utopian, or, worse, a liberal dream.<sup>133</sup>

Fundamentalism, however, must not be judged too hastily. While it is true that Moody himself generally concentrated on winning souls, he was not unaware of the social problems of his day. He was especially concerned with the condition of the working poor. Moody's lieutenants, moreover, were more socially active than their leader. But, in the final analysis, for

---

132. Marsden, p. 6. Marsden points out that fundamentalism is a "sub-species" of revivalism. Marsden, pp. 38-39. Ernest Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970) views fundamentalism in continuity with an older, more traditional millenarian movement, while Louis Gasper, *The Fundamentalist Movement, 1930-1956* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, [1963] 1981) explains the movement as a result of a confluence of factors, including revivalism, anti-modernism, and millenarianism,

133. Marsden, pp. 38, 81. McLaughlin notes that the heightened tension caused by premillennial eschatology enabled revivalists to increase their output. Men responded more quickly to such an urgent call. Eschatology, furthermore, became the litmus test of orthodoxy. Optimistic or kingdom-oriented eschatologies were considered by fundamentalists to be *ipso facto* modernist. McLaughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, pp. 257-258.

Moody the solution to all problems was the revival. Prosperity and social status were virtually guaranteed when a sinner decided to believe in Jesus.<sup>134</sup> Sunday's converts, known as trail-hitters, were more socially active than Moody's. Revivals were still paramount, but Sunday emphasized that the Christian life must be an active one. Consistent with his legalistic assumptions, Sunday's proposed reforms were directed against dancing, card-playing, and drinking. Prohibition especially was viewed as a panacea for all of America's problems.<sup>135</sup> Fundamentalism, thus, cannot simply be considered a religion of retreat and passivity. Some fundamentalists were active in various reform movements. From 1900 to 1930, however, they retreated rather suddenly from social involvement. Pietism, antinomianism, and pessimism had been advancing together since the Civil War, but after 1900 a more significant "Great Reversal" was taking place in reaction to the growing liberalism of mainline denominations and by 1930 all political and social action was suspect.<sup>136</sup>

### *Revivalism and American Church History*

The effects of revivalism on the demographics of American church history have been profound. Prior to the Great Awakening, Congregational, Presbyterian, and Anglican churches were most numerous. Following the revival Baptist churches received a substantial increase in membership.<sup>137</sup> By 1775 Baptist churches, though concentrated around Rhode Island, were nearly as numerous and as widespread as Anglican and Presbyterian churches. Methodism, born during the first Awakening, had gained some ground in Maryland, southern New Jersey, and north Delaware, but even here it was not dominant.<sup>138</sup> Eighty

---

134. Marsden, pp. 43, 46; McLaughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, pp. 170, 252.

135. McLaughlin, *Billy Sunday*, p. 37; *Modern Revivalism*, pp. 412, 439.

136. Marsden, pp. 85-91.

137. C. C. Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism in New England, 1740-1800, Strict Calvinism and Separate Baptists in the Great Awakening* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962) traces those who separated from Calvinistic denominations to their assimilation into Baptist churches. Gaustad estimates that the number of Baptist churches in New England increased from fewer than six in 1740 to 325 by 1800. Gaustad, p. 121.

138. Charles O. Paullin, *Atlas of the Historical Geography of the United States*, ed. John K. Wright (Washington, DC: Carnegie Institute, 1932), plate 82.

years and two revivals later, the various branches of Methodism constituted the largest Protestant denomination in America. Baptist, Presbyterian, and German and Reformed churches were next most numerous. Baptists were by this time entrenched in the rural South and German Lutherans had settled mainly in the mideastern states. Congregationalists remained powerful in New England, but nationwide the number of Congregational churches was less than one-third the number of churches in the largest branch of Methodism.<sup>139</sup> By the last decade of the nineteenth century, Methodists and Baptists had enhanced their dominant position in American Protestantism. Baptists remained especially strong in the South, while Methodist churches were numerous in nearly every state east of the Mississippi River. Presbyterian churches were relatively widespread, but their membership did not approach that of the Methodist and Baptist churches. Congregationalists remained virtually isolated in New England.<sup>140</sup> These shifts in church membership follow a significant pattern. With each wave of revivalism, people, resources, and power moved out of Puritan-Calvinist churches into Arminian-revivalist churches. By the beginning of this century, Baptist and Methodist churches, which had in America been virtually created by revivalism, dominated American Protestantism.

Within particular denominations as well revivals had a pronounced impact. The First Great Awakening produced schism in the Presbyterian Church, nearly divided the Dutch Reformed Church, and precipitated large scale separations from Congregationalist churches.<sup>141</sup> Presbyterians divided again in 1837 over theological issues that had been exaggerated or produced by revivals.<sup>142</sup> Even in churches and segments of denominations which reacted against Finney's new measures or Oberlin perfectionism, revivalistic techniques were used and defended.<sup>143</sup> The conclusions of an Old

---

139. Paullin, plates 83-84; Smith, pp. 20-21. The Methodist Episcopal Church (North), Methodism's largest faction, had approximately 783,000 members, while the total number of Congregationalists was around 200,000. Nationally, Methodists numbered over 1.5 million.

140. Paullin, plates 85-87.

141. Hudson, pp. 62-63; Gausted, ch. 7; Weisberger, p. 60.

142. McLaughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, pp. 14-15.

143. "Revivalism in one form or another became the accepted technique

School Congregationalist like William Sprague (1795-1876) indicate that even those most opposed to Finney shared many of the revivalist's assumptions and goals.<sup>144</sup> The distinctive of nearly every protestant denomination in America can be analyzed as either outgrowths of or reactions against revivalism. Some denominations retained a Puritan flavor, but even these were affected by revivalism.

The two extremes of early twentieth-century American Christianity, the social gospel and the fundamentalist movements, both emerged from the same revivalistic milieu. Historians commonly recognize the close connections between revivalism and fundamentalism. Though revivalism's links with the social gospel movement and liberalism are less generally known, they are no less real. The logical links between anthropocentric revivalism and social Christianity are fairly obvious. Man is the center of both systems. In one, the emphasis is on the many, or plurality; in the other, it is on the one, or unity. Philosophically, all that is required to make the transition from revivalism to the social gospel is the adoption of a more inclusive universal.<sup>145</sup> In both movements, God is immanent, and at the service of man. In both, humanitarian ethics and human rights social theory replace theonomic ethics and theocratic sociology. In both, dogma is subordinated to ethics. In both, man, whether individually or collectively, is his own savior.

A great volume of circumstantial but nonetheless compelling evidence may be assembled to demonstrate historical links between the two movements. First, the churches most influenced by the social gospel were those northern churches which had experienced Finney's radical brand of revivalism. Southern churches, whose traditional conservatism was strengthened by their opposition to radical abolitionism, were generally less influenced both by Finney and the social gospel. Many of the leaders of the social gospel movement – including Gladden, Rauschenbusch, and Richard Ely (1854-1943) – spent their early years in New York churches in the aftermath of burned-

---

of practically all the voluntary churches, the instrument for accomplishing the denominations' objective of evangelism and missions." Mead, *Lively Experiment*, p. 122.

144. McLaughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, pp. 50-53.

145. Rushdoony, *The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy* (Fairfax, VA: [1971] 1978).

over district revivalism.<sup>146</sup> Many social gospelers, furthermore, first looked to revivalism as a means of reform, but later recognized that the social conscience of the revivalists had frozen on antebellum issues.<sup>147</sup> There were also a number of transitional figures between revivalism and the social gospel that indicate historical links between the two movements. Warren A. Candler (1857-1941), for example, criticized liberalism in his 1904 book, *Great Revivals and the Great Republic*, for never having produced a revival, but Candler's vague social thought was open to liberal interpretations. Candler's use of the term "brotherhood of souls" in the place of the social gospel's "brotherhood of man" disguised very thinly his basic agreement with those whom he criticized.<sup>148</sup> Even Billy Sunday could in admittedly rare instances strike a liberal chord. In one sermon he placed partial blame for crime, prostitution, and drunkenness upon American society for permitting men "to live in foul, unlighted rooms where from eight to ten people live, cook, eat and sleep, working year in and year out from fourteen to fifteen hours every day."<sup>149</sup>

Moody's two Bible colleges vividly illustrate the connection between fundamentalism and modernism and their common source in revivalism. One of the schools, the Moody Bible Institute (Chicago) became a bastion of fundamentalism. The other, the Northfield Schools (Massachusetts), went modernist. Significantly, and with some justification, both claimed to be following Moody's example.<sup>150</sup>

R. J. Rushdoony has suggested that the underlying intellectual struggle in colonial America was not between the Enlightenment and Christianity, but between two types of Christianity: Arminian and Puritan.<sup>151</sup> Perry Miller and his

146. Handy, pp. 12, 19, 173, 253; Singer, p. 155.

147. McLaughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, pp. 347-348.

148. *Ibid.*, pp. 354-362. The subsequent history of Emory University, of which Candler was president, may indicate the dominant element in Candler's thought.

149. Quoted in *ibid.*, 436. Environmentalism was a characteristic of nineteenth-century revivalism, as Sizer's study of revival hymns demonstrates. In the hymns of P. P. Bliss, unregenerate man is not a rebel against God, but a victim of sin. Sizer, p. 29.

150. *Ibid.*, p. 274.

151. Rushdoony, "The Myth of an American Enlightenment," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, Vol. III, no. 1, pp. 69-73. The identification of the conflict as Puritan versus Baptist has much to recommend it. For such a

students have forcefully demonstrated the central role that Christianity has played in American history. America's history simply cannot be understood apart from American theology. Thus, as far as Rushdoony goes, he is correct. But, it seems to me, his definition of the conflict is too narrow. Instead, the fundamental conflict in American intellectual history has been between revivalism and Puritanism, each of which connotes a cluster of philosophical and social, as well as soteriological concepts. The core of revivalism is Arminianism, but, just as Puritanism has historically meant a great deal more than Calvinism, so revivalism has meant more than its Arminian soteriology, and revivalism is the form which Arminianism has most often taken in America. In this study, I have sought to demonstrate that the conflict between Puritanism and revivalism can be used as a paradigm for understanding American church history.<sup>152</sup> The growth and decline of denominations, the birth and death of reform movements, and the theological history of America can all be viewed in terms of this basic struggle. Revivalism, essentially a rebellion against Puritanism, has been predominant in American Protestantism since at least 1740; until recent years Puritanism has been all but dead. Clearly, Deism, Darwinism, German higher criticism, Hegelianism, and Marxism have helped shape the pattern of American Christianity. Revivalism alone cannot explain every departure from orthodoxy. Nevertheless, even where forces other than revivalism influenced American churches, revivalism created a climate in which more obnoxious forms of humanism could be accepted.

---

perspective, see Jordan, ed., *Failure of the American Baptist Culture*. Anabaptism and revivalism have much in common: Both are democratic, Pelagian, legalistic, and monastic. In America, however, direct descendants of European Anabaptism have, until recent years, remained on the fringes of American Christianity. Even Baptists in America have generally been "Calvinistic" Baptists. Anabaptism in America has taken on the form of revivalism. Perhaps, in the final analysis, they are simply two ways of looking at the same phenomenon.

152. For a biblical defense of the use of paradigms, see Gary North, "The 'Protestant Ethic' Hypothesis; *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, Vol. III, no. 1, pp. 185-201. Paradigms, by their very nature, oversimplify the case. I am not, therefore, arguing that every fact of American church history must be fit into a rigid theoretical framework. Rather, paradigms give a distilled picture of where we have been, where we now are, and, hopefully, point where we ought to go.

Subjective revivalism has led in two quite different directions, and at the moment the leftward thrust seems to be dominating, largely because liberal churches have retained an optimistic, kingdom-oriented eschatology. Conservative churches have discarded those doctrines of Puritanism that made it culturally dynamic: theonomy, postmillennialism, and predestination.<sup>153</sup> Fundamentalists who have recently begun to take the dominion mandate seriously have done so by adopting in practice a theonomic and postmillennial outlook, while formally retaining their pietistic premillennial systems. Still, they have been unable effectively to combat liberalism. The combat is, in fact, purely cosmetic, because both sides are in basic agreement.

The Christian Reconstruction movement has achieved one of the most remarkable syntheses in the history of Christian thought, taking the best and most Biblical from both fundamentalists and social gospellers. Reconstructionists have stood with fundamentalists in defense of the inerrancy of the Bible, creation, the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, and the resurrection. Indeed, they have "out-fundied" the fundamentalists by insisting that the Bible is authoritative and inerrant on everything, not just religion. On the other hand, reconstructionists have been critical of fundamentalism for its pietism and its Neoplatonic dichotomy between soul and body. Like the social gospellers, reconstructionists emphasize the wholeness of man (God does not save souls, He saves men) and a dynamic, but not relativistic, view of the kingdom of God. Reconstructionist Christianity is far more than a resurrection of Puritanism. It is a refined Puritanism, tried in the furnace of opposition (Ps. 66:10f.), and hence more consistent to the basic premises of Calvinism than seventeenth-century Puritanism. And it is the only faith that can battle secularism and emerge triumphant.

#### *Conclusion: Revivalism and the Local Church*

Most historians of revivalism claim that the revival continues into the present day in the form of television evangelism and Billy Graham-type crusades.<sup>154</sup> In a sense, this assess-

---

153. See Peter J. Leithart, "Calvinism as a Cultural Force," *The Counsel of Chalcedon*, (March/April 1983), pp. 8-12.

154. McLoughlin, for instance, sees a continuity between the revivalism of

ment is accurate: Television and itinerant evangelists preach traditional revivalistic Arminianism, make use of expensive public relations machinery, and employ methods borrowed from the entertainment industry. In a more profound sense, however, revivalism today manifests itself in mainline Protestant denominations. Revivalism has been institutionalized and the result has been a *de facto* Baptist ecclesiology and church government in most American churches.

The most obvious effect of revivalism on local churches has been its divisiveness. Following the First Great Awakening, for instance, many New Light Presbyterians and Congregationalists separated from their churches and were later absorbed or organized into Baptist churches.<sup>155</sup> The methods used to conduct revivals, moreover, directly undermined the stability of the local congregation. Many of the preachers in the first revivals were itinerants, a method of evangelism that puts minimal emphasis on the local church. Church members might be inclined to prefer nationally prominent revivalists to their local pastor.<sup>156</sup>

Individual churches were affected in more subtle ways as well. Ideas of the very nature of the church have undergone radical revision. Arminian revivalism hastened the disestablishment of state churches in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and these two factors combined to produce a voluntaristic view of the church.<sup>157</sup> The church came to be viewed as an assembly of individuals, democratically controlled, and undemanding. That membership in a church requires submission to authority and a permanent and serious commitment surprises, even angers many American Christians. The medieval and Reformation idea that church mem-

---

Finney, Moody, and Sunday on the one hand and the evangelistic crusades of Billy Graham on the other. McLaughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, chapter 9.

155. See Goen, chapters 2 and 6. Significantly, the ecclesiological reasons for separation were usually twofold: First, separates, most of them New Lights converted in the Awakening, protested against the reception of unregenerate men into church membership, and secondly, they despised the use of creeds as a test of orthodoxy. Goen, pp. 36-40. See Sutton, "The Baptist Failure," pp. 175-180, for a discussion and refutation of Anabaptist ecclesiology. It should be noted, however, that these radical Anabaptist tendencies were modified by the Calvinistic elements of the Awakening. Gaustad, p. 120.

156. For the effects of itineracy, see Tracy, pp. 424 ff.

157. Mead, *The Lively Experiment*, chapter VII.

bership is not optional and that the church is not a voluntary body, but an organic community established by God with ties of faith and fellowship that may be dissolved only in the most extreme cases, is anathema. Withdrawal from a church was once a significant and often painful decision. No longer. Today, Americans flit from church to church and from denomination to denomination for the most trivial reasons. One woman was considering leaving her church because it was getting too crowded. Clearly, there are other factors that contribute to the loss of community in modern American churches, but the individualistic emphasis of revivalism is largely responsible for destroying the concept of the Body of Christ.

Consistent with its revivalistic foundations, American Protestants have come to define religion in emotional terms and preachers that offer comfort and exude warmth are the most popular. As a result, worship has become diluted. In many churches, as in the revival setting, the term "worship service" is a misnomer. The real focus of the Sunday-morning gathering is the preacher, not corporate worship of and communion with the Lord of Hosts. Moreover, form and structure in worship are considered inhibiting. This is true not only of Pentecostal churches, but of many mainline Protestant churches. This antipathy toward formal worship was inherited from the Puritans, who despised all things Roman, but it gained strength in the chaotic atmosphere of the revivals. In 1742, Judge Joshua Hempstead of New London, Connecticut, went to hear revivalist John Davenport preach. Hempstead found it "Scarcely worth the hearing" because it was "without form or comeliness. It was difficult to distinguish between his praying & preaching for it was all Meer Confused medley." At the end of the service, the congregation sang a hymn "30 or 40 times Immediately following as fast as one word could follow after another. . . ." <sup>158</sup> Later revivals were more subdued, but what they gained in orderliness, they lost in participation.

Furthermore, the message of the church has been simplified and perverted. On the one hand, many churches preach an exclusively individual salvation. Every sermon is a revivalistic sermon and the sinner is assured that he can revive him-

---

158. Joshua Hempstead, "Diary," in Bumsted, p. 89.

self. The believer benefits and grows little. The simplicity of the Gospel is emphasized. Irrelevance and unconcern for the state of the world has become a matter of boasting. On the other hand, there are churches which preach an entirely social (read political) salvation, and a millennium during which all men's rights everywhere will be held sacred. Sin is basically in the environment, not in the heart. Such churches bewail the complexity of social issues, and appeal to experts for advice and to politicians for relief of social ills.

The nature of the church, its message and mission, its worship and government must all be covenantal. Revivalistic individualism, antinomianism, and pessimism must be thoroughly purged from American churches. The reconstruction of the local church, like all reconstruction, must begin with change in the hearts and minds of men. For two and a half centuries a subtle internal humanism has been gnawing at the foundations which support American Protestantism: We have nurtured our greatest enemy. It is counterproductive to point to outside forces as the cause of the church's decline. Christians themselves are responsible. We no longer act or think like a church; indeed, we have forgotten how a church should think, or what its characteristics are. The mere recognition that the churches of America themselves are responsible for their present impotence and confusion indicates where reconstruction of America must begin. We must first tidy our own house, and then we will be qualified to speak with authority on the issues which confront the modern world (Matt. 7:1-5).

## II. RECONSTRUCTING CHURCH GOVERNMENT

### THE CHURCH IN AN AGE OF DEMOCRACY

Ray R. Sutton

Some like it hot,  
Some like it cold,  
Some like it in a pot,  
Nine days old.

**T**HAT'S how the nursery rhyme goes. The theme is diversity. Diversity is a wonderful thing, but I've often thought about this little rhyme in relation to the Church.

Here, in the Mother of God's people, you'll find about every kind of "critter" imaginable. This phenomenon is a testimony to the grace of God. But the variety can sometimes become a source of conflict.

Now I'm not suggesting that we come up with a scheme to do away with variation. That would be an unBiblical response to a very Biblical problem. Furthermore, that would be boredom. And besides, you could never pull it off.

No, I'm addressing a problem that probably grows out of the fact that the Church cuts across every kind of boundary (rightly so) and lumps a bunch of very different people together. After they're assembled, the problem of "how do we live together?" begins.

Here is where the subject of Church government arises. Many paradigms have been suggested, but the one that seems to have captured the day is *democracy*. Democracy means "power from the people," which is the same as saying "power from below." And, there's no question but that this political view has carried the day. It seems we live in an age when men do what is right in their own eyes whether they're in or outside the Church.

In the State, political representatives have no sense of representing anyone or any law higher than themselves. In the Church, regardless of the denomination, the practical

bottom-line is that both are run by the people. For example, the Baptists, where there is not elder rule, are self-conscious about letting the congregation run things. The Presbyterians have a different *form* of government, but when push comes to shove, the people have their way. <sup>1</sup> Then there's the family. In the family, a Dr. Speck mentality prevails. The children have their way, and manipulate parents who, out of a sense of guilt, let them have what they want.

The concern of this essay, however, will be with the Church. It is my opinion that a democratic spirit has infected the Church. And once this attitude is fully understood, it will become clear that democracy is more than just an approach to government. It is an entire world and life view.

Paul met this problem at Corinth where his few converts were raised in an autonomous atmosphere which had to be checked. Paul's struggles with the Corinthian Church were primarily centered around a "Greek mind-set." Since Van Til has referred to the Greek mind as the high water mark of all pagan thought, the problems within the Corinthian Church ought to be viewed as the high water mark of pagan influences in the Church.

Even a superficial study of the Epistles to the Corinthians tells the 20th century Christian that his problems are not unique, and modern man's problems should be classified in terms of the same Greek influence. This Greek influence in our civilization can be seen everywhere. You see it in the architecture, philosophy, politics, and churches of our culture. Thus, by carefully studying *Paul's* correctives, we can learn what our emphases ought to be in contemporary Church and society.

Our approach in the present essay will be simple. First, we consider the background of the Corinthian people. It informs the reader of a rebellious and contentious history. Second, we should examine some over-arching philosophical ideas. Third, we will overview the book. And, finally, brief comments will be made on the early chapters to give the reader a feel for the problems, and more importantly, Paul's solutions.

---

1. Traditionally, Southern Presbyterian Churches try to solve congregational problems by simply removing the entire officer corps. The result: You get two sets of officer corps and often *two* different Churches in one building.

*A City of Political and Moral Rebellion*

Located on an isthmus between mainland Greece and a little island that sticks out like a hand, Corinth was called the "eye of Greece." Militarily, if Corinth fell, the whole nation could have easily been conquered. This was not necessarily true from an ideological point of view for Athens was the center of philosophy. Yet, God in His providence forced Paul from the city of intellectual influence, Athens, to the city of political and moral influence, Corinth.

Corinth had a history of political rebellion. Because of continued rebellion, and its autonomous view of government, Rome completely destroyed the city in 146 B.C. Corinth lay desolate for one century until Julius Caesar rebuilt the structures, and started civilization moving again. But the democratic mind-set of Plato could not be driven away simply by removing the city of Corinth. Anarchy is too much a part of man's sinful nature.

The history of religion clearly shows that every religion except the True religion believes that power comes from below — man. This is another way of saying *life* comes from man. But, if life originates with man, life comes from chance not creation. To be specific, life comes from *chaos*. Here is the ontology of the religion of revolution. Life comes from chaos, thus, "let's blow up civilization to create a new and better world."

This has always been the mind of man apart from Christ. Whether one listens to Rousseau, Marx, or liberation theology, this is the message. "Life comes from anarchical chaos." In its political application, life-from-chaos thinking leads to autonomous and rebellious behavior, such as is found in the history of Corinth. But the life-from-chaos mentality does not stop with politics.

Corinth quickly regained its strength after the Roman destruction, and by the time of Paul's second visit the city (500,000) was "the Vanity Fair of the Roman Empire." They were as morally autonomous as their politics. To "corinthianize" became a term of debauchery.

Behind Corinth stood a large hill, 1800 feet, on which was built the Acrocorinth, a temple to the goddess Aphrodite (Venus). This temple was an expression of the religion of revolution which says that life comes from moral chaos. The peo-

ple and Aphrodite's religion taught that purity came from debauchery. Juvenal "sarcastically alluded to it as 'perfumed Corinth,' " because of all the prostitution and homosexuality. And Chrysostom referred to the city as "the most licentious city of all that are or ever have been."

We saw above that the belief that life originates from below leads to political anarchy and so it is in ethics. Sometimes this can mean activity as severe as living with prostitutes, or behavior as episodic as short periods of drunkenness. Regardless of the moral expression, the behavior indicates an attempt to initiate new life by chaos.

I knew a man who would periodically disappear and hit all the bars in the local town. In between these moments of carousing he was an upright, dedicated-Christian, hard-working, family-man. Yet, he could not understand why the pattern was in his life. I suggested to him that he was living with vestiges of paganism, and seeking to *rejuvenate* his life the wrong way. As we talked, he indicated that he was afraid of getting old, and this was his way of feeling young again (rejuvenating his life).

This leads me to a more critical discussion of the major problem with the Greek mind. We have already seen some of the general problems which this created for the city. But before proceeding to the specific problems of the Church at Corinth, we want to be precise in our understanding of the Greek/pagan mind and world view. To acquire this precision, we should compare and contrast the Greek mind to Christianity.

### *Continuity/Discontinuity*

These words are often used in reference to the Holy Trinity, but here I am using them in reference to the creation. The continuities of life are those things which never change, and discontinuities are the aspects of life that change. Christianity and paganism have opposing views concerning continuity and discontinuity. Unfortunately, the modern church has adopted the pagan view of continuity/discontinuity. The following chart helps present the significant differences.

	<i>Non-Christian</i>	<i>Christian</i>
Continuity (Constants)	Natural Law	Word of God
Discontinuity (Change)	Chance	Obedience/disobedience

First, the pagan mind places the constants of life *in* creation. The universe is a machine governed by laws. Objects fall to the ground, for example, because of the "Law of Gravity." The Christian, however, believes that God created the earth and all there is, and the constants of life are in and through His Word. God's Word is the only thing that does not change. Using the "Law of Gravity" analogy, the Christian says that an object falls to the ground because God's Word ordained it so.

But the pagan traps himself with his view of continuity. The universe becomes an impersonal machine that has no mercy. Although a superficial explanation of the world is provided by such a view, pagan rationalism shuts out the possibility for change. And here we have the dilemma in full. How does man create laws without inhibiting change? If the world is run by unchangeable laws, then there is no possibility for change. He finds the basis for change in the second presupposition.

Second, the only way out, given his presupposition of constancy, is to inject chance. Chance is his savior, and *spontaneity* his god. The pagan who reduced God to a watchmaker, winding up the universe at the beginning of time, now goes outside of creation to free himself. He becomes irrational, a mystic, and even willing to dabble in the occult to reach outside the universe. Since we live in an age of irrationalism today, one finds that many of the leading minds of Western Civilization "receive inspiration" from a "higher consciousness."<sup>2</sup> Having locked themselves in by their own faulty view of "natural law," modern men run to the other end of the continuum for change and freedom. But, chance is just as tyrannical as natural law. Thus, the other side of the pagan error is this preoccupation with *spontaneity*.

For the Christian, form and freedom, law and change, are not in conflict, yet for the pagan one can see that these are antagonistic to one another. What is the difference between the Christian and non-Christian views? The Christian mind does not put constants, apart from God's providential and

---

2. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Mythology of Science* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1967), pp. 1ff. Stanley Jaki, *Science and Creation* (Edinburgh and London: Scottish Academic Press, 1974), pp. 336ff. Dr. Jaki is an Hungarian-born Benedictine priest with doctorates in both physics and theology. Primarily an historian of science, he ties advancement in science *to the influence of Christianity*. Constance Cumbey, *The Hidden Dangers of the Rainbow* (Shreveport: Huntington House Inc., 1983), pp. 217-220.

covenantal faithfulness, in man (see above chart). Continuity is in the Word of God, or the covenant. The Apostle Paul says that all things “hold together in Christ” (Col. 1). Thus, continuity in creation comes from God, and change results in a negative or positive direction according to man’s response to the covenant. Obedience leads to blessing and growth — all the imagery in the Bible about vines (Jn. 15), and trees growing up by rivers of living water (Ps. 1) — and, disobedience leads to recreation and curse with the unrighteous becoming like a desert.

In other words, faithful obedience to God’s Word brings life, and disobedience results in death. Life is not static, and therefore change comes as man obeys the Word of God. Science and all disciplines of the mind of man advance when man lives according to God’s Covenant/Word.<sup>3</sup> The Bible does not inhibit man, as the pagan would have us believe, it provides true liberty with which to advance humanity, and the proper presuppositions with which to observe and understand the universe.

Therefore, the Greek mind seeks to make creation or nature God by putting the constants in creation. And attempts to manipulate God by reaching outside nature. This was the context into which Paul brought the Gospel. As we proceed to examine the basic theme of I Corinthians, we see what Paul was attempting to combat in a fuller light.

### *Structure and Theme of I Corinthians*

I Corinthians divides into three parts. At the beginning of each major section—1:10-4:21; 5:1-6:20; 7:1-16:2—we find a grammatical key which says in effect, “it has been reported among you.” Thus, Paul uses these basic reports concerning the Corinthian Church to structure his thoughts.

These three sections group under the three marks of a true Church – the ministry of the word, the administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of discipline. The first section in Corinthians concentrates on the proper preaching of the Word of God. Nothing, not even the minister, should interfere with the preaching of the Cross. The second section addresses the problem of the lack of discipline. And the final pericope

---

3. *Science and Creation*, pp.138ff.

speaks to the proper bonding or the sacraments.

The specific theme of Corinthians, however, is found in Paul's comments which are judgmental or tearing in nature. Hebrews 4:12 says, 'the Word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword piercing even to the *dividing* asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow.' The tearing of the Word of God is a judgmental process that fits a basic *covenantal pattern* in Scripture.

The covenantal pattern in Scripture consists of ( 1) A Word from God; (2) A response from man; and (3) God's evaluation/judgment. Paul's purposes, clearly seen with a cursive reading of both letters to the Corinthians, are in the third category. Paul spent time with, taught, and brought the Word of God to the Corinthians (Acts 18). The "reports" (1:11, 5:1, 7:1) sent to him were a statement of their response to the Word of God which *he* brought to them. The time for evaluation had come, and so, not liking what he saw in their response, his letter essentially passes judgment. And this judgment tears to the heart of man.

Paul's emphasis in I Corinthians points out why it is dangerous to try and build a whole theology on the epistles. For the most part, the y are evaluative in nature, and the writers presuppose that the Word from God has already been given to these people in the Old Testament and Gospels. Paul knew that they had received the Word of God already because he was the one who took it to them.

Ironically, in the case of the Corinthians, judgment was their major problem. The Corinthians did not want to be torn by the Word of God, and here is point of contact with our previous discussions on the Greek mind. They were under the influence of Greek thought, which said that life comes from death. Death is the ultimate chaos. Fitting this in with our chart above, death is the injection of chance from outside the universe. But we must keep in mind that death, for the pagan, is not the same as facing judgment. A pagan might be willing to die, but this does not necessarily mean that he is willing to face the judgment of God. A person who commits suicide, for example, is most often trying to avoid some sort of judgment. Of course, the believer knows that the individual will go to meet his/her Maker, and face judgment anyway.

At the same time, we must state that pagan thought wants life apart from the judgmental-death-tearing of the Word of

God. So, death in the case of the pagan is only ceremonially acted out to avoid the real death. In this kind of ceremony — the kind that is designed to escape responsibility to God — death becomes a game in hopes that the reality will disappear. Yet, death is a reality for Jesus Christ *really* faced death, and not just ceremonially.

Therefore, the Christian mind understands that it is judgment and not just death that must be faced. Death is the penalty and result of judgment. Further, one must face this judgment with Jesus Christ or he will truly die. Nevertheless, life comes through judgment according to the Christian position which is altogether different from the non-Christian view.

Paul emphasizes the need to face judgment and he brings out this theme by his reference to the *Feast of Unleavened Bread*. He wrote the first letter to the Corinthians during the Feast (I Cor. 16:8)<sup>4</sup> which began the first day after the Passover Sabbath. It started with a firstfruits offering that was followed by seven days of refraining from the use of leaven (Lev. 23: 4ff.). The firstfruits offering was the first stalk of wheat that was *cut* down by the reapers. This imagery is a symbol of judgment and being torn away from old leaven. The “cutting down” of the sheaf comes by the hand of the reapers, and prefigures all judgments to come — the destruction of Israel, Christ, and later on the world (Matt. 3:12)

The Feast of Unleavened Bread began with this symbol to indicate that leaven is a death which results from judgment. During the next seven days, leaven was avoided because it represented the corrupting influence of sin. By beginning this period of feasts with a time of abstaining from leaven, judgment-tearing was implemented by reformation of life. In Scripture, the repentant see judgment as coming from the loving hand of God, and turn from their wicked ways. The reprobate, however, rush head long into more self-conscious, fermented, sin.

Paul alludes to this Feast, and the need for repentance from fermented sin in a similar context of judgment in I Corinthians 5. Here, he addresses the need for Church discipline,

---

4. W. J. Conybeare and J. S. Howson, *The Life and Epistles of Saint Paul* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1968), p. 381. Conybeare says, “He [Paul] wrote during *the days of unleavened bread*, i.e. at Easter (I Cor. 5:7; see the note on that passage), and intended to remain at Ephesus till Pentecost (16:8, cf. 15:32).”

a form of judgment in the Church, and specifically commands the Corinthians to “purge out the old leaven of malice” (v. 8). This purging is the tearing side of facing judgment and appears throughout the Old Testament.

Covenant cutting in the Old Testament involved some form of tearing both symbolically and really. But normally those who received the sign of judgment were not torn in pieces. When Israel was delivered from Egypt, the nation was torn from the world to be led to the Promised Land. The Red Sea was the theological boundary which indicated the rebirth of the Nation at the time of Crossing. Preparation for this departure was the removal of leaven that symbolized separation from the world (Egypt). At the first Passover, death appeared on the doorposts, and ethical tearing by removal of old leaven averted the Angel of death which literally tore the Egyptians like wild beasts. Thus, the Feast of Unleavened Bread was a time of separating from the world and its ways to prepare for renewed empowerment, Pentecost (Lev. 23 :15ff.).

With this Feast as the backdrop to our discussion, we see that in each section of I Corinthians Paul develops death, judgment, and tearing as major themes. In some cases the Corinthians wanted to avoid death to escape their responsibilities of personal and corporate judgment. In other cases, they tried to inflict some form of death, or create a pseudo ceremony to escape the responsibilities of covenant life.

In the first section of Corinthians, Paul addresses the problem of schism. Schism is literally rending the Body of Christ. He attributes this problem to an undue emphasis on dynamic men and their ministries in the Church. His corrective, however, is the preaching of the Cross — a message of death and judgment — which Paul says was the center of his preaching. The Corinthians did not want “negative” preaching. They wanted positive preaching that would soothe them. They did not want to listen to the uneloquent with the right message. They wanted flashy, attractive, charismatic preachers. In other words, they thought that life would come to them apart from facing the judgment-tearing of God.

Paul’s attention in the second section turns to the subject of judgment in relationship to Church discipline. The Corinthians wanted spiritual growth without pain. So, when problems arose in the Church, as they are certain to arise in any Church, they took the path of least resistance. Discipline

seemed to be contradictory to love, and they did not want a harsh Gospel. The result: Discipline was avoided in the name of avoiding conflict.

Finally, Paul tackles problems relating to the sacraments and/or proper bonding (Chapters 7-16). What do these problems have to do with the theme of life through judgment? Several matters touch on this subject. First, there was the problem of asceticism. This is the denial of certain earthly prerogatives to become spiritual. Going back to our chart, we see that spirituality is in terms of obedience not abstinence. Remember, pagan thought attempts to leave creation, through some mystical connection, to bring life. Essentially, the ascetic is no different. He attempts to escape creation, which is to try and escape judgment.

Second, Paul is concerned that the Corinthians avoid pagan communion services (I Cor. 10) and properly commune with the living God. Christian communion remembers the Lord's death, and here we see attention drawn to judgment. The Lord's Supper is a time of judgment, and a time of life through judgment. Hence, the second sacrament is a means of grace.

Third, Paul talks about the meeting of the Church where the Lord's Supper is normally to be observed. This meeting had become chaotic to such an extent that he had to tell them to do things in order. Chaos was corrupting the use of gifts because the Corinthians were patterning their meetings after the pagan festivals. For example, the gift of tongues was being abused. Self-oriented glossalalia, however, was not new to the pagan world. But the Biblical gift was totally unique since it was not intended for self stimulation. In other words, the Corinthians had forgotten that this meeting was not primarily for their personal benefit. Rather, it was a time to come under the judgment of God, and edify one another.

At the end, Paul concludes this section with the 10CUS *classicus* passage on the Resurrection. After confronting the Corinthians with the need to face death and judgment, he concludes by telling them Jesus faced the judgment of God and was raised from the dead. The point being: If the Church at Corinth would walk properly with Christ, it too would properly face the judgment of God and find newness of life.

The remainder of this essay is devoted to a development of the theme of life-through-judgment-tearing in the Book of

I Corinthians. The methodology will be a treatment of Biblical theological ideas primarily in the first four chapters. Only general summary comments will be made on the last sections. The reason for this is twofold. One, commentaries are generally quite weak on the first half of the book, and place most of their emphasis on the other chapters. This is easily proven by asking most Christians what the first chapters of the book are about. Usually, they do not have a difficult time, however, telling you that the last chapters of the book talk about communion (ch. 11), love (ch. 13), spiritual gifts (chs. 12-14), and the Resurrection (ch. 15).

Two, this essay is part of a commentary which is being written on I Corinthians. Space does not allow a complete development of the entire book. But the comments need to be thorough enough to point out the important message of I Corinthians. It is my opinion that the early sections set up the major themes. Hence, more attention is placed here, and even at that, I must stress that this paper touches only major ideas in these chapters.

The present paper deals with the problem of democracy. I believe that the solution to this problem is summarized in Paul's letter to the Corinthians. Since the book primarily deals with the necessity for proper judgment and bonding in the life of the Church, we can assume that Church leaders will find in these ideas the keys to settling a wild congregation. But, Paul sets out his concern to curb a democratic spirit even in his salutation.

#### *The Governmental Language of Paul's Introduction*

Given the democratic mentality and libertarian morality of the Corinthians, Paul begins by alluding to Biblical government. Government, and especially Biblical government, is repugnant to "free-spirits ." Paul does what any good pastor would do. He wants the Corinthians to face the judgment of God in Christ. Since Biblical government in the Church is the implementation of this judgment, the place to begin with libertarian morality is reference to the method of God's rule. The way Paul phrases himself in the salutation expresses this kind of solution to the Corinthians' problems.

*I. Surname Definition and Calling.*

Paul begins with surname definition and calling. His name was defined in terms of calling. In an age of nominalism, names become nominal or fortuitous. This has not always been the case in Western Civilization. There was a time when a man's name reflected his calling. If he were a blacksmith, his name was called Smith. If he were a parson, his name was called Parson. Any dictionary will confirm that these names are popular today, but have no connection with vocation.

Most important, however, Christianity taught man that in Christ his vocation would be a reflection of his covenant with the same. When Paul was converted, his name was changed. Christian tradition in the Church has applied the name-change-principle. At the point of baptism, an adult or child would receive his Christian, or first name. His new name before his function name indicated that Christ's calling took priority over natural function. And, his natural abilities should come under the use of the Christ.

So, outside of Christ, calling is only functionally determined. This ultimately leads to totalitarianism. Scripture says that man's function in this world is not *accidental*, instead, a man's calling is ordained by God.

The fact that a man was defined by his calling points to definition which is beyond himself. In the Middle Ages, a man was destined by birth to a certain occupation.<sup>5</sup> Christianity interpreted this as practical *Predestination*. A man's definition was outside of himself, in other words, and thus definition or calling preceded essence.<sup>6</sup> Adam was first

---

5. Clothing and calling are directly related to one another. A man also pointed out his calling by his clothing. The "unisex/uniclothing" movement is an expression of totalitarian philosophy and ultimately an attack on the Doctrine of Creation - the doctrine on which calling is established. Elsewhere in this symposium I develop this concept in greater detail in an article, "Calling and Clothing."

6. Van Til has said this in so many words by his emphasis on the Creator/creature distinction. Since God was before the created world, and the created world therefore did not eternally exist, man receives definition from God. He does not look to himself. James Jordan has made this observation in his taped series on Christian World View which can be purchased from Geneva Ministries, 708 Hamvassy, Tyler, Texas 75701.

predestinated to be created before he was created (Eph. 1:11ff.).<sup>7</sup>

Later in history, men started to look more to what they were “good at.” This too, proves predestination because God put that “natural” ability in to begin with.<sup>8</sup> But man in all of his fallenness attempts to find definition in his essence apart from a God and calling which transcend himself. He would like to recreate society in his own image. An expression of this is the non-differentiated society of totalitarianism where men and women dress and look alike.<sup>9</sup> In the movie *THX-1138*, one sees a 21st century world under the ground. The people only differ functionally, and are kept on drugs to prevent *self* expression and assertion. The leading character of the movie, Robert Duvall, eventually escapes to the overworld of freedom and the ability freely to be himself by transcending (in a Biblical sense) beyond function. Only the world above can provide new meaning and definition. Nevertheless, the world of totalitarianism removes created and recreated differentiations. Christianity teaches that regardless of “natural” ability, God calls men to do certain tasks. The genius of Reformation theology was that it pulled the Western world back to an understanding that calling comes from God.

---

7. This is the order of Decrees, but the point is that God planned before He created. His plan provides the definition to the universe by which it must operate. Thus, He is the one who must change that definition. Redemption, however, is God's *calling* man back to his original definition in the garden. See L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939), pp. 100-108.

8. This is why consistent Marxists object to the concept of natural ability. An example of this is found in a pamphlet on the POWs of the Korean War. Communists would allow our soldiers to play baseball, but their positions could not be selected on “natural ability” because that would prove predestination. Marxists understand better than most evangelical Christians, who are mostly Arminian, the implications of “natural ability.” See Major William E. Mayer, *Communist Indoctrination - Its Significance To Americans*, (The National Education Program), p. 20.

9. Diversity is created by God. Distinctions in creation are an expression of this diversity. In a very important work, *Psychological Seduction* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1983), p. 144ff., William Kilpatrick discusses the need for sacred/profane distinctions. He *does not* refer to a distinction in a nature-grace-dichotomy sense. Rather, he speaks of the need to maintain ethical distinctions. The concept of calling would fit into this category and reinforce vocational distinctions.

The Doctrine of Definition not only implies predestination, but *government*. To define something is to rule over it, and dominate it. Since man's definition comes from God, he must look to his creator for definition. After creation we find man defining, or naming the animals. By this act, he is carrying out the mandate (Gen. 1: 27ff. ) to dominate the animals. By naming his newly provided wife, Adam sets up the created pattern of the woman's receiving the name of the man,<sup>10</sup> and by this act, he dominates. In the New Covenant, one receives a new Name at baptism (Matt.28:18 ff. ). From the Biblical precedent, we must interpret the renaming at baptism as placing man under a new rule and government. This redefinition by name and calling brings me to Paul's leading comment.

Paul leads into the letter to the Corinthians with a single statement that runs in the face of democracy. He expresses practical predestination via his calling. Moreover, he reminds them of the new government under which they were placed. Why is this antagonistic to democracy? Because it says that Paul acts on the basis of a word/call from above, not on the basis of man's word. He would never have responded to their "report s" if it were not for his calling from God.

This is the sum of what Paul will say to them as a matter of fact. Look closely at the second verse and one will find a second reference to the concept of calling. It is as though Paul is deliberately emphasizing the need to find definition and function according to calling. The Corinthians must learn to operate in terms of their calling in the body of Christ, and not according to personal inner impulse about anything. Furthermore, they have been placed under a government which is defined by God. Therefore, as the Corinthians are defined by God, their autonomous behavior is checked.

The doctrine of calling is important to the peace and purity of the Church. Too often, the heavy emphasis of modern evangelicalism on "lay leadership" destroys the doctrine of calling. Lay people should be involved in the work of ministry, but most of the time they will do more for the Church by being the best at their calling. Paul's whole argument about

---

10. Today it is popular for the woman to keep her own name. This pattern in contemporary society is one more symptom of a world trying to deny its Creator. Nevertheless, the Church must remember that the concept of the woman's taking on the name of the man is rooted in orthodox Christianity.

spiritual gifts, in chapters 12-14 for example, is that the people with leadership gifts should lead, and everyone else ought to do what they are gifted or called to do.

### *11. The Definitive Church*

While we are on the subject of calling, another governmental concept is tied to the use of this idea. Significantly, the Greek phrase for “called saints” (1:2) is often found in the Septuagint, where it is used to translate the Hebrew phrase “holy convocation” (Lev. 23:4). Allowing the parameters of Hebrew Scripture to inform our understanding of the Greek New Testament, as did the original writers and readers, “called saints” takes on added meaning.

The “holy convocation” of the Old Testament was a *numbered* body. It was not just anyone who stumbled into Israel. In fact, the Old Testament saints were very precise in their census about who was and was not in their camp. Their membership was *definitive*.

In the modern Church, there is much discussion about whether a Church should have a membership roll. The Biblical concept, “called saints,” should forever put the issue to rest. The Church should have a roll. The rationale is obvious, but we have more to argue from than just the logical deduction that there can effectively be no discipline if a membership roll does not exist. Therefore, as the “holy convocation” of the Old Testament was definitive, so is the New Covenant Church.

Building on the “called saints” concept, as a matter of fact, one finds reference to several lists of membership in Scripture. The Book of Revelation mentions a roll (Rev. 13:8;17:8), and the Epistles have lists of names at the end of them. Granted, these lists were not designed to be membership rolls, but that is what they effectively became. For, when the Apostle/authors mentioned someone as being in a local Church, that person could not claim membership in some nebulous universal Church, as is done today, to avoid discipline.

### *III. The Obligatory Church*

Continuing to build on the concept of a *called* group of people, we can also conclude that the Church is not a voluntary

organization in the strictest sense of the word. The notion of being called implies the question, 'Who did the calling?' Answer: God did. This call, like the call of creation into existence, cannot be resisted. The Church, therefore, is not a voluntary organization. Membership is mandatory, and the life which God requires of His saints is obligatory,

In the present multi-denominational society, many professing Christians believe that Church membership is not required. This is a denial of their own profession whether they realize it or not. By the way, this is not to say that one is not a Christian if he is outside the institutional Church. But it does mean that no effective Church discipline can be implemented on him. Normally, a Christian will enter under the roll of a local Church where he is more likely to be accountable. Not all Churches with membership rolls exercise discipline. But one thing is fairly certain. One cannot be excommunicated from that of which he is not a definitive member. So, without the obligation of Church membership, the local Church quickly degenerates into a social club.

#### *IV. Theology of Place*

Paul refers to the "Church in Corinth" in the introduction. This designation speaks volumes to a modern protestant Church. But one cannot catch the relevance of Paul's comment without seeing the *theology of place* in Scripture.

Man was made out of dust, and has continuity with the land. Whatever he does, it has some relationship to the ground. The mandate given to him was specifically to cultivate the ground and have dominion over all the animals that lived off the land. The designated sphere of man's dwelling was the garden. God created the garden as the first *place* where man met God and received his mate, and it was to be expanded to cover the whole earth. Everything about man was tied to a specific place.

After the fall, one of the aspects of the blessing of the covenant was *place*. Abraham was blessed with the promise that he would inherit land (Gen. 12:1-2), and this land is identified as covenantal ground. Throughout the Old Testament the people of God look forward to inheriting and maintaining the promised land because this is one indicator that the covenant is not broken.

The New Covenant does not alter the concept of place. For that matter, the concept of a *land* for the people of God, Jew and Gentile together, is expanded to cover the whole earth. Paul says to the Ephesian Church, "Honor thy Father and Mother . . . that . . . thou mayest live long on the earth" (Eph. 6:2-3). Significantly, this is a quotation from the Old Testament Law, and the Greek word *earth* normally means *covenantal land*. In this context, however, Paul applies the concept of covenantal land to the whole world. The covenant still has the aspect of space, but the space is expanded to the whole world.

From this we can conclude that the concept of *geography* or *place* is still tied to the covenant. The mission of the Church is earthward oriented, and finds its identity in a particular geographical context. This poses an interesting challenge for the Protestant Church. Since the Reformation, Protestant Churches have organized in terms of *ideology*, as opposed to geography. Initially, this was not the plan, but as Protestantism continued to fragment along theological lines, and became more Platonic, an earthward orientation was abandoned. Eventually, whole eschatologies were conveniently engineered which excused the Church from ever attempting to gain dominion of geographic space.

Historically, the Church was structured in terms of a *parish system*. From Paul's geographic designation of Churches, it is apparent that a maturing Church will return to this type of definition. How? In a time of theological flux when the major Protestant denominations are fracturing, re-organizing, and sometimes fracturing all over again, a Church needs to work on two fronts. First, it needs to work with Churches of its own affiliation to stress the importance of local connections. This should not require dilution of particular doctrinal positions. Most orthodox Churches, for example, are committed to fighting abortion. Local connections could be established around this issue.

Second, a Church should try to build relationships with other Churches in the area that are, practically speaking, attempting to accomplish the same goals. Since the advent of the Moral Majority, many Fundamentalist Churches are politically involved. Local organizations could be formulated around this movement which cut through denominational boundaries. For a local Church this could prove to be invaluable if society breaks up. It will have a broad pool of

friends to call upon. One thing is for certain, in this situation, a Church will find out the impotence of the mother denominational Church to respond to practical needs; for, every Church in its denomination will be hurting. Who knows, maybe God will use this kind of circumstance to force the Church back in a geographical direction.

#### *V. Twofold Witness Concept*

Notice that Paul starts by affirming a unified front with Sosthenes. Sosthenes was a converted priest (Acts 18) who had become an elder or leader in the Church. Why does Paul go out of his way to align himself with the leadership of the local Church?

First, Paul knew the dangers inherent in undermining local leadership. For an evangelist, missionary, or any other kind of itinerant minister to do this spells death to the local Church. And if the battle is lost at the local level, contrary to what some revivalists might say, the whole war is lost. Revivalism has virtually destroyed the American Church.<sup>11</sup> Not only has each major revival injected a form of decisionalism into the Church, which has historically pulled American religion into Arminianism,<sup>12</sup> but revivalism has taken religion outside local Church government. The result has been a weakening, not a strengthening of the Church, and an almost magical view of Church growth has been adopted. As long as the Church wants magic to revive her, she will con-

---

11. Charles Hedge was extremely critical of the first Great Awakening. Believing that it crippled the American Church, he condemned many of its irregularities and endorsed the Old Side in the Old Side/New Side controversy. See Charles Hedge, *The Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States* (Philadelphia: American Presbyterian Press, [1851], 1983), Part II, pp. 102ff. Also, see an invaluable work which evaluates the Great Awakening by Nathan Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977). His thesis is that the Great Awakening had died by the time of the French and Indian Wars, and a revival of Puritanism returned a sacred cause for liberty to America and issued into the American Revolution.

12. Some Calvinists might object, reminding me of the fact that the *altar call* was not used in the Great Awakening. This is *true*, but conversion was pulled away from the sacraments, ipso facto, and when this happens, human action is sacramentalized. See my essay in the *Geneva Papers*, No. 25, "The Soteriology of Baptism (11)."

tinue to lose influence in the western world.

Second, Paul adopted a *two-witness* approach to ministry. The Old Testament taught that something was confirmed by the mouth of two or three witnesses. This law undergirds any aspect of life that requires witnesses. In the Church, ministry needs more than one man in leadership. Even an apparent one-man-show has some concept of plurality. Paul applied this concept when he referred to Sosthenes, and said to the Corinthians that his admonitions came from a plurality of leadership.

Even though Paul was an Apostle, he used the plurality concept of the twofold witness. How much more should ministers, and particularly young ministers trying to plant Churches, take a team approach? Most Church planting arms of denominations have discovered that Churches are built better with teams of men.

Germane to the governmental emphasis which we are underscoring, the fact that Paul utilized the twofold witness practice indicates a judicial thrust. For one, Paul knew that his letter would serve as charges against the Corinthians before God's tribunal. Like the Prophets of the Old Testament, he was bearing witness against them. Why else would he refer to Sosthenes?

For another, Paul knew the Corinthian Church was not functioning as a government – he exhorts them to implement Church discipline in the fifth and sixth chapters. Reference to another in agreement, and particularly one who was a leader among them, would cause them to listen. In other words, the process of discipline was progressing to the second stage (Matt. 18:15). Paul's twofold witness approach, therefore, was consistent with the other governmental emphases of the introduction.

### *Summary*

Paul begins his letter with major governmental concepts embedded in the first few verses. These verses are normally called the salutation. Paul was not opening his letter this way because he was borrowing from the style of the day. For that matter, the Holy Spirit was imparting revelation that would transcend every culture and civilization. So it was not important that this letter fit the literary milieu of the day. Whatever

the Holy Spirit led Paul to say, the statements were put there to communicate what had to be said to correct the problems at Corinth. The Corinthian Church was fragmenting for various reasons, which we will come to in a moment, and Paul knew the Corinthians needed to be re-oriented. These are only a few of the major concepts found in the first few verses of the book, but perhaps they will help the reader to see the definite proclivities of the Apostle Paul. Now we turn to the primary problem of the Corinthians.

### Schism

Refusal to be torn by God's judgmental processes was the major problem of the Corinthians. We meet the first cause of the problem in Paul's statement, "there be no *divisions* among you" (I Cor. 1:10). Division has an Old Testament origin which literally means 'tear.' The Greek word in I Corinthians 1:10 is schizo from which we derive our English word "schism." In the Septuagint we find it is used to describe three important tearings of the world: The Flood (Gen. 7:11), the parting of the Red Sea (Ex. 14:21), and the destruction of Jerusalem (Jer. 52:7).<sup>13</sup>

Each of these was the application of God's curse. The curse is generally symbolized by some sort of tearing. When the covenant with Abraham was cut, God instructed him to separate the animals so that God could walk between them and ratify the covenant (Gen. 15). The tearing of the garment, as is often the case with the prophet or anyone who has been part of a covenant breaking process, is a sign of a torn covenant. When Christ died, the garment in the Temple was torn, thus signifying that the Old Covenant had been broken in two senses. One, Israel was a covenant breaker. Two, Christ was

---

13. In Jeremiah 52:7 the reference describes the destruction of the city of Jerusalem. In Lamentations 2:8, this is referred to as a tearing down of the walls (see the NIV translation). The same verse calls this tearing a lamentation. So, a lamentation is a form of tearing. This explains why our Lord spoke of His death and resurrection with the analogy of childbirth, and used the very word lamentation (John 16:20-21). His death was like a birth in that He was torn apart by the curse of God the Father. But His death issued into life, as the birth of the child which tears the mother brings life. Therefore, tearing can be unto death, as in the case of the Egyptians at the Red Sea, or unto life, as in the case of birth and rebirth in Scripture.

destroying the covenant by taking the curse upon Himself which established a better covenant. So, every time the covenant is ratified symbolic tearing occurs, and when the covenant is broken *real* tearing results.

Thus, Paul uses the word *schizo* to point to the fact that the covenant is being torn. It is almost a play on words because, the Corinthians, on the one hand, will not face the proper tearing by God. Yet, on the other hand, the curse was being brought by the Corinthians themselves through divisions. Rejecting the tearing that leads to life, the Corinthians were literally being torn to death (I Cor. 11:30).

Paul's warning, therefore, places their behavior in a very serious light. He was saying that an unlawful tearing was occurring, and if they did not check their behavior, apostasy would result. In other words, the tearing that began with *schisms* in the Church would grow into a complete rending of the covenant. As the preferred reading of I Corinthians 1:13 says, "Christ has been divided!" (without a question mark).<sup>14</sup>

This is precisely what happens in the modern Church. Often, people become disenchanted with a local Church, begin to cause dissension, and eventually leave. A better destination, one without the problems of the former Church, is perceived. In reality, schism has been consummated, and apostasy results.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, why was this tearing-curse-of-the-covenant process taking place in Corinth? In Paul's continuing argument, he explains several contributing factors.

(1)

*The Greek Model of Ministry.* From Paul's criticism of "I am of Paul, I am of Cephas," it is apparent that the Church at Corinth had become ego-centered. Corinth was following the Greek *heroic-model* of leadership.<sup>16</sup> When a man demonstrated

---

14. See marginal reference in the *New Amen*"can *StandardVersion* of the text.

15. This is not the case where liberalism forces orthodoxy out. Nevertheless, it is much better if the conservatives force the liberals out. Examples of this are the Eureka Classis of the Reformed Church of the United States and the Lutheran Church Missouri<sup>1</sup>Synod.

16. This is not to be confused with a Christian view of heroes. Biblical heroes are men who prove themselves by continued faithfulness, and come to be recognized as God's leaders. Such men are found in the "Hall of Faith" in Hebrews 11.

unusual abilities, normally in the Olympic Games, he was considered above nature and invested with more of the being of God. His reward was elevation above others.

In Christian ministry, Church members often adopt this pagan model. Leaders are understood to be personally closer to God (to possess more of the being of God), and end up being virtually worshiped.<sup>17</sup> The principle of plurality of leadership is a check and balance against this one-man-show deification of leadership. Nevertheless, man loves to worship himself via one heroic leader. The Corinthians were rallying around select *individuals*, and undermining the work of a team *ministry*. How ironic — a democratic society, filled with mythical visions of equality, was quick to create partisan side-shows along the lines of a Greek model of ministry.

Unfortunately, modern discipleship programs use this same Eastern and/or Greek model of discipline. The Christian method is Trinitarian expressing a one and many influence on the disciple. In practical terms, this means that one is disciplined by the group as much as the individual. When either the individual or the group takes on a more predominant role, imbalance results. The disciple either fails to realize the influence he can have as an individual, or he becomes pampered.

Discipleship programs have done an excellent job at showing the importance of individual influence and involvement. But, today, our Churches are filled with “pampered” individuals who are the product of too much direct attention. They float from Church to Church trying to find someone who will give his/her life for him. Only one has totally given His life for the Church, and that was Jesus Christ. Perhaps this was not the precise problem in Corinth, but there is point of contact between one-man discipleship programs, ego-centered ministry, and the Greek model of leadership.

The corrective is (1) the correct doctrine of office. It is not because leaders are closer to God, or possess more personal holiness that they should be followed. It is because they have been *officially* set apart by God and then the Church.

And, the other corrective is (2) plurality of leadership. Christian leaders are supposed to be servant team-players. They should be willing to take leadership, but see their re-

---

17. This phenomenon grew to be called the heresy of Donatism. We will discuss this subject later.

sponsibility as working to raise up fellow-laborers. When a leader allows himself to become the "great man on the pedestal," he has sown the seeds of a humanistic ministry. Man centered ministry can only result in endless division. Perhaps this is what Luther meant when he spoke of never wanting a Church to be named after him.

## (2)

*Catholicity and Integrity.* The Church has historically struggled to maintain unity without compromising Truth. Judging by the state of the Church in both East and West, neither has done too well. The East has preserved some semblance of unity, but reacted to the doctrine of *substance* with a platonic emphasis. The West has essentially done the same, but its doctrine of *substance* but created a multi-denominational octopus.

Protestantism has failed to give the world a better Church. I am not suggesting that we all head back to Rome. That was the fatal mistake of the Oxford movement of the last century.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, it is time that Orthodox Protestants recognize that the mature man which Paul describes in Ephesians four has Unity as well as Truth.<sup>19</sup> Protestantism must never give up on striving for unity.

Convenience has led many theologians to place this unity on the other side of the Second Coming. But Paul's argument is not that the Second Coming is given to accomplish a mature man. Rather, spiritual gifts of evangelism and pastoring are given to this end (Eph. 4:11ff. ). There will not be need for gifts in the Eschaton. The Church will have arrived to a full state of maturity. So, Paul's argument is that these gifts work to produce the mature man, and this implies progressive maturation "until" maturity is attained at the end of time.

Unity and Truth are not in conflict with one another. Only man's sinfulness creates a dialectic in principle and practice. Truth cannot be given up, yet that very Truth speaks of a True unity that will come about in history. The Church, to

---

18. George Salmon, *The Infallibility of the Church* (London: Scherratt and Hughes, [1888] 1914). Salmon provides one of the best and most incisive arguments against the Oxford Movement.

19. Liberals have recognized the need for unity, but for the wrong reason. Largely Unitarian in theology, as most of Western religion, the motivation for unity is the belief that all men are saved.

date, has yet to figure out a way to achieve unity without compromising Truth. This author is not prepared to give "the" answer, but he has observed several issues involved in the effort to maintain catholicity and integrity.

One, if the Reformation thought taught the world anything, it was that *human covenants cannot be absolutized*. Man is totally depraved and bound to sin, and sometimes unto apostasy. Because of the sinfulness of man, God therefore allows human covenants to be terminated in a lawful manner. If unrepentant sin cannot be resolved, tyrannies are established, and furthermore, to do so, ultimately absolutizes man. For example, if a king breaks the law of God, he can be deposed (depending on the severity of the sin). If, as in the case of Charles I of England, he commits treason, he may rightfully be put to death. The king cannot be above the Law of God, and to absolutize the covenant between the king and the people makes the king God.

Equally important, however, covenant breaking should be dealt with lawfully. A human covenant should be dissolved in a legal manner. When a king commits treason, he should be tried by a court of law. It is not enough for common consent of the people to take the law into their own hands. Elected representatives of the people and ordained by God should decide.

Applying these ideas to the Church, members of local Churches must learn to check their movement among and between other Churches with accountability. One should not leave under his own recognizance. Nor should he be admitted into a Church and given communing privileges until proper transfer has been secured. Also, local Church governments should predetermine to respect other Ecclesiastical bodies that are Trinitarian. Moreover, they should realize that some problems cannot be resolved to the satisfaction of all parties concerned. This means that members should be allowed to transfer, even under discipline in some cases if need be. This position allows for maximum latitude and maintains the integrity of the Church at the same time. No doubt this will not satisfy every hypothetical situation, but in practice it will go a long way toward maintaining purity and peace.<sup>20</sup>

---

20. Perhaps someone will point out that the Reformers found themselves outside the one Church in the West. First, we must remember that the historical situation was totally different. Second, they were forced out. Third, they quickly established local Ecclesiastical government to which they were accountable. Autonomy was only temporary.

Two, the perspective of fellow Christians should be taken into consideration. Man is presuppositional and operates with varying motivation. In the Old Testament, a man did not have to pay as severe a sacrifice if he committed an unwitting sin (Lev. 4-5). His motivation, objectively determined through a judicial process, was taken into consideration.

Perhaps some unnecessary Church disputes and divisions could have been avoided if perspective were taken into account. For example, Wesley and Whitfield split over predestination. But it ought to be weighed to what extent Wesley *really* rejected the true doctrine of predestination. Could it have been that Wesley resisted a rationalistic concept of sovereignty that sidestepped covenant, and attempted to penetrate the decrees of God through Calvinistic mysticism?

I think it is quite possible that Wesley and many other "Arminians" reacted to this kind of Calvinism. They saw the *covenantal structure* of the Bible and man's responses couched in those terms. God always deals with man according to his response to the visible covenant.

Yet, at the time in which Wesley lived, he witnessed a kind of Calvinism that tried to determine salvation on the basis of predestination and not the covenant. Perhaps he understood that no one could penetrate into the Decree of God.

Further, did Wesley really reject predestination, judging by his prayers? Did he pray that God would save men? Is this not explicit acceptance of the Sovereignty of God whether Wesley perceived the connection between the way he prayed and the doctrine of predestination? So, I think Wesley rejected a kind of "enlightenment" Calvinism.

I am not trying to exonerate Wesley completely. Surely he had serious theological problems. But, upon much reflection about the effect of the Enlightenment on Calvinism, I wonder if the debate at some points, between Wesley and Whitfield, was somewhat like two ships crossing in the night. This historical illustration, among many others, demonstrates the important need to consider perspective and even emphasis.

Three, the varying rate of growth among churches and individuals should be considered. People do not grow at the same rate and this makes for conflict. In the Parable of the Soils, the Lord said that the good soil bears fruit thirty, sixty, and one hundred fold (Mk. 4:8). This indicates variation of growth, and means that each Church will be filled with people

who bear fruit at different levels. Many times catholicity and integrity can be preserved by simply recognizing this fact.

(3)

The third contributing factor to schism was *boasting* (I Cor. 1:26-31). Boasting has to do with *image* and *environment*. Paul says that man's boast should be Jesus Christ (1:21), and Jesus is the true image of God (Rem. 8:29). So, when a man boasts in God, he is establishing the true image of God.

Boasting also has to do with *environment* in that Paul says no flesh should boast in the *presence of God* (1:28). The presence of God refers to God's environment which reflects His image. Ezekiel 1 and the Book of Revelation describe an the environment as consisting of such things as Cherubim, sea of glass, rainbow, and worship. This order, which is in God's presence, is His environment. So, environment is the image of God in expanded form. Given the fact that boasting creates an image and environment, we are prepared to make a few observations.

One, boastful man establishes an environment that reflects his image not God's. He creates a world around him that looks identical to him. There is no diversity; it is static because it must match his personality. His boasting creates a large trophy room that only feeds his ego. Anything that invades the environment created by his boasting is viewed as antagonistic.

Two, the humanistic boaster, that is the man who boasts in man not God, creates a closed universe. His world is a personality cult for himself. Psalm 40:3 says, "For the wicked boasteth of his heart's desire, and blesseth the covetous, whom the Lord abhorreth." His closed universe is so motivated by envy that he creates an environment based on envy, and attracts a community of envious people around himself.

Three, the environment of boasting is deceptive because it is not based on Truth. If it were, then the boasting would be to God. The presence of deceptive humanistic boasting is visible in the modern Church. Recently, on a trip to England, my wife and I visited a large Anglican Church in London. On Sunday, there was a small congregation of people roped off in section down front. Just outside the roped off section were hundreds of visitors noisely taking pictures and sightseeing. Like so many churches here in the United States, this church

boasted of being much more than reality indicated. It is like the church which has 2,000 in attendance on Sunday morning, but cannot draw more than a handful on Sunday evening or Wednesday night prayer meeting. This church might boast of many great things, but the effort is vaporous.

Four, the boaster creates activity around himself that dies of its own momentum. At the inquisition of Peter and John, Gamaliel made an interesting observation. He said, "Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men. For before these days rose up Theudas, *boasting* himself to be somebody; to whom a number-of men about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought. . . . And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God" (Acts 5:35-39).

Gamaliel argued that this movement would die of its own natural death. If it did not, then the Jews would know that they were fighting against God. In the same way, the boaster creates his own world that dies. But if one boasts in God, he creates a world that will never die. Moreover, his name will take on new definition and meaning because it has truly been identified with something that will last forever!

(4)

*The Medium is the Message.* Here is a fourth cause of schism. Mode of preaching became more important than the message. Paul reminded the Corinthians that he did not come to them with "persuasive words" (2: 4 NASV) because the strength of his preaching was in the message. He deliberately directs their attention away from the medium. For the Greeks, however, great preaching conformed to the dramatic style of the amphitheater.

Today, it is no different. Most seminaries strain to make bores into elocutionists. Style is everything. It is no wonder because we have a society which is entertainment oriented. The homiletical philosophy is to "produce a great entertainer." P. T. Forsyth said it the best. "This is the bane of much popular religion, and the source of its wide collapse. People

are *hypnotized rather than converted*. They are acted on by suggestion rather than authority, which lowers their personality rather than rallies it, and moves them by man's will rather than God's."<sup>21</sup>

Unfortunately the Church plays into the hands of pagan desire with this rather *subjective* emphasis of manipulation. Even the great R. L. Dabney in his *Lectures on Sacred Rhetoric* said that the key to great preaching was the will to dominate.<sup>22</sup> Are the greatest preachers the ones who have the greatest desire to manipulate people? Is this correct? Is this the emphasis of Paul? To all of these questions, Paul answers "no." He emphasizes the message over the medium. In other words, the correct message will go a long way for therein lies the power. Certainly, we can say that manipulation has been the key to many great communicators, vis a vis Adolf Hitler and the like. But good communication is not the same as good preaching.

Good preaching is first and foremost at its best when it is *simple exposition*. This method directs one's attention to the *objective* Word from God where God has spoken in finality, and away from the hearer's subjective whims. One of the most important books ever written on preaching, *Thoughts on Preaching*, was penned by the first professor of Princeton Theological Seminary, J. W. Alexander. His basic argument was that preachers need to return to the ancient practice of expository preaching. He says the following.

The pulpit discourses of Roman Catholics as well as Protestants, during several centuries, have been, for the most part, founded on short passages of Scripture; commonly single verses, and oftener less than more. . . It is not a little remarkable, that in an age in which so much is heard against creeds and systems as contradistinguished from the pure text of Scripture, and in which sacred hermeneutics hold so high a place in Theological education, we should have allowed the methodical and continued exposition of the Bible to go almost into disuse, . . .

The expository method of preaching is the most obvious and natural way of conveying to the hearers the import of the sacred

---

21. P. T. Forsyth, *The Principle of Authority*, 2nd ed. (London: Independent Press, 1952), p. 51. Cited in Donald G. Bloesch, *The Future of Evangelical Christianity: A Call for Unity Amid Diversity* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1983), p. 98.

22. R. L. Dabney, *Lectures on Sacred Rhetoric* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth Trust, 1979), pp. 233-260.

volume. It is the very work for which a ministry was instituted — to interpret the Scriptures. In the case of any other book, we should be at no loss in what manner to proceed. Suppose a volume of human science to be placed in our hands as the sole manual, text-book, and standard, which we were expected to elucidate to a public assembly: in what way would it be most natural to work? Certainly not, we think, to take a sentence here, and a sentence there, and upon these separate portions to frame one or two discourses every week. No interpreter of Aristotle, of Littleton, Paffendorf, or of Paley, ever dreamed of such a method. *Nor was it adopted in the Christian church, until the sermon ceased to be regarded in its true notion, as an explanation of the Scripture, and began to be viewed as a rhetorical entertainment.*<sup>23</sup>

Most of the great preachers of history have used the “simple exposition” approach.<sup>24</sup> This particular approach allows the text to stand forth, and submerges the man in the message. When the sermon is over, the people are not so impressed with the greatness of the preacher as they are with the power of the Word of God.

One more criticism of subjective preaching: It psychologizes the text. The preacher must apply the Word of God to the people, but he does not need to psychologize and twist the text, forcing it say something it was not intended to say, to make the Bible relevant. The effect of this kind of preaching is illustrated in the opening comments of Kilpatrick’s *Psychological Seduction*.

The deep faith we have in psychology was illustrated for me while attending church in Scotland a few years ago. The incident was not dramatic, but it has stuck in my mind. The priest was delivering a sermon, and to buttress his message he referred to the authority of John’s Gospel, the Epistles of Saint Paul, the writings of Saint Augustine, and so on. The congregation seemed unmoved. The man to my left yawned. A woman in the next row was checking the contents of her purse.

“As Erich Fromm says . . .,” the priest continued. Instantly a visible stir of attention rippled through the crowd as it strained forward to catch every nuance. The yawning man closed his mouth, and the lady shut her purse; both came alert.<sup>25</sup>

---

23. J. W. Alexander, *Thoughts on Preaching* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), pp. 228-229. Italics added.

24. *Ibid.* pp. 230ff.

25. William Kirk Kilpatrick, *Psychological Seduction* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1983), p. 13.

The Church and its ministers are to blame for this kind of response. They have poured secular psychology through the verses of Scripture for so long— to an educated audience that knows where the minister really obtains his sermons – that he, the preacher, has undercut his own authority. His methodology has placed the real authority outside of Scripture, and the result is that the man in the pew trusts Erich Fromm more than the Apostle Paul.

The most important book on preaching which has ever been written—one every minister and seminary student ought to read – has a significant title, *Sola Scriptura*. Translated, the title means “Scripture alone .” One might ask, “why would a book on preaching be given that title, it sounds like a study in the doctrine of Scripture instead of instruction on homiletics?” The author, Sidney Greidanus, realized long ago what psychological preaching was really saying about the Word of God. He emphasized the need for a *redemptive-historical method* of preaching. The redemptive-historical method presupposes that history is the story of *God* working in history rather than the story of a world without God. The latter view — an atheistic interpretation of history — is a humanistic view of history which totally removes God from history. <sup>26</sup> With the correct view of history, however, *the historical texts of Scripture become the basis for dogma.* <sup>27</sup> God creates history with His Word, speaks His Word to man, and His history becomes foundational.

With this presupposition in mind, we see that there are two basic ideas bound in the redemptive-historical method. First, the Bible is to be interpreted *organically*. When one comes to any Bible text, he should try to understand its continuity with what else is happening in Scripture.

In a stage play, for instance, one may never evaluate the characters apart from the totality of the play. . . . Applied to Scripture, this means that every part of the one redemptive history can be properly interpreted only when this interpretation is Christological, for Christ is the center in which all of redemptive history has its unity and in Whom it finds its interpretation. If one disconnects a part from this Center, he has robbed it of its Christological character and retains, at best, an edifying moral which contains nothing particularly Christian .<sup>28</sup>

---

26. Gerardus van der Leeuw, *The Bible as a Book* (St. Catherines, Ontario, Canada: Paideia Press, 1978), pp. 13ff.

27. Sidney Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura* (Toronto: Wedge Publishing, 1970), p. 131.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 136.

Second, redemptive-historical preaching is concerned with *synthesis*. Greidanus points out the difficulties in using this term – in hermeneutics it refers to the “deeper sense” of Scriptures, and in homiletics it is used in contrast to analytic – and explains a much different use of synthesis than Americans are used to hearing. Synthetic interpretation means that one should “pay close attention to the specific relationship (synthesis) of elements within the text. A certain text may contain many of the same elements as other texts, but in the synthesis of these elements every text is unique. Consequently, every text has a unique message, for the preacher should preach the text as a unit and not as a collection of separate elements.”<sup>29</sup>

Whereas the first aspect of redemptive-historical preaching focused on the continuity, this point concentrates on discontinuity. Greidanus, to my knowledge, does not make the point, but this approach is consistent with the Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity. The Holy Trinity is one and many and has continuity and discontinuity. Therefore, one would expect the Revelation of God to reflect the oneness and manyness of the Trinity.

Paul’s Christocentric approach to the Corinthians seems to bear the same emphases as Greidanus. The Corinthians were *subject* oriented. They centered their attention on the man instead of the text. Paul attempted to correct this mis-focus by reminding them that good preaching is in terms of its attention to Christ, not the personal eloquence of the man. For the Corinthians, it was a matter that touched the preservation of the unity of the Body of Christ because their man-centeredness was tearing them apart.

## (5)

*The flesh.* The fifth reason for schism was the *flesh*. Paul points this out in the third chapter of I Corinthians when he says, “And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of *flesh*, as to babes in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still *fleshly*” (I Cor. 3:1-3, NASV).

---

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Calvin on Ezekiel, pp. 66-67, 334-36 (1st vol. on Ezek.).

The theology of flesh goes back to the creation of man. When God made man, the text says, “then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.”

Originally, man was *animated dust*.<sup>30</sup> His animation came from the *breath* of God. Even the mutual *one-flesh* relationship that existed between man and woman (Gen. 2:25) implies unity in animation. After the fall, however, man was changed by his rebellion to God. He acquired a new animating principle. The flesh was *self* motivating and even motivated by the Devil (Eph. 2:2).<sup>31</sup>

Man experienced a great power loss. Prior to the fall, he had been empowered by God. Having lost God’s power, man turned to the one place where personal power was apparent — *procreation*. Power to bear children represented the ability to create, and the ability to turn those children into cities indicated the real source of ultimate power. This was demonstrated in that Cain named his first son, Enoch, and the first city after his son (Gen. 4:17).

Man was obsessed with power and new empowerment. He sought dynasties and empires instead of Biblical city/cultures. His religion was one of power instead of obedience (ethics). Because of this power orientation, violence and bloodshed followed him. Cain killed seven men and his son, Lamech, killed seventy men (Gen. 4:24). This is power religion which seeks to establish by force an empire on human blood. So, blood and birth, to the pagan, are the magical keys to building his empire.

Paul makes the connection between flesh and violence when he says, “For you are still fleshly. For since there is jealously and *strife* among you, are you not still fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men” (I Cor. 3:3 NASV). In other words, man-centered ministries result in Church violence because empowerment is being sought in man’s name and empire. Even the Church can become a platform for men to build their own private empires. Such an approach, which Paul describes in I Corinthians 3, tears up the Church.

---

31. In the original text of Ephesians 2:2, the Greek word for “working in” is *energeo*. We derive the English word *energy* from it. Although derivation does not prove meaning, it is sometimes helpful where the derivation agrees with usage. In this case it does, and we see the motivating power of the Devil.

## (6)

*Perfectionism.* It is interesting that Paul closes off the first major section of the Book of Corinthians with an apologetic for his ministry. Why? Leadership was being destabilized by preoccupation with some leaders over others. Some leaders were more appealing than others because they seemed to have better qualifications. Some wanted to follow Apollos and others wanted to follow Paul. For that matter, this explains the apologetic tone throughout both Epistles written to the Corinthian Church, and particularly I Corinthians 4.

Not following leadership in the Church because of inferior skill, maturity, and qualification is the sin of *perfectionism*. *Perfectionism* requires and expects visible perfection in the leadership, and bases submission on performance instead of calling. God, however, blesses a people who are willing to live on the basis of calling instead of perfection.

God has confirmed this time and again in history. In the early medieval period, a group of people known as the Donatists tore up the Church because they were unwilling to follow certain leaders whom the *y perceived* had betrayed the Faith. This subjective course of action on the basis of *perception is the key to the problem*. Norman Cantor elaborates on the Donatist controversy.

The Donatist controversy was more important than others to the Christians of the western church. It led to a conflict between Donatism and Catholicism which, with a long hiatus from 700 to 1050, lasted from the fourth to the sixteenth centuries. This is the fundamental doctrinal dispute in western Christianity. In the fourth century Donatism was confined to its birthplace of North Africa (the present Algeria and Tunisia), where it divided the old and militant Christian community into schismatic and orthodox churches. Donatism, named after a certain bishop Donatus, one of its founders, was an indirect outcome of Diocletian's persecutions. The governor of the North African province had been quite lenient, merely requesting the Christians to make a symbolic repudiation of their faith by handing over their Scriptures. The wealthier Christians adopted this convenient course of action. But when the persecutions ended, they found themselves branded as "traitores" (betrayers) by a group of zealots, mostly from the poorer classes, who demanded that only the heroic saints who had in no way , betrayed their faith be regarded as members of the church.<sup>32</sup>

---

32. Norman Cantor, *Medieval History* (New York: Macmillan, 1969), pp. 40-41.

A bishop of Carthage, Felix, had been accused of being a "traditore," but was exonerated by Constantine. Nevertheless, two Episcopates resulted when the people ignored the judicial ruling and elected Majorinus as bishop of Carthage whose successor was Donatus.<sup>33</sup> Cantor continues in his description at this point.

The Donatist puritans claimed that the traditores had lost grace and were not even Christians any longer. They demanded that the sacramental rites be administered by priests of pure spirit, and held that sacraments administered by unworthy priests were invalid. The Catholic majority maintained their belief that it was the office of the priest and not his personal character or quality that gave sacramental rites their validity. This was the pivotal point of dispute – a church of saints as against the Catholic (universal) church. At the end of the fourth century the great church father and native North African, St. Augustine, mustered all his learning and eloquence against the Donatists in behalf of the Catholic position, but neither the arguments of the Catholics nor even the persecutions waged by the orthodox emperor entirely prevailed against the Donatists. They became an underground church and disappeared only after the Moslem conquest in the seventh century. Donatism reappeared again in the west in the second half of the eleventh century. Its absence from the Christian religious scene for several centuries enabled the Catholic church to assert its leadership in early medieval Europe, a task that could not have been successful had the church followed the Donatist ideals of exclusiveness and not attempted to bring all men into the fold and tried to civilize them.<sup>34</sup>

Donatism failed to give the world a better Church because prior to eternity holiness must be defined in terms of *perseverance* instead of *perfection*. The Corinthians were basing their willingness to follow on their *perception* of perfection. Not only is it wrong to build the Church on perfection, but one's perception is an even weaker foundation. Whose perception do we trust? As one can see, *perfectionism* is fraught with problems, problems that cause schism.

#### conclusion

A Church in an age of democracy will find that schism incessantly recurs. Paul begins the argument of his letter to the

---

33. *Dictionary of Church History*, Edited by Douglas, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1969), p. 308.

34. *Medieval History*, p. 41.

Corinthians with this issue. The thrust of this paper has been primarily to speak to the issue of schism and allow Paul's development of this theme to control the study. For, in the first four chapters of I Corinthians, we find the major causes of schism,

As the first section spoke to the matter of unlawful *tearing*, the second section speaks to unlawful *bonding*, fornication. The remainder of the book, 7:1 to 16:9, develops the theme of proper tearing and bonding.

It is not within the scope of this paper to continue the argument. But we must remember that the time of the writing of this letter was the Feast of Unleavened Bread. It was a time for coming under the judgment of God to be torn and rebonded to His Word. In an age of democracy, the Church, more than ever before, should allow herself to be torn and renewed in her Covenant. The time of rebellious ways must cease, or God may turn Western culture into another North Africa where the Gospel has not been successful, except in a few very isolated and temporary situations, since the seventh century ! 35

---

35. It should be kept in mind that prior to the coming of Islam, the North African Church had been very strong through the time of Augustine. But mysticism and premillennialism crippled the Church in this part of the world such that God has never given it back.

## TWO-TIERED CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

Gary North

**B**ECAUSE so few people take seriously the authority of the modern, “democratic” church in the United States, including most church members, there has been no pressing need in our day to restructure church membership. After all, hardly anyone feels the necessity of following church discipline (since there is always another church down the street to join if you should get in trouble), and churches have so little influence in the culture at large. Who worries about the legal structure of sovereignty over the affairs of the church? Since there is so little gain from controlling the church today, it is inexpensive to defend it.

### *How I Could Take Over Your Church*

Let us assume, just for the sake of argument, that your church is word-i capturing. Maybe it owns some valuable property that I could sell at a profit to real estate developers. Perhaps my little church building is no longer sufficient to seat everyone comfortably on Sunday morning, but the members do not want to spend any money on buying a nice new building. In any case, I have decided to get your property, no money down, simply by taking over your monthly mortgage payments. Here is my one-year plan to get what I want.

First, I know what you want: new members. A large and growing congregation is always seen as an asset. So I make a deal with members of my church. They will slowly and inconspicuously join your church. If your church gives altar calls, they will march down the aisle. If you want them to be baptized (or rebaptized), they will agree immediately. Week by week, you will experience an “evangelism explosion.” You will be astounded at how “the Holy Ghost is working to build your church’s ministry.” And since you baptize them and allow them to take communion, you will no doubt allow them to

vote. Therein lies a tale — a tale of discount property.

Eventually, you will call a congregational meeting. When I have made certain that my people control at least 50% of the votes in your church, I will instruct them to begin electing new deacons, elders, and trustee members. Maybe we can do it in one evening; maybe we will bide our time. But election by election, my people will gain the positions of authority in your church if your church is democratic. (Roman Catholics do not need to fear; neither do Episcopalians and Methodists. )

There will come a day when my people will decide to sell the church property. Or if we want the church property without a formal transfer of title, the day will come when my people will vote to leave the denomination and join up with my church. The paperwork is not all that important. One way or another, we will be able to take away everything you and your members have struggled to build up over a lifetime. *If you allow all baptized communing members to vote, you have turned over title to your property to me, in principle.* I can take legal possession any time I can round up enough conniving people to outvote your members by 50.1% to 49.9570. So can your local Masonic Lodge, Unitarian Church, Moonie Congregation, or Church of Cosmic Vibrations. Am I wrong about this? Check your by-laws.

Any church in a college town could be lost to a bunch of students within a few months. Legally, there is nothing you could do to protect yourself, unless you changed your by-laws before the invaders got their majority. But would you see the threat in time? Wouldn't most congregations simply rejoice at "all those nice young people who are being led to Jesus"? Christians are notoriously naive concerning anything political. Nevertheless, the legal process for controlling churches is overwhelmingly political.

### *Democracy and Immigration*

We can examine this problem from another standpoint, the strictly political. The twentieth century has seen the coming of immigration and emigration barriers. The Communist 'paradises' line their borders with barbed wire and guards, in order to keep their citizens inside the New World Order. Socialist "paradises" may allow people to leave, but many of them refuse to allow people to take their capital with them:

cash, gold, silver, and so forth. They are allowed to leave "with the clothes on their backs," but not much more.

Similarly, the democracies have now created barriers to entry. At the beginning of this century, such restrictions were rare. Today, people attempting to enter most democratic republics had better have a lot more than the clothes on their backs, or else they will be sent back to their point of exodus. Immigration barriers, quotas, and other restrictions keep out "the human flotsam and jetsam." No longer does any democracy honor the sentiments of Emma Lazarus, whose words are inscribed on the statue of liberty: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free; the wretched refuse of your teeming shore; Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed, to me: I lift up my lamp beside the golden door." They had better be carrying American Express cards if they want to join those who have found "the good life" in some democratic land.

What made the difference? Cheaper transportation, for one thing. In the early nineteenth century, poor people who came to the United States were people from northern Europe, since those were the nations we traded with. The masses of immigrants came on board trading vessels — the great schooners that used the poorest people as ballast. The West-East trade carried large, heavy cargoes, such as timber. Coming back, they carried people. Yet even in this case, ocean voyages were time-consuming and expensive, relative to the wealth of the masses of working people. Few could afford the trip, and few would leave, unless their lives depended on it (the Irish in the late 1840's who were escaping the potato famine) or they saw tremendous opportunities in America (skilled workers). But by the 1880's, the coming of the steamship had opened up southern Europe and the Mediterranean to immigrants, and more of them could be squeezed into steamers. "The changeover from sailing ships to steamships was sudden and dramatic. As of 1856, 97 percent of passengers arriving in New York came by sail, but just sixteen years later virtually all came on steamships. Changes in origin were almost as dramatic. Whereas more than four-fifths of all European immigrants to the United States came from northern and western Europe in 1882, by 1907 more than four-fifths were from southern and eastern Europe. Still, it was not until 1924

---

1. Thomas Sowell, *The Economics and Politics of Race: An Intonational Perspective* (New York: William Morrow, 1983), pp. 151f. Cf. Sowell, *Ethnic America: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), pp. 11ff.

that the United States passed a comprehensive, universal immigration restriction law. What had happened in the meantime? Basically, the root cause was the rise of the welfare State. When the treasury was opened to those who could bring out the largest vote, a major threat to taxpayers loomed. The immigrants were poor. Once they became politically mobilized by the great political machines of the cities – increasingly, these were Democratic Party machines in the twentieth century — Republicans saw the threat. How could the “bottomless pit” of economic demands be filled? It was one thing when Republican “captains of industry” could use immigrant labor to reduce costs of production or to break newly formed unions— unions that resented the low bids of the immigrant laborers – but quite another when these immigrants began to vote. Thus, the trade union movement and conservative Republicans saw that they could cooperate on the political issue of immigration. So did other people in other democratic nations. Those who had already “climbed to the top of the mountain” decided that in order to reduce “competition at the top,” they could “pull up the ladder” and keep the huddled masses huddling elsewhere.

Thus, it was the advent of a doctrine of “salvation by politics” which sealed the fate of prospective immigrants. When the ballot box became a way to gain wealth – an easier road for many than thrift, hard work, and risk-taking– those who were already favored by the system increased their efforts to keep out competitors. Politics is different from voluntary cooperation. This is an important point in Oscar Handlin’s classic study of immigration to America, *The Uprooted*.

One organized activity raised problems of altogether another order. Immigrants could associate in lodges and publish newspapers to their hearts’ content. These were voluntary activities and had no effect upon any but their members. But when groups formed after the same fashion entered politics, the consequences were entirely different.

The difference sprang from the unique qualities of political action. The end of politics was the exercise of power through the State – in which were embodied all the socially recognized instruments of control and coercion. In this realm was no room for the voluntary; control was in-divisible. The Irish who built Carney Hospital in Boston did not thereby limit the ability of the Jews to found Beth Israel, or of the Yankees to support Massachusetts General. But an election had only one outcome and, once the

contest was over, left only victors and vanquished. Here the separateness of the immigrants was an immediate challenge to all other groups.<sup>2</sup>

Politics involves coercion. Those who receive 50% plus one vote can control the organization, subsequently excluding those who received 50% minus one vote. It is "all or nothing." It is understandable why democratic governments after World War I erected barriers to immigration. As the ideology of the welfare State spread, it became all-important to restrict the arrival of large numbers of new potential voters — voters who might be even more greedy should they gain access to the public treasury. When the State did little for people, it could be ignored. When it gained the power to tax them (after 1913 in the United States), it gave politics an elevated position in the minds of voters.

After 1917, immigration barriers increased in the United States, culminating in the Immigration Act of 1924. Albert Johnson, who was the chairman of the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization of the House of Representatives, wrote these not so awe-inspiring words in 1927 as a Foreword to a supposedly scholarly economics book which was a defense of immigration restrictions:

The United States of America, a nation great in all things, is ours today. To whom will it belong tomorrow?

Many years ago our people, proud of their institutions, ambitious, hopeful, altruistic and sympathetic, entertained the thought that their country was destined by an all-wise Providence to serve as the world's great harbor of refuge to which the ill-circumstanced of all nations might repair. The myth of the melting pot grew and flourished. With little or no discrimination we took unto ourselves the blood of all classes and all climes, all races and all religions. Our land was new. It needed development. We yearned for growth in things material. Counting not the ultimate cost, we invited all to come to help us build our houses and our highways, to help us dig our coal and iron and gold, to help us hew and plant and fabricate.

The result is too well known to require extensive comment. Millions came. Today, instead of a well-knit homogeneous citizenry, we have a body politic made up of all and every diverse element. Today, instead of a nation descended from generations of freemen bred to a knowledge of the principles and practices of

---

2. Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations that Made the American People* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1952), p. 201.

self-government, of liberty under law, we have a heterogeneous population no small proportion of which is sprung from races that, throughout the centuries, have known no liberty at all, and no law save the decrees of overlords and princes. In other words, our capacity to maintain our cherished institutions stands diluted by a stream of alien blood, with all its inherited misconceptions respecting the relationships of the governing power to the governed.

It is out of an appreciation of this fundamental fact, vague at first, but later grown firm and substantial, that the American people have come to sanction — indeed to demand — reform of our immigration laws. They have seen, patent and plain, the encroachments of the foreign-born flood upon their own lives. They have come to realize that such a flood, affecting as it does every individual of whatever race or origin, can not fail likewise to affect the institutions which have made and preserved American liberties. It is no wonder, therefore, that the myth of the melting pot has been discredited. It is no wonder that Americans everywhere are insisting that their land no longer shall offer free and unrestricted asylum to the rest of the world.

The United States is our land. If it was not the land of our fathers, at least it may be, and it should be, the land of our children. We intend to maintain it so. The day of unalloyed welcome to all peoples, the day of indiscriminate acceptance of all races, has definitely ended.<sup>3</sup>

You can see the shift in perspective. In earlier years, immigrants were economically valuable. Today, however, they are too diverse. The author of the book, Roy L. Garis, agreed completely. He made this remark at the end of the book (p. 353): “For America, the Japanese are a non-assimilable people, as are all Asiatics. . . .” Yet few immigrant groups have been more successful in assimilating into the “melting pot” of American life, and certainly few are more productive economically.<sup>4</sup>

The fear of immigrants has grown worse in the 1980's, as a result of the economic and political dislocations in Mexico and Central America. Senator Simpson of Wyoming has introduced legislation to make mandatory a universal identification card for any American who seeks employment. Now that bilingual education has been established by the courts as mandatory for public schools with Spanish-speaking students,

---

3. Albert Johnson, “Foreword,” to Roy L. Garis, *Immigration Restriction: A Study of the Opposition to and Regulation of Immigration into the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1927).

4. Sowell, *Ethnic America*, Pt. III: “Americans from Asia.”

and now that these same courts have made it illegal to exclude the children of illegal aliens from the public schools, there is a rising tide of anti-immigration sentiment. The larger the welfare State grows, the greater the concern over immigrants.

### *Old Testament Requirement*

There were no immigration restrictions in ancient Israel, despite the threat of alien religions in Israel. Ancient Israel was not a pure democracy. It was not a welfare State. To exercise political or judicial authority in Israel, a person had to be in a covenant with the God of Israel. The law set forth religious requirements that restricted access to such judicial authority by aliens: Edomites and Egyptians could not become full members of the congregation until the third generation; Moabites and Ammonites could not enter until the tenth generation (Deut. 23:3-8).

It was assumed that there would be strangers in the land. Again and again, the law of God warned the Israelites not to mistreat widows, fatherless children, and strangers. The Israelites had been strangers in Egypt and had been mistreated; they were not supposed to mistreat strangers in their land.

Why would strangers come to Israel? For many reasons: trade, better working conditions, greater judicial protection, greater safety from marauders, and all the positive benefits promised by God to Israel in Deuteronomy 28:1-14. Why not take advantage of better external conditions? So confident was God in His own covenantal promises of blessing that His law established guidelines for dealing with the strangers He knew would come to Israel in search of a better life. His blessings would not be limited to internal feelings that were available only to covenanted Hebrews. They would be available to anyone living in His covenanted land during those periods in which His people remained faithful to Him and to His law.

In other words, Old Testament law established two forms of membership for circumcised people: full membership (executing judgment) and Passover membership. Circumcised people could come to the Passover (Ex. 12:48), even though they were not entitled to full membership in the congregation of the Lord. They would hear the law in the various teaching services, including the seventh-year service in which the

whole of the law was read to every resident in Israel at the feast of tabernacles (Deut. 31:9-12). Year by year, those aliens who were being exposed to the teaching of God's law would be faced with a decision: remain in their position of half-way citizenship, or remove themselves from the congregation of the Lord. In some cases, their families would have to wait for ten generations. But was this unreasonable, an unfair discrimination against aliens? No more unfair than the same ten-generation restriction applied to Hebrews who were heirs of an illegitimate sexual union (Deut. 23:2). The covenant line of Judah had been polluted by bastardy: Judah and Tamar (Gen. 38). Who was the heir of the tenth generation? None other than the greatest king in Israel, David. His family had been excluded from a position of exercising judgment until David's generation.<sup>5</sup>

The law of God recognized in the period of the Old Covenant that maturity takes time, that ethical rebellion can be so great that it takes generations of adherence to the law to train up a generation of law-abiding people. Until the ritual, ethical, and theological evils were removed from the thinking of men, given the demonstrated rebellion of their culture in the past, they were not allowed to participate in the execution of God's judgment. They had to prove themselves first.

Because they could not become competitors in the judicial system, they could be welcomed by the Israelites. God commanded the Israelites to treat them well, as a matter of required hospitality. It was a major form of evangelism. Men from far and wide were to hear the stories of prosperity and righteousness in Israel, and they would then glorify God:

Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who bath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that bath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? (Deut. 4:5-8)

---

5. The covenant line was: Judah-Tamar begat Pharez, and nine generations followed: Hezron, Ram, Amminadab, Nahshon, Salmon, Boaz, Obed, Jesse, David (Ruth 4: 18-22).

*Two-Tiered Church Membership*

The reigning philosophy of mass democracy has captured the minds of most Protestant Christians. They have structured their churches so as to avoid any criticism of being "undemocratic." The problem for non-hierarchical churches is that there is now no effective way to screen out people from the exercise of church authority. Unlike the Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and Episcopalians, whose top-down hierarchical structures serve as barriers against the theologically and bureaucratically "unwashed," congregational-type churches and Presbyterian churches face this problem daily. Only because the local church in our day is so weak, ineffective, underfunded, and culturally impotent can it escape the problem of the "immigrants."

Baptism is seen as the equivalent of Old Testament circumcision by most churches. Thus, baptized individuals are granted access to the teaching of the church. Communion is another problem. While it is understood as analogous to the Passover, few churches really acknowledge the full extent of this Passover-communion link. Any circumcised male could attend Passover (Ex. 12:48); not every baptized individual is allowed to take communion in today's church. The modern church has erected a major barrier to full participation in the life of the church. Some churches require children to be a certain age before partaking. Other churches require "confirmation" of teenagers. (A Presbyterian father asked his 12-year-old daughter about the doctrine of confirmation that she had been taught in a Lutheran school, and she provided a classic summary: "They say that you get saved when you're baptized, and then you can then do anything you want until you apply to get confirmed at 13." There are Lutheran children, I suspect, who have only a marginally clearer conception of confirmation than she had.) Still others restrict adults from the Lord's Supper until they have gone through some sort of introductory theology class.

Virtually all churches draw some sort of distinction between baptized members and full communing members. Those that do not make such a distinction among adults at least make it with respect to children. Churches that allow children to vote in church elections are rare, but they are all marked by an unwillingness to allow infant communion. The

idea of a three-year-old voting is too much to swallow.

In short, there are first-class *members* and *second-class numbers* in every congregation. The dividing line is access to the Lord's Table. Not every baptized member can claim access to communion. To draw the analogy, not every circumcised Jew can claim access to Passover. Problem: every circumcised person could attend Passover in Israel. So the parallel between the sacraments of the Old Testament and the New Testament is not honored by modern Christians.

Once a member has legitimate access to the Lord's Table, he also has access to the franchise. He can determine who gets elected as church officers. He therefore begins to exercise authority. Thus, the modern democratic church comes face to face with the problem of the immigrant: Is this person theologically qualified to exercise judgment? Is the church as an institution risking its theological and judicial integrity when it opens the right of voting to any and all communing members?

If the church is to preserve its theological integrity, then it must not allow people to vote who do not share a commitment to the church's official theology. If a person is not covenanted to the church in terms of a set of standards – standards by which he may be judged, censured, and excommunicated — then what is to protect the church from being swamped by people who reject its first principles? After all, in a democracy, the majority rules. How can a church police itself to make sure that those who can become a majority in any election do, in fact, adhere to the church's standards?

If the church decides to screen candidates for full membership by means of a lengthy training program, then it must face a most unpleasant and unscriptural task: excluding these candidates from the communion table. But if the churches immediately give access to full membership and the Lord's Supper to every baptized member, then the threat of democracy becomes very real. Majorities rule.

So the question is: How did ancient Israel protect itself? It did so through a two-tiered membership. Newcomers had to demonstrate their knowledge of and acceptance of God's law-order before they could exercise judgment in Israel as full members. But all circumcised men and their families had access to the Passover. The question of full membership was determined by a person's willingness to adhere to the covenant. For strangers, they had to wait for several generations before

the period of testing was over.

The church has ignored the obvious solution to the problem of "democratic immigrants" for far too long. What is needed is two-tiered membership which is not based on access to the Lord's Supper. Instead, access to communion comes immediately upon baptism, as the Bible teaches. Full voting membership, which is analogous to full judicial membership in ancient Israel, should be based on a period of screening in terms of a set of theological, ethical, and judicial standards.

Churches have creeds, either explicit or implicit. Churches screen out evil-doers. The fewer evil-doers that a church can screen out, the more evil that church is likely to become over time. The bad leaven corrupts the good, but institutionally impotent leaven. An army that cannot discipline its troops is an easily beaten army.

A baptized member who refuses to proclaim his full intellectual acceptance of the church's creed or standard, but affirms his willingness to be judged in terms of it, even though he doesn't believe all of it, should be admitted to the Lord's Table. He has made a covenant by affirming his willingness to abide by the terms of the covenant. But until he affirms that he has accepted the doctrines involved in the creedal statement and disciplinary standards, he should not be given the right to vote in church elections.

This method of separating first-class members and second-class members solves several important problems. First, there is no need to establish a long delay between the time of baptism and the person's access to communion. Second, children as young as infants can be given communion without compromising the legitimacy of church authority. Third, people who want to exercise authority must first declare wholehearted support of the basis of institutional authority: the creed. Fourth, church officials can examine the lives of covenanted members before giving them access to the reins of power, but without feeling guilty about having to exclude these people from the Lord's Supper. Fifth, the church is protected from invasions by people who really do not agree with the church's first principles.

### *Two-Tiered Eldership*

One of the ways that churches have sought to protect themselves from the "great unwashed" is by establishing a

priestly caste, meaning a sacerdotal system. Ruling elders are distinguished from teaching elders. Your average congregation selects its ruling elders by itself, but the teaching elder must also be approved by a higher body. Thus, the teaching elder becomes a member of a separate caste. "All elders are equal, but some are more equal than others."

In independent churches, the authority of the pastor is great. There is no Presbytery or other ruling body over the local pastor. Thus, the caste system become more rigorous. The congregation may be able to fire him, however, so he risks becoming alienated from the "great unwashed," since new members have the same voting privileges as the older, experienced members. It compromises him, since he cannot appeal beyond the congregation to a higher body for protection or investigation of any charges (or rumors) lodged against him. Thus, because of the lack of protection, those who vote on all-or-nothing issues become dominant. These people may not have the maturity to make such decisions.

The biblical answer is to unify the authority of the entire eldership but divide the membership between those who exercise authority and those who don't. Then the elders can serve in whatever position their talents allow, without fear of being swamped in a church election by members who really are not in support of the church's standards. The two-tiered membership — voting and non-voting — can be substituted for both the two-tiered eldership system and today's system of two-tiered membership: communing and non-communing.

## SUBSTITUTES FOR CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Jim West

**I**T is commonplace among Calvinists to identify the preaching of the Word of God, the proper administration of the sacraments, and church discipline as the three cardinal marks of a church of Christ. What is uncommon is for some Calvinists to go so far as to speak of the “two” marks of the church while exalting church discipline to the sublime status of a preservative of the church’s preaching and sacramental ministry. In other words, it has been argued that church discipline is so integral to the very factuality of the church that its absence means that the candlestick has been removed even when a form of evangelical preaching continues to pulsate in the “church.”

We only mention this uncommon argument to underscore the intense esteem with which some have regarded church discipline. By all means let us not allow a supra-Biblical zeal to upset the balance among the three marks of the church; but let us also remember that there *is* a third mark of the church! In a day when about the only thing that is heresy is a heresy trial, it becomes incumbent upon us not only to champion the truth of church discipline, but more specifically (given the fact that discipline has been largely excommunicated from the bosom of the church) to excommunicate its illegitimate substitutes; and the number of these substitutes are legion. In this article, we shall define church discipline and list some of its modern day substitutes.

### *Kinds of Church Excommunicates*

The New Testament identifies two classes of excommunicates: first, those who have been formally sentenced by the Church of Christ (1 Corinthians 5:5). Second, those that excommunicate themselves by leaving the pale of the visible church in order to feast in the world (1 John 2:19). Because of

the "deceitfulness of sin," it should not surprise the church if the allo-excommunicate endeavors to *remain* in the congregation *physically* to enjoy as many privileges as he may; while the self-excommunicate may often leave the visible church with the specific intent to frequent *another*. The former would have his cake and eat it too (or as many slices as the church will "divvy" up), while the latter would spiritually banquet in palaces unknown as yet to the "bird of the air" which "shall carry the voice" and the "wings (which) shall tell the matter."

In the more corporate sense, the Lord sometimes excommunicates specific churches. The nature of this excommunication lies not in a geophysical removal of the members of the church, but in the *withdrawal of His* gracious *presence*. In the Old Testament the removal of the tabernacle from the camp was an excommunication, and in the New Testament the threat to remove the candlestick portended the same (Exodus 33: 7; Revelation 2:5).

#### *The Occasion of Biblical Discipline*

There are many reasons why an article on Church Censures is necessary; and most of these reasons have their origin in negative contexts. For example, one area where the church of the 20th century has become culpably lax is in the area of child-rearing. *The Directory for Worship* of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church provides us with illustrative material when it states:

Before the baptism of an infant, the minister shall require that the parents acknowledge the duty of believers to present their children for holy baptism and that they assume publicly their responsibility for the Christian nurture of their children. <sup>1</sup>

What follows are two questions pertaining to baptism asked by the minister to the parents. I shall only quote the second of these:

Do you *promise to instruct your child in the principles of our holy religion as revealed in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments*, and as summarized in the Confession of Faith and Catechism of this church, and do you promise to pray with and for your child, to set an example of piety and godliness before him, and to endeavor by all the

---

1. *The Standards of Government, Discipline, and Worship of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (Philadelphia: The Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1960), p. 76. Citations from this Church's standards are from the older "black book."

means of God's appointment to bring him up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?<sup>2</sup> (my emphases)

Parents that take such a vow are unquestionably as sincere as the minister who asks the questions and the congregation that looks on with its approval. But apparently, the "promise to instruct your child" and "to pray with and for your child, to set an example of piety and godliness before him" is *limited* to the climate of the home and the Sunday School. Education in the sacred halls of the Moloch State for six hours a day or thirty hours a week is not seen as in any way violating the baptismal vow of the parents, let alone the law of God. After years of "neutral" education in the state-church, when the child has grown into manhood, parents and elders often wonder how and why the covenant kiddies have become paragons of godlessness instead of trees of righteousness. They raised them Orthodox Presbyterians but they have become Heterodox Presbyterians instead. They begin to think that what they once regarded as the Only Pure Church (O. P. C.) is not so pure after all. Anxious questions are asked: Is there something deficient in the covenant? Has God failed me? Did I not faithfully instruct my child? Did he not learn the Shorter Catechism verbatim? Was he not a joyous participant year after year at the church's youth camp? When it is suggested that the humanism of the public school may have been the child's Trojan Horse, the parents are incredulous ! They rationalize:

My child never received any non-Christian training; although it is true that it was not distinctively Christian either. As far as I know the teacher never said anything antagonistic to Christianity.

The rationale behind such a defense may stem out of *grim apologetical ignorance* (the non-Van Tilian "Wan Tilian" pastors may be the real culprits here!) or an *inordinate pecuniary fondness*. That every fact of the universe testifies of the glory of God (Psalm 19; Psalm 148) ought to be enough to persuade the weakest theological featherweight that a State-directed education that suffocates the facts of creation and providence is atheism exemplified. Every parent ought to know that before true Christian education takes place, the facts must be

---

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 76-77.

recognized for what they really are: *God-created facts*.

This apologetical ignorance is compounded by the monetary interests of many. Rightly so, Christian parents should be angered at the prospect of having to finance the public school (through compulsory taxation) and the Christian School *simultaneously*. Since one is mandatory and the other is not (speaking legally) they opt for Caesar's tax and Caesar's educational program. (Judas was not the last one to demean true devotion when he said, "Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?")

Preferring Athens to Jerusalem is certainly not a monopoly of any one church; the problem is as outstanding for Reformed churches as for Evangelical. What should be done? Parents should be carefully taught from the Word of God that if the parents continue to send their children through the humanistic grid, they should come under the formal discipline of the church. If the individual congregation does not see the contradiction between Moloch education and the baptismal vow, then the church itself should be censured by other churches.

Not only is there a laxity in the implementation of discipline in cases where discipline is called for, but there is today a sinful stringency applied to cases where discipline in fact should NOT be implemented. This writer has witnessed congregations where converted hippies have been formally reprimanded by the eldership for smoking cigarettes (outside the context of worship) and criticized by the church membership for wearing blue-jeans while many of their own daughters wore dresses short enough to call for the powdering of two additional "cheeks." In one congregation, one of the elder's sons was a declared agnostic (Harvard bred) but remained on the rolls in good standing (although not a communicate member). There is even an entire denomination that professes allegiance to the Westminster Confession of Faith but enforces the man-made dictum of total abstinence from alcoholic beverages to the extent of formal church discipline! (One of this Church's ministers told me that drinking and smoking are about the only two things that qualify for excommunication.) Churches must also come to grips with the utter hypocrisy of censuring certain prominent members for lack of attendance while the less prominent who have not attended for years remain on the rolls as dead weight. The more spiritual members

who leave are pursued and even disciplined, while the less spiritual cadavers remain forgotten members. (We call this "memory erasure .") This is particularly true of some of the covenant children whose incorrigible conduct is second in disgracefulness only to the moral cowardice of the elders who often fear offending the covenant parentage and justify the lack of discipline by making the concept of non-communicate membership a totally meaningless belief. (Apparently, the non-communicate membership are not subject to excommunication. ) I have been in a church where a non-communicate teenager fornicated and was erased from the roll for her impenitence. (The action was conveniently announced during a morning worship-service while the parents were out of town and the word "excommunication" was deliberately avoided). I have also seen runaway covenant youth remain on the rolls simply by virtue of the fact that their parents are still members of the church. Examples could be multiplied and readers of this essay could probably write some horror stories of their own.

### *Keys of the Kingdom*

No treatment of church discipline can be coherently presented without some exposition of the "keys of the kingdom." This phrase is found in Matthew 16:19 where it is closely associated with the Church of Jesus Christ. In this passage the church is pictured as comparable to a house which is founded on a rock. It is of *this* church that Jesus says, "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven." Moreover, it is because this selfsame house is identical with the keys, that we may conclude that the church has the awesome responsibility to open the portals of heaven to the penitent and to shut them hermetically to the impenitent. This is what it means to bind and to loose.

Now, it must be emphatically said that the power of the keys in the omnipotent sense belongs exclusively to the David of the Church, the Lord Jesus Christ. Only He may justly damn and mercifully forgive. As the Revelator said: He is the One 'that opens, and no man shuts; and shuts and no man opens' (Revelation 3:7). So it must be made clear that although the authority of the Church is absolute, it is not as absolute as Christ and the reason for this is that the Church's

authority is a delegated absolutism which can only be ratified in heaven when it is Scripturally directed.

Because the New Testament testifies that the Church is represented by her officers, the keys of the kingdom are committed by Christ *to them*. The Church is not a democracy, much less an autocracy; but a monarchy. The elders are monarchs with ecclesiastical responsibilities of kingly import. Collectively, their being designated the "session" is but an earthly microcosm of the macroscopic session of their King on the right hand of God in heaven. So the office of elder does not ultimately exist because the congregation votes to elect them to that office. The elders are prime ministers under the sovereign authority of King Jesus. Drawn-up in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in the year of 1648 by Richard Mather (the father of Increase Mather and grandfather of Cotton Mather), and John Cotton (who wrote the preface), the Cambridge Platform relates to the matter at hand:

This government of the church, is a mixed government (and so bath been acknowledged long before the term of independency was heard of) in respect of Christ, the head and king of the church, and the sovereign power residing in him, and exercised by him, it is a monarchy. In respect, of the body, or brotherhood of the church, and power from Christ granted unto them, it resembles a democracy, in respect of the presbytery and power committed to them, it is an aristocracy. <sup>3</sup>

It is sometimes argued that "the keys of the kingdom" are native only to the Apostles. It is fervently but erroneously maintained that the keys are given only to Peter and that in Matthew 18 the keys are limited to all the Apostles, no more and no less. Our contention, however, is that the keys are bequeathed to the church at large. One of the charges of the Apostle Paul against the Church at Corinth was that, in his absence, the Corinthian Church had not put away a fornicator. His holy complaint was that they had not mourned that he "that bath done this thing might be taken away from you" (1 Corinthians 5:1). His holy command was for them to assemble in order "to deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh . . ." and to "purge out therefore the old

---

3. One means of access to the Cambridge Platform is to secure a copy of *The Reformation of the Church*, ed. by Iain Murray (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), pp. 233-271.

heaven" (5: 7). Therefore, we may argue from the narrower to the broader in affirming that every church has the responsibility to wield the keys toward members who like-wise Corinthianize. This eliminates two substitutes that have been used liberally in 20th century churches: allowing the family and the state the sole liberty to punish the offender. Church discipline is just what it implies: discipline that is ecclesiastically imposed.

### *Duality of the Keys*

The keys have been divided into two: the key of *discipline* and the key of *doctrine*.<sup>4</sup> The former includes the right of the church to admit or exclude members; the church has the duty to excommunicate members that are heterodox in theology or life and to admit sinners into the communion while judging whether or not these sinners carry a profession that is both *credible and creditable*.

Now the key of discipline spells only one thing: *excommunication*. There is of course a sense in which every believer is under the discipline of the Lord. In fact, in the Scripture, to be taught is equivalent to being disciplined (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). Discipline in this sense belongs to the key of doctrine. But the subject of this article is the key of discipline and the key of discipline is nothing less (or more) than *excommunication*. The Heidelberg Catechism answers the question, "What are the keys of the kingdom of heaven?" with the following answer: "The preaching of the holy Gospel, and *church discipline, or excommunication out of the Christian Church . . .*" (my emphasis) (Question 83). This equivalency between discipline and excommunication is important because it excludes sundry substitutes that have arrogated to themselves supremacy in the ecclesiastical world. Moreover, it is because church discipline has not been exclusively equated with excommunication that the church has had "the slows" regarding implementation of the key of discipline. When the key of discipline is regarded as synonymous with exhortation, counseling, expostulation, etc., or whatever comes short of excommunication, the meaning of the key is obscured.

---

4. James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 2:186-200.

### *Nature of the Keys*

Of course it would be gross injustice to attribute any physical properties to the keys. They are to be understood *figuratively*. These necessary spiritual properties wall out any metallic conceptions. The Elders of the church are not dragons in any sense of that term. Chapter XXX, Article 2 of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* describes the bounds of church-rule:

To these officers the keys of the kingdom of heaven are committed, by virtue whereof they have power respectively to retain and remit sins, to shut that kingdom against the impenitent, both by the word and censures; and to open it unto penitent sinners, by the ministry of the Gospel, and by absolution from censures, as occasion shall require.

Although the keys are spiritual, their utilization often has radical physical implications. In this way Church censures parallel sanctification since to be sanctified means to have one's heart "set apart" unto the holiness of God. But sanctification has very real spatial implications too. The Christian is not to go near the harlot's house lest he "mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed" (Proverbs 5:8-11); and he is not to be "unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Corinthians 6:14-18). Now the utilization of the keys may also have sundry physical implications. For example, when the keys are used to retain sins and shut the kingdom from the impenitent, the consequences may be:

1. Death.
2. Sickness.
3. Refusing the sinner church privileges, including free access to the congregational worship.

Of course, in the first two areas, the Church is passive, and only in the last area may she be active. But the church may physically exclude excommunicates from the worship services ! The reason for this is that the church is not first of all a missionary society, but the body of Christ. When the church forbids a Jezebel to teach, she is telling Jezebel not only to desist from a fornicative activity, but either to physically sit down or to physically leave (Revelation 2:20). Commenting on the nature of the excommunicate's separation the English Puritan Thomas Taylor said, regarding Titus 3:10:

Of separation from all those spiritual good things which the Lord communicates in the church, as the word, sacraments, and prayer; for these are holy things, and the privileges of the faithful, out of whose society the others are cast.

But if they are barred from the word, are they not cut off from the means of their repentance? I answer, both the word and the nature of the censure shut them out of the congregation of God's people, as does the practice of the ancient church.<sup>5</sup>

If it be further queried: Why should an excommunicate be barred from hearing the word? We reply: for the same reason that he must be barred from participation in the Lord's Supper. The church may neither feed swine with pearls (the Lord's Supper) nor cast its pearls before swine (the Lord's Gospel). As long as the excommunicate remains incorrigible, he must not be welcomed into the fellowship on any other basis than repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ. *This excludes him from the congregational suffrage, congregational prayer, congregational sacrament, congregational Psalm-singing, and in short, admittance into the Christian auditory.* If it be asked, 'What if the excommunicate defiantly comes to the worship service anyway? Do we then forcibly eject him?' Let us augment this question with another which is more than merely hypothetical: "What if Jezebel insists that she will not relinquish her teaching position and thus struts to the pulpit to deliver her homily in open defiance of the elder's reproof? Do we, dragoon-like, utilize brawn when brain fails?" There are two possible answers to this surprisingly realistic question:

1. There may be times when corporeal means must be used, as when John Calvin was prepared to strong-arm Philibert Berthelier, the drunken debauchee and attorney of Servetus, who threatened to partake of the Lord's Supper unworthily (and over Calvin's dead body!), or —

2. The Elders may call upon the civil magistrate whose responsibility is clearly that of doing whatever best subserves the interest of piety and peace in the commonwealth.

*The Cambridge Platform* takes issue with our concept of total excommunication. It argues:

And, the excommunicate being but as a publican and a heathen, heathens being lawfully permitted to come to hear the Word in church assemblies, we acknowledge therefore the like

---

5. Thomas Taylor, *Exposition of Titus* (n.p., Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1962), p. 532.

liberty of hearing the Word, may be permitted to persons excommunicate, that is permitted unto heathen. And because we are not without hope of his recovery, we are not to account him as an enemy but to admonish him as a brother. (Chapter XIV, Article 6)

The ground of his admittance into the Christian auditory is his "civil rights" (this is stated in an unquoted section). Our contention is that the excommunicate has forfeited his spiritual rights, including the right to hear the word within the context of the congregational worship. *The Cambridge Platform* errs when it says that "we are not to regard him as an enemy, but to admonish him as a brother." The phrase that they have quoted is scriptural (2 Thessalonians 3:15), but misapplied. The censured in 2 Thessalonians are not excommunicates in the final sense of heathen, but fallen brethren who are to be treated as brethren. The congregational word is open to them, but the same word is closed to the excommunicate although open to other heathen (1 Corinthians 14:23-24). Until the excommunicate repents, we must forbid him to participate in the fellowship and worship of the church. Our responsibility toward him must be understood in the light of Thomas Taylor's counsel:

This censure does not loose the bonds of all spiritual society; but notwithstanding it, we may and must love the excommunicate in the Lord; admonish and rebuke him; pray for him, though not with him, and receive him upon his repentance, like a brother as before.<sup>6</sup>

*The Cambridge Platform* avers:

While the offender remains excommunicate, the church is to refrain from all member-like communion with him in spiritual things, and also from all familiar communion with him in civil things, farther than the necessity of natural, or domestic, or civil relations do require: and are therefore to forbear to eat and drink with him, that he may be ashamed. (Chapter XIV, Article 5)

The strongest argument for the exclusion of the excommunicate from even the worship services lies in the nature of the censure and the nature of the church. The church is not primarily a missionary society, but the holy fellowship of God's people. To be excommunicated means more than

---

6. *Ibid.*

simply having one's name removed from the official roll of membership. If one will not hearken to the preached word of the elders performed privately, why should we expect him to listen to that same word publicly? So, it is not a case of shutting him off from what he has never heard, nor is it a case of not wanting him to repent. We are telling him that he is not invited to the congregational worship service for the praise of God, the preaching of the Word of God being the center of that worship, as long as he insists on worshipping God on his own terms.

Under the rubric of *the nature of the church* — it ought to be remembered that the visible church is best understood by its *synagogical* counterpart.<sup>7</sup> Much that is predicated of the synagogue is also predicated of the church. For example, in the theology of James the synagogue and the church were ynonymous institutions (James 2:2). Jesus indicts the church at Smyrna and correctly describes it as ‘a synagogue of Satan’ (Revelation 2:9). Those that claim they are Jews but are not, Christ says he will “make of the synagogue of Satan” (Revelation 3:9). *To be excommunicated from the synagogue was equivalent to being put out of the synagogue.* This was the fear uppermost in the minds of the Jews, who — during the earthly pilgrimage of Christ — “did not confess him” lest they should be put out of the synagogue” (John 12:42). We are told of the parents of the healed man who “feared the Jews: for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue” (John 9:22). Christ warns his disciples that they should not be scandalized when they are “put out of the synagogue” (John 16:1-2). In another context, the Apostle John condemns Diotrephes who did not receive the brethren but instead “cast them out of the church” (3 John 10). The indictment of Diotrephes is itself indicted but not for the spiritual-physical excommunication, but for casting them out on an *inequitable basis* — a basis stemming from a desire to pontificate and establish his own “personality cult.” The Greek word here (3 John 10) for “casting out” (*ekballo*) is identical with the verb used to describe the (bodily) casting out of Jesus into the wilderness in Mark 1:12. So our point sticks: Excom-

---

7. For additional data on the synagogue-church equivalency see the Rev. Douglas Bannerman's *The Scriptural Doctrine of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1955), pp. 107ff.

munication is a spiritual censure with physical implications. The excommunicate (to be truly excommunicated) must be banished from *all* the ordinances of the church. As Thomas Goodwin concurred:

But excommunication is a throwing of a man out of a fixed communion of all ordinances for worship. . . . Excommunication is to take him from the midst of them ('from among you,' 1 Corinthians 5:13) with whom he did use to worship. The very import of the word excommunication is *ex communi coetu*; the formal and direct act therefore of excommunication is to throw him out of that fixed communion which he had. <sup>8</sup>

### *Love Covers a Multitude of Sins As a Substitute*

In a general sense, love does not bring up or remember offences; it does not resemble the buoyant cork which pops to the surface every time the pressure top-side has been released. But love does not forgive sins that have not been confessed. Only when a man says "I repent" does the responsibility of forgiveness come into play (Luke 17:3-4). Love must forgive when there is genuine repentance; love must not forgive when repentance is absent. And love must be longsuffering for a multitude of sins of a general character. <sup>9</sup>

The Bible does spell out various offences that may rankle the peace and purity of the church, and says that our confrontation with these offences must be dutifully disciplinary. This is the unmistakable teaching of Matthew 18 where Jesus manifestly places His own imprimatur upon the excommunication of an obdurate church member. In this passage, the original offense is not even stipulated; the basis of the excommunication is founded upon the man's *contumacy*. It is because he would not *hear* (obey) the church that he is to be numbered with the publicans and sinners.

The toleration of notorious sin in the context of the church is, at bottom, the unloving of love. The reason for this is that love cannot be understood apart from its predicates. It is, for example, described in the Scripture as truthful. Paul says that

---

8. Thomas Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin* (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1865), Vol. XI, pp. 141-142.

9. If confession of sin has not been made, forgiveness does not and cannot take place. Where there are sins which are not considered "scandalous," forbearance, not forgiveness, is what the Lord would demand of us.

love “rejoices in the truth” because it is meaningless apart from the truth (1 Corinthians 13:6). The command to love comes to us in a *law-form*. The Great Commandment is the Great Commandment of the Law (Matthew 22:36-37). The Puritans have spoken about the law of God as “the eyes of love.” And the law of God tells us that the church must demonstrate truthful and law-abiding love by expunging from her midst the morally cancered.

#### *Four Encouragements for Church Discipline*

Matthew 18 provides us with four sanctified incentives for the utilization of the keys of the kingdom. The first is: the judicial sentences of the elders “shall have been” ratified in heaven. To encourage reluctant, if not cowardly elders to make use of the keys, Jesus says: “Assuredly, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Here the Lord uses the future perfect tense which should be translated, “Whatever you bind on earth *shall have been* bound in heaven . . .” When one says that something *shall* be done, that is speaking the language of certainty. But when one says that what the judicatory does “shall have been” done already in heaven, that is adding certainty to certainty. All of this is to say that when the Church is governed Scripturally, such government shall have been ratified in heaven. God not only adds His own hearty “amen” to the decisions of the church, but the very judicial activities of the church are an expression of what has already been ratified in the heavenly halls of justice.

Second, the presence of Christ is promised as an encouragement for church discipline. Jesus says: “For where two of three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.” This verse was never intended to give warrant for small prayer meetings, or small home churches, or instant family churches. This verse was given to justify church discipline. The special presence of Christ is promised when two or three (elders) gather to institute church discipline. Significantly, the verb “gathered” is used in 1 Corinthians 5:4-5 in the identical sense. There Paul says: “In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are *gathered* together, along with my

spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus .“

Third, the name of Christ gives authoritative encouragement for church discipline. The elders are gathered together in “My name” (Matthew 18:20). The name of Christ gives authority to the church. Church discipline is not an human enterprise performed in the name of human authority. The use of the keys of the kingdom is not an act of pontification. It is nothing less than the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Fourth, Christ’s promise to answer our prayers is an encouragement for church discipline. Jesus says: “Again I say to you that if two or three of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven.” Here, there is a premium put upon union in prayer in the *context* of discipline. By lowering the number to two or three, Christ gives His encouragement for church censures. The idea in this verse is not just to pray in concert, but to pray for some definite thing in the context of discipline.

### *The Longsuffering Substitute*

It is maintained that the church must be forbearing in imitation of her forbearing Lord. It is affirmed with a pious sincerity: ‘Was not Jesus long in patience toward wayward sinners? Let him that is without sin cast the first stone!’”

At this juncture we must emphatically affirm that the longsuffering of the Lord toward the worldling is not analogous to the question of longsuffering directed toward a gangrened limb of the Body of Christ. These are simply two entirely different spheres of longsuffering which call for two entirely different *contextual* expressions. The longsuffering that we are to manifest toward the worldling should not be *automatically* applied to the Church. If it is, there is the danger of such explicit “longsuffering” settling into an *implicit long-sanctioning*! The fact that God is longsuffering with me is not a warrant for me to be longsuffering with myself for my sinfulness. In Biblical terms, I am to be vindictive, revengeful, and volcanic toward my own bosom sins (2 Corinthians 7:11). I am to crucify that Delilah lust before it flowers. I may never be longsuffering with myself in lieu of repentance.

Of course, if the church were to imitate the longsuffering

of Christ to a T, she would desist from any discipline altogether since the whole age between the two advents is a period of God's longsuffering. The exercise of church discipline would be postponed until the parousia!

The Lord's gracious procedure with the church of Thyatira (Revelation 2:18-20) affords clear evidence of how He deals with both theological and sexual fornication. The Lord's indictment reads: "Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because *you allow* that woman Jezebel . . . to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication. . . ." Both Jezebel and the church are required to repent. The point of contention here is not that the church did not formally disapprove of Jezebel's behavior, but that "*you allow* that woman. . . ." The church *permitted* the fornication to continue. That is the crux of the covenant lawsuit. To be sure, space was granted Jezebel and the church to repent, but not outer-space. The Lord would have the church to repent quickly lest He come quickly and remove the candlestick quickly ! It matters little whether the church disapproves of rotten limbs; what is at issue is whether the church "allows" those members to continue as members of the body of Christ. In terms of divine computation and assessment, the Lord sees *the allowal* of these members to continue as members as tantamount to long-sanctioning instead of longsuffering.

Moreover, why is God longsuffering toward the sinner who is outside the church? The answer is so that *He might show mercy* (1 Timothy 1:16). And this is exactly the reason for shedding this bogus "forbearance" expressed toward the scandalous "brother" who is within the pale of the visible church. If the church wants an impenitent brother to repent he must be excommunicated from the congregation. The church then has a responsibility to divest herself of a cavalier longsuffering that confuses longsuffering with long-sanctioning.

The above truths defuse such turtle cliches as "Haste makes waste" and "What is awesome must be done slowly." These ideas simply do not mesh with New Testament revelation. They are more than often a cover-up for moral cowardice. The Lord says to the church as Pergamos: "Repent or else I will come unto thee quickly . . ." (Revelation 2:16). If upon continuance in sin, the Lord will come quickly, then we can expect that a quick response of repentance toward previously tolerated members is required. In terms of *the*

*velocity* of discipline, it would be good to imitate the enforcement of the Theocratic Law of Israel that was keenly echoed by Artaxerxes:

And whosoever will not do the law of thy God, and the law of the king, let judgment be executed *speedily* upon him, whether it be unto death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment (Ezra 7:26).

Let the spiritual censures of the church be imparted speedily so that God's holy name might be glorified speedily and congregational holiness speedily preserved.

### *The Erasure Substitute*

Chapter VI, Article 2 of the Book of Discipline of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, prescribes what is to be done about judicial cases without full process:

When a member of a particular church, whether or not he be charged with an offence, informs the session that he does not desire to remain in the fellowship of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and the efforts of the session to dissuade him from his course have failed, *it shall take no other action than to erase his name from the roll and shall record the circumstances in the minutes.*<sup>10</sup> (my emphasis)

We are immediately concerned with those that have in fact been charged with an offence. As plausible as this bit of legislation may at first seem, it is not addressing the case of a self-excommunicate who comes to the honest realization that he was never really a Christian in the first place, but to the man who actually justifies, defends, and advertises his sin under the label of Christianity, and who cares not to remain within the pale of the prosecuting congregation. A recent publication explains why the Erasure Substitute is not sound doctrine:

a. A man should not be allowed to lessen the judgment against himself for his course of sin by committing another sin (i.e. leaving the church without proper cause and becoming a schismatic) to minimize the force of such a judgment.

b. The integrity of Christ's Church must be maintained both against *internal* and external criticisms for winking at sin. To allow

---

10. *The Standards of Government, Discipline, and Worship of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, pp. 55-56.

a quiet withdrawal can only be construed as 'sweeping sin under the carpet.'

c. Discipline, according to biblical revelation . . . is necessary for the benefit of the offender because being followed by the loving admonitions and prayers of the whole congregation, it may lead him to repentance. Christ and the apostles clearly attribute an efficacy or power to the church acts of discipline (Matthew 18:18:1 Corinthians 5:4-5). The failure to administer discipline is equivalent to a tacit admission that there is no spiritual power or authority in the act, but simply a breaking of outward ties.

d. Excommunication forewarns of the future and final judgment of God upon the unrepentant person, a judgment which none can escape by quiet withdrawal. (This further serves to deter others from sin.)

e. To allow a quiet withdrawal would be to seek peace through compromise rather than obedience. This is a worthless type of peace.

f. A church has a duty to other Christian churches not to allow a person to leave its membership in apparently good standing when it is known that that person is living in sin. This might not have been a problem in first-century Corinth, but it is a very real one today. No Christian church has the right to forsake its responsibilities to other Christian churches. If another church, knowing that a certain person is under discipline, proceeds to receive that person into fellowship, their sin will be upon their own heads. On the other hand, if one church allows an unrepentant sinner to withdraw quietly, and then that person joins another church, the first church (which failed to discipline) is responsible for allowing the corruption of another church, when it might have been prevented by the proper action of the first church.<sup>11</sup>

The words of the Cambridge Platform seem appropriate here: "The church cannot make a member no member but by excommunication" (Chapter XIII, Article 7),<sup>12</sup>

---

11. Daniel E. Wray, *Biblical Church Discipline* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1978), pp. 14-15.

12. This, of course, does not pertain to letters of transfer or commendation which display the Scriptural ecumenicity of the Christian Church. We mention this because of our awareness of some churches bearing Reformed Creeds which actually excommunicate those who would transfer to other churches !

It *may* also not apply to the self-excommunicate who has formally denied the Faith (let us say blatantly and self-consciously) and who has departed from the congregation. Such a person may come under this censure only insofar that the judicatory excommunicates by *excommunicative*

*The Laissez-Faire Substitute*

In Matthew 13 Jesus speaks of the Son of Man sowing “good seed in his field .” As a consequence of this sowing, a large harvest of wheat springs up and is – “while men slept” – accompanied by a virulent growth of poisonous weeds. With what turns out to be perverted zeal, the servants of the householder seek confirmation from the householder concerning their plans to uproot the tares. Jesus vetoes the plan for *two* specific reasons: (1) His compassionate solicitude for the wheat lest they be mistakenly plucked-up with the tares. Not the mistaking of the tares as wheat, but the mistaking of the wheat for *tares* is His shepherdly concern. (2) The inevitability of a perfect judgment at the end of the world when — to paraphrase Augustine — all of the wolves inside the church will be sifted while (outside the church) all of the sheep will be separated from the wolves. As Jesus said. “The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that do offend and them which do iniquity . . .” (Matthew 13:41-42). Most students of Holy Writ are aware that this parable has been used as justification for a kind of laissez-faire approach to church discipline. The central idea expressed is: “The church has no duty to remove scandalous members from her body. It is, in fact a *Christian duty* to let both the wheat and the tares grow together until the Day of Judgment .”

A common method in vogue for combating this interpretation is proffered by an appeal to verse 38: “The field is the world.” From these words it is deduced that Jesus is not speaking of the church at all, but rather “the world at large .” It is our earnest conviction that this refutation is weak in at least two regards: (1) The growth of the wheat *precedes* the tares in order of time so that it is the tares who are actually infiltrating the domain of the wheat. (2) Verse 41 speaks of the Son of Man sending his angels to “gather out of his kingdom all

---

erasure. (This is different than the mere *parliamentary* erasure that is practiced by a number of churches today.)

It should also be noted that the circumstances for any one case always differ. All we can do is offer some Scriptural guidelines. It would be wrong to put the Bible in our own preconceived strait-jacket. This is done, for example, when a church decides that the party guilty of scandalous sin should be *automatically* censured for one *year* regardless of the circumstances.

things that offend." In other words, the field maybe the world, but the world is *Christ's kingdom*. This parable begins: "The kingdom of heaven is *likened . . .*" (verse 24). A parable of parallel import in the same chapter states that the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net in which is gathered fish of every kind and after the net is filled, the fishermen draw near to shore and cast the bad fish away, while keeping the good. This last act of sorting the fish is interpreted as the way it shall be at the end of the world (verse 49).

One cannot overlook the "gathering" motif of both parables. Both the wheat and the good fish are not gathered *into* the world, but they are gathered *in* the world. In the former of these parables, the tares infiltrate *the already gathered wheat*. If both the good fish and the wheat are gathered, it is nothing short of intellectual suicide not to ask, "What are they gathered into?" We believe this parable answers this question; and it answers this question by using two important terms *interchangeably*. The terms are "world" and "kingdom" (verses 41 and 38). Jesus speaks about a royal world and a worldly kingdom. When we say "worldly kingdom," however, this must not be construed to be synonymous with *worldliness*. What is in view here is not the perversity of the kingdom of Christ, but rather the *global expansiveness* of the kingdom. Moreover, one of the significant ramifications of this parable is that when Jesus returns He will not find radical spiritual declension on the earth. No! When Jesus returns he shall deliver "up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power" (1 Corinthians 15: 24). As Benjamin Warfield observed:

. . . the period between the two advents is the period of Christ's kingdom, and when He comes again it is not to institute His kingdom, but to lay it down.<sup>13</sup>

Christ's kingdom is before the second advent; God's is after. (See the Matthew 13:41 and 43 contrast.)

If then the field-world is the kingdom of Jesus Christ (that is, centrally His visible church), how are we to explain the *laissez-faire* implications of verse 38 when Jesus instructs his disciples to let both wheat and tares grow together? Those

---

13. Benjamin Warfield, *Biblical and Theologian Studies* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1952), p. 487.

that have insisted that because the field is the world the parable has no application to church discipline may be properly charged with *oversimplification*. In their zeal to wall-out two practices (that the wicked may enjoy immunity from ecclesiastical censure and that the infidel may be decapitated by either secular or ecclesiastical authorities) they overlook that the church comes into existence *in the world*. What Jesus is teaching is that the first advent would not be characterized by an immediate sifting of the wheat and the tares. Jesus is here warning about the "sons of Boanerges" mentality. The parable is a candid warning against *certain* excesses of church discipline. It is directed "against the view that men are able to determine infallibly who are born again and who are not and, in reliance on their supposed infallibility, must establish a perfectly pure church." 14

*The Admonish-Rebuke-Suspension-Excommunication Substitute*

It has sometimes been affirmed that the above order of discipline must be normatively implemented in church censures. On the plus side, the syndrome certainly teaches the necessity of good order in the appropriation of a deliberate and cogent discipline, the very opposite of rash and inequitable censures. There exists in such good order an implicit warning against the well-known practice of "shooting from the hip" first popularized in the famous American horse-opera medium. Let every word be weighed in the light of Holy Writ; let every censure be imparted with a reasoning that is in absolute subjection to the authority of Jesus Christ!

On the minus side, such a formulation must never be interpreted as laying a foundation for the "chronological slows ." For example, if someone in the church is guilty of adultery and remains inured in the face of godly counsel, the desirable procedure in this case is not a long and contracted trial in which after months and years the accused *is only formally admonished!* The Admonish-Rebuke-Suspension-Excommunication Syndrome is not a Gibraltar-like chronological process, so much as a guide for a discipline that must be pensive and deliberate.

---

14. R. B. Kuiper, *The Glorious Body of Christ* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), p. 306.

What is particularly insidious about this syndrome is that it treats excommunication as an entity separate from the preceding aspects. If we hold to our original premise and aver that discipline is in reality synonymous with excommunication, we cannot Scripturally maintain a position that would lead people into the error of equating excommunication as the final stage of discipline. The reason for this is a very good one: *the whole judicial enterprise is the process of excommunication*. This is why there have been theologians who have properly spoken about Excommunication *minor* (admonish, rebuke, suspend) and Excommunication *major* (the actual expulsion). So when we say there are four degrees of censure what we *should mean* is there are four degrees or stages of excommunication. When the offender is formally admonished, he is already *in the process* of being excommunicated. It is important to grasp this fact because there is little that is more disheartening and discouraging for a congregation than a discipline that is either half-baked, abortive, or procrastinating. Augustine used to speak about the corruption of the best as the worst. No discipline is not a corruption; it is simply a rejection. But a limpid discipline imitating the proverbial pace of the snail is a corruption of the worst sort. The New Testament's characterization of the church censure which is motivated by supreme love to Christ for the purity of the church and reclamation of the offender, always moves with Cherubic speed.<sup>15</sup>

#### *The Prayer Substitute*

It is sometimes either formally stated or informally thought that church discipline will be offensive to the erring brother as well as others in the congregation. So it is usually

---

15. Recently, a well-known spokesman for a denominational church bragged that although the church had been in existence for about forty years, it had only one judicial case come before its General Assembly. In the context in which this was written, this was supposed to mean that the church's disciplinary procedures were so efficient in the lower courts that disciplinary work by the General Assembly was all but unnecessary. Let me suggest another reason: the discipline in the church as a whole was so slow and bureaucratic that would-be excommunicates were in fact "excommunicated" by the ensuing discouragement of time-consuming inefficiency and ecclesiastical bureaucracy. Elders who revel in the U.S. Constitution's stress upon the right of a "speedy trial" and yet carp at the wholesale violation of this statute in the civil courts, should take a cue themselves!

imagined that it is *enough* to pray for the Holy Spirit to convict the heart of the offender. "He will be restored to fellowship in this manner," it is said. Of course this kind of argumentation sounds very pious but once it is unmasked it will prove to be sheer hypocrisy and piosity. For beginners, how can obedience to the command of Christ be tyrannical and unloving? To make such a claim is tantamount to charging Christ with folly for making such ecclesiastical pronouncements as Matthew 18.

Secondly, for one to adopt this attitude is really a sin. To pray and ask the Holy Spirit to reclaim a brother without imposing church discipline (the divine means) is categorically sinful. It is akin to a Christian who prays that God would convert the heathen when he himself lingers in evangelistic atrophy, or like someone who prays, "Give us this day our daily bread"- expecting a roasted chicken to come flying into his mouth while all the time shunning lawful employment. To pray for the outcome without exercising the means is sin!

Will the offender be offended? Of course he will. The choices are either offend God by not offending the offender or offend the offender and thereby please God. In addition to this the words of Solomon are appropriate: "Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful" (Proverbs 27:6).

### *The "Can't Judge" Substitute*

Matthew 7:1 states "Judge not that ye be not judged" and is thus often used as justification for the practice of "not judging." It is fervently maintained that because we too are sinners and cannot be *judges of men's hearts* that there is very little place left for any kind of ecclesiastical discipline within the body of Christ. Such argumentation is freighted with innumerable difficulties. Logically, those who say that we "cannot judge" regarding those who possibly should be excluded from the church should also affirm that we are incapable of exercising the keys in *admitting men* into the pale of the church. The Body of Christ would thus be a body without any members!

As for Matthew 7, the context of this passage shows us that Matthew writes about the censure against the hypocrite. Christ is here indicting the self-righteousness of the religious braggadocio such as the scribe or the Pharisee. He is not con-

demning the censure that may spring from lowly piety, the same piety that proceeds from the man who smites his breast and says, "God be merciful to me a sinner." The man who complains about the splinter in his brother's eye while carrying a timber in his own is the emphatic subject of this passage. In other words, Mr. Mote-eye *may* judge Mr. Timber-eye, but certainly not the reverse. This passage says "aye" to mote-eye judging, but condemns the hypocrisy of timber-eye judging. Such mote-eye judging is absolutely necessary; and such judging is incumbent upon every Christian. John says: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but *try the spirits* whether they are of God . . ." (1 John 4:1). But we can go even further and say that Mr. Mote-eye has no inherent monopoly on the judging duty. Once Mr. Timber-eye has removed his own timber, he is *then* mandated to "see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye" (Matthew 7:5). All of this is another way of saying that Christians should be provoking one another unto good works, and that such a responsibility should be exercised in a spirit of unfeigned love and in "the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1).

So the church of Christ does not infallibly judge the heart nor must the church of Christ *strive* to judge the heart infallibly. Men are admitted into the church because they give external evidence which is credible, not because we say that we really know what is in a man's heart. Only God really knows if that profession of faith is really creditable, that is, if it is sterling and thus redounds to His honor and glory in the inward man. It is the same with church censures; evidence only of an external sort is judge. The final judgment of the soul is always left to God alone. The power to save and to damn does not reside in the church even though what she binds on earth is bound in heaven and what she looses on earth is loosed in heaven. Church discipline is an ordinance instituted by Christ and the welfare of the church surpasses any maudlin notions that we may have regarding the individuals on the church rolls.

#### *The Demographic Substitute*

In order to keep the numbers of the church high, it is contended that it would be wrong to cast people out of the church

for *little* sins. Church discipline, however, is not concerned with simply casting someone out of the church, nor is it simply interested in so-called "little sins." To begin with, no sin is a peccadillo. And as one has said: "The purpose of church discipline is the removal of sin from the sinner, not the removal of sinners from the church."<sup>16</sup>

Church discipline is primarily interested in sins that are public and notorious, not sins that are private and inward. Normatively (but not always), the key of doctrine is concerned with the latter while the key of discipline focalizes on the former. If church discipline is not utilized, the church may be larger, but its spiritual growth will be seriously retarded. *There are two ways to measure growth and the individual spiritual growth of the members must never be sacrificed on a demographic altar.* In short, if the truth is worth defending and championing, there will be church discipline. Or to put it another way, where there is church discipline, there will be a church of Christ. Where it is absent, Christ is absent and instead of a church of God, we have a synagogue of Satan.

The laconic observation of G. I. Williamson is applicable here: "It were better that the honor of Christ be maintained than that a thousand sinners be kept on the rolls of the visible church to his dishonor."<sup>17</sup> In the case of a congregation of two or three, it were better that the name of Christ be honored than that one sinner remain on the rolls to His dishonor! Church discipline may result in a smaller church, but it will be a truer church. And Jesus Christ abominates a church which advertises a name but is spiritually dead (Revelation 2:1).

### *Mourning As a Substitute*

There is the peril that the Church may use lamentation as a substitute for the key of discipline. This is especially true when the church confounds a deep, heart-felt detestation of sin as a *comprehensive response*. An outstanding catalyst of this confusion is the mistaken conviction that Paul's zeal to censure the church in Corinth for allowing the free reign of a for-

---

16. G. I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1964), p. 238.

17. *Ibid.*

nicator was motivated by that church's joyous acclaim of fornication as a holy life-style. So, it might be imagined: "Our mourning for this brother's sin is proof enough that we have not Corinthianized."

The unambiguous evidence, however, challenges the interpretation that the Corinthians were revelling in wholesale iniquity. Paul has a contrivency with the Corinthians, not because they did not mourn, but because *they should have mourned in such a way* that the one "that has done this thing might be taken away from you" (1 Corinthians 5:2). *In other words, there was mourning but there was no mournful follow-through of excommunication.* To be sure, the Corinthians were an assembly of mirth-makers; but this does not mean that they were self-consciously rejoicing in presumptuous sin. They were, as Charles Hedge says, "elated with the conceit of their good estate, notwithstanding they were tolerating in their communion a crime even the heathen abhorred." The crucial word in this passage (1 Corinthians 5:2) is the word *hina*. (translated "that"). Because *hina* is causative in force, Paul's argument could be filled-in to read: ". . . in order that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you." They gloried in spite of the sin; it was a glorying in the "Christian" climate of the congregation *without* specific censure of this specific sin. They should have acted like a pestilence was among them which called for immediate judicial action and prayer, except in this case they were found derelict not in prayerless declension, but in judicial laxity. The duty of removing this man "away from you" entails the responsibility to congregate for the purpose of delivering "such a one unto Satan" (verses 4 and 5). Lamentation by itself is not enough. Where it is used to induce the condition of judicial paralysis or is substituted for judicial action in any way, the mourning itself is Corinthian in quality.

*Using Excommunication Minor as a  
Substitute for Excommunication Major*

Calvinistic churches have rightly striven to sanctify the seal of the covenant which is portrayed in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper by encouraging the broken and contrite to participate and discouraging (or fencing) the profane from the same. When such discouragement is directed against a pro-

fane 'brother," the discouragement has been referred to as "excommunication minor" (or "suspension") in distinction from "excommunication major" which latter is the final censure of expulsion from the visible church. When EM<sub>1</sub> (Excommunication minor) is employed, it should be made clear to the brother under discipline that excommunication is not just an *eschatological* event that he may one day experience, but rather that he is *already* in the process of being excommunicated. *It is very important to make this clear to the congregation, which may wrongly interpret the elders' hesitation to employ EM<sub>2</sub> (Excommunication major) as sheer allowance and tolerance of scandalous sin.* When EM<sub>1</sub> has been implemented, the verdict of the church has already been declared. Excommunication major is simply the final and formal sentencing.

The continuity and discontinuity between EM<sub>1</sub> and EM<sub>2</sub> may be graphically demonstrated by two Biblical cases: *the spiritual excommunication* of the man who will not "hear" ("obey") the church in Matthew 18, and the *spiritual segregation* that is to be imposed upon the brother who will not work (see 2 Thessalonians 3 :6ff.). The first class are those who have been excommunicated and are thus to be regarded as *heathen*. The second class are the ones who are in the throes of the excommunication process (EM<sub>1</sub>) but are still not to be regarded as the enemies of Christ but rather admonished *as brethren* (see 2 Thessalonians 3:15). In the latter case, all fellowship is to be withdrawn from the erring brother so 'that he may be ashamed." *Obviously*, if the church has withdrawn its fellowship from the erring brother, it would be a token of brazen hypocrisy for the grand symbol of Christian fellowship which is displayed in the Lord's Supper to be freely offered the one under EM<sub>1</sub> discipline!

Normatively, there should be a period of time between the administration of EM<sub>1</sub> and EM<sub>2</sub>. We can speak about the initiation of discipline (EM<sub>1</sub>) together with the period before the final sentencing (EM<sub>2</sub>) as a time when the church should be promoting the edification of the fallen brother. In short, the soteric purpose of church discipline may never be forgotten (not even EM<sub>1</sub> may be equated with retributive justice). But there is a punitive aspect of even EM<sub>1</sub> and that aspect is demonstrated in the retreat on the part of the brethren of Christ from maintaining any fellowship with the offender.

The time then between EM<sub>1</sub> and EM<sub>2</sub> should not be time

*ad infinitum*. The time lapse must be long enough for the sinner to repent but short enough to guarantee the continuity between EM<sub>1</sub> and EM<sub>2</sub>. Situations of course differ, but generally whenever weeks and months separate the "two" excommunications, the church cannot avoid the charge of being cowardly in carrying out Christ's direct orders to excommunicate. *This is especially true when there has been no visible change in the life-style of the EM<sub>1</sub> excommunicate.* He may come to church but this dodges the real issue: has he in fact repented of the notorious sin? <sup>18</sup> It may be imagined that because the offender is still attending the worship services that this is a lucid commentary about a heart that is *soft and malleable when it is in fact hard and pliable.* (à la John Bunyan's Mr. Pliable!) That he lives in his notorious sin and still frequents the congregational worship often shows a divided desire to run both with the hound and with the hare ! When the church allows an immoderate space of time to elapse, it has broken the continuity by substituting EM<sub>1</sub> and EM<sub>2</sub>. Under such circumstances when there has been no judicial follow-through, the discipline or excommunication has been aborted. So, on this very important matter of time the elders are not left to the arbitrary caprice of reason. The progress of the excommunicate is the Biblical criteria: "However, to prevent extreme subjectivity, their chief criterion must be the presence or absence of *visible* progress, or *visible* responsiveness to admonition or rebuke. In other words, they must ask what visible effect the Word of God is having on the offender."<sup>19</sup>

### *The Counseling Substitute*

This brings us then to the last and perhaps (considering its rapid growth to stardom) most insidious substitute for church discipline, and this is, *counseling*. Now of course we are in favor of expostulating with the notorious sinner so that he might enter into the repentance that makes the angels of heaven rejoice! But this genre of counseling is Biblically

---

18. Sometimes the offender will not come to the church and may even "hide-out" from the elders. In such cases, it does no good to employ EM<sub>1</sub>. The offender has already made the break. The elders must not cover-up the seriousness of this contumacy. Unless there are *compelling* reasons to the contrary, EM<sub>2</sub> must of necessity be the next step.

19. Wray, *Biblical Church Discipline*, p. 14. Emphasis his.

distinct from the counseling that is the end-all, the alpha and omega of the whole judicial enterprise. In cases of notorious sin, counseling may be a good alpha or beginning, but it is a poor omega or end. In our minds it is even conceivable that specific instances may arise when it would be unlawful to employ *any* counseling. (Consider Acts 5 and Ananias and Sapphira.) Although we are not sure as to how this works itself out in the practical cases of the church of the twentieth century, it can be generally stated that this procedure can be followed when professing brethren are given *great light* and still sin against that light with a high hand. The man who defiantly picked up sticks on the Sabbath was judged *without* counseling for the simple reason that he had been previously enlightened by divine revelation. So the man tries to make it a test case; he arrogates to himself the prerogative of disobeying God in the minutiae of the law.

Counseling may act as a corrosive to church holiness in at least three ways: (1) when no church discipline other than counseling is ever contemplated, (2) when unlawful alpha counseling is performed, and, (3) when alpha counseling continues interminably over a period of weeks, months, and even years so that (for all practical purposes) there is reversion to corrosive number one, even though the official propaganda "line" of the church broadcasts the excommunication doctrine *in theory*. We fear that in actual practice many churches may actually harbor the impure hope that what they consider to be the most "grievous" of God's commandments (that is, the excommunication commandment) will never have to be obeyed, not out of a lawful hope that the sinner's repentance would abort the necessity of EM<sub>2</sub>, but for the self-pleasing and cowardly hope that he would excommunicate himself ( 1 John 2:19), and therefore make the church's *last action* the parliamentary procedure of erasure, instead of the valiant follow-through of EM<sub>2</sub>! The government of the church is, however, not bureaucratic, but Christocentric.

Ironically, the end to which the counselor attempts to bring the sinner (his repentance) often fails because the counselor (we will assume he is an elder) does not employ the God-ordained means. Paul excommunicated Hymenaeus and Alexander so that while being delivered unto Satan, they would *learn* (there is your repentance!) "not to blaspheme" (1 Timothy 1:20). How does the church handle a member who

blasphemes? Paul says that his learning must take place in the college of excommunication!

The case of Hymenaeus and Alexander, of course, does not afford proof that no counseling had preceded their expulsion. What it *does indicate* is that there are some sins that cannot be remedied *by counseling* so that the remedial means for the "irremediable" behavior is excommunication. Although Christian counselors should be enjoined to be hopeful in seeing tangible results, they must not be *naive* either; nor must they always impute to themselves guilt if the offender does not repent, perhaps thinking that the only explanation of the sinner's recalcitrance lay in a faulty counseling methodology. Our *point is that what is often amiss in the counsel is the very fact that it is counsel!*

This leads us then to another implication of unwarranted counseling that may at first befuddle the mind: *counseling left by itself equals sanction*. Such counseling sanctions the offence even when the content of the counsel is an unequivocal condemnation of the sinner's perversity. How can this be? Let us consider Eli as illustrative of our contention. Some mistakenly reprove Eli for dereliction of parental responsibility because he did not rebuke his salacious sons, who – we are told – engaged in fornicative activity and brought down the Levitical worship to the realm of the creature. The mythology of this interpretation is due in part to a disregard of 1 Samuel 2:22-25 where Eli is portrayed as *faithfully* reprimanding his sons. Yet, the judgment of God upon Eli and his house comes later when the Lord affirms: "For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knows: because his sons made themselves vile, *and he restrained them not*" (1 Samuel 3:13). The *true ground* of the indictment against Eli consisted in the fact that he "restrained them not." As a parent and as high priest, Eli had the authority to do more than just engage in vigorous *jaw-boning*. There was *no enforcement* of his counsel and because of this his advice is equated with sanction so that "the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering forever" (1 Samuel 3:14). It is likewise when the civil magistrate reprimands the murderer while refraining from the God-required responsibility of wielding the sword, or when a father like Eli *verbally boards* his children when in fact their rowdiness calls for a more wooden "board of education." The possibility of the enforcement of

counsel is different from mere moral suasion. The church is obligated by Christ to enforce its judicial counsel through the exercise of the keys; and she has the right and duty to loose penitent sinners and bind the impenitent. But when counseling becomes a substitute for church discipline the candlestick itself may be in danger of removal. *When the church reproves the happening, but still allows the happening to happen, the impeachment of the church through the withdrawal of the presence of Christ will unhappily happen* (Revelation 2:20).

### *Conclusion*

It is possible that the counseling substitute may be the most potentially dangerous substitute in Reformation churches today. The elders may be competent to counsel, but they are incompetent to pastor the flock as long as the key of discipline remains only a doctrine of passive lip-service. We believe it an incontestable truth that there has been a one-sided emphasis on the reformation of the sinner to the exclusion of responsible church discipline.

Yet, our call in this essay has not been a call for blood; but rather a call for church holiness. In dealing with erring brethren, the Cambridge Platform provides us with a double-edged warning:

In dealing with an offender, great care is to be taken, that we be neither overstrict or rigorous, nor too indulgent or remiss; our proceeding herein ought to be with a spirit of meekness, considering ourselves, lest we also be tempted; and that the best of us have need of much forgiveness from the Lord. Yet the winning and healing of the offender's soul, being the end of these endeavors, we must not daub with untempered mortar, nor heal the wounds of our brethren slightly. On some have compassion, others save with fear. (Chapter XIV, Article 4)

Church discipline has been described as a "sacred scarecrow." It certainly has not been our intention to make it more of a scarecrow than it already is. But the real issue that needs to be underscored is *the glory of Christ's name and the holiness of the church*. On this matter of church holiness, Louis Berkhof leaves us with some timely words:

There is a very evident tendency to stress the fact that the Church is a great missionary agency, and to forget it is first of all the assembly of the saints, in which those who publicly live in sin

cannot be tolerated. It is said that sinners must be gathered into the church, and not excluded from it. But it should be remembered that they must be gathered in as saints and have no legitimate place in the Church as long as they do not confess their sin and strive for holiness of life.<sup>20</sup>

---

20. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1966), p. 601.

### III. RECONSTRUCTING WORSHIP

#### CONVERSATIONS WITH NATHAN

David Chilton

**T**HE following is a transcript, or at least a reasonably close version, of a series of conversations I had with Nathan, my seven-year-old, as we visited an evangelical church service on a recent Sunday evening. Although the discussion actually took place in several stages (ending late that evening at home), for literary purposes I have reconstructed the conversation as if it all happened during the service. I confess that a good portion of it did go on then, as I tried to explain evangelical worship to an impressionable youngster.

Nathan: Papa, this sure is a funny liturgy,

Papa: Well, it isn't exactly a liturgy. They don't believe in liturgy at this church.

Nathan: How can you not believe in liturgy? Isn't a liturgy just what you do in Church?

Papa: Yes. But what I mean is that they don't believe in having the service written down in advance.

Nathan: Why not?

Papa: They think that if they read something that's written down, they won't really mean it.

Nathan: But all they have to do is think about what it means, and agree with it, and then they'll mean it, won't they?

Papa: Sure. But they don't believe that.

Nathan: But somebody around here must believe it, because we all sang from the same hymnbook. Don't they mean it when they sing the hymns?

Papa: Sure they do. But they think prayers are different.

Nathan: You mean that they can agree with a song that they read, but they don't know how to agree with a prayer that they read?

Papa: Something like that.

Nathan: Then why don't they just memorize the prayers?

Papa: Because they think they wouldn't mean those, either.

Nathan: Can they memorize songs and mean them?

Papa: Sure. But they think music is different. You can read or memorize a song and still mean it. But if you read or memorize words without music, you won't mean them.

Nathan: But don't they teach their children "politeness liturgies"? Like "please" and "thank you" and "you're welcome," and "yes, sir," and "yes, ma'am"? And don't they teach them to mean it?

Papa: Yes, but –

Nathan: And what about Bible verses? Do they memorize Bible verses?

Papa: Of course they do.

Nathan: But they don't mean them?

Papa: Yes, they do.

Nathan: Without music?

Papa: Sure.

Nathan: How?

Papa: Can we change the subject?

Nathan: OK. Why didn't we confess our sins when we began the service?

Papa: This church doesn't believe in it.

Nathan: WHAT? !

Papa: Shhh. Keep your voice down. I mean they don't think the Church needs to do it.

Nathan: Don't we need to be forgiven?

Papa: Sure. They just don't think it should happen in Church.

Nathan: What about the Creed? Why didn't we say the Creed?

Papa: Well, partly because it's liturgical. They think they won't mean it if they say it.

Nathan: We could sing it.

Papa: They don't know how.

Nathan: Oh – they haven't been Christians very long, huh?  
Let's teach it to them.

Papa: Let's not.

Nathan: Why not?

Papa: Because they won't want to do it anyway. Because it's liturgical.

Nathan: Why are they so afraid of liturgy? We could explain that it isn't hard to mean it when you say it.

Papa: But they won't want to do it anyway. They want to be different every week.

Nathan: Really? Different every week?

Papa: Yes.

Nathan: What do they do differently? Do they sometimes take the offering at the end of the service instead of in the middle?

Papa: No. That's always at the same time.

Nathan: Do they sometimes have the preaching at the beginning?

Papa: No, that's at the same time too.

Nathan: Then what do they do that's different?

Papa: They sing different songs.

Nathan: So does our church.

Papa: Well, it really comes down to the fact that they don't have prayers and responses for the congregation to read.

Nathan: Why not?

Papa: They think that reading prayers and responses keeps people from worshipping.

Nathan: Really? What do they think the people should do instead?

Papa: Just sit there and do nothing.

Nathan: That's worship? Doesn't it get boring?

Papa: Not if the elders keep things exciting enough on the stage.

Nathan: Elders? What elders? You mean those men up there on the platform are *elders*?

Papa: Sort of. But they don't always call them that.

Nathan: Why aren't they wearing robes and collars so you know what they are?

Papa: They say elders shouldn't wear special clothes.

Nathan: Why not?

Papa: They think that there's nothing special about clothing.

Nathan: Policemen and soldiers and judges wear special clothes.

Papa: Well, they think clothing isn't special for elders. They think elders should look like everybody else.

Nathan: Then why is that elder wearing a maroon suit with a blue shirt, a green tie, and a white belt?

Papa: Well, it's still a suit. The point is, he can wear anything he wants.

Nathan: You mean an elder could wear a robe and a collar if he wanted?

Papa: No. He can wear anything *but* a robe and a collar.

Nathan: So they *do* think clothing is special!

Papa: Well. . . .

Nathan: There! Someone did it again!

Papa: Did what?

Nathan: He said "Amen." See? That's why this place needs a liturgy book. Half the people don't know when to say things.

Papa: I told you. They don't do a liturgy here.

Nathan: Some people do. Hear that? Somebody just did it again. If we had a book, we could all say it together. That would keep some people from getting it wrong and saying it while somebody else is talking.

Papa: But Nathan, I'm telling you. There's no liturgy. People just say "Amen" whenever they feel like it.

Nathan: WHAT? Where does the Bible say to do that?

Papa: It doesn't.

Nathan: Then why do they do it? Aren't they afraid?

Papa: Why should they be afraid?

Nathan: Because it's a vow, a covenant promise. Doesn't it mean that we agree with God, and that if we don't keep this promise we are asking God to destroy us? Isn't it even a special covenant name for Jesus?

Papa: Sure. But they don't know that. They think it means something else.

Nathan: What do they think "Amen" means?

Papa: They think it means "I feel good."

Nathan: Look at that!

Papa: What?

Nathan: There are people raising their hands !

Papa: So?

Nathan: In our church, the elders raise their hands to God when they pray. But in this church, everybody else does it, whenever they feel like it. And they make up their own liturgy as they go along. You know what I think?

Papa: What?

Nathan: I think that in this church *everybody is an elder* – except the elders.

Papa: That may be the best description I've heard yet.

Nathan: You know, Pa, those elders are tricking us.

Papa: How's that?

Nathan: They really do have a liturgy for their prayers. They keep saying the same thing over and over again.

Papa: Really?

Nathan: Sure. I don't know what they mean, but there are two special words they keep using in all their prayers.

Papa: What words?

Nathan: Well, the first one is "just." They keep saying it. "Lord we just thank you for just being so just special." Stuff like that. They must have it written down, because they all do it.

Papa: What's the other word?

Nathan: It's not really a word. It's a special sound, like a little clucking noise: "Tsk."

Papa: What?

Nathan: Tsk. Tsk.

Papa: What are you talking about?

Nathan: Listen. It goes like this: "Lord, tsk, we just, tsk, we just, tsk, we want to, tsk, thank you, tsk, Lord, for, tsk, for just, tsk, being just so, tsk, special, tsk." Right?

Papa: OK, quiet down and listen to the special music.

Nathan: Wait. What's that guy doing? He looks weird.

Papa: Shhh. He's just singing.

Nathan: Yeah, but he's shaking all over the place. He looks like he's going to fall down.

Papa: Well, that's the way the "special music" singers do it in this church. He's just trying to rock to the beat.

Nathan: Why? It looks dumb.

Papa: Let's figure it out. Why do we have a choir in our church? What do you think they're doing there?

Nathan: It's part of our worship. They help us worship God.

Papa: OK. Now, why do you think this church has people sing?

Nathan: Well, I guess they're trying to worship too. But it seems more like they're trying to look like they're on television.

Papa: Sort of like MTV?

Nathan: Not that bad. It just looks like they want people to notice them instead of praying. Unless — Do you think maybe he's just kind of sick?

Papa: We'll talk about it later. It's time for communion now.

Nathan: What's this?

Papa: Shhh! It's bread.

Nathan: Come on, Pa. What is it really?

Papa: It's bread, honest. It's a little, tiny cube of bread.

Nathan: Looks like a piece of cracker to me.

Papa: Well, sure. It is a piece of cracker.

Nathan: Should we give them some money so they can afford bread?

Papa: They can afford it. But they want to do it this way.

Nathan: Why would anybody want to eat this? Do they like the taste?

Papa: Probably not.

Nathan: Then why would they eat something they don't enjoy — especially at Communion? We're supposed to be happy when we eat with God.

Papa: Be quiet. It's time to drink the cup.

Nathan: OK. Yuck! What is this stuff?

Papa: Urn, it's. . . .

Nathan: Tastes like grape-flavored Kool-Aid.

Papa: Grape juice, probably.

Nathan: Doesn't taste very good. Did they forget to buy some wine ?

Papa: No. They don't drink wine here.

Nathan: WHAT? !

Papa: SHHH!

Nathan: Why don't they drink wine?

Papa: They don't believe in it. They think it's wrong.

Nathan: But it tastes good.

Papa: Well, tasting good isn't everything.

Nathan: But God made it for us to drink, especially at Communion. It makes us happy, and it makes God happy too.

Papa: That's right.

Nathan: Does the Bible say it's wrong?

Papa: No.

Nathan: Then why do they say it is? And why do they drink this yucky juice? And eat those crummy little cracker pieces? No wonder they're so sad!

Papa: What?

Nathan: Well, look at them. Look how sad they all are. They don't look like they're enjoying this, do they?

Papa: Well, no. . . .

Nathan: Well, they aren't enjoying it a bit. But didn't you tell me that Communion is a special dinner with Jesus?

Papa: Yes.

Nathan: And when we come to Communion, the whole Church is coming up to heaven, right?

Papa: Right.

Nathan: And when we go to heaven to be with Jesus and have dinner with Him, we're supposed to be happy, aren't we?

Papa: Sure.

Nathan: Well, why aren't these people happy? Do they think heaven is a sad place to be?

Papa: I think they're sad because they're thinking about their sins.

Nathan: But they've been forgiven, and now they're in heaven! They're supposed to be thinking about Jesus!

Papa: Oh, they're thinking of Him, too. They're sad because they're thinking about Him dying on the cross.

Nathan: But He's not dying anymore. The whole reason we're doing this is that He came alive, right?

Papa: Right.

Nathan: Well, I don't think they could be sad about Jesus. I think they're sad 'cause they had to eat those icky crackers and drink that dumb old Kool-Aid.

Papa: Grape juice.

Nathan: Kool-Aid. Hey, Papa. Why are those people looking at me funny?

Papa: Urn . . . it's because you took Communion.

Nathan: So? Everybody else did.

Papa: Not the kids.

Nathan: Why not?

Papa: Because they aren't allowed to.

Nathan: WHAT? !

Papa: SHHH! They only let grownups take Communion at this church.

Nathan: Why? If you've been baptized you can take Communion, right? Even babies can take Communion, because Jesus feeds them, too. Children need Communion as much as grownups.

Papa: But these children haven't been baptized.

Nathan: *WHAT?!*

Papa: Shhh. It's true,

Nathan: Why don't they want their children to come into the Covenant?

Papa: Well, they do. They just don't believe that children can be Christians until they get older.

Nathan: That's dumb. God can make anybody a Christian.

Papa: Well, I mean that they don't think He *will* make their children Christians. Until they get older.

Nathan: But Jesus wants little children to come to Him. Even

babies. He said so, didn't He?

Papa: Yes.

Nathan: Look. These people have families, right? Don't they feed their babies? They don't make their kids sit in a corner and wait till they're grownups before they can eat. So why shouldn't God feed His children, too? It must be sad for the kids to watch the rest of the family eating without them.

Papa: But they don't think their children really are God's children.

Nathan: But they teach their children to pray, don't they?

Papa: Sure.

Nathan: Who do they pray to?

Papa: "Whom." Objective case. And don't end your sentences with prepositions unless you have to.

Nathan: Do their kids call God "Father"? Like in the Lord's Prayer? Wait a minute. You aren't going to tell me they don't believe in the Lord's Prayer, are you?

Papa: Sure, they believe in it. And many of them teach it to their children.

Nathan: Well then. If they teach their children to say "Our Father," then that means they think their children are God's children, too. Right?

Papa: Uh . . . sort of. But –

Nathan: But they don't baptize them into Jesus. So how can they be God's children unless they're in the Covenant?

Papa: Right. That's why they don't give them Communion.

Nathan: Is this as confusing to them as it is to me?

Papa: It might be if they thought about it much.

Nathan: Well, how are their kids supposed to become Christians, if their parents don't bring them to be baptized?

Papa: When they get older, they're supposed to make up their own minds.

Nathan: About whether or not to obey God? That's pretty

dumb. Do they have to wait till they're older to decide if they want to obey their parents, too?

Papa: Not usually. But they want their children to wait until they're old enough to love God.

Nathan: But I love God. I always have. And the Bible says that people can know God even when they're in their mama's tummy, doesn't it?

Papa: Well, these people think you have to wait until you are older and smarter, so that you understand what it's all about.

Nathan: You mean you can't have dinner with Jesus until you understand what it means?

Papa: That's the idea.

Nathan: Papa, do grownups understand everything about what Communion means?

Papa: Some people probably think they do.

Nathan: I don't think these people understand much about it. If they did, they'd bring their children into the Covenant and let them have dinner in heaven with them. And anyway, how are the kids supposed to learn what it means without doing it? That's like trying to get nutrition from reading a recipe, instead of eating the food!

Papa: Not bad. I'll have to remember that one.

Nathan: OK, so how can a kid get Communion in this church?

Papa: Well, when he gets older – say, around twelve or so – he asks Jesus into his heart.

Nathan: Papa, don't be silly. This is serious.

Papa: I'm not being silly. They tell you to ask Jesus to come into your heart.

Nathan: I've never heard that. Is that in the Bible?

Papa: No. But they think it is. It's just an expression someone made up that means becoming a Christian. They also call it "receiving Christ," which is a little more Biblical.

Nathan: But Jesus is in heaven. And we receive Him every

Sunday – every time we eat His body and drink His blood.

Papa: Uh, keep your voice down, willya? They don't talk like that around here.

Nathan: But Jesus talked like that.

Papa: I know. But they don't know that.

Nathan: Let's tell them.

Papa: Let's not, OK? Not right now.

Nathan: All right. Let's get back to how kids can become Christians and have Communion. When they get older they ask Jesus "into their hearts," right? So do they just go ahead and do it when they get to be twelve?

Papa: Not exactly. The grownups have to be sure the kids really mean it.

Nathan: How can they know that?

Papa: The kids have to cry when they do it.

Nathan: Cry? Real tears? How do they make themselves cry?

Papa: Well, some churches spend lots of time practicing. But, basically, they just have a preacher get up and tell real sad stories, so sad that they make people cry. So then the kids cry, and they walk up to the front of the church and ask Jesus to come into their hearts. Sometimes this happens during the summer. The kids go to a special camp where they listen to people preach at them. Then, on the last night, they all stand around a campfire and —

Nathan: And listen to scary stories?

Papa: No. Sad stories.

Nathan: Aw, shoot.

Papa: Then they cry, and throw little twigs on the fire, and ask Jesus into their hearts.

Nathan: Why do they throw twigs on the fire? Do they think they have to do that to come into the Covenant?

Papa: They think that's how you have to do it if you're in the mountains. It's part of their Summer Camp Liturgy. But if you're home you don't need to.

Nathan: Then do they get Communion?

Papa: No. They usually have to wait, and go through a class to learn what it means to be a Christian.

Nathan: Wait. What have they been doing while growing up? Haven't they already had plenty of classes? Does a kid ever get Communion around here?

Papa: Sure, eventually. After he gets out of the class he can have it whenever everybody else does.

Nathan: Every Sunday.

Papa: No. Every month or so.

Nathan: Why not every Sunday? Don't they go to church every Sunday?

Papa: Yes. But they don't have Communion every Sunday.

Nathan: But what do they do, if they don't have Communion? Isn't that why we go to Church – so we can go to heaven and have dinner in Jesus' House?

Papa: Well, they sing songs and listen to a sermon.

Nathan: But that's part of the Liturgy of Communion. Communion is what the Church service is all about, isn't it? We're supposed to worship God, and then He feeds us with His food. Why do they go to church? Don't they go to meet God?

Papa: Sure. But they think they meet him by just listening to a sermon and getting excited about what the preacher says, if he's interesting enough to listen to. If he isn't a good speaker, then they think they haven't met with God.

Nathan: Look. Don't these people know that Communion makes them strong for living the rest of the week? How is anyone supposed to go without food for a month and still have any energy to do his work?

Papa: Well, they think that if they have Communion every week it won't seem special.

Nathan: It doesn't seem like it's very special to them anyway. I think it would be lots more special if they had it every week and gave it to their children. Maybe then even the grownups would understand what it means.

Papa: You're probably right.

Nathan: Wait a minute, Papa. I think I just figured out the real reason why they don't have Communion very often.

Papa: Why's that?

Nathan: 'Cause it's crackers and Kool-Aid.

## THE SATURDAY NIGHT CHURCH AND THE LITURGICAL NATURE OF MAN

Ray R. Sutton

**M**ANY years ago, a tourist attended a service in a Scottish church. She greatly enjoyed the sermon and was spiritually blessed. Later she inquired about the name of the minister. She thought he was brilliant, and probably about the best preacher she had ever heard. Hearing that he was Ebenezer Erskine, <sup>1</sup> she said, "I will surely hear him again next Lord's Day. He's wonderful ." The next week she showed up bright and early. But as the sermon got under way, she noticed that she did not like this one near as much. It seemed to lack power.

After the service, she related her experience to Erskine. He responded, "Ah, Madam, last Sunday you came here to worship the Lord Jesus and hear His voice. Today you came to hear me and exalt me in your heart. That's why you're going away empty."

Erskine's experience typifies the modern church. Today, people come to church, and for the most part, have no idea what they are coming for. Some like the music. Some like the preacher. Others like the people. But few understand the real purpose for coming to church.

Why? There is a supposition among protestants that worship comes "naturally ." Christians have to be taught everything from how to study the Bible to how to love their wives, husbands, or children. But when it comes to worship, evangelicals are nervous about someone teaching them prayers, chants, and even a "set form of worship ." Worship is the one thing that every living, breathing Christian automatically

---

1. Erskine initiated the Secession church. He was an able leader and preacher at the end of the 17th century. His preaching skills were demonstrated by the crowds he drew. Often the services would be so full that the congregation would have to move outside.

does the right way. Right?

Curiously, with this assumption – that Christians know how to worship naturally — one usually finds a general aversion to any uniform kind of ritual. After all, words like “ritual” and “ceremony” are profanity to the average evangelical. But, the evangelical Church is not alone. Our whole civilization in general reacts to ritual.

“The anthropologist Mary Douglas entitled the first chapter of her book *Natural Symbols* ‘Away from Ritual’ and spoke of the ‘explicit rejection of rituals as such’ and of ‘a revolt against formalism, even against form’ as characteristic of the present.

“The liturgist Romano Guardini asked in 1964, ‘Would it not be better to admit that man in this industrial and scientific age, with its new sociological structure, is no longer capable of a liturgical act?’ The word ‘ritual’ itself has for many, even for most people, a negative connotation. They associate vain repetition with meaningless activity, with formalism, and with going through the motions. Many sociologists, for example, describe as ritualist ‘one who performs external gestures without inner commitment to the ideas being expressed.’”<sup>2</sup>

Is modern sociology right? Is ritual devoid of passion? Perhaps the easiest place to disprove this supposition is in the area of *semi activity*. “No one has been so foolish as to suggest that, since the powerful ritual acts of sexual relationship frequently do not carry the full weight of meaning which they should, and are often used by the unscrupulous as means of manipulating other people, they should be abandoned by human beings in favor of some more meaningful form of activity.”<sup>3</sup>

Modern man is a hypocrite. On the one hand, he revolts against form and ritual. On the other, he embraces it when convenient. This ambivalence appears in the church. For the most part, modern evangelicalism opposes ritual. But there are choice times, such as weddings and funerals, when even God-fearing fundamentalists run to the prayer books.

Someone might think this charge of hypocrisy is too strong. Not all are self consciously anti-ritual. Indeed most do not attempt to flee from rite. I wish that were the case. The

---

2. Leonel L. Mitchell, *The Meaning of Ritual* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), p. ix.

3. *Ibid.* p. x.

fact is, protestants, for the most part, do try to live in the mythology that 'their church does not have ritual.'

Therefore, I want to do two things in this essay. First, I want to establish the *inescapability of ritual*. Second, having established the first point, I want to make some Biblical theological observations that get down to the *specifics* of worship.

Let's start with the *inescapability of ritual*.

### *The Saturday Night Church*

Early in my college years, I was asked to attend a Bible study to debate an evolutionist. When I arrived another man, a student at a nearby seminary, had also been asked to defend creationism. Both of us decided to represent the position, and after the meeting, we ended up discussing the state of the church.

He told me about an experiment in ecclesiology. He and another colleague of his at a local seminary wanted completely to break from ecclesiastical tradition. They desired no ritual. They sought a true church unbridled by denominationalism and church history. These ambitions fostered interesting features.

Saturday night, not Sunday, was the time of meeting. At first, there would be no officers. Everyone would be equal. No set form or format was set. This was to be a church led by the Holy Spirit. Form, it was presumed, suppressed the free expression of the Spirit. If all were to participate, the Spirit could not be quenched. No pews, no building, none of the trappings of ecclesiology. In every way, the Saturday Night Church, was to be a pure return to New Testament Christianity.

I remember those first meetings in the home of one of my new found friends. We all met with idealistic excitement, anxious to see what the Holy Spirit would bring to pass through our faithfulness.

It was not too long before the room was full, and we had to make a decision. Where would we meet when there was no more room? Some thought a church building was out of the question because the Spirit would be stifled. Others suggested a synagogue as a nice alternative. Finally, it was agreed that we would meet in the home of a wealthy dentist.

This seemed to solve all our problems. It was a home. It was big. It was comfortable. It was acceptable. And for anti-

establishment, upper-middle class students, it was ideal.

The Saturday Night Church was everything we thought a church should be. True primitive Christianity had been recaptured. But one of the first problems, although I did not recognize it as such then, was in the area of ritual.

When one throws out all known accepted ritual, he faces an interesting problem. How is baptism to be performed? What is the best way to bury people? How are the meetings to be conducted? How are officers selected?

Just about all of the questions concerned ritual – the most pressing ones centering around the weekly meeting. At first, the leaders led, but that was thought to be too suppressive. The solution: *liturgy by popular consent*.

In retrospect, it is interesting to see what happened. In the beginning, there was considerable variation from traditional worship. After all, that was probably the main desire of the group – to avoid the boredom of establishment churches. But eventually, the will of the group sought stability more than unconventionality. The group wanted to live in the security of knowing what was going to happen from week to week. Thus, the non-liturgical church fell into a ritual.

The meeting became predictable. Even the participants became predictable. The same ones generally spoke. The meeting started at the same time and in the same way. The sermon, “share lesson” as it was called in those days, was given to the more gifted because everyone preferred to hear them. And the last meeting I attended even had a young man read a prayer that was, to my recollection, an adaptation from an old Anglican prayer book. Try as it did, the Saturday Night Church, in all of its reaction, could not escape ritual and rite.

#### *Pulpit Liturgy*

Whether the original founders of the Saturday Night Church would admit it or not, this experiment in ecclesiology was a reaction. What was being reacted against? The mother church from which they came, and attended sometimes on Sunday, was a preaching center more than a church. They wanted fellowship – the kind perceived to exist in small settings.

The major criticism of one individual concerning the mother church was that the preaching was too formal. Their

service was quite simple — prayer, two hymns, announcements, Scripture reading, sermon, and benediction. The sermon was normally 45-50 minutes. But the critics wanted informality from the pulpit.

The preacher was quite able, but he used the same approach every week. He was a verse by verse preacher. He was predictable. Every week, one could expect the same basic methodology. His sermonic consistency was ceremonial.

In those days, the rage at the seminary where this preacher taught was variety in the pulpit. It was taught that a preacher should vary his method week to week from biographical, topical, thematic sermons to even dramatic presentations. This was the ultimate. But the mother church, as anti-liturgy as the Saturday night group, would not stand for the breaking up of the ceremonious ways of their present teachers. Hence, the solution was to fly out of a pulpit liturgical church into an informal liturgical church.

From one situation to another, flight from rite was mythology. They were living in the illusion that ritual was optional. In each setting, however, formality appeared in one form or another. Their presuppositions: freedom comes first without form. Life comes from random, spontaneous actions.

#### *Wellhausen and Chaos Religion*

The famous 19th century German theologian, Julius Wellhausen, expressed the same presuppositions. With them, theological interpretation of the history of the church took a new direction.

Virtually all modern theological scholarship adopts his two main value judgments.

“The first is that freedom and spontaneity are good, while organization and ritual are bad. The second is that spontaneity is early, but organization is late. These presuppositions of his work explain how he can argue with such conviction for the order of sources JEDP. JE, where worship is free and disorganized, was written first; D, with its organizing tendencies, came next; the hide-bound ritualism of P must be latest of all.

“While it is easy to guy Wellhausen’s approach to the history of Israelite religion by saying that he saw the liberal Protestantism of JE gradually degenerating into the medi-

aeval Catholicism of P, it must be admitted that his basic value-judgments are shared by very many who would not subscribe to his critical position. This no doubt partially explains the continuing attraction of his views, however doubtful some of the intellectual arguments in their favour may be."<sup>4</sup>

The suppositions that primitive is pure, and that life starts simple and complexities, are evolutionary. Evolution says that chaos generates life. Therefore, the random state of matter must be achieved before new life appears.

In philosophy, we call this irrationalism. In psychology, the irrational is expressed in the emotional. Therefore, Wellhausen leads us to believe that the early church did not have any set forms. They depended on the Spirit, which is contrary to form, and had a purer expression of the whole man. He was able to pour forth an emotional response to God because there was no ritual to suppress him.

Records of early Christian practices do not confirm Wellhausen's presuppositions. Pliny the Younger wrote to Emperor Trajan, "It was their habit on a fixed day to assemble before daylight and recite by turns a form of words to Christ as a god: and . . . they bound themselves with an oath, not for any crime, but not to commit theft or robbery or adultery, not to break their word, and not to deny a deposit when demanded. After this was done their custom was to depart, and to meet again to take food, but ordinary and harmless food; and even this (they said) they had given up after my edict, by which accordance with your commands I had forbidden the existence of clubs."<sup>5</sup>

It is obvious that the early Christians were binding themselves in some kind of covenant ceremony. They used the Ten Commandments. Not only does this tell us something about their view of the Law of God and its application for Christians, it points out a ritual in the early church.

Hippolytus, a Roman Bishop, wrote in A.D. 210 that he wanted the bishops to return to the form of worship that was observed in Apostolic times. He was bothered by new innova-

---

4. Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1981), p. 27.

5. Pliny, *Epistles x. 96*, tr. J. Stevenson, *A New Eusebius* (London: S. P. C. K., 1968), p. 14.

tions entering the Church. He wrote a form which has been the main model for the church. The following is a section on the Lord's Supper.

*Let the deacons present to him, the bishop, the oblations and let him, laying his hands upon them with all the presbytery, give thanks and say:*

The Lord be with you.

*And let all say:*

And with your Spirit.

*Bishop:* Lift up your hearts.

*All:* We have, to the Lord.

*Bishop:* Let us give thanks to the Lord.

*All:* Worthy and right.

*And let him continue thus:*

We give thanks, O God, through your beloved child Jesus Christ, whom in these last days you have sent to us a Savior and Redeemer and Messenger of your will, who is your inseparable Word, through whom you created all things, and whom, in your good pleasure, you sent from heaven into the womb of the Virgin, and who dwelt in her womb and was made man and shown to be your Son, born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin.

When he had accomplished your will and gained for you a holy people, he stretched forth his hands to suffer, that by his passion he might set free those who have trusted in you.

When he was betrayed to his freely chosen passion, that he might destroy death and break the chains of the devil and tread hell underfoot and enlighten the righteous and fix the limit and manifest the resurrection, he took bread and, giving thanks to you said: Take, eat, this is my body which is broken for you.

Likewise also the cup, saying: This is my blood which is shed for you. Whenever you do this you make my memorial.

Remembering therefore his death and resurrection, we offer you the bread and cup, giving thanks to you that you have made us worthy to stand before you and minister to you.

And we ask that you send your Holy Spirit upon the oblation of the holy church, that all who partake of these holy things being gathered into one may be filled with the Holy Spirit, for the strengthening of their faith in the truth, that we may praise and

glorify you through your child Jesus Christ, through whom to you be glory and honor, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in your holy church, now and forever.

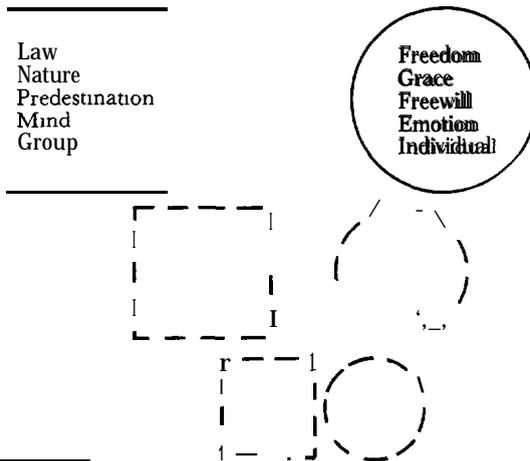
Amen.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, the early Church had ritual, and the notion that the early Church's worship was simple – that is – erratic, is pure mythology and wishful thinking. This kind of thinking grows out of a basic evolutionary presupposition that chaotic worship is the purest.

### *Form and Freedom*

Using Wellhausen as representative of modern man, we can go a step further in our analysis. For Wellhausen, form is in a dialectic, or in conflict with freedom. Pagan man has always wrestled with the relationship between them. But he has never been able to resolve the perceived dialectic. Why?

As Van Til says, man sees life in terms of antinomies because he does not believe that God is absolutely sovereign. The presupposition of antinomy produces conflict between form *and* freedom. In the following chart, we have attempted to capture the conflict. The square represents form and the circle, freedom.



6. *Apostolic Tradition 4*, ed. Bernard Botte, *La Tradition Apostolique de Saint Hippolyte*, Liturgiewissenschaftliche Quellen und Forschungen 39 (Münster: Aschendorfsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1963), pp. 10-17. Translation by Leon Mitchell in *Meaning of Ritual*, pp. 78-79.

Under form, we can put subcategories of law, nature, predestination, mind, and group. Under freedom the following concepts are perceived as opposites: Freedom, grace, freewill, emotion, and the individual. Some might want to pull form and freedom close together as the dotted lines indicate. But dualistic thought can never move them together. Thus, form and freedom, no matter how close, are still antagonistic to one another.

Thus, modern man perceives the world in terms of a dialectic. The world is in conflict with itself to the point that all it can do is synthesize these concepts, or live in some kind of attempted "balance." Regardless of how he attempts to resolve form and freedom, however, the one always ends up against the other. Thus, modern man makes a preference of one over the other. He would rather live in the realm of freedom because his presupposition is that form destroys freedom.

#### *Resolution in Christ*

Christ resolves the tension. In a sense, sinful man does live in a conflict between form and freedom. Set forms stifle his creativity, he thinks, and so he rebels.

Christ settles the matter. One need only read the first chapter of Ephesians. The phrase "in Him" occurs several times. It is remarkable to see all the great philosophical and practical problems resolved in all of these "in Hires." For example, His redemption of the world pulls the plan of God, predestination, and the work of the Spirit into perfect harmony. Form does not destroy creativity and freedom. Rather, predestination establishes it *in Christ*.

For that matter, "The Spirit is always to be understood in relation to Jesus Christ, and as such it is equally the source of reason and form. . . But freedom of the Spirit is itself a freedom bound by Jesus Christ as its norm. It is finally a Christological freedom. Thus even as we rightly claim place for freedom in worship, we still find ourselves theologically bound by the Word. And we only demonstrate in our thought about worship what we find to be true in the experience of worship itself form and freedom are defined as correlative by the Word. And the category of 'language' deriving from the biblical meaning of 'Word' comprehends both as the sine qua non without which neither thinking about worship nor worship

itself is possible.”

So, one cannot have freedom without form, nor form without freedom. We must discard the notion that Christians should or can escape God's forms. Freedom is always in terms of form or ritual. To rebel against ritual is revolution against the way God ordered the universe.

### *The Liturgical Structure of Time*

Man is a creature of ritual. Everything he does, from shaving to love-making, works into predictable patterns. Yet, modern man naively thinks his worship is somehow neutral to the doctrine of ritual. We have seen, however, that ritual is inescapable, and that form and freedom are not in conflict.

We further see man's liturgical nature as we examine *time*. Time is *connected to everything*. Time was created to follow a basic liturgy. So, everything was created to follow a sacred liturgy.

Leviticus 23 explains. Moses says, “The Lord's appointed times which you shall proclaim as holy *convocations* – My *appointed times* are these. For six days work may be done; but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation. You shall not do any work; it is a sabbath to the Lord in all your dwellings” (Lev. 23:2-3).

The Hebrew words for *convocations* and *appointed times* are the same. The word is found in Genesis 1:14, and translated, ‘seasons.’ The reference in Genesis qualifies the purpose of the “great lights.” Thus, these seasons are not necessarily the seasons of the years. Judging by other uses of the word, the meaning ought to be connected with the sabbath — the time for *convocating* with the Lord.

The use of this word indicates that time was created to originate and culminate around God's throne on the sabbath. Time cannot be reduced to the natural, nor is it neutral. It has a sabbatic orientation.

Furthermore, time itself falls into a liturgical rhythm. The first six days are designed for work. The seventh takes its place as a day of rest. Even after the fall, the basic goal of time does not change. The realization of this goal, however, alters. Only through redemption is true sabbath-rest restored (Heb. 4:8).

---

7. Paul Waitman Hoon, *The Integrity of Worship* (New York: Abington Press, 1971), p. 219.

*Time and Worship*

Time and worship (convocation) have direct bearing on one another. God created this inter-locking relationship. One's view of one controls the other.

For example, the early Church believed the congregation should stand while praying. To kneel during prayer was as improper as fasting on the New Covenant Day of worship. Sunday was the day of the Resurrection. The Son/sun had risen on civilization. To kneel during the time to rise was considered a serious offenses

Whether one agrees with this view or not, he should see that one's view of time directly affects his understanding of worship. The main temporal concept in the opinion of some of the early church fathers, that the day of worship equals day of resurrection, demanded certain action.

In a more critical issue, the church's interpretation of time affected worship. Basil and Augustine were the two leading figures in the controversy.<sup>9</sup> Basil believed that time was cyclical. He based his view on an interpretation of the creation week of Genesis.

First, he stressed that the first day was not called first, but "one ." Second, each day returns on itself, and each week returns on itself. Third, since the week returns to one, time is a unity. Fourth, the eighth day, following the seventh, is outside of time. The eighth day is eternity. It is unchanging. The implications were important. According to Basil, there is no designated day of worship in the New Covenant. Furthermore, true worship is in heaven. To reach heaven one must transcend time by contemplation and stoicism. The septenary week represents the old creation. The new creation day of eternity is outside of time. It can only be reached by leaving time.

The effect of Basil's teachings froze civilization. Time was "incommunicable ." Time and eternity were separated. That meant the goal of history had no connection. Hence there was no progress.

---

8. Jean Danielou, *The Bible and the Liturgy* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Servant, 1956, 1979), p. 263.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 242-286. The following remarks are a summary of Danielou's brilliant observations.

Western man takes a simple word like "progress" for granted. He assumes that he will be making more money the next year. The next president will be better. His children will grow out of their phases. And he quotes the cliché, "time cures all ills."

Western man is unique. Other civilizations simply do not think this way. Their view of time is static. Cultures like the Polynesian world assume that life goes in a circle. What they do at any one point in the year will happen the same time and way the next year. Year by year, life does not change.

Why does Western man so naively think the future will be better? Even when empirical evidence indicates it will not get better, he has a sort of innate belief that it will. Why? The western world was influenced by Augustine's beliefs about time and worship.

Augustine changed the world with his writings, *City of God*, and *Concessions*. Both focus on a sabbatic view of time and life. In the *City of God*, Augustine spends considerable time showing that history is moving in a septenary pattern toward a future glory. Although he wanted to avoid a millenarian viewpoint, he still held that history would progress through seven time periods. It would end in A. D. 1000.

This emphasis injected a concept of progress. Western civilization was rescued from the direction of the eastern church and world. History, according to Augustine, was moving to a doxological end.

*Confessions* also had a sabbatic theme. He stressed an *interior* sabbath. *City of God* was more cultural in its orientation. *Confessions* concentrated on inner rest. His famous statement about being restless until finding rest in God captures the theme.

In Augustine, the sabbath concept of time and worship carries forward. History and eternity are converging together, rather than being completely separated. Augustine stopped here, but not before giving enough to the church and civilization to begin the Middle ages. The world moved forward!

The difference between these early bishops points out the relationship of time and worship. Without a fixed time of worship in history, the world became static. Pulling a concept of sabbath, that is worship, into history, progress entered Western Civilization. The week was no longer viewed as just returning on itself. It was moving toward a sabbatic end.

*Sabbath Day and Eighth Day*

Augustine did not go so far as to connect the Sabbath Day and eighth day. He did not need to. The effect was there. The moment he brought a sabbath concept past the Cross and into the New Covenant, Old Testament feasts converged on the New Covenant day of worship.

It is my opinion that Augustine could argue the way he did because of more fundamental Biblical presuppositions. It was understood that the sabbath was a day of worship. In the New Covenant, the day of worship changed from the seventh to the first. Reference to the sabbath, therefore, resulted in shifting the concept to the new day of worship. Teaching a sabbath concept, and emphasizing a fixed day of New Covenant worship, the Sabbath Day and eighth day merged in post-resurrection history. This historical phenomenon, born out in the early Church and in the presuppositions of Augustine, had Scriptural underpinnings.

First, Luke refers to the New Covenant day of worship as "the day after the Sabbath" (Acts 20: 1ff. ). Significantly, Moses had described the double sabbath of pentecost as the "day after the sabbath" (Lev. 23:16), the exact terminology which New Testament writers used. So, the day New Covenant believers worshipped on was called a sabbath.

Second, the feast of tabernacles involved first and eighth day sabbath rests (Lev. 23:39). Not only are first and eighth days brought together, but the sabbath is made into a first and eighth day of worship. Eighth day sabbath was practiced and prefigured in the Old Testament.

Third, the day after the 15th of Nisan was the beginning of firstfruits. The Apostle Paul spoke of the resurrection as the firstfruit from the dead (I Cor. 15:20). The early Church undoubtedly understood the resurrection day as the fulfillment of this event.

The sabbath of the Old Testament transfigured, therefore, and merged with the new Lord's Day (Rev. 1:10). History is saved from a cyclical view because the eighth day concept breaks up the septenary week. Sin had the effect of causing men to adopt cyclical patterns (Col. 2: 16ff. ). The New Covenant sabbath broke this down.

Germane to our study, the union of these concepts meant the festivals of the Old Testament formed a background for

New Covenant worship. The feasts were absorbed into the eighth day. They become a model from which we can determine the theology of worship.

Before we move to the second half of this essay, however, let us summarize what we have said thus far. Ritual and liturgy are inescapable. That's all we have really tried to say up to this point. We began with a simple illustration about an experiment in ecclesiology. We have ended with a discussion of time.

We end our "inescapability" presentation on this note because it is so obvious. My 'Saturday-Night-Church-friends' discovered that the New Covenant sabbath had too strong a pull. Too bad they (and I) did not listen more carefully to the lesson of history. Voltaire had tried to alter the sabbatic pattern of time, and failed. Such attempts always fail because the world was created to run in a sacred liturgy. Both work and worship fall into predictable patterns.

Now that we have established the inescapability of ritual, let us move to some of the specifics. The best place to begin is with the implications of the Old Testament sacrificial and sabbatic systems collapsing into Christ.

### *Sacrifices and Sabbaths*

We have established that the Old Testament sabbath system coalesced into the New Testament sabbath. If Christ is the fulfillment of all the sabbaths of the Old Testament, the day of celebrating Christ's resurrection should be informed and structured accordingly. Clearly the early Church acted on this supposition. We shall return to this point in a moment.

But we must first consider that if Christ is the fulfillment of the sacrifices of the Old Testament system of worship, then New Testament worship in *Christ* should be structured by them. The sacrifices began with confession of sin, *the sin offering*, proceeded through dedication offerings, *grain and whole burnt offerings*, to a meal with God, *the peace offering* (Lev. 1-7). When we come to New Testament worship, we find this pattern reproduced. Confession of sin comes before or at the beginning of worship (Matt. 5: 23 ff.).<sup>10</sup> And, the Lord's Supper

---

10. Note the structure of Colossians 3:12-17. Compared with Ephesians, this section is speaking about worship. Notice that forgiving is mentioned at the beginning of Paul's comments.

is the culmination of the worship meeting (Acts 20:11).

The Book of Revelation is one continual worship scene because it takes place around the throne of heaven. In general, the book begins with a confrontation of the sins of the Church (Rev. 1-3). Then, through a process of antiphonal interaction between heaven and earth, and the passing of judgment through the proclamation of the Word of God, the Apostle John sees the world offered up to God as a living sacrifice (Rev. 4-19). Finally, the world is brought to the Eucharistic table in the city of God (Rev. 20-22).<sup>11</sup>

My observations are not new. The Historic Church, although there is much variation within the broad structure I have outlined, has seen the sacrificial structure of New Testament worship. The Mass of the Roman Catholic Church is set up in this fashion. And, while rejecting the transubstantiation view of the Mass, Lutheranism has carried over the basic structure.

### *The Festival System*

Turning to the sabbath system of the Old Testament, we can see how it has been carried over into the New Testament concept of worship. To make our points, let us back track for a moment.

The feasts of the Old Testament were called sabbaths. Everything grew out of and returned to them. In the spring, the Old Covenant man began his year with Passover. In autumn, he ended with the feast of Booths. Passover signaled that re-creation begins with redemption. The feast of Tabernacles points to the end of history's culminating with the Messianic reign. Both times of the year these festivals were extended sabbaths. One led to the other, and when one was over, the faithful man eagerly awaited the other.

The yearly pattern was a magnification of the main temporal unit, the week. A man worked six days to sabbath. He sabbathed to work six days. Special sacrifices were doubled on the sabbath because it was special. Holy Convocation, special

---

11. Massey H. Shepherd, *The Paschal Liturgy and the Apocalypse* (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1960), pp. 77-84. Shepherd develops the liturgical structure of the book in a much more thorough fashion. Although his development differs slightly from the one I have laid out, it generally confirms my point.

worship, occurred. These events made sabbath days and times central. Pentecost was a time of offering. The first sheaf had been offered in a wave offering on the day after the sabbath. The last offering in a heave offering was made on the day of Pentecost giving God the new grain. The people had received the harvest of God, now God received the harvest of man. Man was expected to give of his produce before he spent it all. God's tithe was not to be used as man's nest egg. His offering was thereby a statement of dependence on God that He would continue to provide the next year.

Pentecost carries over into the New Covenant. Paul commands the Corinthian church to bring its gifts on the first day (I Cor. 16:1ff.). Most translations render this gift as a collection. It was an offering. Why the distinction?

An offering is mandatory. It is not optional. The New Testament believer is required to tithe his firstfruits, one tenth, because Christ is the Melchizedekal priest who receives the tithe of Jew and *Gentile* (Heb. 7:6). So, Grace is specified. We know how much we owe God, everything. And, the way we show God that everything belongs to Him is by giving the firstfruits, one tenth.

So, offering is representative of a man's whole life. The first three centuries of the Church define a Christian as an offerer. The excommunicated person is one who is forbidden to offer. When time came to place the tithe before God, man was doing more than giving that one tithe. He was offering everything. Historically, tithing has tended to be a comprehensive event. One man refers to the offering event as follows: 'We might well learn from Negro and Pentecostal congregations who kinesthetically act out offering by rising and leaving the pews, walking forward to present their gifts, circling the church in procession and returning to their seats. Or at Communion, why should not women of the congregation come forward at the time of offertory, lay the cloth and set the table as they do at home, and bring in bread they have baked? And cannot the equivalent of offerings at the harvest festival be much more often employed?

"The late Charles Gore once said that the offertory at an early christian Eucharist resembled nothing so much as a modern harvest festival. And Joseph Jungmann deduces from a mosaic floor excavated at Aquileia that in the Constantinian era men and women formed an offertory procession bringing

not only bread and wine, but also grapes, flowers, a bird, even property handed over in the form of a deed or voucher. In a different vein, could the worshipers' need to confess and expiate be met by inviting them to act out a gesture of reconciliation with their brother before they present their gift, or by inviting them to lay on the altar written confessions of sins or requests for counsel or prayer?

"But offering needs to be rethought and rehabilitated in other services than the Eucharist. Offertory processions and actions are clearly suitable at Baptism and confirmation. Underlying all is the pastor's duty to enlarge his people's understanding of offertory by teaching them its manifold meanings, its history, and especially its connection with their worldly life. The two chief secular realities with which worship needs to be related in our day, it has been said, are matter and power, the world of economics, science and technology, and the world of sociology and politics."<sup>12</sup>

The offertory pulls in everything that a man has. The church has made this more involved, not to assuage man's guilt, but to convey the idea that the offering is a consecration by giving up.

Pentecost was a time of remission. Passover was complete at its end. But Pentecost was on the fiftieth day and thereby tied into this numerical pattern. Pentecost took place on a grander scale at the fiftieth year of Jubilee. Double sabbath happened in the year as well as the week. The land was returned and slaves were remitted.

Man needs to have regular cancellation of his debts to God. The Absolution of sin officially cancels debts. At this time the elders bind and loose. As the Scriptures say, whosoever sins you remit, they are remitted. Binding and loosing go with remitting of sin.

#### *The Feast of Tabernacles*

Once a year the people of God were reminded of the dwelling place given at the Exodus (Lev. 23:33). It was not a natural dwelling. It came through God's redemption. The dwelling was a new tabernacle made from the same tree which symbolized Christ. Every year they returned to their new

---

<sup>12</sup>, Hoon, *The Integrity of Worship*, p. 234.

dwellings. This represented a return to the source of their redemption. In the New Testament Christ “tabernacled” (Jn. 1:14), and became the true tabernacle among men. The church memorializes its salvation at the Eucharist. It retabernacles in the true tent of the world.

Each year a pilgrimage was made to Jerusalem. A man would take his tabernacle and throw it on the road saying Hosanna to God in the Highest (Ps. 118), and also say, “save me” (v. 25). Man indicated that his way to the altar of God condemned him. He needed salvation. When Christ came into Jerusalem in the spring fulfilling the Feast of Tabernacles held in the fall, the people threw their tabernacles at his feet (Jn. 12:13-15). They recognized that he was the way to the altar of God. They wanted his salvation. Furthermore, the Old Covenant tabernacles at the Feast of Booths are called the body of the believer (1 Cor. 6:19). The believer throws his tabernacle/body at the feet of Christ’s Tabernacle/body as a dedication.

Finally, the feast involved drinking of the brook (Lev. 23:40). Jesus tells a woman at the feast of tabernacles that she will never thirst again if she drinks his water (Jn. 7:37-38). This particular feast represented the coming in of the nations. At the feast 70 bulls were offered representing the nations of the world (Gen. 10). This drink is symbolized at the Eucharist.

Thus far in our discussion of the Biblical theology of worship, we have dealt with the feasts and sacrifices. They set up the basic structure for New Covenant worship. Let us continue our development of the Biblical theology of worship by delving into some of the particular terms associated with worship. Our study cannot be exhaustive, but only introductory. So, we must be very selective.

### *The Knee*

The first Biblical term we come to is “knee.” As a verb, it is to kneel. “Bending the knee” is connected with prayer in general and special worship (Ezra 9:4ff with 10:1; Acts 7:60). It is curious that the knee, translating the Biblical words *barak* and *gonu*, is selected to capture the essence of man’s worship. Positively and negatively, worship is described in terms of the use of the knee (1 Kgs. 19:18). In fact, the knee is even a symbol of man himself (Job 4:4).

The central significance of the knee is clarified in a concrete reference. When Abraham causes his camel to kneel with him (Gen. 24:11), both are made to rest. Thus, kneeling is a gesture of resting.

At the beginning of time, God established the Sabbath day on which He rested (Gen. 2:1ff.). In the natural sense, rest is sleep. In the redemptive sense, rest is faith and all that is associated with it. When man rests in the Lord he acknowledges complete dependence (Heb. 4:10). He indicates that his life takes its orientation around the God of Scripture. Therefore, bending the knee is a statement of faith.

This explains why bending the knee is a statement of faith regardless of the object before whom the subject bows. Also, we understand why the Hebrew noun for "knee" can also be translated "bless." One who is resting in God is given His rest. This is the kind of blessing that grows out of Biblical *genuflection*.

What is genuflection? From the Greek word for "knee," *genu*, we derive the word genuflection. Protestants have come to fear this word because of the gestures associated with it. Actually, the Biblical concept of genuflection is simply resting in the Lord through worship. But in the history of the church it became perverted. How?

When worship ceases to be an *act* and shifts to being an *aid*, genuflection becomes magical. Man gravitates toward talismans of all sorts to stimulate himself. And this is where we run into the point of contact between protestantism and Rome.

The average evangelical goes to worship looking for an aid to his life. As one man told me, "I go to worship to be made to feel good." This view is essentially no different from the Roman Catholic concept of aids to worship. From the preaching to singing, he wants to be stimulated. The modern evangelical needs 'aids,' and if he is not stimulated by various aids, worship will be rejected. The irony about this view is that the worship service designed to be an act — a liturgical service — often is perceived to be unspiritual. The service with the most stimulation, however, is believed to be the real thing.

Worship is active not passive, indicative not subjunctive, and man should come to God resting instead of manipulating. If he comes in faith, he will need no props. Worship ceases to be a stage. The Biblical Christian realizes that he should not live for stimulation, but for service to the Lord of heaven and

earth. A people who live for stimulation are sexually oriented and easily manipulated. All a tyrant has to do is find out what stimulates, and he has control.

Thus, worship is first and foremost an act and statement of resting in the Lord. As the imagery of the camel bowing in the sand conveys, man paints a picture of his faith by what he does in worship.

#### *To Prostrate*

The second term is closely associated with the first, It means to prostrate one's self (*proskunein*). Often an act of worship would consist of kissing the person who is being worshipped, and prostrating one's self on the ground before him (Gen. 22:5; Jn. 4:20-24; Acts 10:25ff.).

The word kiss is a derivative of this word, and that explains the close relationship between them. To kiss something involves a gesture of union or oneness. Kissing is symbolic of a greater oneness. So, we find that the terms for kiss are associated with union (Ps. 2:12).

The prostration is an act which acknowledges that man is but dust. As he lies face on the ground, he points out that he is what he was made of. Mordecai would not bow to Haman and thus indicated that he was not a true son of Adam. He made a proud assertion before the unbeliever, denying that he was dust (Esth. 3:2). God nearly destroyed the whole nation for Mordecai's behavior.

Second, it also says that one is not equal with the one being bowed to. For both reasons, Jesus would not submit to Satan's temptation and request to prostrate Himself (Matt. 4:9 ff.). Finally, when Peter went to Cornelius's house, he would not let him bow in this fashion (Acts 10: 25ff.).

Regarding worship, when one enters the presence of the King of kings, he should subordinate himself, and bow into the dust, thus proving that God is God and man is man. At this moment the church kisses the Son,<sup>13</sup> and conveys in general that she has prostrated herself.

One, as we come to worship recognizing what is happening, our attitude should be different toward this time. Two,

---

13. This, in part, is what kissing the ring of the Bishop means, since His ring is the token of the marriage of the Son to the Bride.

we begin by a statement defining our view of God and man. At the beginning of the service man acknowledges that he is a sinner, and he refers to God as "the Lord and giver of life." Finally, all this time, man should be aware that an important reunion is taking place. It is a reunion of the marriage of heaven and earth.

One final comment about worship as an act of submission. Since we make a statement of submission, and thereby reunite with God's people through the ages, worship is a discipline. One's view and practice of worship is indicated in the service. It is possible for this truth to be lost one of two ways: On the one hand, disciplined submission in the service can be only show. In this case, it is a substitute for submission.

On the other hand, a loose view of worship is most often an indicator of loose discipline in the church. If the service is preacher centered, it means that the preacher is the source of discipline. He can even dominate in such a way that the people are confused as to what reunion is occurring. In the middle ages, the priest centered service led to a belief that reunion with the priest was occurring. He was the one holding heaven and earth together, so that the service was seen as orbiting around him.

One other application: We have found that a person's response to the worship of the church is quite telling. For example, we had a man who would not say the confession of sin. He did not believe a Christian needed to confess sin, and certainly not every week. He was not here long before his rebellion became more open, and he wanted to run the church.

Others have refused to sing some of the music. They do not like it for one reason or another. But the Elders set the agenda. If they select a certain style of music, the congregation can try to prevail on them in other ways besides open protest. Actually, silence during the singing is one of the highest forms of protest. In the final analysis, one should go to another Church rather than protest this way.

I believe the problems occur when music is atomized. In our day, tunes are elevated in importance above the words. As a matter of fact, the early and medieval church did not want the function, the tune, to take predominance over the form, the words. John Calvin, for example, favored the chants of the early church for this reason. If one sees anything in the early music of the church, he should perceive that the music is

designed to make one concentrate on the words.

I have also observed that some people come to a worship service, have made fun of the various parts of the service, waiting for the "real" part, the sermon. We have found that those people are not around long. Reason: They miss the point that worship is a reunion of heaven and earth. Out of respect to God, they should conduct themselves accordingly. The aspects of worship in the historical church are designed around this supposition. Thus, if one comes into the presence of the King, he should prostrate himself. Whether he acknowledges or realizes that fact does not alter how God views someone who comes into His presence and rebels against the service of worship at His feet.

### *Liturgy*

The third Biblical word concerning worship is probably the most obvious. When someone hears the word *liturgy* he may have a number of images. Robes, formality, or orders of service in church bulletins may be a few. But whatever we think of the word, we must realize that it is a transliteration of the original Greek word, *leitourgia*.

The Greek word was used often in the secular world. Most of the time, the word referred to *services* required by the state. "Certain duties were liable to be laid on any citizen who possessed more than three talents, about 700 pounds sterling.

"Four typical such duties were: (a) Choregia, which meant the supplying of all the expenses to maintain and train a chorus for the great dramatic performances. (b) Gymnasarchia, which meant the paying of the expenses involved in the training of outstanding athletes for the games. (c) Archithetoria, which was the defraying of the expenses of embassies sent out by the state on solemn or sacred occasions. (d) Trierarchia, which meant the shouldering of all the expenses of a trireme or warship in time of national crisis. Still later, especially in Egypt, nearly all municipal duties were leitourgiai. The state picked out a suitable man and laid on him the duty of serving in some capacity his town or village or county."<sup>14</sup>

Also the word referred to any sacred priestly service. The

---

14. William Barclay, *New Testament Words* (London: SCM Press Ltd. 1964, 1971), pp. 177-178.

writers of the New Testament freely used the word this way, and that in itself does not distinguish its use. The New Testament writers, however, significantly altered the *object* to which one's service was offered.

Luke explains that the apostles were "ministering to the Lord" (Acts 13:2). Instead of bowing to the state, they bowed to the Lord. Immediately, we see *the* major discontinuity between pagan and Biblical use. In the Greek world, worship was state centered. In the Scriptures, Luke told of a worship that was God centered.

Whether the reference is to the state or the sacred, however, liturgy meant some kind of service. Perhaps an order was involved, we are not told. We have no reason to doubt that order was used in ministry to the Lord (I Cor. 14:33). The emphasis of the word is service as opposed to a performance to entertain God.

### *Keepers of the Cup*

How exactly did the Apostles serve the Lord? Did the Lord need something which they were to provide? Were there specific ways to minister? These are a few of the questions that begin to arise in our minds. Unfortunately, the immediate text does not answer them. But a study of this word in the Scriptures provides one of the most important insights into the theology of worship.

In the LXX of the Old Testament (I Kgs. 10:5), this Greek word is translated "ministers" in a parallel format to cupbearers. We know from its use in secular Greek, and the use of a closely related synonym that this word can be used this way. But here we have a clear reference to ministers being in the category of cupbearers.

This is not surprising since the cup plays such a central role in the tabernacle/temple. One, cleansing was often done from a cup. When the people of Israel needed to be renewed in their covenant, the blood of an animal was placed in a bowl and poured on them. Two, the laver of purification water was also called a cup (cf. Is. 22:24 & Ex. 24:6). Three, the lampstand in the tabernacle had *cups* made of almonds with capitals or crowns on them (Ex. 25:31-35). Finally, the blood of pass-over was carried in a cup (Ex. 12:22). Therefore, the ministry of the priests was very much concerned with the cup. It was

for this reason that the prophets used the imagery of the cup to visit judgment on their people (Zech. 12:2, Jer. 25:15).

Further consider that the concepts of cup and service are theologically related by our Lord (Mk. 10). We have seen that liturgy is basically a kind of *service*, and here in this context our Lord pulls the two concepts together. Although another Greek word is actually used, it is in the same word field because they both translate many of the same Hebrew words in the LXX. In a Biblical theological sense, service goes with bearing the Lord's Cup. Thus, the special service of liturgy must be tied to bearing the Cup.

### *The Cup and Inheritance*

What is the purpose of the cup in Scripture? After all, it is used often, and has great significance to New Testament theology since the second sacrament is called by that name.

Bearing the cup could mean simply having the Lord's Supper. And that is not to be excluded from our interpretation. The early Church had the communion in connection with every teaching of the Word of God. But we would miss the meaning of the cup itself.

The Psalmist tells us that the cup is an *inheritance* (Ps. 16: 5). This relationship between cup and inheritance is established in Genesis 2. Tilling the ground was the way to man's inheritance. The work of Adam was to produce a garden, grow a vine, and turn the fruit into wine. Wine is eschatological. Man must take God's natural fruit and process it into wine. It takes *time* to ferment.

After Noah leaves the ark, he recapitulates what Adam was to have done. As soon as he offers sacrifice and receives God's blessing, he concerns himself with God's estate. He grows the vine, and drinks the fruit from it. So, the ideas of inheritance and cup are not too distant. Wine was the out-working of the inheritance God gave man, and the cup became the symbol of all God's possessions over which man was made trustee.

The cup represents man's inheritance from God. If man inherits blessing, the cup is called a cup of blessing. If he inherits curses, he will have to drink down the "dredges." The cup, therefore, symbolized something bigger than the cup. It was a man's estate.

In the ancient world, pagan kings used the cup to symbolize their whole world. Often, the king's cup was ornately designed as a miniature world. His cup was used for divination (Gen. 44:5), and the cupbearer, chief in command, tended to the cup. When a decision had to be made, the cupbearer divined for the king. Thus, the cupbearer was more than someone who just tested the king's wine. He managed the king's estate and manipulated the king's world from the cup.

Joseph was such a man. In this story, the cup had central significance. When he was taken to Egypt, his first opportunity to advance centered around the interpretation of a dream (Gen. 40). And the dream spoke of the future of two men. The one who would live was the butler. The butler was a cupbearer. So, Joseph's ability to divine apart from the King's cup made a great impression. Furthermore, it is clear from this that the butler had good reason to keep Joseph in prison. A man such as this would take his position.

After Joseph became a keeper of the cup, the cup reappeared in the Joseph account (Gen. 44:1-5). It was the Pharaoh's cup that was placed in Benjamin's sack. This explains the seriousness of the apparent crime. But there was also an important symbolism conveyed. The chalice of Pharaoh was placed in the hands of the youngest, the "second" born of the house of Israel. Egypt had fallen into the hands of Israel, Joseph.

### *The Cup and History*

The management of the cup affected the history of Egypt and Israel. God draws on the imagery of the cup to judge nations. The nations are made to drink of the cup (Is. 51:17-22). Since they were not living faithful to God's cup or sacrifice, it became a judgment.

This process is similar to that in I Corinthians (I Cor. 11: 30ff. ). Here the application, however, is made to the church. If the cup is partaken of unworthily, then it becomes a judgment. Man's personal history is affected. Due to the central place of the Lord's Supper in the church, one's whole life is either blessed or cursed by how the cup is observed. His inheritance either becomes a blessing or a curse.

In the Book of Revelation, the cup appears time and again as the instrument of judging history (Rev. 14:10; 16:19; 18:6).

As God's *bowl* of wrath, history is moved according to it. As in the personal application of the cup, the destiny of nations is measured by their relationship to the cup.

The reason is that the cup in the New Testament is Jesus Christ. God's estate and inheritance is His Son. If we receive it, then blessing is poured out. If we or the nations reject God's estate, we are judged.

Pagan man wants to reduce the cup from God's estate to something magical. In the Arthurian legends, whoever manipulates the Holy Grail has the power to rejuvenate the land. Certainly these ideas are based on Christian realities. But they are perversions.

There were two ways of searching for the grail. One was through black arts and sex.<sup>15</sup> The other was popularized in the Arthurian legend where the grail was acquired through purity and morality. In any case, the one who had the grail could raise armies and ride to victory.

Hitler even searched for the grail. He chose the first method, the black arts. Most historians ignore Hitler's involvement in magic and the black arts. But Hitler believed that he was in contact with an ancient magician Klingsor. This particular magician had been castrated in the early middle ages because of an adulterous affair with a King's wife. Hence, he turned to black magic and sought to acquire the grail to defeat the king.<sup>16</sup> Hitler wanted to contact Klingsor for essentially the same reason. Only, *he* wanted to conquer the world.

Even these perversions of the cup, indicate its relationship to history. The correct view, however, is that liturgy is the inheritance of the Lord. When man serves the Lord in special and general worship, he manages this inheritance. History is effected.

15. In Biblical religion, sex is not a sacrament. God makes food and water the sacraments to make man realize his dependent nature.

16. Trevor Ravenscroft, *The Spear of Destiny* (New York: Bantam, 1974), pp. 182-183, 185. Ravenscroft must be read with a very discerning eye. His method of historicism is "higher consciousness." Nevertheless, Hitler, it is now known, was definitely very involved in the occult. Winston Churchill's adviser on Hitler, Dr. Walter Stein, had informed him of the fact. But Churchill had the information suppressed for a number of reasons. A much more credible work to the historical eye, and one that confirms Ravenscroft's thesis, is by George Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964).

*Managing the Cup and Liturgy*

This should change how we view worship. Worship is the heart of keeping God's cup. His inheritance is managed before His throne in worship and the life flowing from it. It is a service. It is a service that has historical consequences.

The various parts of the service are more clearly understood if we see worship as the management of the Lord's estate. One, what the church does in worship effects history. The pastoral prayers and other requests have consequences. We are not manipulating history. We are *managing* history. We are asking that the will of God be accomplished according to His Word. Two, we understand that we are the King's cup-bearers. He has given us a responsibility. At God's right hand, we are His stewards. The stewardship begins around His throne.

*Confession*

In Lewis Carroll's, *Alice in Wonderland*, the King says to Alice, "If there is no meaning in it, that saves a world of trouble you know, as we needn't try to find any." Most psychologists with the exception of Hobart Mowrer and a few others speak of confession with the King's predisposition to disregard its meaning. Generally, they avoid any real study of the meaning of confession.

To my knowledge, no one has researched the relationship between the collapse of the "black box," the confessional in the church, and the rise of alternative means of confession. How ironic. Western civilization has depended so heavily on confession in personal and legal contexts. The church itself has framed its worship around the concept. And psychologists almost unanimously appeal to some kind of group therapy that inevitably entails "baring one's soul." From every point of view, confession is not some kind of banal activity.

Confession is at the heart of how man relates to God. In our study of the theology of worship, we have come to a word-field that encompasses all of worship. It has meaning — contrary to what those who think like the King in *Alice in Wonderland*. Even if we did not know what it meant, we would

have to look closely at the word because of its comprehensive relationship to worship. Confession in one way or the other speaks to every aspect of worship.

The Greek word is a compound (*homo* = same, *logia* = word) which is used to mean, "say the same," "to admit what is said," "to confess a charge," "to confirm the receipt of money," "to agree or submit to a proposal," or "to promise." The root meaning is to "say the same thing." Applied in different contexts, *homologia* and its other compounds meant contract in legal settings, and prayer, praise, creed, proclamation, and confession of sin in liturgical backgrounds.

The Hebrew word *homologia* translates a word (*yadah*) in the LXX that is used to mean "to throw out the hand." The hand can be thrown out in a legal way to "strike hands." In our day it would be like shaking hands. Like *homologia*, it can also be used in the liturgical setting to mean raising the hand in praise. Of course, these contexts are not mutually exclusive of each other. Many times, indeed most, the setting for throwing out the hand is both legal and liturgical. Also like *homologia*, *yadah* can speak of throwing out the hand for prayer, proclamation, praise, and confession of sin.

### *Confession of Sin*

It is proper to start with this aspect of confession as it refers to worship. When men came into the presence of God, they normally began with confession of sin. When Israel entered worship of the Lord corporately, they began the same way (Neh. 9:3).

Confession means to say the same thing as. God's Word is the first statement defining our behavior as sinful. Confession is the second statement repeating God's judgment on our behavior. In this agreement, the same thing is said. Thus, man begins worship by meeting God at the very point of exit from obedience.

Man must come to God at the original point of disobedience. Confession confronts this disobedience thereby drawing together entrance to and exit from God. It is the point of contact. Although man tries to avoid confronting his sin, God brings him back to the original point of exit.

Adam and Eve violated the tree of *Life* by eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The tree of life becomes the

door (Jn. 10), through which man must pass to gain access again to God. Israel came to the door of the promise land twice. The first time they sent spies in and failed to follow up on their suggestions. Forty years later, God brings them back to the original point of exit. They pass the test the second time. The place of exit becomes the place of entrance.

When Peter denied the Lord, he denied Christ three times. After the Resurrection, Christ interrogates about the one-time bold disciple about his love for Him. Three times Jesus asks Peter if he loves Him. Three times Peter must confess the Lord.

Throughout Scripture, man must come to God confessing sin. There is no escaping the reality of his fallenness. Each week we come to worship having disobeyed God in the week before. Our first task is to begin by confronting where we have disobeyed. Confession of sin is designed to put up two signs which both simultaneously signal to us where we have fallen away, and where we come in. Thus, confession draws man back from that which took him away. With that, worship starts off on the right foot and takes on greater significance. We become ready to participate and listen.

### *To God*

Not only does man re-enter where he left God, it cannot be stressed enough that man confesses all sin against man and God *to God*. Sin is against God. It is a challenge of the "unshakable rights of God." Until He is appeased, guilt is not thoroughly removed.

Hobart Mowrer and others do not agree. Even though they speak of religion, their words are gutted of Biblical meaning. Confession is pragmatic. It must be done to correct the problem. But for them, sin is exclusively against man, not against God.

The Bible uses a word for confession of sin which means to throw out the hand. It is interesting that man throws out his hand to either God or man. Mowrer's version of throwing out the hand to fellow man is the Integrity Group, or the Encounter Group as it has come to be known. In the group, one "tells his story."

Jay Adams makes the observation that just telling one's story is "like the fellow who hit his head against the wall

because it felt so good when he stopped. . . . Mowrer's everyday unending efforts to atone do not satisfy. There is no atonement in them. The attempt is really quite pathetic. People who have 'graduated' from his groups often hang around the edges of the group. They revisit. They seem to be searching for something. One said, 'I think there must be something more.' <sup>17</sup>

One of R. J. Rushdoony's greatest insights is that men must confess, and they will confess in any way they can — informing, gossiping, slandering, breaking down. <sup>18</sup> It is all in the original word God uses to explain confession of sin — throwing out the hand. Man must throw out the hand of remorse to God, however, before he finds true relief from sin. The man who said, "God be merciful to me a sinner" did just that.

The stoics interpreted *homologia* to mean living harmoniously with nature. *Homo* meant same, but *logia*, in their opinion referred to logic. Confession was nothing more than an exercise to preserve order. Like the sensitivity training groups, they sought forgiveness to keep their inner person in harmony. Being guilty broke down continuity with nature. Thus, appeasing the wrath of God was not at issue.

### *Praise and Proclamation*

The first aspect of worship that confession speaks to is confession of sin. Throwing out the hand to God, however, touches on other areas of worship. True Biblical confession of sin is closely tied to praise and proclamation. The words we have been studying even translate this way.

In Scripture, confession of sin leads to praise and proclamation. The character of admission of wrongdoing transforms into something else. Therefore, praise and proclamation are nothing more than confession of sin cast in terms of thanking God or declaring His Word.

*Praise.* David begins in Psalm 22 and 30 talking about the heaviness of sin. But these statements are followed by com-

---

<sup>17</sup> Jay Adams, *Christian Counselor's Manual* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), p. 88.

<sup>18</sup> R. J. Rushdoony, *Revolt Against Maturity*, (Fairfax: Thoburn Press, 1978).

ments of praise. And these Psalms are essentially prayers which perform this function. After praising God, David finds happiness. So happiness is tied to confession of sin. Not in an artificial way as we have seen with Hobart Mowrer's approach. But happiness comes truly because we are praising God that we have been delivered.

*Proclamation.* Proclamation takes two forms – preaching and eucharist. Psalm 30:9 says this confession or praise is the declaration of the mighty acts of God. Proclamation of the Word of God is a confession. Witnessing is not neutral. Preaching is not neutral. Since they are a confession, in the subjective sense they speak of dependence on God. The end is to drive the listeners to trust in the God of Scripture.

In the objective sense, proclamation is a creed. In Scripture the word for confession means a body of belief. These beliefs are the mighty acts of God. The Apostles Creed is an example. It can be outlined around the great events of the Christian faith. But it is only valid if we are coming to the creed as a confession of our need because of sinfulness.

Seeing proclamation and praise as extensions of confession of sin also corrects our view of the audience which hears these. We are not witnesses to the world. We are witnesses before the world to God. What is the difference? We are on God's witness stand, and He is the judge. The world is God's court, not man's. This is apparent when Christ speaks of failure to confess Him before men meaning that He will not confess the man before God (Matt. 10:32).

Testimony and preaching are first and foremost *to God*. This changes the typical approach to these subjects. Preaching is not entertainment. It should be directed to God. After all, if He is pleased, the results will be there. But this means that men will not always be pleased. The day proclamation seeks to please men the prophetic edge is lost. When John the Baptist reprimanded Herod, he did so as a witness *to God*. In the Old Testament, that was the role of the prophet. He was in a divine courtroom making testimony. John the Baptist did what he did, because he was bringing covenant lawsuit against Herod, not because he was trying to win the king. When preaching ceases to be a confession of faith to God, even though done before men, it becomes just like the theater. It might be entertaining, but it is irrelevant to the cause of Christ on earth.

*Conclusion*

In this essay, we have sought to do two things. The first part was devoted to the inescapability of ritual and liturgy. The second part has attempted to lay the foundation for a Biblical theology of worship.

Why have we included the second part? I believe that we must do more than be critical. The first part was fairly critical in its tone. And, once one realizes that form is inescapable, it becomes a matter of determining the proper form. Hopefully, this study, along with the others in this journal, will set the reader on the right path to finding *the proper forms of worship!*

## THE MARRIAGE SUPPER OF THE LAMB

Gary North

**T**HE two most important rituals in the Old Testament were circumcision and Passover. The two were intimately related. The common link was blood: doorposts and foreskin. The blood points forward to Christ's sacrifice on the cross, Christian commentators acknowledge, but why was it smeared on the doorposts? What is the symbolic relevance of the doorposts? The imagery does not seem to be related to the cross. Furthermore, the Hebrews were never again required to smear their doorposts with blood after this night of deliverance. What did the symbol mean? Furthermore, what relationship did this symbolism have with the symbolism of circumcision, Israel's other important rite? Why is it that in New Testament times, we have abandoned both forms of these rites, yet we link Passover to the Lord's Supper, and circumcision to baptism — the only sacraments for Protestants? Wouldn't we expect the two rites to be symbolically linked in the Old Testament if we believe that the two sacraments are linked as covenantal signs in the New Testament?

As already mentioned, the visible link is the presence of blood in both rites. But the blood in both instances appears in very specific settings — something that commentators never discuss. Commentators may be suffering from embarrassment, or they may not have recognized the link. In either case, we need to explore the symbolism of both rituals.

### *Pillars and Footstool*

Before discussing the symbolic nature of the doorposts, it is necessary to examine some preliminary biblical passages that relate to this symbolism. The symbol of the pillar in Scripture is the starting point. Isaiah 66:1, which is part of the Old Testament's most important eschatological passage, informs us: "Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my throne,

and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? And where is the place of my rest?" This is what I call *footstool* theology. It describes the victory of God over all His enemies. The New Testament says of Christ that "this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting [waiting] till his enemies be made his footstool" (Heb.10:12-13). The Greek says "a footstool for his feet." Jesus challenged His opponents with a reference to David's words concerning Christ's turning His enemies into His footstool, and no man ever asked Him any more trick questions (Matt. 22:41-46). God symbolically places His feet on top of the earth as a man sits on a chair and rests his feet. In God's case, the chair He sits on is a throne.

If we view the earth as God's footstool, then the tabernacle and temple can be seen as His throne, a place of majesty and judgment. The place of worship is described as a footstool. "We will go into his tabernacles: we will worship at his footstool" (Ps. 132:8). Kline's description of God's glory cloud deals with the symbolic representations of God's majesty. "God's theophanic glory is the glory of royal majesty. At the center of the heavens within the veil of the Glory-cloud is found a throne; the Glory is preeminently the place of God's enthronement. It is, therefore, a royal palace, site of the divine council and order of judgment. As royal house of a divine King, the dwelling of deity, it is a holy house, a temple. Yet the Glory is not a static structure, but mobile, for the throne is a chariot-throne, Spirit directed and propelled through the winged beings, a vehicle of divine judgment, moving with the swiftness of light to execute the sentence of the King."<sup>1</sup>

Kline argues that the creation itself is designed after the pattern of a glory temple, and he cites Isaiah 66:1. "Similarly, the natural heavens consisting of heaven (the firmament), and the heaven of heavens (the cloud waters 'above the heaven') are regarded as God's royal chambers and chariot. In harmony with the identification of heaven and earth as a macrocosmic temple, the earthly tabernacle and temple that appear in redemptive re-creation symbolism are designed, as various architectural features show, to be a microcosmic rep-

---

1. Meredith G. Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1980), pp.17f.

resentation of heaven and earth.”<sup>2</sup>

It is the mental image of God seated on His throne that brings us to the topic of pillars. The angel of judgment is spoken of as having “his feet as pillars of fire” (Rev. 10:1). When building the temple, Solomon employed Hiram of the tribe of Naphtali (not Hiram of Tyre), who had been living in Tyre, the son of a Hebrew woman and a man of Tyre, to work as a craftsman on the project. He was a brassworker. Hiram’s first job was to construct a pair of tall brass pillars, eighteen cubits (27 feet) tall (I Ki. 7 :15-20). These pillars were placed in the porch of the temple (v. 21).

In the holy of holies of both the tabernacle and the temple, there was God’s mercy seat made of gold. It was to sit upon the ark of the covenant. On each end of the mercy seat was a gold cherub. Their wings covered the mercy seat. The description of this arrangement appears in Exodus 25:17-21. The ark was placed inside the temple within the oracle, a large room overlaid with gold (I Ki. 6:19-20). Inside the oracle were another pair of gold cherubim, ten cubits (15 feet) tall, with the wings touching the walls (w. 23-28). So there were cherubim covering God’s throne, and huge cherubim covering the cherubim, ark, and mercy seat. On the walls were carved cherubim (v. 29), corresponding to the cherubim on the curtains of the tabernacle (Ex. 36:8). Then there were more cherubim in the outer area between the ledges of the temple (I Ki. 7:29). In Ezekiel’s vision of the temple, cherubim cover the doors and doorposts (Ezk. 41:16-20).

What did this symbolism mean? What was the relationship between cherubim and the throne, the pillars, and the doorposts? Kline believes that the structure of the tabernacle and temple horizontally — inward to outward — represents God’s cosmic temple vertically, from earth to the heavens. “A reproduction of the Glory-cloud, as we have now seen, the tabernacle also reflected the structure of the cosmos-temple, itself a copy of the Glory-temple. The ark was God’s ‘footstool’ and thus corresponded to the earth-footstool in the cosmic temple, while the higher region of the holy of holies where the Glory was enthroned in the midst of the cherubim corresponded to the heaven and heaven of heavens. Agreeably, Ezekiel saw the theophanic Glory above a heavenly firma-

---

2. *Ibid.*, pp.20f.

ment above the heads of the living creatures. The overall floor plan of the tabernacle with its divisions into outer court, holy place, and holy of holies reproduced on the horizontal plane the sectioning of the cosmic temple into earth, heaven, and heaven of heavens. And each of the tabernacle's three divisions, not just the holy of holies, represented heaven and earth in its vertical dimension, the court standing under the open sky and the holy place, along with the holy of holies, under the symbolic heavens of the tabernacle coverings. The three screens at the court gate, the main temple entrance, and the entrance to the holy of holies are called by the same term for 'covering' (*masak*) as is used of the Glory-cloud."<sup>3</sup>

What, then, is the meaning of the two giant pillars in the porch? If the throne of God is represented by each of the three closed spaces of the temple, then the pillars would seem to be symbolic representations of the legs of God, who is seated in judgment over the earth, His footstool. If this identification is correct, then the symbolic reference points of both Passover and circumcision become clearer.

### *Passover*

The doorposts can be understood as equivalent to pillars. They are symbolic representations of legs. We now come to the problem of explaining the meaning of the bloody doorposts of the Passover, and (later) the bloody legs of Moses' son, Gershom, called the "bloody bridegroom" by his mother, Zipporah.

When the link between doorposts or pillars and legs is recognized, we can then perceive an indirect but important symbolic aspect of Passover: *the bloody doorposts were symbolic of the wedding night*. When the virgin bride comes to her bridegroom, they both expect the appearance of blood. Blood is the proof of her virginity. Her virginity testifies to her faithfulness to her family's honor, as well as faithfulness to her bridegroom. The great discontinuity between single and married life — a life with a covenantal bond — is marked by blood. So important was this in Israel that the absence of blood on the wedding night was grounds for divorce — a divorce marked by the execution of the bloodless bride:

---

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 40f.

If any man take a wife, and go in unto her, and hate her, And give occasions of speech against her, and bring up an evil name upon her, and say, I took this woman, and when I came to her, I found her not a maid: Then shall the father of the damsel, and her mother, take and bring forth the tokens of the damsel's virginity unto the elders of the city in the gate: And the damsel's father shall say unto the elders, I gave my daughter unto this man to wife, and he hateth her; And, 10, he bath given occasions of speech against her, saying, I found not thy daughter a maid; and yet these are the tokens of my daughter's virginity. And they shall spread the cloth before the elders of the city. And the elders of that city shall take that man and chastise him: And they shall amerce [fine] him in an hundred shekels of silver, and give them unto the father of the damsel, because he bath brought up an evil name upon a virgin of Israel: and she shall be his wife; he may not put her away all his days. But if this thing be true, and the tokens of virginity be not found for the damsel: Then they shall bring out the damsel to the door of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her with stones that she die: because she bath wrought folly in Israel, to play the whore in her father's house: so shalt thou put evil away from among you (Deut. 22:13-21).

The tokens of her virginity were the blood-stained cloth. This was the visible sign of her faithfulness. The tokens were her protection from a false charge that could lead to her death. Since this evidence was easy to fake (animal blood), the cloth probably was held by a third party, perhaps those referred to in the Old Testament as "of ficers," who were concerned with recording court decisions and genealogies.<sup>4</sup> Her father, as the defender of her reputation, needed evidence for a legal hearing. Without this evidence, there would be doubt in his own mind concerning her honor, and therefore the family's honor. Others might spread rumors about her faithlessness. Without the tokens of her virginity, her husband might grow tired of her and divorce her by having her lawfully executed. Therefore, visible blood stains were a *badge of honor*, as well as *legal evidence for a bride's protection*.

---

4. Calvin writes on this, "It is plain from this passage, that the tokens of virginity were taken on a cloth, on the first night of marriage, as future proofs of chastity. It is also probable that the cloth was laid up before witnesses as a pledge, to be a sure defence for pure and modest young women; for it would have been giving too much scope to the parents if it had been believed simply on their evidence; but Moses speaks briefly as of a well-known custom," John Calvin, *Commentary on the Pentateuch*, comments ad loc

Theologically, Jesus Christ is the bridegroom of the church (Matt. 9:15). God's promised restoration of Jerusalem also pointed to His own role as a bridegroom:

For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth. And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the LORD shall name. Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God. Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah: for the LORD delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married. For as a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee: and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee (Isa. 62:1-5).

In the case of the Gentiles of Moses' day, they could see the *symbolic righteousness of redeemed Israel* on the doorposts. The doorposts were covered with the blood of the lamb. We know today that this imagery pointed forward in time to the blood of Christ. Christ died to provide righteousness – a righteousness acceptable before God — for His bride, the church. It was His blood, not hers, that stained the tokens of her virginity. It was His pain, not hers, that accompanied the blood. He displays the tokens of His bride's virginity for the enemies of God to see.<sup>5</sup>

God took Israel publicly into the bridal chamber. *The blood on the doorposts was God's announcement of the consummation of the marriage.* The most eloquent account of this marriage in the Bible is found in Ezekiel 16:1-14.

Again the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, cause Jerusalem to know her abominations, And say, Thus saith the Lord GOD unto Jerusalem; Thy birth and thy nativity is of the land of Canaan; thy father was an Amorite, and thy mother an Hittite. And as for thy nativity, in the day thou wast born thy navel was not cut, neither wast thou washed in water to supple thee; thou was not salted at all, not swaddled at all. None eye

---

5. This use of the imagery of the blood of the lamb obviously does not exhaust all the possible images. The lamb was also a sacrificial animal whose blood covered sin. But the problem for the commentator is to deal specifically with the problem of blood on the *doorposts*. This was a unique use of blood in the Old Testament. Why doorposts? What did the sin covering have to do with doorposts? We should not seek to evade this important exegetical question.

pitied thee, to do any of these unto thee, to have compassion upon thee; but thou wast cast out in the open field, to the lothing of thy person, in the day that thou was born. And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live. I have caused thee to multiply as the bud of the field, and thou hast increased and waxen great, and thou art come to excellent ornaments: thy breasts are fashioned, and thine hair is grown, whereas thou wast naked and bare. Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I sware unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord GOD, and thou becamest mine. Then washed I thee with water; yea, I thoroughly washed away thy blood from thee, and I anointed thee with oil. I clothed thee also with broidered work, and shod thee with badgers' skin, and I girded thee about with fine linen, and I covered thee with silk. I decked thee also with ornaments, and I put bracelets upon thy hands, and a chain on thy neck. And I put a jewel on thy forehead, and earrings in thine ears, and a beautiful crown upon thine head. Thus wast thou decked with gold and silver; and thy raiment was of fine linen, and silk, and broidered work; thou didst eat fine flour, and honey, and oil: and thou wast exceeding beautiful, and thou didst prosper into a kingdom. And thy renown went forth among the heathen for thy beauty: for it was perfect through my comeliness, which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord GOD.

The sequel, as Ezekiel was sent to proclaim, was Israel's subsequent faithlessness, a whoring after other gods (Ezk. 16:15-59). Nevertheless, God will remember His covenant with Israel (Ezk.16:60-63). There will be restoration; God will bring the harlot back into His house (Hosea's whole message). But the initial wedding ceremony, as described by Ezekiel, fits the symbolism of the Passover night better than it fits the giving of the law at Sinai.<sup>6</sup> This night established Israel as His bride – a bride dressed in the finest clothing, for all the rebellious world to see. In this case, the jewels were supplied by the Egyptians.

Inside the blood-smeared hovels in Egypt, there was safety.

---

6. The phrase, "I sware unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee," refers to the original covenant between God and Abraham. Sinai only re-confirmed the terms of the original covenant, as did the Passover, Paul stresses the crucial importance of the Abrahamic covenant as over the covenant at Sinai: Gal. 3:16-18.

What did these hovels signify? It must be stated from the beginning that there can be multiple symbolic meanings in any given image in Scripture, and the dwellings of the Israelites in Egypt convey several important meanings. In both Passover and circumcision, *all* aspects of redemption are brought. But what about doorposts? To understand the meaning of the doorposts, these homes can be viewed as symbolic wombs, with the doorposts as symbolic legs. With the early morning came Israel's delivery as a new nation. It was a birth, a new *birth*, into a new life. The blood was put on the doorposts the night before; the next morning, God brought forth a new nation. The symbolism of marriage and birth is consistent.'

Egyptian homes did not benefit from the blood. Egyptian households had no tokens of virginity to display. Egyptian homes could not provide safety. There would be death, not life, in every Egyptian household (Ex. 12:30). The bridegroom brought the charge of faithlessness before the court, if we can stretch the symbolism to cover the idea of Egypt as a false bride – the condition of all rebellious cultures. The sentence of death was brought against Egypt's firstborn, as it was against Adam, the firstborn earthly son of God. (Adam is called "of God" by Luke in the genealogy of Jesus: 3:38. The words 'the son' were added by the King James Version's translators, but the usage is basically correct. The firstborn sons of the patriarchs were types of Adam: Ishmael, Esau, and Reuben. They were rebellious sons, not heirs of the promise, not possessors of the birthright. The second Son, or the second Adam, the true first Son, Jesus Christ, becomes the lawful heir. Without a covenant with God's true firstborn, Jesus Christ, the earthly firstborn must perish.) The failure to acknowledge one's need for the tokens of virginity — which God alone can provide, through His grace in the work of His son, Jesus Christ — is an *assertion of man's autonomy*. Man tries to proclaim his own virginity, his own righteousness, as the lawful, honorable, ethically pure bride of Christ, the bridegroom. But the required evidence is lacking. The Father has no proof that his "daughter" has not betrayed the family's honor. The sentence of death is brought against the bloodless bride.

No such sentence could be brought against Israel on the night of the Passover. Forty years later, no such charge could

---

7. We can also see the homes as cities of refuge, or as arks.

be brought against Rahab the harlot, for she had made a covenant with the spies, as God's representatives, and she placed the sign of this covenant publicly in her window: a scarlet cord. This was the mark of blood on the opening of her house. The spies escaped through her window, which was part of the defensive wall of Jericho – a symbol of the protection they received in her house. The men of Jericho trusted in the bloodless walls and bloodless gates of their city, and the walls came tumbling down. But not the entire wall. One portion survived intact. The house of the harlot, which bore the tokens of ethical virginity, meaning the scarlet cord, was not destroyed. The thin thread of the covenant supported her wall, and it stood, while the rest of the walls collapsed. Inside that house there was life, this time for the family of the former harlot. It was the place of her new birth. She, too, marched out into freedom, for she possessed the tokens of virginity. Those who had no bloody tokens of virginity had their own blood shed that day (Josh. 6).

So the symbolism of the bloody doorposts also testified to an ethical *discontinuity*.. from unrighteous maidenhood to righteous womanhood. It symbolized the protection of the formerly faithless bride by her bridegroom. The slain lamb provided the tokens of Israel's ethical virginity. Those inside the blood-marked homes received new life that night.<sup>8</sup>

Did Israel know that this was part of the meaning of Passover? I believe that they did, because they knew of something that happened to Moses on the way to Egypt, which James Jordan has called a "proleptic Passover."<sup>9</sup> It is that to which we now turn our attention.

---

8. The blood in question was not symbolic menstrual blood, No marriage could be legally consummated during the woman's menstrual cycle. It was illegal in Israel to have sexual relations during this time of the month (Lev 20:18). I am not arguing here that the symbolism of the Passover had anything to do with menstrual blood. Quite the contrary: it is we, as fallen sinners, who come before God as people dressed in symbolic menstrual rags. The familiar phrase in Isaiah 64:6, "all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags," is a softened translation. The word translated as "filthy" literally means 'menstrual.' Shame is attached to such rags; the tokens of virginity, on the contrary, were the opposite of shameful. To lack such a cloth was shameful, and legal grounds for public execution.

9. See James B. Jordan, *The Law of the Covenant. An Exposition of Exodus 21-23* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics), Appendix F.

*Circumcision*

The following interpretation of the meaning of circumcision may sound strange to modern Christians. Part of the problem, as Rushdoony has written in his forthright and seminal essay, "Uncovering the Springs," is the "unholy prudery" of the modern church, which prevents Christians from reckoning with many laws.<sup>10</sup> The view of the doorposts presented here helps to clarify a neglected and difficult passage – neglected *because* it is difficult — the circumcision of Moses' son by Zipporah, Moses' wife. God had sent Moses back into Egypt with these words: "And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD, Israelis my son, even my firstborn. And I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me; and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn" (Ex. 4:22-23). Immediately following these verses comes the difficult passage:

And it came to pass by the way in the inn, that the LORD met him and sought to kill him. Then Zipporah took a sharp stone and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband art thou to me. So he let him go; then she said, A bloody husband thou art, because of the circumcision (Ex. 4:24-26).

The pronoun references are a major problem for interpreters. The words "him" and "his" make the interpretation difficult. Several modern translations insert the word "Moses" at one or more places, but he is not identified in the Hebrew text. What is important is the proper translation of the words rendered by the King James translators as "bloody husband." The proper translation is 'blood-bridegroom,' or "bridegroom of blood." Moses had neglected to circumcise his son. Now he and his family were returning to Egypt to confront Pharaoh in

---

10. R. J. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 427. Rev. Rushdoony was referring to the whole topic of menstruation when he wrote these words, but his comment is equally applicable in this instance. In another context, he notes the prudery of nineteenth-century Unitarians and Transcendentalists: *The Nature of the American System* (Fairfax, Virginia: Thoburn Press, [1965] 1978), p. 86n. Given the subject matter of his essay, it is understandable why he "cut off" the unholy prudes in advance. Little old women of both sexes are too easily offended. It was the biblical symbolism he discusses in his path-breaking essay which in part gave me the courage to discuss the topics in this section.

the name of God. There had to be the covenantal mark on Moses' son to identify him as one of the Israelites. The land of Egypt was under a curse because of the blood of the drowned male children eighty years earlier. God was about to unleash the angelic avenger of blood against the firstborn of all those dwelling in Egypt. This angelic destroyer was waiting for him when he re-entered Egypt. There had to be a blood covering in Moses' family. His son had to be circumcised. This was probably his firstborn son, although the Bible does not say so explicitly.<sup>11</sup> Hebrew males were bloodied on the eighth day (Lev.12:3). The females were not marked in any way, although they are circumcised in some pagan cultures.<sup>12</sup> The question arises, why were the males singled out? Christians baptize females. Females are to bear the invisible mark of the Christian covenant. Yet they bore no covenantal mark in the Old Testament era. Why not? Why did the covenantal sign not apply to daughters?

From what has already been said about the tokens of virginity, the answer should be clear. The bridegroom had to provide the blood for a faithless bride, if the bride was to survive. In marriage, the blood comes from the woman's body. Theologically speaking, the blood cannot come from the new bride's body, for she has been unfaithful, a harlot. Rahab is the archetype. So the blood must come from the male. *There had to be blood to serve as a legal token of a consummated marriage between faithful couples.* Israel circumcised all males as a sign. It was, in part, an admission on the part of Israel, the bride, of their need for the tokens of virginity. The bridegroom alone could legally provide the tokens. *The circumcision of the males of Israel pointed to the blood that would be shed by the Messiah, the Bridegroom who calls His bride into His chamber* Without the bloody tokens of virginity, Israel, as an ethically faithless bride, would perish. Circumcision was only for males, for only their shed blood could testify to the *bridegroom* provision of the

---

11. "At the time of the incident Zipporah evidently had only this one son. He was thus her firstborn son." Hans Kosmala, "The 'Bloody Husband,'" *Vetus Testamentum*, XII (1962), p. 20.

12. "Circumcision (Introductory): in James Hastings (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, (2nd ed.; New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1932), Vol. III, pp. 659, 667-68. Circumcision of females is sometimes called "introcision."

tokens of virginity.<sup>13</sup> Since the bride, theological y speaking, was in need of the tokens, daughters were not circumcised in Israel, for the whole point was that *the rebellious daughter could not provide the legal covering she needed.*

Zipporah correctly identified the need to circumcise Moses' son. There are problems with the passage, however. First, was Moses or his son the object of the assault by God? Second, at whose feet was the bloody flesh tossed? Third, was that flesh actually tossed, or could the words better be understood as a smearing of blood on the feet or legs? Fourth, to whom was Zipporah speaking when she said, "A bridegroom of blood thou art"? There is no agreement by commentators on any of these points.<sup>14</sup>

God had promised to kill the firstborn sons of Egypt if Pharaoh resisted. It is possible that the next pronoun reference, "the LORD met him and sought to kill him," refers to Moses' firstborn son. George Bush, the mid-nineteenth-century commentator, took this view.<sup>15</sup> I agree with Bush: the avenger of blood was attacking Gershom. As the firstborn son, he represented the future of the family. The more conventional view is that God sought to kill Moses. God had identified Israel as His firstborn son, and Moses was the representative of Israel. If God's representative would not adhere to the covenant, then he deserved death as a lawless firstborn son. He had rebelled against the law of God by neglecting to circumcise his son. He was stating, symbolically, that the faithless bride (Israel) was not in need of a blood covering,

---

13, Jordan comments, "Just as it was blood from her 'private parts' which would have been her token, so it must be blood from his, for it is at this part of their bodies that they become 'one flesh.' The blood of the wedding night is the visible token of their oneness, blood which flows from the very place at which they become one flesh. Since the woman cannot provide it, the circumcision of the man does. The groom circumcises himself on the wedding night, painfully, in order to provide a legal covering for the bride he loves, and as a token of their union." Jordan also notes, "Thus, Adam and Eve felt their shame especially in their private parts, and made aprons. Illicit sexual activity is called 'uncovering nakedness' in Leviticus 18. Discharges from the genitals, life flowing away, cause uncleanness (Lev. 15)." See Jordan, *op cit.*, pp. 257f.

14, A survey of every opinion ever advanced on the subject, which he could dig up, is provided by Jordan, *ibid.*, pp. 243ff.

15. George Bush, *Notes on Exodus* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: James & Klock, [1852] 1976), I, p. 67.

and that his family was not in need of such tokens of ethical virginity. He was the head of this family, as well as the representative head of Israel; God would not permit him to escape the consequences of such an act of rebellion.

Second, at whose feet was the bloody flesh laid? Cassuto, the great Jewish scholar, argued that it was at Moses' feet.<sup>16</sup> Kosmala argues that it was the son whom Zipporah confronted.<sup>17</sup> He needed the covering. Zipporah knew that God would *pass over* her son, and spare him, if he bore the mark of blood. I agree here with Kosmala's interpretation.

Third, did she *toss* the flesh at his feet? Cassuto thinks she *touched* Moses' feet. Kosmala believes that Zipporah touched the legs of her son. He writes: "It is important, therefore, to make the sign on the child *visible*. It must be seen. That is necessary for any blood-rite. When God commanded the Israelites to smear the blood of the slaughtered animal on the lintel and the door posts, it was done in order that it might be seen: 'When I see the blood, I will pass over you . . . and not smite you' (Ex. xii 13 and 23)."<sup>18</sup> The language is not specific, so we can only guess. The main point is this: there was a *blood covering*, visible before God, which led God to cease the attack on Gershom (or possibly on Moses). And this blood covering was applied to the legs. (We have returned at this point to the symbolism of the doorposts.)

Finally, whom did she call "blood-bridegroom"? Instinctively, we assume it must have been Moses. Bush argued that it was her son: "Aben Ezra remarks, 'It is the custom of women to call a son when he is circumcised *a spouse (hathan)*.' Kimchi in his *Lexicon* . . . concurs in the same view, which is also supported by Schindler, Spencer, Mede, and others."<sup>19</sup> The significant aspect of Zipporah's remark is in the phrase itself, "bridegroom of blood," not the person to whom she was speaking. She was identifying the significance of the circumcision, which pointed to *the bridegroom's act of mercy in providing the blood covering needed by the wife*. Without this covering, the bride was legally unprotected. If Moses, as the husband, was un-

16. U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, translated by Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, [1951] 1974), p. 60.

17. Kosmala, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

18. *Ibid.*

19. Bush, *Exodus*, p. 69.

willing to circumcise his son, then Zipporah, his Midianite wife, would do it in his place. She had a better understanding of circumcision than Moses did. 20

James Jordan has summarized the meaning of this passage: "Moses had not circumcised Gershom in Midian. God's wrath was expressed against all who dwelt in the land of Egypt, and that wrath was pointed against the firstborn sons. When Moses came into the land of Egypt, God tried to kill Gershom. For some reason, Moses was not able to perform the circumcision, and Zipporah did so. She smeared the bloody foreskin on her son's legs. God saw the blood, and passed by. Zipporah stated that circumcision had made her son a 'bloody bridegroom.'" 21

Circumcision in the Old Testament pointed to the ultimate sacrifice — a bloody sacrifice — by the Bridegroom Himself, for the sake of His bride. It was Christ's substitutionary provision of the *legal tokens* of the church's *ethical virginity* that guaranteed the *permanent bond* between them. The Bridegroom would not hold the wife by means of fear, always threatening to expose her before her father and the world as a harlot — a threat of death if she ever displeased Him. *The blood of Jesus Christ*, like the blood of circumcision and the blood on the doorposts, like the scarlet cord in the harlot's window, is *God's promise to His loved ones of His faithfulness*. We shall never be cast out as a hated, judicially unprotected, guilty wife who has no tokens of virginity.

This is therefore a guarantee of *continuity* in history, and beyond history. God will be faithful to His own. When they pass from spiritual death to spiritual life, they cannot pass back into death. Once the tokens of virginity are supplied to the wife, she has her legal protection. Her husband cannot cast her out legally. Those who have no covering — no legal tokens of virginity — can expect a final casting out, a final *discontinuity*, when they receive the punishment of the second death (Rev. 20:14). Men need the first discontinuity — the discontinuity of spiritual life out of spiritual death — in order to avoid the other awful discontinuity — the second death — which is in fact a continuity: spiritual death which becomes

---

20. The Midianites, of course, were descendants of Abraham, and thus knew about circumcision; cf. Gen. 25:2.

21. Jordan, *op cit.*, p. 253.

eternal death. Adam provided the first discontinuity; Jesus Christ provides the second: from spiritual death to spiritual life, meaning eternal life.

We need not assume that the symbolism of circumcision is limited to the symbol of the tokens of virginity. Vos argued that it referred to the inability of man, by his own flesh, to provide true life to heirs, that physical descent from Abraham is not the basis of life.<sup>22</sup> But Vos was speculating; he provided no exegesis to prove his case, although this may be one possible additional meaning of circumcision.

Rushdoony's observation should be carefully considered in light of my analysis of the relationship between circumcision, the bridegroom, and the tokens of virginity. He writes that "the Hebrew word for bridegroom means 'the circumcised,' the Hebrew word for father-in-law means *he who performed the operation of circumcision*, and the Hebrew word for mother-in-law is similar. This obviously had no reference to the actual physical rite, since Hebrew males were circumcised on the eighth day. What it meant was that the father-in-law ensured the fact of *spiritual circumcision*, as did the mother-in-law, by making sure of the covenantal status of the groom. It was their duty to prevent a mixed marriage. A man could marry their daughter, and become a bridegroom, only when clearly a man under God."<sup>23</sup> This is accurate as far as it goes, but we can go even farther. The in-laws were admitting that their daughter needed the blood covering. They were admitting that Israelites, as the bride of God Himself, were in need of legal tokens of virginity. The *true Bridegroom* is the *truly circumcised* man — a man whose own blood provides the covering for His bride.

As Rushdoony says, the root of the Hebrew word for bridegroom is related to circumcision. The link has not been taken seriously by most commentators, but traditionalism should not blind us to the truth. Rushdoony's insight is innovative. We should apply it more consistently to the symbolism of circumcision. *The true Bridegroom is Jesus Christ, the truly circumcised Son. It was the shedding of His blood that finally*

---

22. Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, [1948] 1975), p. 90. James Jordan provides an extended theological discussion of circumcision in its various meanings in his *Law of the Covenant*, pp. 78ff.

23. Rushdoony, *Institutes*, p. 344.

*nullified the rite of circumcision.* The Bridegroom has come. The wedding night is over. The bride has her tokens of ethical virginity. Now we baptize our daughters. *We no longer perform the rite of circumcision because the Bridegroom work is completed.* Those who would deny the link between the bridegroom, circumcision, and the tokens of virginity have an obligation to explain why the sign of the new covenant is administered to males and females, but the sign of the older covenant was administered only to males. Biological differences were involved — not infant differences, but the differences between bride and bridegroom.

### *Legs as a Symbol*

The doorposts are symbolic of legs. The doorposts of Israel were covered with blood, just as Gershom's legs were covered when Moses entered the land of Egypt. This bloody covering in both instances was what saved the lives of the first-born sons. In the case of the doorposts, it was the blood of the sacrificial lamb which saved their lives. In the case of Gershom, it was his own blood — the blood of a "bloody bridegroom." It should take no remarkable leap of theological imagination to understand Who is being represented by the images of the lamb and the bridegroom.

Doorposts also support the gates of a city. If my argument regarding the imagery of legs is correct, then we ought to be able to find examples in the Bible of "gates" being used metaphorically to describe the private parts, both male and female. We find both: Isaiah 45:124 and Song of Solomon 8:9.25

---

24, Isaiah 45:1 is memorable: "Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates, and the gates shall not be shut." This is a very graphic metaphor. It means that Cyrus will conquer cities, passing through the gates in victory. But why the anatomical reference to "the loins of kings"? Because the two "gates" of each king will also be opened - opened in terror of the might of Cyrus' forces. These anatomical gates will not be shut. It is what passes through them, outward, that indicates just how terrified these kings will be,

25. "Wall" in the context of the Song of Solomon 8:9 refers to virginity, the same meaning attached to "boards of cedar." The explanation of the "towers" on the "wall" in Song 8:10 is explicitly stated in the text. The reference to the "door" in 8:9 — the same Hebrew word as "gate" in Isaiah

*Conclusion*

Both Passover and circumcision speak of the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ in many different ways, but one way both speak is to show the Bridegroom providing His own precious blood as a substitute token of virginity for His wayward bride. Jordan has commented on the contemporary relevance of this, in that it “also explains the reference in Revelation 19:7, 9 to the ‘marriage supper of the Lamb.’ The blood of the lamb was the sign of Israel’s marriage to the Lord, at Passover. The Passover feast, thus, was a marriage feast. Passover was the marriage feast of the lamb. In the New Covenant, the Lord’s Supper fulfills Passover (and all the other feasts and meals of the Old Covenant as well). Thus, the Holy Eucharist of the Church is the marriage supper of the True Lamb of God. Since the Book of Revelation is arranged in the order of a worship service, we expect the Lord’s Supper to come at its climax, as here it does. In a very precise way, then, the phrase ‘marriage supper of the Lamb’ refers to the fulfillment of Passover.

“In paganism, the marriage relation between a man and his god is seen in sexual terms. Thus, sexual relations are sacramental in pagan religions, and repeatedly in Scripture this ‘fertility cult’ form of religion is warned against (for an example, see 1 Sam. 2:22). Because of the Creator/creature distinction, there is no sexual relationship between God and man. The sexual relationship between man and woman symbolizes the Spiritual marriage between God and His bride. The act of this Spiritual marriage is not ritual fornication in a temple, but the communion meal. Eve was said in 2 Corinthians 11 to have committed fornication with the serpent; what she actually did was eat the serpent’s food. Similarly, the act of marriage between God and His Church is nothing more and nothing less than the Holy Eucharist.”<sup>26</sup>

Jordan also notes: “We may also call attention to the parallel between the call of the bride in Revelation and in Canticles: ‘Come swiftly.’ It is a call for the final and ultimate Spiritual consummation of Christ’s marriage to His bride. Cf.

---

45:1 - is clarified by 8:10. The context here is anatomical. This context is not universal in Scripture; it only occasionally appears. But when it does, we should acknowledge it and attempt to deal with it.

26. Jordan, *op. cd.*, p. 259f.

Rev. 22:17, 20 and Cant. 8:14. The 'marriage supper,' which is the Holy Eucharist, is the weekly consummation of the marriage. While Christ will return to end history some day, His weekly meeting with His Bride is the 'swift coming' here invited. Christ feeds His Bride, which is the Spiritual reverse and correction of Adam's being fed by his wife (Gen. 3:6). In paganism, the fact that the festival supper is the Spiritual form of the consummation of marriage was perverted and lost, so that sexual relations were viewed sacramentally. The Bible nowhere teaches that sexual relations are sacramental. Physical marital relations are analogous to Christ's love for His bride, and the Spiritual expression of that love is seen initially in the sacrament of Holy Baptism (that is, New Covenant circumcision) and repeatedly in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist."<sup>27</sup>

In this way, we see that the weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper is, in part, a testimony of our Spiritual security due to the tokens of virginity provided by our heavenly Bridegroom.

---

27. *Ibid.*, p. 260.

## CLOTHING AND CALLING

Ray R. Sutton

A while back, I went to Louisville, Nebraska. Several fathers, members of Faith Baptist Church, had been jailed because they had their children in a Christian School. One of the members of the Church I pastor had gone up to see what was happening. After a couple of days, he called and recommended that I make the trip. He also said that a few of the pastors were going to see the governor of Nebraska in a few days, and it would be good if I could go with them. After I made a commitment to go, my friend said, "Oh yeah, you need to be prepared because there's a good possibility some of these pastors are going to be put in jail."

Who was I to worry about being put in jail? After all, the Apostle Paul and thousands of other Christians had been martyred for their faith. But the thought of being put in jail was a new one for me. It had crossed my mind from time to time. Now, however, the real possibility faced me.

I decided to do something which I had been theologically committed to for a long time. I wore a *clerical collar*. When I arrived I noticed that I was the only minister wearing one. A pastor told me a Lutheran minister had been through a few weeks earlier, and the local Eastern Orthodox priest had been very active and supportive, but no one else had been there who wore ministerial clothing. And I could tell from the looks I was getting that there was a certain suspicion about me. But I persevered, and continued to wear the collar. In two days, stock in collars went up.

What happened? Two days later I went to see the governor of Nebraska. Actually, I saw the governor's top aide, because the governor was not ready to talk to the pastors yet. About two hundred of us went. Most of these pastors marched around the capitol building, and approximately twenty-five of us made it all the way to the governor's aide.

I remember the scene well because, as I said, I was the

only pastor wearing a clerical collar. The governor's aide walked in rather disinterestedly. I could tell he did not want to talk to these men, but I could also see that he did not appear too concerned. And then, his eyes fell on me. Rather, his eyes fell on *my collar*. He was almost shocked. His eyes raced up and down from my collar to face, and face to collar. It seemed as though this happened a thousand times in that brief second when he first saw me.

The spokesman for the group was stating our purpose for being there while the aide tried to gather his composure. When the spokesman finished, to my surprise the aide recognized me first as though he were thinking, "I know who just spoke, but this guy with the collar on is the most important leader." I spoke my piece about why the fathers should be released, then other pastors spoke up. Each time, however, the governor's aide would look back at me to see if I approved. I realized then that my collar was worth a thousand words. Whether my Baptist friends would admit it or not, even though I was not the leader of the group, *I seemed to have become the real power*, at least in the eyes of the governor's aide. As we walked out of the capitol, I thought, "What would have happened if all two hundred pastors had showed up wearing collars? Would the governor still have refused to see us?"

I am certain that the governor's aide only had a pragmatic concern. He perceived that this issue was reaching into larger denominations which have much more clout. He saw me (wrongly in reality) as a "big gun" compared to the other men, who dressed in business suits.

But even that proves a point. The collar represents something to the unbeliever. Whether evangelical protestants want to recognize the point or not, the collar represents an office of authority. But isn't that the way it should be? Shouldn't the *person* of the elder be sublimated? Shouldn't people submit to the *office* and not just the man? The answer is yes to all those questions.

For too long, protestants have denied the undeniable. As C. S. Lewis has said, "The modern habit of doing ceremonial things unceremoniously is no proof of humility; rather it proves the offender's inability to forget himself in the rite, and his readiness to spoil for everyone else the proper pleasure of ritual." The purpose of the collar is to cover the man and accent the office or calling. Even unbelievers generally recognize this.

If one does not think the collar is a symbol of authority and office, watch how a minister is normally dressed in the movies. He is just about always a Roman Catholic or Episcopalian, not only because these are the two most influential denominations in the Western World, but because *all their ministers wear their calling*.

These illustrations sound good, but someone committed to the Bible must ask, "Is clerical garb Biblical?" I believe the answer to that question is "yes." So, the primary purpose of this essay is to demonstrate the Biblical propriety of distinctively ministerial dress. A secondary purpose is to discuss specific ministerial clothing in worship and at everyday work. Finally, I want to address some of the practical questions and issues. Let us begin with three lines of Biblical argument for ministerial clothing.

### *Clothing and Glory*

First, clothing is glory. The multi-colored garments of Aaron were called "glorious" (Ex. 28:2,40). Clothing is not primarily for protection, nor is its main purpose to prevent nudity. As we will see in a moment, the human body is itself a form of clothing.

Glory is the interpretative key for understanding clothing. It takes us to the glory cloud around the throne of God. Ezekiel and John saw into this realm and recorded their visions (Ezek. 1 & Rev. 1ff.). They saw many created beings, human and angelic, dancing a liturgy around God's eternal throne. But perhaps more significant to our study of clothing is the fact that these beings are engulfed by the refracting light of God's presence. This light refracts through people and space, forming a glorious rainbow wall (Rev. 21:19ff.).

In other words, the rainbow wall consists of color and *people* (Rev. 21:14ff.). One who measures has a "gold" measuring rod (Rev. 21:15), and gold is typically a color of the priesthood. Other colors are specifically associated with the apostles (Rev. 21:14,19). We could draw other conclusions perhaps,<sup>1</sup> but the mix of color and people indicates that the

---

1. Color tells the story of redemption. If one looks at a color chart, he will find that the two base colors which form polar opposites are white and black. White represents God's presence in Scripture, and black refers to hell.

Next to these colors on either end of the color chart is a purplish (scarlet)

rainbow glory-fabric in heaven points to function and status. Leaders in particular are surrounded by brilliant colors.

Parenthetically, even if the multi-colored clothing of the rainbow does not establish a basic principle, the very least one could observe is that created beings in the glory cloud have different clothing and function. Angels are adorned one way, the saints have white robes (Rev. 7), and Elders also have a certain dress (Rev. 4:4).

Nevertheless, the rainbow clothing of officers in heaven provides a point of contact between heavenly and earthly principles. God surrounds the officers of heaven with a rainbow,<sup>2</sup> and reproduces it in the coat of Joseph, the patriarch (Gen. 37:23). Let us consider the drama of the Book of Genesis.

Originally, man's flesh was his glory (I Cor. 15:38ff.), and by obeying God, the glory of his flesh could be improved. I agree with James Jordan's thesis that the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil represented *judicial* rule.<sup>3</sup> References to

color. Interestingly, this is the color of the robe, and particularly the color of the robe Christ wore (more reddish from the blood emphasis). Christ was cast to Hell in His suffering on the Cross, yet He *sits* at the right hand of God, next to the light. This deep purple color could indicate the color of ice cold frozenness. Hell is not only portrayed as hot, but also extreme cold. Notice the number of times that the Devil and demons come from the far *north* (Jer. 1:14; 4:6; 6:1; Is. 14:13; Job 26:6-7). The cold represents that which never changes. Thus, on the other end of the color chart, purple is next to the white because God never changes.

In the middle of the color chart are the colors of green and yellow. These are the colors of the earth in the Bible. The earth is pictured by the color chart as being between heaven and hell.

On the lower end of the color chart, toward hell, and next to the purple color, are the colors of red and orange. These are the colors of judgment. Man passes through judgment before he goes *to* hell even though hell is a form of judgment.

Thus, color reinforces the theology of the Bible, and as one might suspect, joins with all of creation in pointing toward the God of Scripture.

2. One could conjecture that this "human" rainbow explains the various colors in humanity. Humanity was created to surround the throne of God as part of His Glory. The sea of humanity with all its many colors represents this.

3. James B. Jordan, "Rebellion, Tyranny, and Dominion in the Book of Genesis," Gary North, ed., *Tactics of Christian Resistance*. Christianity & Civilization No. 3 (Tyler, TX: Geneva Ministries, 1983), pp. 38-80.

“knowing good and evil” always occur in the context of some kind of rule (I Kgs. 3:9). Adam and Eve, however, were under probation. They were to abstain from this tree. God tested them to see if Adam and Eve would wait until He was ready. Then God would glorify their flesh even more by placing on them the “robe” of authority.

Adam and Eve rebelled against God. Prior to this rebellion they were able to walk naked because their flesh was glorious. Sin, however, corrupted their flesh when they wanted the robe of authority on their own immediate terms. They refused to wait, be patient, and depend on God’s timing. They fell and lost their glory. Their flesh-clothing became tainted. They even tried to manufacture their own clothing. But one cannot manufacture true glory. It is Spirit produced. They needed God’s help.

The rest of the Bible is the story of how God gives basic glory back to man. God began with animal skins. They were simple and basic, but all that they needed at the time. Eventually, those animal skins become a coat of many colors. The end of Genesis concludes with the son of Adam, Joseph, receiving a coat that looks like a rainbow (Gen. 37:23). Furthermore, Joseph is ruling the greatest power in the world, Egypt. So, the Book of Genesis begins with Adam and Eve’s salvation by animal skins, and ends with great beauty and rule in the form of a rainbow robe. It is the Old Testament story of salvation to glorification (Rem. 8: 28ff.).

What happened to Joseph was topological of what Christ would bring. Christ is called our clothing (Gal. 3:27). It begins at baptism where we put on Christ (Gal. 3:27). At first, the clothing is simple. But eventually it grows into the glorious resurrection body which Paul implies is “new flesh” (I Cor. 15:38ff.). Looking at it another way, God’s first act of re-clothing is to provide salvation. The last act is the provision of a cloak of rule. Paul says that Christians will judge the world and angels (I Cor. 6:2ff.).

This redemptive progression is the complete movement from glory to glory (II Cor. 4:1ff.). God transfers to earth the rainbow of glory around His throne. So, the diversity of special calling in God’s House is expressed in some way on earth.

Once we understand that clothing is glory, we can see why man likes to make distinctive clothing to mark out his office. It

has to do with *place* in either the Kingdom or life in general. Man's glory is in his work. In his work he finds his *place* in the world just as a person discovers his place in the Kingdom. Clothing represents that place, whether it is the uniform of a policeman, nurse, fireman, businessman, judge, or minister. Even though a man may not be a Christian, he still associates special dress with certain occupations.

If this principle is inescapably a part of natural creation, how much more will it be in the realm of re-creation? Indeed, salvation establishes work and calling. Wherever Christianity has gone, the doctrine of calling has followed. The Reformers of the 16th century taught that a man's work was a direct reflection of his salvation.

The office of ministry certainly falls within the recreated realm of God's rainbow. As we look into the rainbow of people and angels in the glory cloud around God, we see distinctive dress. As clothing is part of God's glory, so it is with man.

In the following, our second line of Biblical argumentation turns our attention to the office of minister. In the Old Testament, the special priesthood — every member of Israel was a general priest (Ex. 18) — wore distinctive clothing. Apparently, this principle carries over to the New Testament.

#### *General Equity of the Ceremonial Law*

The *Westminster Confession of Faith* says that the general equity of the Law of God is carried over to the New Testament. Traditionally in Presbyterianism, the general equity concept has only been applied to the "moral" law.

But closer examination of the New Testament indicates that this fundamental principle of general equity ought to be applied consistently to other types of law. For example, the general equity of ceremonial law also carries over to the New Testament. I believe that in the New Testament there is a general equivalent to Old Testament law in the matter of food. Does the New Testament prescribe food? Definitely!

The Church is told that food represents the pagan nations of the world (Acts 10). By eating all foods, the Church symbolizes the conquest of the Gospel over them. Not to eat all of the foods of the world is ultimately a denial of the conquest of the Gospel. The New Testament also prescribes another food. The Church is told to eat the Eucharist until Christ returns

(I Cor. 11). Therefore, one should conclude that there are food laws in the New Testament.

Reformed thinkers would argue better for continuity in the moral law if they would press home the general equity principle in other areas. Why resist this consistency? For centuries Reformed thought has had the best principle for understanding the relationship of the two Testaments and covenants. But through inconsistency, it takes away what it so effectively establishes.

I believe that it can be demonstrated that the same general equity principle applies to the priesthood of the Old Testament. There are certain alterations in application, but generally speaking, elders in the New Testament take over the functions of the priesthood of the Old Testament. The priesthood represented the people to God and God to the people. This did not mean that the people could not pray and talk to God directly. The only difference, which is the major difference of the Testaments, is in the *high priesthood*. The High Priest had a redemptive and atoning function. Since the coming of Christ, no elder-priest has this function.

How can we say that elders are like the priesthood? Observe the functions and dress of the elders in the New Testament. James says that elders are to anoint those who are sick (James 5:14-16). In the Old Testament, this was a priestly function. Paul says that Timothy received his ordination by the laying on of hands (I Tim. 4:14). In the Old Testament, this was a priestly function. Paul also presumes continuity of the priesthood in some sense when he uses the Old Covenant priest as an example of pay (I Cor. 9:13-14). The only way to understand how elders pick up the functions of the priesthood is through this principle of general equity.

General equity of priesthood also applies to clothing. The Levitical priesthood of the Old Testament wore special clothing. It might be argued that the clothing marked the tribe, not the vocation. Perhaps, but it seems to me that the Bible places calling before function. Whenever the Jews turned this point around and thought their birth established function, God rebuked them. Indeed, Jesus' ministry reminded the Jews that the ones who received God were "born not of blood . . . but of the Spirit of God" (Jn. 1:13-14). So, the Levite's clothing was a sign of calling first, and family second.

Carried over to the New Testament in the form of a

general equivalent (general equity), we see the Church's historic rationale for ministerial dress. Elders or Bishops have special calling. Like the Levites in the Old Testament, this call should be visualized in their clothing. Nothing in the New Testament changes this Principle. The Book of Hebrews does away with the High Priesthood, but the specific principle of priesthood continues. As a matter of fact, Hebrews 5-7 argues that the Melchizedekal priesthood has been established (Heb. 5:6). The fact that the writer argues for a priesthood means that the basic principle of priesthood continues.

We have argued in this second line of thought that the concept of general equity pulls the concept of priesthood into the New Testament. We have argued from the Old Testament to the New Testament. Our next line of argument is from heaven to earth.

#### *Heaven as a Model for Earth*

Heaven is a model for earth. The Lord's prayer sets up the paradigm, which is contrary to much of what we see in evangelicalism. But given the fact that we pray for heaven to come on earth, *heaven is a model for our activity down here.*

Christianity is a religion of internals and externals, and not exclusively one or the other. Nor is Christianity just a religion of the invisible as opposed to the visible. Sin might pit these realms against one another, but redemption removes the antithesis and transforms history so that it conforms to heaven.

Heaven progressively comes down to earth and fills it to the four corners. We pray, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, *as it is in heaven.*" So, our principle is that heaven (the invisible) is a model for the (visible) earth. We can even go so far as to say that when we look into heaven to see what is happening, we find a model for all that we should do on earth. The Christian world view model ought to be formulated in this manner. But a Christian world view is not our direct concern. We are discussing special clothing for elders.

Therefore, using our principle that heaven is a model for earth, we can say that since the elders in heaven have distinctive dress (Rev. 4:4), the elders on earth should wear special clothing. Also, there are 24 elders — corresponding to 24 divisions of Old Testament priesthood (I Chron. 24-25). The

passage in Revelation 4 says the elders wear white robes and crowns. The rest of the saints wear white gowns, with the exception of martyrs who wear blood-stained robes, but we are led to believe that the elders have special crowns to set them apart. Since this kind of practice in heaven is true, so the Church on earth should do the same.

Our third line of argumentation is fairly simple. Heaven is a model for earth. This point concludes three Biblical reasons for distinctive ministerial dress. Now, let us turn to specific dress.

### *Ministerial Clothing*

The Bible seems to allow for flexibility, but there are some general principles which the historic Church has understood and applied. These principles flow along the same lines that we have thus far developed. But, we should distinguish between worship and regular everyday apparel.

Worship is special because it participates in the eternal Sabbath around the throne of God. In worship heaven draws near so that there is a great heavenly host surrounding us (Heb. 10:19- 12:1ff.). On the New Covenant Sabbath, Sunday, heaven and earth are joined, the Church is lifted up to Christ and feeds on His True Humanity, and the Elders of earth join with the Elders of the Church of all ages to lead public worship. What the Church does at this time should be consistent with the liturgy of heaven, lest we offend the "cloud of witnesses" (Heb. 12:1) at the only time they get to look into history. What the minister wears should also be in conformity with the spectrum of color being diffused through the wall of glory.

Historically, worship has been very colorful. Eastern and Western Churches have preserved this tradition. It is a tradition that is extremely Biblical. Man loves color in dress and design because God made His creation to love His presence. But the careful reader will observe that the officers of the rainbow wall in heaven are *Apostles*. One might be tempted to say that rainbow apparel should be restricted to the Apostles. The minister is not an Apostle, and there is not succession in his person.

I would agree with these observations, but would say that this is the best argument for an officer's not wearing his own

clothing when he leads worship. Careful observation will not only reveal that the Apostles wore the rainbow, but that their dress parallels Christ's clothing. There are some distinctions, but the connection is there because the Apostles were given special revelation and completed the revelation of Christ.

So, to dress like Christ and the Apostles is to say that the minister has authority, not in his person, but in the office of Christ, duly established by the foundational work of the Apostles. Not to wear liturgical dress goes in the precise direction the non-liturgist is concerned not to go. The pastor who preaches in his three-piece suit speaks a theology by what he wears. Unfortunately, it conveys his person at the one time that he most definitely should be speaking for Christ and pushing his own person into the background. Liturgical dress helps to focus the congregation on the work of Christ and the Apostles because the minister has no authority outside of them.

A quick survey of liturgical dress further makes the point. The dress of the minister should reflect the High Priesthood of Christ. Historically, clothing for special worship has been the white alba and stole, the former being a covering or robe, and the latter being a mantle or yoke of calling (see Elisha). The stole seasonally changes to different colors to match the Church year.

The Church calendar visually demonstrates that the Church believes the seasons of the natural order are subordinated to the redemptive order, and that time is being redeemed and moved in a line toward final judgment. It therefore steers the people of God away from the notion that the world moves along naturally. The minister's stole matches the colors of redemptive progress to show that Christ controls history through the management of His servants, and that is the very point: ministers are servants of the office of Christ. Their person is covered up and Christ stands forth.

But what about everyday clothing? Historic, orthodox Christianity has believed that time is divided into general and special worship. What the minister does during the week is of a more general nature. Because he does not actually leave his office, he should continue the principles mentioned above. The exception is that the character of his work changes. Around the throne of God he represents the glorious reign of Christ. During the week the minister's slavery to Christ stands forth.

The collar represents the “easy” yoke of Christ. In the Bible, men are often likened to oxen. Generally, every man is to be an ox for Christ, plowing up the earth and carrying out the Great Commission/Cultural Mandate (Gen. 1: 28ff.; Matt. 28 :19ff. ), but ministers are specially likened to oxen. Paul uses the principle of not muzzling the ox while it is threshing to argue for the clergy’s salary structure (I Cor. 9:9ff. ). The Church stands on good Biblical grounds when it chooses the collar to symbolize the special yoke.

In summary, these distinctions in clerical garb should be maintained. The Church has the flexibility to change the distinctive dress. The point is: The officers of the Church should wear distinct clothing at all times and especially at special times. The State realizes the importance of special clothing. The magistrates or Judges of the land have always worn robes. One never hears the argument that their official clothing is insignificant. Most fundamentalists who object to a minister’s wearing robes never think to object to the civil judge wearing one. Yet both wear the robe of office for the same reason.

#### *Practical Considerations*

The suggestion that ministers should wear distinctive dress and quit dressing incognito, like businessmen, points to some practical issues. These need to be addressed for they reinforce the relationship between clothing and calling.

First, uniform is inescapable. Whatever clothing accompanies special work becomes a uniform. When a pastor or elder presides in worship, his clothing, whether he realizes it or not, becomes special. Why is it that most ministers do not preach in sportswear or the other extreme, a tuxedo? Why do they not wear something other than the three-piece business suit? The reason is twofold.

One, democracy has simultaneously removed the distinctive authority and office of elder in the Church, and turned Americans into statists. The Judges of the land can wear distinctive clothing, but the pastor is just any-old-Joe.

Two, however, the clothing of the minister is still unique, and many Churches pride themselves in the way their preacher dresses in the pulpit. I know of some situations where the minister does not make a liveable salary, but the

people make sure he wears expensive suits into the pulpit. Why? One writer has explained that the suit of the minister is a special uniform in the following.

It must first be observed that the wearing of particular clothes to mark particular occasions or functions appears to be so nearly universal in the history of human society that it may be regarded as a natural cultural law, departure from which is not only psychologically unhealthy, but also in practice all but impossible: if, for example, the celebrant of the Eucharist today decides to wear "ordinary clothes," they immediately cease, psychologically, to be ordinary clothes, and become another form of symbolical ecclesiastical garb, their very ordinariness making an extraordinary theological or sociological point.<sup>4</sup>

Another thing to consider is that when men do not dress according to status, they dress according to style. Most ministers dress for the latter reason. Consequently, their clothing changes with the fads of the day. If the styles change to guru suits, the minister shows up in one. The nice thing about traditional ministerial clothing is that it tends to stay the same. The shirts may change from black to gray or other conservative colors. But the white collar always lets a person know the calling of the man who wears one.

A second practical consideration is that distinctive clothing which corresponds to distinctive calling accents individuality. Think about the calling/clothing of Western society. Doctors wear white coats. Firemen wear red hats. Policemen wear some kind of distinctive dress. In each case, the clothing of these professions accents, and does not detract from individuality.

Recently I lectured on "The Church as a Shadow Government." I was wearing a clerical collar. Afterwards, in a question/answer time, one man asked me to explain why I was wearing clerical garb. As usual, I was the only speaker dressed this way, and sensing that all wanted me to answer this out-of-context-question, I gave them a distilled version of this essay.

When the lecture was over, and several people were standing around asking more questions, I noticed a man hanging back. He approached and said that he had particularly ap-

---

4. *The Study of Liturgy*, ed. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, Edward Yarnold, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 488-489.

preciated my comments about clothing and calling. He showed me his hands bearing the unmistakable marks of a mechanic's calling, and said, "After hearing what you had to say, for the first time I am not ashamed of the grease under my nails ." Puzzled at that response, I asked for further explanation.

He said that he understood from what I had said that every man has a calling, and each call will have distinctive clothing. The grease under his nails is part of his uniform. He realized that he should not be ashamed of his calling or uniform. I thought later that my collar, properly understood, could do the same for other men. It has. Yet part of the mythology about clerical clothing is that it plays down other callings; that simply is not the case unless the Church teaches the wrong reason for ministerial clothing.

Third, distinctive clothing which corresponds to calling enhances opportunity for one's profession. People talk about cars to mechanics. They talk about ailments of their physical body to doctors. They also will talk about their "soul" to ministers. The problem is that most of the time, people do not know who the ministers are unless they wear distinctive dress.

A while back, I was in England to establish a mission Church for the Association of Reformation Churches. My wife and I went sightseeing one day and ended up in the great Canterbury Cathedral. Standing in the basement of this great Cathedral I could see several priests standing beside rooms for people who wanted counsel. A young girl came up to one of the priests, weeping. He began to speak to her.

I thought, "Wait a minute. I am an Elder and a Bishop in Christ's Church. This girl ought to be speaking to me rather than this priest who probably does not even believe in the orthodox faith ." But then it dawned on me that this girl had no way of knowing I was a pastor. There I stood in my cowboy boots and coat (pastors in Texas often wear boots).

Since that experience, I have started wearing distinctively ministerial clothing, and I have had more opportunities than I had ever imagined. Once when I was on my way to speak in another state, a couple standing in line behind me initiated conversation. They were extremely talkative, and wanted to know all about the Church I pastored. Then the man said, "We're on our way to a funeral. My brother-in-law just dropped dead of a heart attack. And he was the same age as

me." When he said that, he said it all. He was thinking about his own life, and as I discovered, he was thinking about eternal matters. I was able to talk about the Gospel and encourage them to trust in Christ.

Just recently I was in a bookstore where a lady confronted me in the stacks. She said, "You're a real pastor aren't you?" I replied in the affirmative, and she began to tell me about a personal problem. After we talked for a while, I said, "What Church do you go to?" She told me the name of one of the behemoth evangelical Churches in town. After assuring her that I would be willing to help, I said, "Why don't you go to one of your pastors, instead of me?" She responded, "Because you're a real pastor."

Protestant ministers need to realize that they are only robbing themselves of many benefits by not wearing their calling. The clothes may not *make* the man, but they *mark* him in a time when everyone, the State especially, needs to know the great number and force of real American ministers.

## CHURCH MUSIC IN CHAOS

James B. Jordan

“Moreover, Chenaniah, the leader of the men of Levi, was charged with the striking up of song — he carried on the instruction in singing because of his skill” (1 Chronicles 15:22, New Berkeley Version).

*Rita:* I went to the pub. They were all singin’ – all of ‘em – . . . oh, some song they’d learned from the jukebox. And I thought, just what the frig am I tryin’ to do? Why don’t I just pack it in, stay here, and join in the singin’?

*Dr. Frank Bryant:* And why didn’t you?

*Rita:* You think I can, don’t ya? You think because you pass a pub doorway and hear ‘em all singin’, you think we’re all OK, that we’re all survivin’ with the spirit intact! I did join in the singin’, but when I turned around, me mother had stopped singin’, and she was cryin’. I said, “Why’re you a-yin’, mother?” And she said, “There must be better songs to sing than this .“

From the film *Educating Rita*

Produced & Directed by Lewis Gilbert

Screenplay by Winy Russell

I am a catholic presbyterian in theology and ecclesiology. I am a neo-puritan in my views of social ethics and eschatology. But as I look at the present state of music and liturgy in conservative presbyterian churches, and at the history of these things in presbyterianism and puritanism, I find a tremendous contradiction.

The contradiction is this: Those who have the best theology, and who are the most committed to the inerrancy and authority of Scripture, generally have the worst music, and the poorest psalmody. Another contradiction lies in the fact that Reformed and presbyterian scholars have insisted on the centrality of the psalter in worship, yet their churches

have never progressed beyond the kindergarten of metrical psalmody.

### *The Trinity Hymnal*

To begin the discussion, I shall take as a test case the palpable inadequacies of the *Trinity Hymnal*. The *Trinity Hymnal* was published in 1961 by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. It is regarded as the acme (currently at least) of presbyterian hymnals of a conservative, Calvinistic persuasion. Young pastors seeking to upgrade the worship of their congregations regularly work to replace existing hymnals with the *Trinity Hymnal*.

Yet, from the standpoint of historic Biblical and orthodox Christianity, the *Trinity Hymnal* has a number of serious defects.

First, the *Trinity Hymnal* contains absolutely zero chanting versions of the psalms. The psalms were chanted exclusively for the first 2500 years of their existence, and are still chanted in many orthodox Christian churches today. There is no recovery of this heritage in the *Trinity Hymnal*. Moreover, the 1895 presbyterian *Hymnal* contains chants for the psalms, yet this presbyterian heritage was dropped from the *Trinity*.

Second, as regards metrical or versified psalms, the *Trinity Hymnal* is far from complete. A glance at the index reveals only 62 complete metrical psalms, with 68 psalm portions in metrical form (that is, several verses of a psalm, but not the whole psalm). Since many of these overlap (more than one version of a given psalm), 43 psalms are not represented at all.<sup>1</sup>

Third, we might think that the "Responsive Reading" section of the *Trinity Hymnal* contains all the psalms, but we would be wrong here too. There are only 106 complete psalms, and ten psalm portions. Moreover, if we mesh the responsive readings with the metrical psalms, we still fail to come up with a complete psalter.

What is weird about all this is that Calvinistic churches have always held to *exclusive* psalmody. The OPC, one of the

---

1. Only four of the 22 sections of Psalms 119 are found. Hymns based on one verse or *one* phrase of a psalm have not been counted in this reckoning, only verifications of whole sections of psalms.

most traditionally Calvinistic of presbyterian denominations, might then be expected to include at a minimum all the psalms in its hymnal, but it does not. The result is that any church which takes psalm singing seriously will have to supplement the *Trinity Hymnal* with something else. (We consider psalters later in this essay.)

Fourth, musically the *Trinity Hymnal* is not very good. The large majority of tunes are either lackluster specimens of boring Scottish/English ballad metre tunes, or else harmonically superficial gospel tunes. There are, happily, a number of good Welsh, Anglican, and Lutheran tunes in the book. (Why not set metred psalms to chorale tunes, and make use of the best of Western music?)

Why is this? The general answer is that Calvinism was early influenced by the philosophy of stoicism, which prized a kind of intellectual and ascetic plainness in dress, architecture, and music.<sup>2</sup> The music of the psalms went from the lively Geneva jigs to the deadness of the Bay Psalm Book.<sup>3</sup> Calvinists were also against musical instruments in worship. The result was that there was very little development of a musical culture within the church. Presbyterianism simply has no heritage of good psalm music, and it has no hymn tradition at all (since presbyterianism held to exclusive psalmody until quite recently). More generally, it can be said that, as a result of this history, presbyterians generally do not have well developed taste when it comes to matters liturgical and hymnodic.

Moreover, fifth, the beautiful familiar tunes of many lovely hymns have been replaced by others, sometimes of far inferior calibre. "Jesus, Priceless Treasure" is severed from its chorale tune, and given another. "Of the Father's Love Begotten" loses its lovely plainsong melody (one of the few plainsong tunes which is immediately singable by any congregation). "Be Still, My Soul," set to Sibelius's "Finlandia" in most hymnals, is

---

2, Calvinists were a lot better than their later Unitarian descendants, whose prudish asceticism is sometimes confused with the milder stoicism of the earlier Calvinists. The study of the influence of stoicism on Calvinistic protestantism has yet to be done, to my knowledge. Early Calvinistic political writers used the pen name "Lucius Junius Brutus." Calvin himself translated Seneca. The founders of the United States used early Roman republican (stoic) models more often than biblical ones. And so forth.

3. See James B. Jordan, "Puritanism and Music," in Gary North, ed., *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction VI:2* (Winter, 1979-80): 111-133.

here given another tune.

Sixth, while much of the *Trinity Hymnal* is theologically "high" and valuable, a collection of "Hymns for Informal Occasions" rounds out the book. These gospel refrain songs are, for the most part, musical and textual rubbish. They arise from the American revivalist ethos, and they militate against historic orthodox Christianity in tone and substance.<sup>4</sup> They are better dead than read, and should simply be eliminated from the musical life of the church. As long as this junk is bound in the hymnals of the church, for that long people will want to sing them. A hymnal which does not even contain all the psalms, but which contains page after page of these vapid songs, is definitely setting forth an uncertain sound.

Seventh, the *Trinity Hymnal* preserves the curious and meaningless custom of placing "Amen" at the end of hymns. Eric Routley rightly remarks that 'there are two authentic uses of amen — the asseverative and the responsive.'<sup>5</sup> The former use is familiar to us as the "Verily, verily" of some of Jesus' sayings. This has no liturgical use. The latter is the liturgical use, and is the people's way of saying, "I agree," or "I am associated with that." Thus, it is used after prayers.

In the Middle Ages, the amen was sung by the congregation after listening to the choir sing a plainsong hymn.<sup>6</sup> Since Reformation hymnody and psalmody was congregational in nature, however, "there was no question of singing amen at the end of hymns. . . ."<sup>7</sup> Amen was never sung after any hymn before 1850, when the revival of interest in the Middle Ages in England, associated with the Oxford Movement and the Tractarians, introduced it. "So eager were the Tractarians to make it clear that the medieval culture alone was the pure religious culture, and medieval hymnody the proper norm for all other hymnody, that at a number of points in their hymnals they appended doxologies with amens to existing hymns."<sup>8</sup> This reached its climax with the addition of amens to all hymns, in the most famous and influential hymnal of all

---

4. See the study by Sandra Sizer, referred to in the bibliography at the end of this essay.

5. Eric Routley, *Church Music and the Christian Faith* (Carol Stream, IL: Agape [Hope Publishing Co.], 1978), p. 96.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 97.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*, p. 98.

time, *Hymns Ancient and Modern*.

The custom spread to presbyterians, and to others to a lesser extent, apparently “for no reason but the obscure and irrational notion that the Church of England knew its work in matters of liturgy.”<sup>9</sup> Routley goes on to point out that the Anglican scholars realized their error, and began abandoning the practice in the 1920s, and other groups have since followed suit, though the custom is now ingrained in some American groups. That this is perpetuated in the *Trinity Hymnal* is one more unfortunate aspect of that book.

It will be simpler to comment on the custom of amening hymns here than to return to it later in this essay, so let me make a few remarks. Some American hymnals use amen with serious hymns, but leave it off for gospel refrain songs. An example is the *Worship and Service Hymnal* (Hope Publishing Co.), used in many presbyterian churches. (The *Trinity Hymnal* amens all songs.) The older *Service Book and Hymnal* of the Lutheran Church in America (one of the finest hymnals ever put together), uses the following principle: “Amen has not been provided for hymns which are didactic, hortatory, narrative, or contemplative, but it appears, properly, at the conclusion of hymns which end in prayer or praise.”<sup>10</sup> If amen is to be used at all, this seems a salutary rule. The Christian Reformed *Psalter Hymnal* uses no amens at all.

Eighth and finally, we look at the Responsive Readings. Here the *Trinity Hymnal* stands in direct line with an unfortunate and unBiblical American tradition of responsorial worship, in two respects. First, instead of psalms, we have “selections.” These selections are sometimes happily made up of just one psalm, but usually they are made up of two or three psalms read one after another. The psalms are not grouped by theme, but are presented in order, one after another (except for those which are skipped altogether). The results are unintelligibly random untheological groupings which are conducive only to rote use,

But second, and far worse, the responsive readings simply

---

9. *Idem* We can be certain of one thing: Most presbyterians knew nothing about historic liturgy, and thus were in no position to evaluate the Anglican trends. Most conservative presbyterians still know nothing about it.

10. *Service Book and Hymnal* (Minneapolis, Augsburg, 1958), p. 287.

alternate verses with absolutely no interest in the theological dynamic of the psalms. Hebrew poetry is set up in terms of parallel phrases, as every student knows. Generally speaking, this is a reflection of the theological canon of a testimony of two witnesses: Each truth is said twice, in different words. For 3000 years, the psalms have been chanted responsorially and/or antiphonally by alternating along the lines of these parallel phrases.<sup>11</sup> For some reason, during the 19th century American churches began simply to alternate whole verses, paying no attention to the poetic form of the text. The only reason I can imagine for this is sheer ignorance. Why in the world the *Trinity Hymnal* would perpetuate this meagre tradition is beyond me (and is the more unfathomable when we note that Edward J. Young, one of the finest Old Testament scholars of his day, was on the hymnal committee).

This is, in my opinion, extremely important for worship, and I need to explain why I think so. Let us take a couple of examples. Here is Psalm 99:1-5, in the historic responsorial form:

1. The LORD reigneth; let the people tremble :  
R. He sitteth between the cherubim; let the earth be moved.
2. The LORD is great in Zion :  
R. and He is high above all the people.
3. Let them praise Thy great and terrible name :  
R. for it is holy.
4. The king's strength also loveth judgment; Thou dost establish equity :  
R. Thou executest judgment and righteousness in Jacob.
5. Exalt ye the LORD our God, and worship at His footstool :  
R. for He is holy.

We notice in verses 1, 2, and 4, that the second half of the verse repeats what is said in the first half, in different words. Why is this important? Because it demonstrates the very order of truth. God speaks first, and man listens. Then man says God's truths back to him, but in man's own words. Here we have in microcosm the whole dynamic of the God-man relationship. Man does not say his own original word, but neither does he simply parrot God's words back to Him. Man

---

11. Responsorial worship occurs when the leader says one phrase, and the congregation responds with the next. Antiphonal worship (rare in protestantism) occurs when the congregation alternates with the choir, or when the congregation is divided into two halves, alternating.

is to ingest and digest God's words, making them his own, and then repeat the substance of them back to God. True responsive reading preserves this theological dynamic. The minister speaks for God the first phrase, and the people respond back to God with the second.

Verses 3 and 5 show a different kind of response, a response of pure affirmation. Here again, just looking at the text, anyone can see that the traditional method of recitation is theologically more pregnant.

Let us take one more example, to show the dynamic nature of the traditional method. Psalm 115:3-11:

3. But our God is in the heavens :  
R. He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased.
4. Their idols are silver and gold :  
R. the work of men's hands.
5. They have mouths, but they speak not :  
R. Eyes have they, but they see not.
6. They have ears, but they hear not :  
R. Noses have they, but they smell not.
7. They have hands, but they handle not. Feet have they, but they walk not :  
R. Neither speak they through their throat.
8. They that make them are like unto them :  
R. So is every one that trusteth in them.
9. O Israel, trust thou in the LORD :  
R. He is their help and their shield.
10. O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD :  
R. He is their help and their shield.
11. Ye that fear the LORD, trust in the LORD :  
R. He is their help and their shield.

Not only is the traditional method of responsive reading true to the form of the text (which the modern method ignores), and not only is the traditional method theologically correct (while the modern method has no theology to it); it is also the case that the traditional method is more dynamic poetically and rhythmically, and thus far more satisfying. The alternation of short phrases is more exhilarating than the alternation of long sentences, and such an exhilaration in the presence of God's own holy Word is surely a good thing.

In fine, expressionless music and textual ambiguity characterize the hymnody of the *Trinity Hymnal*, and a lack both of Biblical and of liturgical scholarship characterizes its responsive readings. It is a halfway house between a good hymn-

nal and a bad one. Happily, there are some better alternatives.

*Alternatives to the Trinity Hymnal*

Unhappily, none of these alternatives is "perfect" from a Reformed and presbyterian standpoint. The *Worship and Service Hymnal* contains a large percentage of gospel songs, and very few psalms. It is basically in the revivalistic, not the historic orthodox Christian tradition.

With the advent of Christian popular music, following on the Jesus Movement of the late 1960s, we have seen a number of new hymnals. These are genuine curiosities, with a lot of old gospel songs together with some newly discovered historic hymns,<sup>12</sup> and a large helping of post-Jesus Movement scripture songs and hymns. These are so bad that they deserve a separate counterblast, and they are dealt with at the end of this essay.

The presbyterian *Hymnbook* is a fine hymnal, and preferable at several points to the *Trinity Hymnal*.<sup>13</sup> It contains very few gospel songs, and a relatively large number of great historic hymns. The music is on the whole better than the *Trinity Hymnal*. The index discloses roughly 60 metrical psalms. There are fewer responsive readings, but most are set out in traditional (Hebraic) form. In all these respects, the *Hymnbook* is superior to the *Trinity Hymnal*. It rivals the *Trinity Hymnal* in amending all hymns. Its only drawback is that it contains a few (very few) liberal hymns, such as "Once to Every Man and Nation ." (It is, after all, the product of three liberal denominations.) In my opinion, however, it is easier to filter out a handful of liberal hymns, than to try to stop the use of a hundred or so gospel songs (which are theologically hardly any better).

The Christian Reformed *Psalter Hymnal* is better yet, since it contains a representation of all 150 psalms (though some of the psalms are incomplete). It contains virtually no gospel songs. It contains no amens. The hymns are drawn from the best of the Lutheran, Anglican, and Old Catholic heritage. The same theological acumen which governed the selection of

---

12. New to the editors; not new to Anglicans and Lutherans

13. Published by the PCUS, UPCUSA, and RCA (Richmond, Philadelphia, New York: 1955).

texts in the *Trinity Hymnal* is at work here (orthodox Calvinism), but there is quite a bit more liturgical sense in evidence. There are, however, only about 175 hymns (not counting psalms). Moreover, since the psalter is not really complete, the church interested in serious psalm singing will have to supplement the *Psalter Hymnal* with something else. Also, the *Psalter Hymnal* does not have any responsive readings.

We discuss psalters below. Given the situation today, it is not possible to have a complete psalter and a good hymnal in one volume. Thus, the serious church will have to have two books, one for psalms and one for hymns. Assuming that we have a psalter, there is no point in buying a hymnal which has a high proportion of psalms, because then the two overlap one another.

Presbyterians should consider using one of the three really good hymnals which are available. The Episcopal *Hymnal* (1940) is one. It contains 600 or so hymns, all of high quality from all traditions except gospel songs. Like the *Hymnbook*, there are a few (very few) liberal hymns, which are easy to detect and avoid. It also contains quite a few canticles for chanting the text straight from Scripture. It contains few psalms (since Episcopalians chant these from other books), and thus little overlap with whatever psalter the serious church selects. The rule for amending hymns here is the same as in the Service *Book and Hymnal*, mentioned above.

The Lutheran Service *Book and Hymnal* is the second hymnal which should be given serious consideration. It contains about 600 hymns, no gospel songs, and reflects conservative, orthodox Christianity throughout (except again for one or two liberal hymns, easily avoided). It contains few psalms, since these come from other books in the Lutheran tradition. Musically it is the best hymnal ever published, to my knowledge. The LCA and ALC Lutherans have, in recent years, switched to a new hymnal (inferior, and more liberal in tone), and frequently you can buy used *SB&Hs* from such Lutheran churches. Also, it can still be purchased from Fortress Press (dial 1-800-FORTRESS).

The *Service Book and Hymnal* also contains a compendium of prayers, and a responsive reading psalter, set out according to the traditional (Hebraic) pattern. The text is the AV. The psalter is incomplete, but contains 113 psalms, almost all complete (e. g., Ps. 137 leaves off the second half). (Compare this

to the *Trinity Hymnal*, which has 106 psalms and ten psalm portions. ) There are also responsive readings taken from other Scripture songs, such as the song of Hannah and the song of Moses. Additionally, the *SB&H* contains a wealth of useful liturgical materials, in beautiful musical settings. We are presently using the *SB&H* in our (presbyterian) worship, and the people have responded enthusiastically to it.

Recently, the Missouri Synod Lutheran Church switched to a new hymnal, freeing up copies of its older *The Lutheran Hymnal*. Copies of this might be obtained from LCMS churches in your area. It contains about 675 hymns, including several psalm chants. All of these hymns are excellent. It has a better selection of traditional Lutheran hymnody than does the *SB&H*, but fewer Old Catholic and Anglican hymns. Some of the Lutheran chorales (such as "A Mighty Fortress") are in original metre; much more fun to sing.<sup>14</sup> Like the *SB&H* it includes a fairly complete psalter (set out the right way), a compendium of prayers, and good liturgical materials (though the music for these is better in the *SB&H*).

(I should like to add one note to organists. To my knowledge, all hymnals have the problem of printing the music of the hymns in their original keys. The reason this is a problem is that the tuning pitch of music has steadily risen over the past several hundred years. The music of J. S. Bach, for example, originally sounded at least one whole step lower than it does today. That means that D major for Bach's day is equivalent in pitch to C or even B major today. Unfortunately, the editors of hymnals do not seem to be aware of this fact, though it is generally recognized among musicians today. Hymns continue to be published in rather high keys. In practice, this means that organists need to drop the pitch. ["A Mighty Fortress," for instance, should not be played in D major, but in C.] When church members complain about the songs going too high, they have a legitimate complaint. It helps to be aware of the fact that the songs were originally sung lower. Hopefully, new hymnals will take this fact into consideration. )

---

14. Organists need to be aware that *The Lutheran Hymnal* has the obnoxious musical characteristic of "picardizing" every third in every minor cadence; not just in the amens, but in the middle of the hymn as well. These major thirds should be ignored, by all means. (In my opinion, the amen at the end of a minor tune should also be minor )

*Psalters*

For 2500 years the psalms were chanted in careful translations, according to the obvious poetic principles of the text. By the time of Reformation, they were sung in Latin in worship, before a silent congregation. The Reformers, interested in capturing the hearts of the people, set about to producing popular metrical versions of the psalms. Had these metrical versions been kept at the popular level, and outside of formal worship, it would have been better. Sadly, however, the Reformers in Europe (though not in England) dropped the chanting of psalms altogether, and introduced metrical paraphrases of the psalms into worship. This was the first step in the gradual removal of the psalter from the life of all but the strictest liturgical churches.

The Church historically has held that the psalter, being the hymns God Himself wrote, should have first place in formal public worship. This is a position which we may call "preponderant psalmody," as opposed to "exclusive psalmody." Since God had written these, men should not tamper with the text, but chant the very words of God. Downgrading the psalms into metrical paraphrases was all right for informal use, but not for formal worship. In worship, the people should be upgraded so as to sing the psalms in proper, literal translations.

Metrical psalms are not the same as Biblical psalms. There is no way to get around that fact. First, the process of converting a psalm into metre destroys the parallelisms of the text, obliterating the dynamic theological value of the original poetry, as we have discussed this above. Second, in order to get the words to come out right in metre, the text must be jacked around. Third, if the psalm is to be rhymed as well as metred (which is usually the case), this requires even more twisting of the text. Thus, there is simply no way any intelligent person can maintain seriously that singing metrical psalms has the same value as chanting the text as God wrote it.

Metrical psalmody, however, became Calvinistic orthodoxy. The suggestion that psalms should be chanted frequently meets with arched eyebrows and expressions of disdain, though the situation is changing.

We are stuck. A good chanting version of the psalms, in a traditional translation, and printed in such a way as to be

usable by a congregation, is simply not available. Given what we have said in this essay, one would think that such a thing would be a high priority in churches committed to the *absolute inerrancy and plenary authority* of the Bible, but such is not the case. Millions of dollars are spent by conservatives to produce a simplified paraphrase of the holy Scriptures (the New International Version), which will be here today and gone tomorrow, but no money can be raised to produce a good chanting psalter, so that our congregations can be transformed from gospel song wimps into militant psalm-chanting warriors.

So, since something is better than nothing, let us take a look at what is available in the line of metrical psalmody. Here we enter into another problem. Reformed and presbyterian theologians rightly adhere to what is called the "regulative principle of worship," which means (in slogan form) that whatever is not expressly commanded for worship in the New Testament is forbidden. The Westminster Confession of Faith is far more wise in saying that God may not be worshiped in "any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture ." This leaves open the possibility of consulting the Old Testament, and it leaves open a discussion of what it means for the Scripture to "prescribe" something. For instance, on the basis of the whole Scripture, one can make a case that a church calendar, a Church Year, is "prescribed ."

Now, here is the rub: Certain Dutch Reformed theologians insist that it is not commanded that men should harmonize the singing of the psalms. Thus, harmonizing is wrong. All should join in unison before God. On the other hand, they see that the Bible does advise the use of musical instruments, and particularly the organ. Thus, in conservative Dutch churches, the regulative principle means that the organ plays a prelude before each psalm, an interlude between each stanza, and a postlude at the end. The organist, if he or she is good, can use a different harmony for each stanza. The people are to sing in unison, and not harmonize. Thus, Dutch psalters only give the melodic line.

Now, the Scottish and Puritan advocates of the regulative principle found something else commanded in the sacred text. They found that musical instruments are forbidden, since nowhere in the New Testament are they found in use by the

church on earth.<sup>15</sup> But, they believed that harmonizing is just great. Thus, the Scottish and Puritan churches sing a cappella, but harmonize.

This is *the* "Reformed" position. You figure it out.

Well, it has consequences. The Scottish-type psalters pitch the tunes up high, because the lower voices (alto and bass) don't sing the melody anyway. The Dutch-type psalters don't have any harmony in them, and you have to look high and low to find a separate organ book.

Let's now look at what's available. First, there is the *Scottish Psalter (1929)*, published by Oxford University Press. Virtually all the psalms are metred in ballad or common metre (8.6.8. 6). Moreover, the pages are split, so that you can vary the tunes with the texts at will.

Problems: The split pages are unfortunate, since we tend to memorize music and words together. It would be much better to have fixed a set tune with a particular text. Second, the metred psalms are awkward, since a hopeless desire to stick close to the original governs the verification. For instance, Psalm 2:

Why rage the heathen? and vain things  
 why do the people mind?  
 Kings of the earth do set themselves,  
 and princes are combined.

It is hard to sing such wretched verse with a straight face, and that is not conducive to serious worship. Third, there is tremendous monotony to the fact that virtually every text is set to ballad metre. Finally, the tunes are too frequently as dull and inexpressive as any music ever dreamed up.

At the other pole in some ways is the Anglo-Genevan Psalter put out by the Canadian Reformed Churches: the *Book of Praise*.<sup>16</sup> Here we have all 150 psalms, with the Genevan melodies, in the original peppy Genevan metres. With their fast and dancelike rhythms, they are a joy to sing (when sung at a pitch a step lower than written). Since the lines are long, nowhere near as much twisting of the text is needed to convert the psalms into metre. Also, the translators

---

15. Forgetting that we pray "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," and instruments are seen in heaven.

16. Order from Committee for the Publication of the Anglo-Genevan Psalter, Box 854, Burlington, Ontario, Canada L7R 3Y7.

have apparently thrown in the towel, and not tried to be super-literal. The result is fairly good English verse, which parallels in idea the poetry of the Hebrew psalter.

Problems: The tunes are unknown to an American audience. Second, only the melody is given. Third, only one line of text is provided with the melody, the rest being underneath the music (or even on the next page). Fourth, it is virtually impossible to get a piano or organ score to go along with the tunes. Fifth, such accompaniments as are available are musically deficient. <sup>17</sup> I wrote to one of the editors of the *Book of Praise* a few years ago, when they began revising the book, and asked why they did not adopt the American style of publication (complete harmony; several stanzas inside the staves). I pointed out to him that there would be a market for such a book in America, given the present reformation in worship. He wrote back to say that in the Netherlands only choirs have books like that, because only choirs harmonize, and that the Canadian Reformed Churches are anti-choir, and so they are not interested in publishing in this format.

There you have it.

I like the "Genevan Jigs" better than any other metrical psalter by far, but I do not see how any American church can hope to make use of them in the near future. I understand that the Christian Reformed Church is working on a separate English version of the Genevan psalter. When it becomes available (if and when), it will be something to get.

There are two American psalters. The first is the old presbyterian *Psalter*, kept in print by Eerdmans. All 150 psalms are represented (though some are abridged). There is a nice collection of "chorales," by which is meant Genevan tunes (some in the original rhythms). The poetic verifications

---

17. By this I mean that the Genevan psalms are for the most part modal rather than diatonic, the former being a characteristic of monophonic music. The modern harmonizations attempt to retain a modal cast rather than switching to a generally diatonic one. The result is strange and awkward harmonic progressions which seem to go nowhere. I have a harmonization by Worp which is very awkward, in my opinion. The older harmonization by Bekkers and Kort is much more pleasing, but it is not in print anywhere, to my knowledge. Nineteenth century harmonizations are diatonic in cast, but at this time the psalms were not sung in the original rhythms, but had been rhythmically squared so that every note was equal in length (the "cantional" style). Moreover, these are not in print either

are freer than in the *Scottish Psalter*, and thus better. The music is rather blah, for the most part, but all right. The main defect is the almost universal preponderance of songs in major keys.

Why do I say this? The simple fact is that the range of expression available in major keys is extremely narrow. Most folk songs are in minor keys or modes. Most great art music is either in minor, or else modulates into minor for long periods of time. It is possible to get by with much more dissonance, and much more unusual harmonic progressions, in minor than in major keys. Minor harmony actually alternates between major and minor chords, while major harmony sticks only with major chords. Thus, minor music almost always sounds much "richer" than does major music, which tends to sound "superficial."<sup>18</sup> This is obviously not a universal rule, but a generality. All the same, the reason the tunes in *The Psalter* are so blah is that they are virtually all major. Harmony consists only of tonics, dominants, and sub-dominants. (The exception is the "chorale" section mentioned above.)

Problems: The music is rather blah, and not all the psalms are complete. Imprecatory psalms have consistently been softened considerably.

We come finally to the latest, and most creative, presbyterian psalter, *The Book of Psalms for Singing*.<sup>19</sup> This is a complete psalter. I don't think anything has been edited, save for a few words here and there.<sup>20</sup> The imprecatory psalms have been left alone. The English verifications are not particularly awkward. Some chants are included.

Musically, *BPS* is a mixed bag. Some very fine and beautiful tunes are included, and some really dull and prosaic ones as well. Some "heavy" and "hard" psalms are given rather

18. It is a myth that 'minor' in music means "sad." More often, music in minor keys is "grand." Is J. S. Bach's "Tocatta and Fugue in c minor" *sad*, or mournful, or dirgelike?

19. Published by the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, the so-called "Covenantors." Available from RPCNA, 7418 Penn Ave., Pittsburgh, PA 15208.

20. For instance, Psalm 83C reads at one place "Like Oreb make their chiefs, their lords like Zebah." Well, the Bible has Oreb *and* Zeeb, and Zebah and *Zalmunna*. Metrical considerations dictated that Zeeb and Zalmunna be omitted. This again points out the fact that metrical psalms are not in fact psalms, but hymns. This reality should be admitted and confronted, not skirted and ignored,

light, major-key tunes (the same problem encountered above). Since the Covenantors are committed to a cappella singing, the tunes are pitched high throughout; after all, only sopranos will be singing the melody. This makes the book hard for most churches to use, unless the organist is skilled at transposition, or you have a modern electronic organ with a transposition switch.

Given the half-way house of metrical psalmody, however, this is the best bet, at present, in my opinion.

At this point, something should be said about the Grail-Gelineau Psalter. Joseph Gelineau attempted to bring over into modern European languages what he saw as the rhythm of the Hebrew text.<sup>21</sup> This he called "sprung" rhythm. The beat stays the same, but the number of syllables between beats can vary. A familiar example of sprung rhythm is "Three Blind Mice," which has four beats per line. Here it is, with the stressed syllables in italics:

*Three blind mice.* [rest] (repeat)  
 See *how they run.* [rest] (repeat)  
 They *all ran into the farmer's wife,*  
 Who *cut off their tails with a carving knife.*  
 Did you *ever see* such a *sight* in your *life.*  
 As *three blind mice.* [rest]

The following are the advantages of the Gelineau method:

- (1) It is extremely simple to learn and use.
- (2) It avoids the metrical and rhyming constraints which affect the purity of metrical psalmody; that is, it is a form of chant.

The following are its disadvantages:

- (1) At present, the only English version utilizes the Grail translation, which is not very precise (so that we are back to the problem of purity of translation).
- (2) Most of the Gelineau psalmody material assumes that they will be sung only by choirs, rather than by congregations (though they lend themselves readily to congregational use).
- (3) The Gregorian Institute has all this material under very tight copyright control, making it hard for a church to use it experimentally.
- (4) The Gelineau melodies are so simple that they can get old after a while.

---

21, It is a matter of debate whether Hebrew poetry really has meter or rhythm, as a rule.

But, for a change of pace on a Wednesday night, why not try some out? A melody (pew) edition of *30 Psalms and Two Canticles* is available from GIA for a reasonable price.<sup>22</sup> You also need to order one copy of the accompaniment edition of the same title.

Theologically considered, the most proper way to sing the psalms is in a fashion that does justice to the parallelism of the text, in some dynamic fashion. To sing a metrical psalm is not the same as singing a psalm, which is why metrical psalmody is liturgically inferior. Metrical psalms are man-composed hymns based on the psalter. I can hear my Calvinistic brethren screaming as I write this, but it is true, and no amount of emotionalized traditionalism is going to change it. Metrical psalms should be considered hymns, for they are not psalms. Gelineau psalms should also be considered hymns, for they also destroy the theology of parallelism.

Anglican chanting preserves the parallelism, though generally Anglican chant psalmody is sung entirely by the congregation (or choir), without the use of antiphony or response. Anglican chanting does, however, lend itself to antiphonal or responsorial use,<sup>23</sup>

The fact is that the simplest and theologically sharpest way to sing the psalms is by the use of plainchant psalm tones. The minister chants the first phrase, and the congregation chants the response phrase. This is simply responsive reading on pitch. Of course, virtually the only people who do this are (gasp!) *Roman Catholics*, so no matter how Biblical it may be, we as protestants must never, never, never do it, lest people suspect that we are "going back to Rome." May it never be thought that we are doing that! Thus, I suppose we shall have to stick with other alternatives (until we grow up and start thinking like adults).

Considering all the interest in psalmody at present among the liturgical churches, those conservative protestants who have outgrown the ecclesiastical kindergarten of kneejerk reaction against Rome should have other, better psalters to choose from in years to come.

---

22. Gregorian Institute of America (GIA) Publications, 7404 So. Mason Ave., Chicago, IL 60638. Write for a catalogue. Phonograph recordings of Gelineau psalms are available.

23. That is, the minister singing the first phrase alone, with the congregation singing the second; or the choir and congregation alternating.

*The Wider Chaos*

Thus far, we have only looked at the chaos in Reformed and presbyterian circles. This is but a microcosm of the chaos in the wider church. While the new liturgical movement turns some within the “mainstream” churches back toward a more objective, Biblical, and psalm-centered worship, evangelical churches (including presbyterian ones) are moving farther and farther away from their Old Catholic and Reformed heritage. <sup>24</sup> Just about the time the “liberal” churches finally revolted against “folk” services, dancing in the aisles, cheap banners made of felt, and the releasing of balloons, we find (predictably) the evangelical churches going in for this type of “relevant” rubbish. <sup>25</sup>

The new hymnody, from what I can tell (and I can only stomach so much of it!), is worse even than the old gospel songs were. The new Jesus songs range from the insipid to the heretical. They employ a musical and poetic vocabulary which is the hymnodic equivalent of Robert Schuller’s theology. Radio Christian music fits in well with radio preaching — both practically worthless. Strong words? Yes, but why pretend otherwise? Junk is junk.

The modern Christian song is produced for a commercial market. It imitates musical styles which are the decadent dead-end of two centuries of the collapse of true folk music. We live in a culture of people who don’t even whistle while they work, let alone sing, and such a culture has no folk music. All modern “rock” music has going for it is its sheer force; “Christian rock” takes out the power and force, and is left with nothing.

The hymn is the highest form of folk music. The hymn must be simple enough, and lovely enough, for congrega-

---

24. Happily, Robert G. Rayburn of Covenant Theological Seminary has stood strongly against this trend, and for a renewed appreciation of the Christian heritage. I have in mind his book *O Come Let us Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980).

25. Perhaps this should be encouraging. The mainstream denominations emerged from their tinsel era with a new appreciation for the heritage of historic worship. Dare we hope for the same for evangelicalism, which is the true heir? (And dare we hope, against hope perhaps, that a recovery of historic worship and psalmody will draw the mainstream churches back toward the historic, orthodox faith?)

tional singing. (This does not mean it has to be foursquare in rhythm, of course.) American culture, having no folk music, produces no hymns. The last hymns produced were the fuguing tunes and sacred harp songs of the last century — still beautiful today, if rather primitive. Gospel songs were written to be sung by professionals as entertainment in crusades,<sup>26</sup> and modern Jesus hymns are written to be played on the radio. Even those that are written to be sung by churches made up of “young” people, or by people in Bible studies, still *imitate* the commercial style.

(Good new hymns have been written in the 20th century, of course. Those that are beloved and will endure have texts written by competent poets, and/or music by competent composers. Think of “We Come, O Christ, to Thee” by E. Margaret Clarkson; or the tune *Sine Nomine* composed by Ralph Vaughan-Williams for ‘For All the Saints.’ “The *Trinity Hymnal*, by the way, does not use the Vaughan-Williams tune.)

This kind of music should not be brought into the worship of the church. Am I a snob to write this? I don’t believe so. I should like to interact with some of the common arguments in this area. One argument goes like this: “Call it contextualization or something else; I prefer to view it as following Jesus who left heaven’s court and stooped awfully low in order to communicate with us. From His perspective He spoke ‘baby-talk’ — isn’t that the idea behind all those anthropomorphic references to His nostrils, arms, ears, etc.?”<sup>27</sup> No, it is not. God does not have to lisp to us. He designed and created us precisely to be receptors of His truth. Indeed, as His images, we cannot help but know Him. There is absolutely no epistemological gap between God and man, as Van Til has taught us. Moreover, what lies behind “anthropomorphic” references is the fact that man, in his totality, was created a “theomorph.” It is God’s nostrils, arms, ears, etc. which are the original; ours are the fleshly copies.<sup>28</sup>

---

26. Which is why most of them go up too high for a congregation to sing. People just kind of shout them out. The worst common example is “Wonderful Grace of Jesus,” an absolutely unsingable song.

27. George Miladin, “Hymns Don’t Need to be Vertical,” in *The Presbyterian Journal* 43:4 (May, 1984): 10.

28. That is, there is a capacity in God of which the human eye is the created analogue. There is an attribute of God of which the human nose is the created image. Etc.

Now, the author wants to draw from this the lesson that we should accommodate the great music of the church to the barbarity of today's "youth." I think not. I don't see Christ making such accommodations in Scripture.<sup>29</sup> I don't think music is neutral. Great music goes with a great God; jazz goes with sassiness. Take your pick.

A second argument I should like to present is this: I do not believe that those who want contemporary popular music in worship appreciate sufficiently what Scripture says about the Christian's desire to sing a new song. I am not sure at all that new converts want to have their old music brought over into the church. From my experience, new converts rejoice to sing music of a refreshingly different cast from what they sang before. From my experience, those who want "Christian rock/jazz/etc." in worship are the children of Christian parents, who are out for some new thing. Let them have it, but on their own, outside of worship.

Third, I do not believe that it shows very much Biblical love, or footwashing, to let people get by with trashy theology and/or music. It is easy to control the music in the church, and to guide people to good hymns and great music: You just don't ever schedule anything else. It is not just that we ought to offer to God the best we have at our disposal (which will vary), but also that for the good of the flock, we need to structure our preaching and liturgy in as theologically profound a manner as is possible, and we need to have the same pastoral concern when it comes to hymnody. People can sing this other stuff on other occasions.

Fourth, "well, didn't Luther use German drinking songs?" No, that's a myth. For the most part, the Lutheran chorales are revisions of Gregorian chants.<sup>30</sup> Yes, some popular tunes

---

29. Routley's comments on this matter are more to the point: "Provided we always bear in mind that the Son of Man was not in fact a glutton and a winebibber, and that the company he kept was able to benefit from his healing and fortifying presence without leaving any stain on him, these texts are a salutary reminder that pride and aloofness have no part in the church musician's ministry." Exactly. We do not have to bring drunkenness into the church in order to minister to drunks, and we do not have to bring rock music into the church in order to minister to rocks!

30. After all, when Luther asked, "Why should the devil have all the best tunes," he (of all people) was not speaking about the beer hall! A moment's reflection will reveal that Luther regarded the Papacy as the primary expression of the devil's kingdom, and the "devil's tunes," which he loved so much, were nothing other than plainchant!

were reworked into hymns, but the following points need to be kept in mind. First, Europe at that time had a genuine folk culture and genuine folk music. To take such music into the Church is quite different from taking over commercial dance-hall and radio music from a culture like ours. Second, European folk music had been influenced by Church music for 1000 years by that time. Folk music returned the favor in giving good tunes back to the Church. Today's popular music has been cut off from Christian influence for a long time, and indeed is often radically demonized. The situation today is far different from what it was then.<sup>31</sup>

Fifth, and this is more important than the space I can take for it here might indicate, evangelicalism and presbyterianism have lost any real sense of the boundary between Church culture and general culture. The notion of a distinctive "Churchy" worship building, of clergy wearing collars and robes, and of distinctive worship music, has been lost in the pervasive stew of American democratic sentiment. This is unfortunate, and has had incalculably destructive effects on the Church at large. Church architecture *should* be different. Church officers *should* wear uniforms. And Church music *should* be different. This is not because general culture is bad, or inferior; it is because general culture is *general*, and Church culture is *special*. Psychological associations *are* important, and are not neutral. This bears directly on the question of the propriety of using either guitars or full orchestras in worship, and it bears directly on the question of bringing over either "Christian radio" style music or concert music into formal worship.<sup>32</sup>

In my opinion, this is the problem with modern "Scripture song." The music lacks profundity, strength, and greatness. Thus, the music does not parallel the text, but tends to weaken it. Moreover, stylistically the music is still the commercial radio style, which is unworthy of the formal praise sacrifices of public worship before the throne of the King of

---

31. Where did early Church chant come from? From the Temple and synagogue. See Eric Werner, *The Sacred Bridge* (Columbia University Press, 1959). The paperback edition (Schocken, 1970) only contains the first half of the book, on the transfer of liturgical form from Israel to the Church. You need to get the original hardcover edition in order to get the study of the transfer of music and melodies.

32. On the subject of special and general, see *my essay*, "The Church: An Overview," in this symposium.

kings. Perhaps as "Scripture song" develops, and young composers come more and more under the power of the text, their music will grow in strength until it is on a par with traditional Church music. Until then, however, it ought to stay in coffee houses, where it belongs.

Sixth, and finally, American Church culture really has very little to offer liturgically or hymnodically. The reason for this is that the vast majority of American churches (save for immigrant and Anglican churches, small minorities) grow generally out of the presbyterian/congregationalist/baptist tradition. (Methodists are culturally in this tradition also). Because of the stoicism and exclusive psalmody mentioned at the beginning of this essay, and because of the barbarity of the frontier, and because of other factors as well, the American Church has generally been cut off from the wealth of the liturgical and hymnodic past.<sup>33</sup> The best thing for the American Church today is a recovery of the best of that past, not an attempt to generate something out of the rubbish of American popular culture. A recovery of that past will provide the young musicians of today with the vocabulary with which they can build new music.

We have today a rising crop of young theologians, who are finding their ways out of the garbage of Schuller, of the charismatic movement, etc., and into good theology. In twenty years, we should have some good men on the scene. The same is true of Christian musicians. Today they are only beginning to rise out of the swinetrough of American gospel and popular music. As they learn more about the greatness of the Christian musical past, they will begin to produce larger works, and hymns, of genuine worth. For the most part, however, that is still in the future.

### *Bibliography*

In this essay, we have only skimmed the surface of the problems faced by the American Church in the area of music. I recommend that the reader procure a set of four taped lectures by your servant on the subject of American Church music. In these lectures, I have analyzed the problems of

---

33. I discuss this at length in the tape series mentioned in the bibliography at the end of this essay,

American Church music in terms of the following motifs:

- a. the economic poverty of the frontier era;
- b. the anti-intellectualism of the revivalistic heritage;
- c. the development of sentimentalism in the 19th century;
- d. the loss of the constraints of liturgy, or else;
- e. the loss of the constraints of exclusive psalmody;
- f. the studied pursuit of infantilism in the 20th century.

These lectures are available from Geneva Ministries, P. O. Box 8376, Tyler, Texas, 75710. The price for these four tapes is \$15.00, postpaid. 34

Also, see James B. Jordan, "Puritanism and Music," in *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, Vol. 6, No. 2. This essay consists of two parts; first, a positive evaluation of the high regard the Puritans had for music, provided it was kept out of worship; and second, a history of the problems, decline, and eventual restoration of Puritan psalm singing.

A fine study of the source, nature, and impact of gospel songs in the late 19th century is Sandra S. Sizer, *Gospel Hymns and Social Religion.* "The Rhetoric of Nineteenth-Century Revivalism" (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1978).<sup>35</sup> Sizer competently discusses the heretical trends in gospel hymnody, its dualistic tone, its shift from orthodoxy to romantic liberalism: ". . . the dominant tone of *Gospel Hymns*, where human beings are essentially victims of evil, impersonal forces. They are not worms but wanderers — exiles or pilgrims, accidentally cast out on foreign shores . . ." (p. 29). She writes, "This is indeed the first important strategic move of gospel-hymn rhetoric: to portray the human condition as that of a passive victim. The solution to the difficulty is equally passive: to rest in some safe place" (p. 30). Thus, we have a shift from man as depraved rebel to man as victim; and a shift from the notion that true faith involves struggle and obedience, to the notion that faith is mere rest and comfort.

There are also good observations on sentimentalism and hymnody in Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture*

---

34. These four lectures on church music are part of a larger series on art and music. The entire set of 17 tapes costs \$5200. The tapes on music only (including the four on church music), number ten in all, and the price is \$33.50 postpaid.

35. Available only in hardcover, list \$27.95. Maybe your library has a copy, or can obtain one for you to read,

(New York: Knopf, 1977; paperback from Avon), a book which is valuable in so many respects that I can only say one thing about it: Buy it and read it as soon as you can.

Important is Eric Routley, *Church Music and the Christian Faith* (Carol Stream, IL: Agape [Hope Pub. Co.], 1978). I cannot go along with everything Routley says in the way of theology, since his perspective is that of a modernist at some points, but his observations on Church music are both sharply pointed and valuable. He sets forth two canons for judging Church music (p. 20): "On the one hand we have the principle that it is not the avoidance of error but the generation of good that we are to look for. On the other hand we have the principle that the Christian's goal must be maturity in Christ. . . . We are therefore on firm ground in saying that where church music inhibits the growth of the Christian society to maturity it is to be censured."

Routley has been around a long time. He has written over thirty books, including some of the most definitive studies of hymns ever written. He is entitled to be irascible, and he is (delightfully) so in this book. Routley blasts at organists who employ the "cheap technique" of hiking the pitch of a hymn up for the last stanza (p. 29). Throughout his book he skewers pretentiousness as a cover for inadequacy, and as hindering the maturity of the Church. But in all of this, Routley keeps us aware that 'the church's worship is 'a conversation which began long before you were born and will continue long after you are dead'. . . . The great church musician listens to the conversation already going on before joining in it" (p. 89). And that, of course, is the problem with modern "Jesus music": Those involved in it have no awareness at all of the ages-long conversation of liturgy, and instead are trying to bring into the Church the meagre coin of current worldly chit-chat. It ought not to be permitted.

"When Vaughan Williams wrote that good taste is a moral concern . . . , I am with him and I think the church should be. Failures of taste are ultimately failures of nerve; bad taste argues insecurity, competitiveness, and a lust for quick results" (p. 96). If this type of comment sharpens your appetite, you will find that Routley's book is salutary reading.

Finally (I am being selective, not exhaustive), I can recommend a careful, judicious reading of Austin C. Lovelace and William C. Rice, *Music and Worship in the Church* (Revised

& enlarged edition – Nashville: Abingdon, 1976). The authors show a good deal of common sense, and good taste, in their discussion of the problems of church music. I found of particular value the first chapter, which addresses the fundamental problem that the appeals of music and speech run in opposite directions: emotional and mental. Searching out resolutions of this problem constitute a continuing challenge for all liturgists and hymn writers.

CHURCH ARCHITECTURE AND THE  
ENVIRONMENT OF WORSHIP: REVALORIZATION  
IN THE PROTESTANT GHETTO

James Michael Peters

A very professional art historian once told me that if a person really wants to understand a particular style of human invention he must first look at its most exaggerated expressions, and ask over and over again, "What do I see? What do I see?" Being a man of immense visual prowess he assured me that it was all a matter of practice, a habit developed from years of following that simple ritual of selecting the extreme case and then asking the proper leading question, methodically working one's way back to the origin of the particular style in question. Of course such a method is a formalist technique which often merely postpones, sometimes indefinitely, the iconographer's responsibility of answering that bigger question: "What does it mean?" In any case I have through the years found this technique to be a valuable tool which forces one to look more carefully at things which are all too often taken for granted.

Considering this, and since the theme of this symposium is the reconstruction of the church, it seems only proper that our visual exploration of the church building should begin with a hard look at the Studio Style of the protestant ghetto. As with most architectural forms the elemental principle of studio style can be expressed mathematically. You take the number of dynamic evangelists, multiply it by the square floor space, and divide by the number of electrical outlets. That result is then multiplied by the size of the viewing audience and divided by the diameter of the satellite dish. The final result is the degree of studio style that an existing church structure has; or in the case of a new building program the result determines the degree to which the final structure must conform itself to the primary function, which is certainly not worship. The primary function of any studio style is theater, the facilitation of entertainment.

Undoubtedly, such a statement is harsh, but is it too harsh? Am I being unfair? Please let me ask of you that you suspend judgment until you finish this essay — better yet, until you finish all the essays in this symposium. Also keep in mind that I am selecting that which is architecturally and liturgically exaggerated among all the children of the reformation, the descendants of those aesthetic orphans of many religious revolts, and iconoclastic wars. Remember also that it is a heritage of tenacious individualism, which often dons the mask of ecclesiastical anarchism. Such outbursts are to be expected, since most protestants persistently build along the flood plain of that mighty river called Revival. So we come to a religious style that has been built up and torn down, over and over again, layer upon layer, year after year, until we are faced with an environment of worship almost stripped clean of its biblical imagery. And although centuries of stoic debates, burned over charismatic revivals, and simple neglect has taken its toll, there is a persistence of image here which still whispers the ancient names of God to those who have eyes to hear with.

### *Protestant Studio Style*

#### *Calvary Baptist Church*

Let us begin our visual exploration at the corners of Burton and Martin in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and look carefully at what might be called “proto studio style .” During my early years as a student I attended a rather large and influential church on this site called Calvary Baptist — Calvary, a name given to the very mount of the cross upon which the Lord of glory was put to death, the center of history, the focal point of redemption for the cosmos. A good name for a church, one of great power — and indeed this was a powerful church. As memory serves me, the seriousness of its responsibility was reflected in its exterior. To the eye, the church’s dark brown brick rose up like some kind of great earth mound, and being almost perfectly square it filled the corner to the point of pushing at the public sidewalks that edged the walls of its northern and western faces. Its southern and eastern faces looked out over a paved parking area for the congregation, and the church’s three buses. The roof had no

jutting spires or steeple to speak of and was of a rather shallow construction, lacking any overhanging eaves. I remember once thinking that if it had been shingled in dark green rather than light gray one could easily have visualized a herd of sheep and goats grazing on an old grass-covered mound in Scotland. Contrary to Freudian opinion, the spires and steeples of the old gothic churches were not phallic images, but grand old symbols of the mountain of God. Calvary never tried to be so grand, just functional. There were no exterior images, and the main entry on the north face of the building can only be described as plain and flat. It was an austere public face for a church of this size. Conspicuously lacking on this facade was the traditional Greek veneer so popular among other powerful baptist churches throughout the ghetto. So one could confidently say that at least externally there was no ode to Greek "democracy" played here. There was no impressive portico with large fluted pillars, just a series of broad steps leading up from Burton Street to a row of evenly spaced wooden doors.

The interior of Calvary Baptist Church was a perfect complement to its earth mound exterior. It was all very warm, solid, and simple. The beige walls were lined with tall rectangular windows of plain glass on the eastern and western sides of the building. Because the windows were clear, and placed in line with the path of the sun, blinds were needed to prevent the light from becoming a problem. I remember the deacons having to make minute adjustments to the window blinds as the light changed on the east side of the church during the morning service, and then on the west side during the early evening service. The windows were in fact so tall that they naturally led the eye up to a high ceiling which was also beige in color. It was a simple unadorned canopy showing just a hint of the massive structural beams supporting the roof; I remember clearly that even before I understood the elaborate symbolism of the gothic nave, whenever I looked up at the exposed beam work I always thought of what it would have been like in Noah's Ark. Beams, floor, and furnishings were all rich brown woods that seemed to go well together. As one entered the church the narthex seemed a bit too shallow for the overall size of the interior. Its narrow rectangular construction was sliced even further by several broad steps that ran the full length of the narthex. Proceeding up these steps one was brought abruptly to the second level of the interior, to the

doors opening on the aisles of what would have once been called the nave.

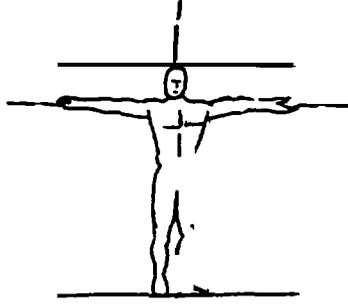
Nave in gothic church architecture is a medieval term derived from two different sources; the Latin "navis," meaning ship, and the old English term "nafu," used in describing "the hub of a wheel."<sup>1</sup> Architecturally, the nave is the main area of worship from the narthex to the outer edge of the axis of a cruciform cathedral. The anatomical term, navel, gives one a further indication of a dynamic that conceptually connects the idea of a living body with a building. As early as the fourth century the cruciform structure of Old St. Peter's in Rome was promoted by St. Ambrose as the best architectural form to symbolize the true ship — the greater Noah's Ark — of redemption to the world; the body and blood of Christ. That is the victory of the cross, life-giving influences flowing out to the four corners of the earth. It was an imagery in which Christians perceived themselves in Christ and of the body.<sup>2</sup> As the navel is that space around which the life of an unborn person is nourished and built up, so likewise the axis of the cruciform church was the place of the great spire, or dome in the Eastern church, under which the word was preached and the sacrament distributed, bringing life and order to a body of people in the nave radiating out as the sign of the cross to the world (as visually represented in the cruciform figure [Figure 1]).<sup>3</sup>

---

1, *The Compact Edition of The Oxford English Dictionary* (New York Oxford University Press, 1973) 1.1902 (original OED, volume N, p. 47).

2. Peter Fingesten, *The Eclipse Of Symbolism* (Columbia University of South Carolina Press, 1970), p. 86. Fingesten correctly points out that the interior of the cruciform church, which had begun with the heavy masculine lines of the Romanesque style, was increasingly feminized as the cult of the Virgin gained power throughout the Medieval period, and by the 15th century Christians and Christ were often architecturally portrayed as being in the body of Mary.

3 Christ spoke of himself as a river of life, and one can hardly miss the architectural imagery of the garden. At the crucifixion Christ had been wounded in head, hands, and feet according to the four cardinal points of the cross. It was a visually symbolic testimony of Christ's blood flowing out to the world as the rivers divided Eden. Cruciformity is humaniformity, since the cross shape is that of a man with his arms outstretched. For a discussion of the cross shape as a fundamental world-model in scripture, see James B Jordan's comments in *The Sociology of the Church Essays in Reconstruction* (Tyler, TX: Geneva Ministries, 1986).



*Figure 1*

Obviously this is an architectural term that has long since lost most of its biblical meaning for protestants in general. Our ghetto is not known for its cruciform cathedrals, so the architectural imagery is not readily apparent. In this there is something fundamentally true about that old saying, "out of sight, out of mind."

Much more important to most students, I myself being one at this time, were two features each located at the two extreme ends of the narthex. Here on the one hand were found the administrative offices of the pastors, and on the other hand something else, something that went almost unnoticed for its architectural significance. The importance of the offices for us students lay in the fact that Calvary's pastors were lively articulate communicators — they had to be, for as we shall see later, rhetoric is all they had going for themselves. So they spent an inordinate amount of their time counseling the best and the brightest young Christians in the area. Such was to be expected, in that it was a time when young soldiers of the National Guard were shooting real bullets at older students on the Kent State campus. Amidst such social turmoil, who would even take notice of two small stairways also tucked away at both ends of the narthex? And only now, after half my life is gone, do I begin to understand the foreboding architectural significance of these stairs in the church.

On each side of the narthex adjoining the small office was a narrow, single stairway leading up to a large open balcony above. On any Sunday from fall to summer the balcony was full of students attending colleges in the area, as well as many other young people whose parents where members of the church. Only now do I fully understand the balcony's power-

ful attraction to the youth of Calvary Baptist. From above one could see, yet not be seen. It was literally the optimum theatrical vantage point, the visual center for those in the know, for those raised from their youth in an age of mass entertainment, the secular spectacle. It allowed one the opportunist to survey everything worth seeing at a single glance, including most of the congregation. From up above, budding intellectuals could carefully scrutinize the pastor's message without annoying the old timers below, a past generation who simply didn't know any better any way; and even young couples could be indiscreet to the accompaniment of a long choral piece from Bach.

It enabled one to worship God at a distance, while supposedly "drawing near."

Should such a balcony really be so surprising? After all, the southern end of Calvary's "sanctuary" was a multi-level stage, a studio style not terribly unlike any other theater for the performing arts. Oh, there were some differences, but they were just hints, enigmatic whispers from the past that went on being unexplained. Being a politically tense era, biblical patterns of worship were simply not on the agenda. But I suppose such neglect is part of the revivalist tradition, since correct worship is seen as a more or less natural outpouring of an individual's regenerate heart, a heart "unencumbered" by the pomp and circumstance of "Roman Catholic tradition."

Yes, there was always that fear of magic, that fear of ritual. One could see that gnawing fear clearly in the empty communion table pushed up close against the main stage. From the balcony one could just make out the deeply carved letters on its thick edge: "DO THIS IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME." Centered above the table and a few feet back on the main stage was the focal point of the church, a rather large solid looking pulpit without ornamentation. Some ten feet further back was the long pew where the pastors and any guest speaker would sit during the service. Immediately behind them was a raised choir which had room for about five rows of singers, and finally, elevated slightly above the choir was the baptismal area itself, elegantly hidden behind lush red velvet curtains. So we have come to the mount of Calvary Baptist; looking south as slivers of light from the morning sun dance between the window blinds.

It was all there down front on the first Lord's day of July.

Certainly the events of that day would prove to be an answer to a question I had not yet asked. Simply put, it turned out to be a day marked by a liturgy of immense significance. The opening procession began with music and the aid of deacons making sure people filled the pews from back to front. Gentle waves of worshipers in light suits and summer dresses moved along the red carpeted aisles, slowly filling the sanctuary almost to capacity. Since it was the first Sunday of the month, as local custom would have it, the communion meal was prominently displayed upon its appointed table. Above that solemn meal of grape juice and Nabisco crackers, the pastors and singers filed in from unobtrusive doors located at the sides of the choir. Having all sat down, more or less in unison, the music stopped, and silence quickly swept across the assembly. After a brief announcement by the minister of education, the senior pastor stood behind that plain solid pulpit, and called the congregation to worship. There was a moment of silence, then something began that I shall never forget, down front on that warm day of the Lord in July.

We all stood erect to the introductory bars of the first hymn, and began to sing: "Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord. . . ." Knowing the first few verses of *The Battle Hymn of the Republic* by heart, I looked up to watch the choir sing back at me. To my complete surprise the velvet curtains of the baptismal began to undulate; back and forth they went like waves on a red sea, and as the curtains parted I could not believe my eyes. Old Glory was waving proudly in the baptismal of Calvary Church. "Oh yeah, the fourth of July," I thought, "it's Independence Day." In a kind of persistent unbelief I scrutinized the "down front," just to make sure. No doubt about it, the American flag that usually stood at the side of the stage had been moved, though the "Christian flag," as always, was still in the other corner. It did not take the deductive abilities of a Sherlock Holmes to realize that a fan and light had also been placed into the baptismal to give Old Glory that electric breeze so necessary to make her stand out straight and bright.

Everything that followed that day was overwhelmed by the conspicuous presence of the American flag, and a great sense of its utter inappropriateness. I only remember clearly that I kept mulling the same thing over and over in my mind, and the word "inappropriate" kept wanting to turn into the

word “sacrilegious .” I knew the consequences of such% theological drift because early in my Christian life I made the mistake of calling the main area of the church a sanctuary in the presence of a rather persnickety deacon. “Roman Catholics have sanctuaries; we have, ah,” – there was a rather uncomfortable pause, and then he finished confidently with – “an auditorium!”

To summarize, let me contrast Calvary Baptist with what had been standard a few centuries earlier. The baptistry earlier had been located near the door of the church, marking entrance into the kingdom. At Calvary the baptistry was the center of visual focus. The primary purpose of the choir earlier had been to lead and support the congregation, not to entertain; thus the choir was often placed inconspicuously at the back or side. At Calvary, the choir had been moved from behind to before, from back (support) to front (entertainment). Earlier, churches that had balconies used them for the choir, so it could support the congregation as they drew near to God. At Calvary, the balcony was for those who wanted to observe things at a distance. In these ways, the architecture of the church had been reversed, transforming it from a room oriented toward worship into a room largely oriented toward the appreciation of an entertainment: protestant studio style. The vacuum left by this loss of liturgical awareness was being filled by nationalism.

I should like to extend the analysis of such a style of worship into the absurd, and briefly consider one more manifestation of the ghetto for several reasons. First, Old Glory in the baptismal is not the essence of protestant studio style, the way the balcony is used is its essence; secondly, some may think I am picking on the baptists only. I am not, and if I had the space it would be quite easy to give equal time to everyone. Remember, we are looking at that which is most exaggerated so we can see clearly the essential point around which the rest is constructed.

#### *Garden Grove Community Church*

The design of Reverend Robert H. Schuller’s eighteen million dollar Garden Grove Community Church was originally intended to symbolize the garden of Eden, but its architectural message is almost lost amidst the noise of its studio

style. Dubbed the *Crystal Cathedral*, Schuller once described this intensely modern structure of glass and exposed steel truss work as the heart of a "22 acre shopping center for Jesus."<sup>4</sup> Its floor plan is of modified cruciform design in the shape of a four pointed star, 207 by 415 feet in length. It was originally hoped that the extensive use of plate glass throughout the building would enable the preacher's flock to observe the Eden-like landscape surrounding them, thus being reminded of the original garden of God (and of course what a great blessing it is to live in sunny California). Unfortunately the parking requirements for Schuller's drive-in shoppers, who want to worship God from the front seat of their Chevies, won out in the end. Most of the Edenic landscape was paved over, leaving only some reflecting pools and a few shrubs intact. John Pastier, a writer for a prominent architectural journal, described the cathedral as a "splendid gymnasium for an enlightened band of 1920 European naturopaths devoted to sunbathing and hydrotherapy."<sup>5</sup> For Philip Johnson, the architect of the *Crystal Cathedral*, there were four considerations that determined the final design that was approved. It was important that the structure as a symbol of Eden also be a "major attraction for drive-in, television, and walk-in worshippers." How does one worship God from the front seat of a Chevy, or from an over-stuffed chair in the living room? Comfortably from a distance of course; indeed, an effectively infinite distance from the body and blood of Christ. So we have the extended cushy pew courtesy of modern technology, the balcony taken to its logical conclusion.

In the end it was the consideration of mass theater that determined the final architectural and liturgical form of the *Crystal Cathedral*. Such seems to be an inescapable style of the democratized age we live in; religious shoppers looking for that delicate balance of God and entertainment that perfectly suits their private taste. God, amidst all this studio noise is always to be studied, sometimes to be experienced (cathartically so, a kind of religious buzz, from the safety of balcony or living room), and occasionally God is applied to pressing social problems; but God is never, never to be worshiped in

---

4. Robert G. Kennedy, *American Churches* (New York: The Crossroads Publishing Co., 1982), p. 249.

5. *Ibid.*

the old sense of the word, lest one appear to be a sacerdotalist. Classical Greek facades are found in abundance upon the faces of protestant churches not because the design, as in the eyes of the ancients, beautifully signified a holy mountain. For modern protestants they are there as an ode to that mythical bird called democracy, the great leveler and protector of all good religions. Thus the holy mount of the church is secularized, civilized, democratized, and made to conform to the supposed needs of the evangelical ghetto. Ergo, we have "Old Glory" down front in the baptismal, the focal point of the watchful "worshipper."

*Patterns From Heaven*

*God's cosmic stage*

Studio style will be impervious to renovation until protestants come to know, and believe, that essence precedes existence and that God is the author and finisher of both. Let me try to "unpack" that rather esoteric statement so we can begin to know it as something more than an abstraction — that intellectual food for thought, loved so much by the scrutinizers in the balcony, and those cool voyeurs of the video age. If I seem to treat the performing arts sarcastically, it is not because they have no place in the life of the church, but because worship is fundamentally different. Biblical worship is a command performance called by God. We are the players, and God is the audience, the ultimate critic of our performance. More than the imagination is required for participation. It is not a passive event in which only man's mind is in gear. Indeed the secular theater finds its origin in the ancient liturgical dances of the past, a rhythmic expression of the body which always seemed to end in a feast.<sup>6</sup> Dancing and

---

6. Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Sacred and Profane Beauty. The Holy in Art*, David E. Green, trans. (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1963). Although the liturgical origin of secular art is the theme of van der Leeuw's work, note particularly the chapters entitled "Holy Play" and "The Enmity Between Religion and Theater." Van der Leeuw's work is strictly from a phenomenological point of view but is of great value if read carefully, particularly for those Christians how are deeply interested in the arts. One major weakness in the work, in my opinion, is that van der Leeuw fails to treat the significance of the ritual meal, which seems always to have been central to every ancient liturgy.

feasting were activities that required the participation of the whole person and symbolized his dependence on divine blessing. Let us not deceive ourselves into thinking that biblical worship is not, as it has always been, a liturgical dance that requires a sacramental meal. Any order in worship to the accompaniment of music is a processional dance no matter how slow and subtle it might appear to the eye. The greater the pomp and ceremony, the more obvious this becomes. The fundamental connections between dance, feast, and worship seem essential, however, only to those Christians who have through the years maintained a symbolic understanding of the cosmos as God's good and perfect gift to man — a world that in every detail signifies the presence of God and the dependence of man. We can dance before God because we have life, and we have life because God feeds us in every respect.

In an analysis of the sacramental nature of the cosmos, Alexander Schmemmann, a priest of the Russian Orthodox Church, points us in the right direction when he writes: "All that exists is God's gift to man, and it all exists to make God known to man, to make man's life communion with God. It is divine love made food for man, made life for man. God blesses everything He creates, and, in biblical language, this means that He makes all creation the sign and means of his presence and wisdom, love and revelation: 'O taste and see that the Lord is good.' "7 Earth is "Manhome" not just because it is 93 million miles from a G type star, and thus the optimum place in the solar system to support 'carbon based life forms .'8 It is man's home because it is here that the divinely created order of things specifically bears witness to the true meaning of man's life. Earth is in the final analysis our special place be-

---

7. Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973), p. 14.

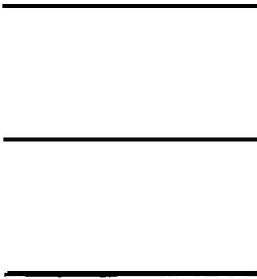
8. I have chosen terms used in modern science fiction because no other art form expresses so clearly the platonic tendency among modern humanists to want to escape the confines of space and time; particularly as they are manifest in the human body. Man's evolution to a higher life form is always presented as some kind of energy being without a tangible body; as in the films "2001: A Space Odyssey" and its sequel "2010," the popular "Star Wars" saga, and most blatantly in the first film in the "Star Trek" series Remember Yoda's instruction to Luke concerning food and flesh? He said: ". . . luminous beings have no need of such stuff." In opposition to this trend are the marvelously imaginative works of Paul Linebarger; better known by his pen name, Cordwainer Smith. Linebarger invented the word "Manhome" as a title for old Earth. In his stories, it is man's home because it is from there that true religion is exported throughout the universe,

cause it is center stage for the incarnation of God, as The Christ. In Genesis 1:14 we are told that the sun and moon were created to be "signs" separating the day from the night, marking the days and years, the "seasons," *mo'ed*, or times of holy convocation, the visitation of God. *Mo'ed* refers to a set time when men are to gather themselves together as a solemn assembly to worship before the special presence of God, as Cain and Abel brought sacrifice at the appointed time. And as one would expect, from ancient times to the present, men have marked time or calibrated their clocks by the motions of the heavens. Even modern men continue to order their lives by the turning of the spheres, but have for the most part lost any deep sense of its symbolic meaning. Men continue to regard one day above another as holidays, but do not think in terms of "holy days" because most of the biblical significance has been removed or covered over by humanistic rebellion. In a drought farmers in America would seed the clouds with silver iodide, and then pray to God for rain; but they would hardly think of the planting season beginning with a special church service.

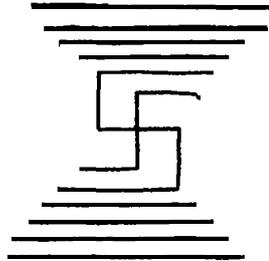
Among the ancients most temple structures had a specific astronomical orientation for telling the time of religious observance, which was always the starting point for any cultural dominion. Marking, or we might say dividing time has always carried with it a complex astronomical symbology universally expressed in antiquity; and although their origin and meaning was often attributed to a pantheon of competing gods, the over-all patterns remained the same, and were incorporated into almost every architectural structure of significance. The twenty four hour day is divided into evening and morning. Night is ruled by the moon and day by the sun, two primary astronomical signs that find their historical meaning in the redemptive plan of God, old covenant and new, one being the reflected glory of the other. I say these things now in brief because I want the reader to begin thinking in symbolic terms as the ancients did; and more particularly, as early Christians did. The early church was extremely sensitive to the symbolic significance of the sun as an image of Christ, and the New Covenant.

Continuing, then, there are also twelve months in the year, and twelve divisions of the sky, called "great houses" for the constellations. Twelve is divisible by two, the number of

solstices there are on earth, which cause the four seasons we experience. Each half-year surrounding the solstices, and bordered by the equinoxes, has days predominated to a greater degree either by light or by darkness. As you can see we quickly move back to God's two great astronomical divisions that dominate the seasons of the earth, both symbolically and physically: relatively greater darkness (night, winter) and relatively greater light (day, summer). The two solstices and the two equinoxes mark out a square among the twelve constellations, and of course the four sides of a square produce the most elemental architectural form. Earth is itself understood spatially according to the four cardinal points, north, south, east, and west.<sup>9</sup> So, if we take the four cardinal points and enclose them, thereby extending the axes to a specified boundary, we reproduce the essential character of sacred architecture that has been replicated over and over again by the hand of man (as seen in figures 2 and 3).



*Figure 2*



*Figure 3*

It has many elaborations but this simple form is always present, either in the structure itself, its ornamentation, or as part of the liturgical action that takes place within its enclosing space.

9. Austin Farrer, *A Rebirth of Images: The Making of St. John's Apocalypse* (Glouster: Peter Smith, 1970). Chapters VIII through IX deal extensively with this type of astronomical and geodetic imagery; and one thing made perfectly clear by this book is that modern protestants find the apostle's prophetic style an utter mystery because they are dead to a symbolism that was so alive and so much a part of Christian life in the first century.

As Christians who believe in the historicity of the Genesis account we see this basic motif in the garden architecture of Eden. We are told that the mountain garden of God had an eastern orientation to a land call Eden; that is, one would be facing east to enter the garden. We are also told that a river went out from Eden dividing the world according to the four cardinal directions. This was the place where God's special presence was manifest to man particularly in the evenings, and it was this place that was forbidden to man, on pain of death, after the fall. It is important to remember that the garden was present as a witness to the civilization that Cain founded, a culture that met its end in the great flood.

#### *Ancient enclosures and the labyrinth*

If we look back to the civilizations that developed shortly after the flood we find an essential continuity with the Edenic pattern. The ziggurat of Ur was literally in the form of a terraced garden mountain, with trees and shrubs planted on it.<sup>10</sup> A common symbol inscribed on potsherds found at Ur, as well as at other sites throughout ancient Mesopotamia, was that of an elaborated cross or labyrinth design known to moderns as the swastika courtesy of the Third Reich, but was of a much older origin than the Teutonic tribes of central Europe. In describing some of the labyrinth designs found at archeological sites of the "Baghouz" and "Samarra" cultures, Clyde Keller writes, "One swastika has twigs and leaves on it representing a turning tree with branches marking the quadrants, such as employed by megalithic temple site calendars. In some specimens fish swim in a circle about the tree."<sup>11</sup> The ziggurat itself was understood as the cosmic center of the earth and part of a larger square enclosure that defined the sacredness of its space. Both mountain motif, and walled enclosure are represented in figures 4 and 5 (on the following page).

It should be noted that I have superimposed an underlying geometry on the ziggurat's eastern face because as a visual concept the joining of triangles as seen here represented the

---

10. Sir Leonard Wooley, *Excavations At Ur* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1954), pp. 130-133.

11. Clyde Keller, "Tree of Life and Labyrinth," *The Epigraphic Society Occasional Publications*, vol. 5, no. 17, part 2 (1978), p. 12.

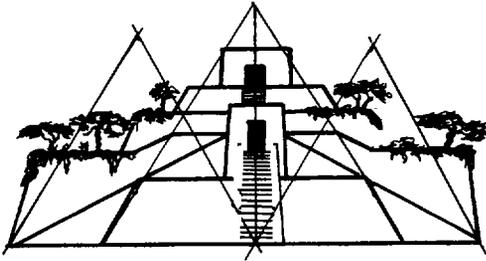


Figure 4

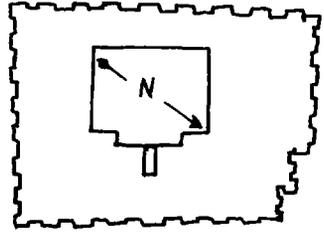


Figure 5

idea of “mountain” not only to the Sumerians, but is also found in Egyptian hieroglyphics, and the pictogram writing of ancient Chinese.

In the heavens the ancient Sumerians called the square of the constellation Pegasus (the winged horse) “1-Iku,” and seemed to think of it as the “primordial field of paradise,” bordered by the cosmic waters of Pisces (the two fish). This is of great interpretive significance because the 1-Iku was in fact the Sumerian’s fundamental unit of field measurement, and was said to have been the floor space of Utnapishtim’s ship, the Sumerian counterpart of Noah’s ark.<sup>12</sup> According to the Gilgamesh Epic, the Sumerian ark was 120 cubits by 120 cubits by 120 cubits in size.<sup>13</sup> Does that shape remind us of anything? It is the shape of the Holy of Holies. In the New Covenant, Christ is said to be “the cornerstone,” and the apostle John used it in describing the heavenly city that comes down to earth (Rev. 22:16).

In Egypt, King Zoser’s stepped pyramid at Sakkara is surrounded by a large wall, and can also be understood interpretively within the context of a cosmic garden mountain. I say this with some confidence because the hieroglyph “Het,” one

12. Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend, *Hamlet’s Mill: An Essay on Myth and the Frame of Time* (Boston: David R. Godine Publisher, 1977), p. 435.

13. Alexander Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 82.

of the basic phonetic symbols of the Egyptian alphabet, is a pictograph meaning "court yard;" (figure 6 is the Het sign).<sup>14</sup>

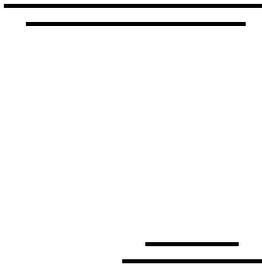


Figure 6

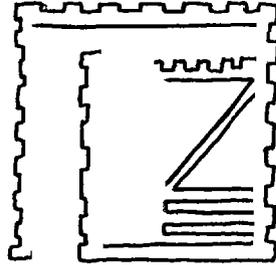


Figure 7

Its form is that of one arm of an elaborated cross, and if extended would appear as a square spiral. The *het* sign was a stylization of an image used in old kingdom Egypt for a sacred palace seal (figure 7).<sup>15</sup> There is also a "meandering" hieroglyph which is an elaboration of two arms of a cross, again in the form of a square spiral (figure 8 [see following page]). According to E. Neville it signified the sacred place of a god-king in the temple at Budastis during the Seal-festival. Neville also points out that according to murals on the temple walls, the "abode" or shrine of the god as signified by the "meandering" hieroglyph "bears certain striking resemblances to the Jewish Ark of the Covenant. It is carried in a boat on men's shoulders, and is protected by two kneeling goddesses with outstretched wings."<sup>16</sup>

By the time the "palace of Knossos" was built on Crete,

14. C. N. Deeds, "The Labyrinth," in S. H. Hooke, ed., *The Labyrinth: Further Studies in the Relation between Myth and Ritual in the Ancient World* (New York: Macmillan, 1935), p. 4.

15. The crenelated pattern of the Old Kingdom palace seal, seen above in figure 5 as the walled enclosure at Ur, was a common architectural device for defense. It allowed soldiers with spears and arrows to place those storming the walls under a lethal cross fire; and again in the minds of the ancients this pattern was indicative of a boundary that meant death if entry was sought without proper sanction.

16. Cited in Deeds, p. 5.

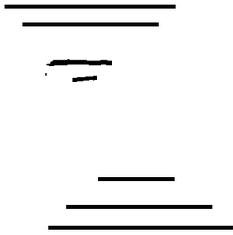


Figure 8

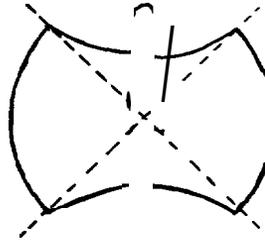


Figure 9

such labyrinth designs had become a religious and artistic convention that played a powerful iconic role throughout cultures of the Mediterranean.<sup>17</sup> It is most instructive for us to note that the Greeks maintained the sacred enclosure's basic meaning in a liturgical sense, and architecturally clarified it in the word "labrys." The word "labyrinth" is derived from the Greek word "labrys," meaning "double axe," and was used by the ancient Greeks to describe the sacred enclosure of the Minotaur, a death dealing god-king that was half man and half bull. In the double axe, the four cardinal points can be easily imagined by extending lines from the center of the axe, out toward the four points of its two edges. It appears as an X with the two opposing sides closed off, as in figure 9. A large fresco in the central court of Phaistos on Crete clearly associates the idea of the labyrinth as a double axe with the enclosed court.<sup>18</sup>

17. Hans Georg Wunderlich, *The Secret of Crete*, trans. Richard Winston (New York: Macmillan, 1974). Wunderlich's *The Secret of Crete*, is a very serious work of revisionism in the area of ancient history, especially that of Minoan civilization. He believes that Crete was a religious and commercial center for a cult of the dead that dominated the cultural life of the Mediterranean area; and considers Egypt as their best customer. A geologist by profession, Wunderlich's real contribution in this work is his critique of Arthur Evans's faulty excavation of Knossos, and of his rather imaginative conclusions based on that excavation.

18. Charles F. Herberger, *The Thread Of Ariadne: The Labyrinth of The Calendar of Minos* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1972), p. 35. Herberger's work takes its point of departure from Homer's remark in *The Odyssey*, that

The rituals that are associated with the Greek labyrinth are similar to those of the Egyptian god Osiris: sacrificial death as a means of ensuring regeneration and vitality for the king, his people and the land. The axe was probably an instrument of ceremonial death and the sacrifice was most likely a bull. The imagery of bull, axe, court yard, and labyrinth was found on almost every type of cultural item on the island of Crete. Two examples are found in figures 10, a clay seal imprint, and 11 a coin; both of which were found at the palace of Knossos.



*Figure 10*



*Figure 11*

The mysterious labyrinth dances so often written about by Greek poets and philosophers signified a descent into the underworld of death and a regenerative return to the land of the living. It must have appeared as a rhythmic procession that symbolically followed the same spiral paths of the elaborated cross. According to Plutarch, after Theseus killed the Minotaur and escaped the Labyrinth he celebrated his victory in Delos with "a memetic dance representing the circuit of the Labyrinth with measures involving turnings and retunings ." The dance became known as the Crane Dance, and was part of a sacrificial ceremony around a horned altar. According to Herberger the crane was one of the many epiphanies of a

---

Knossos was a city on Crete where Mines was king for nine years. This nine year reign is interpreted by Herberger as a ritual cycle of regeneration that was performed in the large courtyards of Crete; and presents an analysis of the famous bull-vaulting fresco of Knossos as a sophisticated lunar calendar used to mark the time when the ceremonies were to begin.

Minoan goddess and the crane's southern and northern migrations followed the seasonal cycles winter and spring.<sup>19</sup> We shall return to this in a moment when we make a brief exploration of iconography in ancient China.

Historically there has been much debate over the basic meaning of labyrinth designs because of their constant association with places indicative of both paradise and the abyss of death. Most modern commentators find this confusing because they do not appreciate the significance of divine presence in the life of worship. Consider the feelings of Cain and Abel as they prepared a sacrifice before the gate of the garden. They knew it as the entrance to paradise, but also as a place of death if one was not careful, for it was a place indicative of God's special visitation.

Finally, lest we think this motif was exclusive to the Mediterranean region, one can see the same symbolism just as elaborately displayed in ancient China.<sup>20</sup> The Chinese language is based upon hundreds of ancient pictographs (picture words), each having a specific meaning. These root characters or "radicals" are joined together to form more complex associations known as ideograms, or picture stories. The oldest examples of such writings are found inscribed on tortoise shells, and were known from ancient times by the Chinese as "the orical bones." What kind of radical is associated with the type of sacred enclosures we have been considering? Right, the enclosed cross, as seen in figure 12 (on the following page) means "cultivated field," and carries with it the same type of elaborate cosmology found among the Sumerians, only under different names.

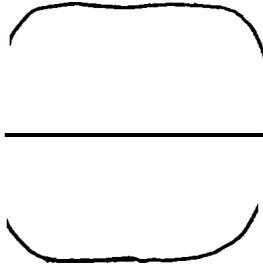
The ancient Chinese built their personal dwellings around a central garden courtyard, usually with a font, tree, or some other iconic object marking the center of the house's cosmic axis.<sup>21</sup> The front of the house was always thought of according

---

19. Herberger, p. 99.

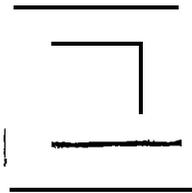
20. I am aware that pyramid temples and labyrinth signs are also found throughout the Americas, but space will not permit a treatment of these. For those interested in perusing these ideas further, the following works of Barry Fell are most important: *America B. C.: Ancient Settlers in the New World* (New York: Wallaby, 1976), *Saga America* (New York: Times Books, 1980), and *Bronze Age America* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1982).

21. Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), p. 109.



*Figure 12*

to the house's orientation to the east, a place traditionally thought of as being protected by a cosmic dragon. Labyrinth designs just like the Egyptian and Greek meandering style abound as ornamental motifs on roof tiles, eaves, and especially ritual food vessels from the earliest periods of Chinese history. The meandering pattern itself is another "radical" in the Chinese language which means "revolve," and is shown in figure 13. If you look at the way this sign was incorporated into a bronze trident, as represented in figure 14, the meaning takes on special significance when one realizes that the trident



*Figure 13*



*Figure 14*

itself is a Chinese pictogram that means mountain. <sup>22</sup>

It is supposed by archeologists that this large bronze figure was set upon a wooden pole and placed in front of the entrance of an ancient chieftain's tent. <sup>23</sup> So the literal meaning of the trident is to revolve around the mountain, and when this is considered within the context of the labyrinth imagery I am proposing here, the religious significance of such an iconic display becomes apparant.

As one might expect these same labyrinth patterns are found in the ancient ceremonial dances of China and seem to have signified essentially the same thing to the Chinese as they did to the Greeks. According to the works of A. E. Armstrong the crane dance of Theseus had its counterpart in China and was even known under the same name. In China the dance was also associated with the bull-headed deity Shen-Nung, there was an underground labyrinth in the mythos, and the Chinese also used a ritual axe for sacrifice. The ceremonies were performed every year in association with spring planting and thought of in terms of the same patterns of cosmic regeneration that were present throughout the Mediterranean.<sup>24</sup>

It is interesting to note that the early founders of Chinese civilization appear to have been strict monotheists, and that blood sacrifices were performed unto a supreme deity called Shang Ti. The purposes of these most ancient ceremonies are unclear, but they were performed at the time of the summer and winter solstices in relation to the northern and southern borders of the kingdom. Surprisingly much of the liturgical text for this "border sacrifice" reads like something you might expect from a patriarch of the old covenant: "Thy sovereign

---

22. The most archaic form of the Chinese pictogram meaning mountain is like that of the Sumerian and the Egyptian pictograms; that is, three triangles in close association, as I have pointed out earlier in this essay, The present-day Chinese character dates back to the early bronze age in China, and is a stylization of the older triangle pattern for mountain.

23. *Treasures from the Bronze Age of China: An Exhibition from the People's Republic of China* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1980), p. 151.

24. Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China* (London, Cambridge University Press, 1954) I:163-164. The pertinent articles by A. E. Armstrong that are summarized in *Science and Civilization in China* are: "The Crane Dance in East and West," *Antiquity* 17 (1943); "The Ritual of The Plough," *Folklore* 54 (1943); and "Chinese Bull Ritual and its Affinities," *Folklore* 55 (1944).

goodness is infinite. As a potter, Thou hast made all things. Thy sovereign goodness is infinite. . . . With great kindness Thou dost bear with us, and not withstanding our demerits, dost grant us life and prosperity.”<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately most scholars tend to ignore this pre-dynastic time of Chinese history as being mythologically irrelevant and expend most of their energy studying the political, economic, and religious dynamics of empire and its worship.

The ancient cosmic and religious imagery I have been describing here has played such a prominent and consistent role in man's life that some scholars of comparative religion now speak in terms of natural symbols. The psychologist Carl Jung called such powerful patterns of human thought, “archetypes,” and considered their persistence in the psyche of man to be “racial memories.”<sup>26</sup> Memories indeed, for God has set the cosmic stage in which “Manhome” spins with appropriate props of His own invention, and their importance and tenacious persistence in man's thoughts comes partly from man's created being, and partly from his experience in a redemptive history that is controlled by God in every detail, even down to the very last denial — and the cocks crow,

*Form follows sign*

I suppose this is the very center of what this essay is getting at, and the key to any revalorization of church architecture. No matter how exhaustive the scientific denial, no matter how complete the theological neglect, the patterns of the cosmos will always be the signs and signatures of God's redemptive glory. As Paul wrote to the Remans, man is without

---

25. C. H. Kang and Ethel R. Nelson, *The Discovery of Genesis: How the Truths of Genesis Were Found Hidden in the Chinese Language* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979), p. 16. This is an interesting and valuable work in that it introduces one to an area of knowledge that has largely been left untapped by Christians. The work's basic flaw is its uncritical methodology, and a tendency to overstate its case.

26. Louis Bouyer, *Rite and Man: Natural Sacredness and Christian Liturgy*, trans. M. Joseph Costelloe (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1963). In the opening chapters Bouyer presents a fine critical survey of the history of comparative religion and psychology; and considers the recent trends by some scholars to use a more consistently phenomenological approach as something of a boon to liturgical studies.

excuse, for all creation bears witness to the invisible presence of the Godhead (Rem. 1:20). God is not, and cannot be anthropomorphic; but creation is, and always will be theomorphic. The entire cosmos has been created in a pattern that signifies the glory of God, and can be understood as a symbolic environment intended to direct our worship toward the one true God. Only through humanistic rebellion does the physical world become alien to us, and set in opposition to God.

The function of church architecture should be essentially the same as creation itself as God intended: sign and symbol shaping forms into an architectural environment most conducive to biblical worship. Since creation proclaims the general presence of God to man, is it not the task of man's art to proclaim God's special presence in the church? Are we not called to make bread for the sacrament? Should we not sing and dance liturgically unto the glory of God? And should not the building in which this dance takes place be conformed according to that purpose?

The pietistic protestant response may be to cry, "Aids to worship, aids to worship; he's talking about aids to worship. Protestants are men of faith and don't need images like some superstitious peasant woman from the old country. Besides, it might lead the church into gross idolatry as it has in the past." But I am not talking about aids to worship as if physical things were some kind of crutch for the spiritually inferior. I am talking about real worship in the God-created real physical world. This world God made is "Manhome," and we are men, and there will always be signs, symbols, and images present in our worship, just as certain as we will always eat food to live.

Is there a fundamental difference between the woman that crosses herself before a statue of Christ and the man who stands at attention singing a hymn before the presence of the American flag? There are people who can do both of these things with a good conscience before God, and there are other people who can do neither of these things without committing a great blasphemy. The protestant church is a living testimony to the fact that if we strip the church of her correct biblical imagery, in time the vacuum will be filled with icons of a different sort. They are often the powerful symbols of the prevailing nation state; or, as is so often the case these days, those sentimental knick-knacks so typical of an emasculated worship: sanctuaries painted in peach pastel, with gentle

white doves floating upon the windows, while in the parking lot it seems every car has it's yellow smiley face, or a "Honk if you love Jesus" sticker on the bumper.<sup>27</sup> How can such a pitiful display stand up to the powerful iconography of the American state? No wonder petty bureaucrats find it unintimidating to *serve* notice of their federal authority over church matters in such places as these.

This kind of iconographic struggle is not new to Christianity. The old Byzantine church struggled with similar trends, and was afraid that the icons of Christ would eventually be replaced by the encroaching icons of the Emperors. The early reformers struggled against the powerful imagery of a decadent Romanism so completely that they swept away a rich Christian heritage that could have been theirs for the taking, and more importantly, eventually lost touch with the significance of the word made visible in the life of Christian worship. Louis Bouyer, a prominent liturgist of the Roman Catholic church, acknowledges that the reformers were fighting against a Roman church that had declined into magic and superstition; but also points out that the protestant reaction was itself superstitious when it came to the rite of the cup and the loaf. In tracing the consequence of this fear in protestant church architecture he points us to the vanishing altar: "Altars plainly visible from all sides were substituted for the altars of the Middle Ages which had been completely shut off in a walled chancel. In Lutheran churches the pulpit was brought as close to the altar as possible. On the altar itself, the Bible replaced the sacred vessels, so that the altar came to be regarded as a kind of secondary, imperfect place for preaching. In Calvinist churches, the pulpit, as a matter of fact, came to dominate and eventually absorb it. In the majority of Reformed churches, the altar soon disappeared. At most it remained as a kind of unrecognizable relic, in the shape of a table, which was used ritually only at intervals, and almost with an uneasy conscience."<sup>28</sup>

Of course the reformers did not have the time or the perspective that we have today in order to sort these matters

---

27. On this sentimentalizing trend in American Christianity, see Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977).

28. Bouyer, *Rite and Man*, p. 59f.

out, nor could they fully appreciate the consequences of an unfortunately overly rationalistic and stoic approach to the liturgical life of the church. Living in the protestant ghetto at the end of the 20th century, and looking squarely at such aberrations as "The Crystal Cathedral," we see them more plainly. We see the theological exhaustion here, like some great artistic style fragmented into faddish offshoots that quickly lose their novelty. And if we are honest with ourselves we know we must go back as protestants, as theologically and historically more mature Christians, and recover an architectural and liturgical heritage that our forefathers left behind because of fear and error.

God help us one day to recover and even surpass the kind of aesthetic and architectural commitment to Christianity that produced church structures like Hagia Sophia at Constantinople. It was in this Church of the Holy Wisdom in the 10th century that leaders from the Russ of Kiev were overwhelmed by the presence of God. From the "The Primary Russian Chronical" comes a witness of the splendor, and a reverence for God in worship that is all but lost on modern nation states, as the representatives from Kiev tried to explain their experience to Prince Vladimir. "Then we went to Greece, and the Greeks led us to the edifices where they worship their God, and we knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth. For on earth there is no such splendor or such beauty, and we are at a loss how to describe it. We only know that God dwells there among men, and their service is fairer than the ceremonies of other nations. For we cannot forget that beauty."<sup>29</sup>

The fact that the Church of Holy Wisdom created an impression that heaven and earth were coalescing is not accidental. Scripture teaches us that New Covenant worship actually takes place in heaven. Some passages indicate that God's heavenly cloud comes to earth in worship, as at the Mount of Transfiguration, and other passages speak as if the saints are caught up to heaven during worship, as in the Book of Revelation.<sup>30</sup> It is because worship takes place in heaven that it is

---

29. Thomas Riha, ed., *Readings in Russian Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974) I:9.

30. On worship in heaven as our pattern, see discussions in Jordan, *Sociology of the Church*.

ultimately unassailable and inviolable.<sup>31</sup> We pray, however, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," thus affirming that the historical task of man is the "heavenification" of earth. Moreover, we know from Genesis 1 that the world is itself a sign of heaven (this being especially clear in that the firmament is called "heaven," after the original heaven of Genesis 1:1). The fact that the earth is a copy of heaven means that earthly things can and should properly be brought into the heavenly environment of worship. It is man's historical task to do this, to take the world and consecrate it to God, bringing all before His throne. The studies of Meredith Kline and others have shown that the Tabernacle and the various Temples of the Old Covenant were also architectural models of heaven, and thus also of earth.<sup>32</sup> While Abram could worship God at an altar under the open firmament of heaven, it was entirely proper for his descendants, as their culture matured, to build more and more glorious houses of worship to God, proceeding from glory to glory. This is the Biblical pattern that the church is to emulate. It explains why Hagia Sophia looked the way it did.

*Hagia Sophia: The Jewel of the East*

For a number of reasons it is fitting that we conclude our explorations by going back to the ancient Byzantine church. We in the evangelical branch of the protestant ghetto have a problem with religious self conceit, especially when it comes to the accomplishments of Western Christianity. But it has been such a long time since the church anywhere has thought of itself in Biblically triumphal terms that I thought it might be instructive to look back to what real Christian empire meant at the height of its power. When was the last time in the history of the church that powerful state rulers thought it necessary to consult a church council about the theological impli-

---

31. The Romans tried through ten great persecutions to destroy the Church, but they failed. Persecutors can lop off the earthly extensions of the Church, but they can never reach her heart, for it is in heaven, and out of reach.

32. Meredith G. Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980). Kline is often heavy going. A simple introduction to this imagery is David Chilton, *Paradise Restored A Biblical Theology of Dominion* (Tyler, TX: Reconstruction Press, 1985).

cations of state policy? Emperor Justinian, who was the patron of Hagia Sophia, had to be concerned with such matters. And when was the last time, in the history of Christianity, that a nation thought it not peculiar to spend as much money on church building projects as on military defense programs?

The other reason for looking at Hagia Sophia lies in the structure itself. First of all we shall see a striking continuity with the ancient patterns we have already considered, which we can relate to Eden and the tabernacle as we visually move through the church complex. But it is in the area of the structure's adaptation to the needs of worship under the New Covenant that Hagia Sophia becomes the premier architectural achievement of the past and in my estimation far surpasses the gothic cathedral in its effectiveness. As Louis Bouyer points out, "The Byzantine architects discarded all the features of the pre-Christian basilica which were not adapted to the Christian liturgy, so they evolved a new type of building where everything was there only for its own purpose."<sup>33</sup>

Hagia Sophia, built by order of Justinian in 532 after the previous church was burned in a religious riot, was situated about 500 meters from the sea wall, and just north of the famous Hippodrome of Constantinople. I call attention to this because of the traditions and imagery surrounding the games of the Roman Empire. They were, like almost every ancient state religion from Sumeria to Greece, dominated by icons of animals possessing great power and predacity: bulls, eagles, lions, and serpents to name a few.

In contrast to this was the utterly pastoral character of Sophia's initial appearance to anyone approaching the western face of the church. According to literary sources there was a broad propylaeum, or raised gate, that a worshiper would first come to as he approached the church complex. Recent archeological work has uncovered portions of an old propylaeum with elegantly carved friezes consisting of sheep, trees, and floral motifs.<sup>34</sup> It seems that these remains were

---

33. Louis Bouyer, *Liturgy and Architecture* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1967), p. 60

34. Thomas F. Mathews, *The Byzantine Churches of Istanbul: A Photographic Survey* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976), p. 262. In comparing the works that deal with Hagia Sophia I have found this book to be a compilation of the most recent and authoritative Scholarship done in the area. so I have used it as the basic point of departure concerning the structure itself.

part of a wide enclosed atrium that lay before the main entrance of the church, and had a large marble fountain in its center dividing the garden symmetrically according to the four cardinal points. <sup>35</sup> So again we are confronted with the enclosed garden courtyard that precedes the mountain of God, as in the Edenic paradise. And there is no more apt description for Hagia Sophia's visual presence than a massive domed mountain,

The main doors of the church are, as I noted above, on the west face of the structure. That means one would be facing east to enter the church. This was true of every church of the old empire, and like the baptists below the Mason-Dixon line, Constantinople seemed to have one on every corner. The insistence of the early church on having the congregation face east in the procession of worship was not only symbolically correct, it was for the primitive church in Syria a militant statement against the Jewish tradition of the synagogue's orientation toward Jerusalem as the center of Old Covenant worship. This is really not the best place to deal with imagery of the east for it is in the church itself that the importance of this symbolism comes to light. <sup>36</sup> For the moment let us complete the exploration of the entrance to the church of Holy Wisdom.

---

35. Cyril Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire, 312-1453: Sources and Documents*, ed. H. W. Janson (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972), p. 85. Although these documents are sometimes in error concerning certain historical specifics, I have tried to use the literary sources from that period to gain some sense of what the aesthetic experience of Hagia Sophia was like for Christians living then.

36. Man was cast out of the garden to the east. Cam moved further east. Men returned to God through a westward movement, so that the approach to God in the Old Covenant was from east to west. It seems that the early church considered that Christ's return from east to *west*, in His victory, in some sense penetrated through the western wall, and now the church is victoriously moving west (at least conceptually, if not geographically). Thus, a return to God for worship is a movement from west to east, and the outflow, now positive in Christ, is from east to west. This is one possible explanation for the eastward orientation of church buildings, which reverses the orientation of Eden, the Tabernacle, and the Temple. Another slant on this is that Old Covenant worship seems to have focussed on the evening, as the sun goes down in the west (e.g., Passover), while New Covenant worship focusses victoriously on the morning and the sunrise of resurrection in the east.

At the main entrance stand three large brass doors. Beyond these one enters the outer narthex, and again passes through large brass doors to the inner narthex. Here one faces even more massive bronze doors that open into the main nave. The doors of the narthex have vase and floral patterns, and the smaller doors of the vestibule have ornate floral patterns in a spiral motif which are bordered with classic Greek labyrinth designs. All the doors are off set from one another except for the very center portal, which gives direct access to the nave without having to alter directions. It is interesting that this main portal was considered the door of the Emperor, and only the other doors forced one to turn and then turn again to enter the nave. This is reminiscent of movement through a stylized labyrinth. And if there is any doubt that the early church understood labyrinth designs as symbols of a passage through the gates of death, consider the placement of the baptistry at the west end of the church, in conjunction with its main entrance.

The baptistry and font are placed at the south west corner of Sophia's main entrance. It seems to have been a common practice in the early church to place the font at the main gate of the church. The baptistry is a domed square with an octagonal interior, and again the eight-sided interior seems to be another popular convention during this time. This was because the church saw the resurrection of Christ as occurring on the day after the sabbath, the eighth day, inaugurating a new, unfallen week for humanity. They noted that circumcision in the Old Covenant was performed on the eighth day. They noticed that Pentecost came on the fiftieth day, which was symbolically an eighth day ( $[7 \times 7] + 1$ ). Thus, it was appropriate to use the number eight in connection with baptism, for baptism is the official resurrection of the Christian, his circumcision, and his personal Pentecost.

The fonts were generally of the walk-through type in the larger churches such as Hagia Sophia, because of a desire to symbolize all of the passages through the waters of judgment found in the scriptures. Consider the conversion of the Russian people under Prince Vladimir. When the patriarchs of a large family clan walked through the waters of baptism, the entire city followed suit, including infants in their mothers arms. Such things were not uncommon in those days.

We can now make our way into the center of worship in

the church. It is dawn and light from the windows on the east face of the church and forty two portals that ring the base of the main dome begins to fill the vast space of the large square nave below. What looked like a mountain from the outside looks like a heavenly canopy from the inside. In the soft morning light, the rose and purple marble of the interior comes to life. Polished to mirror finish, the light is reflected from the lower quarters of the building back up into its ceiling high above. The main central dome curves down into four triangular points that thrust all its weight into the piers of the nave's corners; and stationed aloft, amidst a sky of dark blue mosaic with gold stars, is a six-winged seraph in each corner.

Splendid are the colors at the break of day, but vast is the space it fills. In brick and marble slab the Christian architects of Hagia Sophia spanned a greater space in a single vault than any before them: The outside dimensions of the great Pantheon of Rome neatly fit into the inside this church. After a millennium had passed the highest vault that Gothic architects in the West had achieved would still not touch the gold mosaic cross at the center of the main dome. For a Christian architect this was the challenge of the torn veil, the fundamental difference between the sacred structure of the Old Covenant and the requirements of the New Covenant. By his body and blood Christ had torn the way open into the Holy of Holies. Until that time all that was required was a small space for the high priest to enter in before the presence of God. But now that Christ had opened the way, the court, Israel's equivalent to the nave, was open to the Holy Place.

The basic symbolic pattern for all of this was correctly understood by the Byzantine church: the throne of God impressed upon creation as the dome comes down to touch the four corners of the nave. In the holy of holies, if there was one special place that the presence for God was said to be it was that empty space between the wings of the cherubs on the mercy seat. And likewise, under this great canopy of Hagia Sophia was the mercy seat of the New Covenant. Set on the eastern end of a large ambo or elevated platform, in matching marble of course, was a real gold altar, for the real gold vessels of the holy meal that a procession of officers would bring to the altar every Lord's day, to the accompaniment of the choir located to the back sides of the nave probably in the north and south colonnade. And most important to even the Emperor at this time

was the meal itself. At the other end of the ambo were silver seats for the Bishop and other ruling officers of the church. Between the altar and the "bema" (judgment) seat of the Bishop was the pulpit from which the law, the prophets, and the gospels were read every Lord's day. And yes, contrary to what protestants often believe, the word was preached in the vernacular of the people.<sup>37</sup>

How do we understand this ambo around which the nave was ordered? Just as one might understand the axes of the Gothic cruciform. The ambo was a figure of all the mountains in the scripture where God ever manifested Himself to man, and in particular a symbol of the mount of transfiguration, where man is brought before the presence of God. It was the ambo around which the congregation gathered to be fed by word and rite in a liturgical dance before the throne of God.

It was all down front for 916 years after Hagia Sophia was dedicated. The morning services went on uninterrupted except for an occasional earthquake or two, which only shook things up for a time. The church hardly missed a liturgical heart beat through good times and bad. It was a sign of stability, and hardly a soul seemed to take notice of the changes taking place down front. So for almost a millenium the ecclesiastical center of Byzantine culture performed morning mass, distributing rite and word as God's food for man to the accompaniment of the choir chanting the cadence of dawn into the nave with words like: "The groom comes forth to his bride as the sun goes forth from its chamber." "The morning star has risen in the east ." "Come Lord Jesus ."

And He came, as a wind driving the Islamic Turks before Him, for the speck of the icon in the eye blinded the whole man. But it was not the blue and gold stones shimmering on the walls that caused it. Protestant churches don't have such

---

37. The location of the ambo and the liturgical positions themselves seem unclear to most scholars. Some sources speak of as many as four ambos, while others speak of only one. The location of the ambo is most often described as generally in the eastern section of the nave, and some sources speak of the altar's being behind an iconostasis. It seems clear that significant changes took place within the liturgy itself during the 916 years of services; changes that expressed an increasingly magical view of reality. What I have done here is to describe an ambo with liturgical positions that were common in both eastern and western branches of Christianity at about the time Hagia Sophia was built.

things as icons, of course, but oh how the ghetto has come to love its charismatic leaders that get special revelation from God; and oh how they have grown to love the stars and stripes down front! You see, it was Emperors that loved going through the straight doors, and the people that encouraged them to do so. The problem came not from the mere presence of Emperor or painting, but from the abuse of these, for their belief in the supposed presence of divine rule in the flesh had become a bad habit they just couldn't break. So the Turks came and ruled with a harsh hand, and plastered over the mosaics of Hagia Sophia, turning her into a mosque until 1934, when they decided out of the kindness of their hearts to turn that once grand church into a museum for western scholars to poke around in.

But that is not the end of the story. After Vladimir converted to Christianity he had a tiny replica of Hagia Sophia built in Kiev hundreds of years before the Turkish invasion, and though the Turks ruled in Russia with the same harsh hand the church stood the storm. And I believe the Russian Orthodox Church will be here performing services a long time after scholars are finished poking around in the ruins of the mighty Politburo; for man does not live by rockets alone.

There are many lessons here for protestants at the end of the 20th century. Can we not see the speck in our eye, when looking at such things as the American flag in the baptismal, and shopping centers for Jesus? How can we expect God to take the evangelical ghetto seriously if they don't even take God seriously in worship? Is it not instructive that the new Christian right seems to see only the political, social, and economic dimensions of life; but fails to see the utter travesty of protestant studio style, which can never be anything but a pretense to biblical worship? Do they think as American secularists that man is first and foremost a political animal that needs to protect his "democratic" space? Above all else we are called to be priests of the most high God, and everything else finds its true life and order about the ambo in God's nave. Did God call Israel out of Egypt to liberate them politically and economically; or was it the liberation of true worship that God sought for His people (Ex. 3:18)?

There was a time when I believed that art must be, by its very nature, last on the agenda of Christian reform. I do not think that any more. I was told many years ago by a Roman

Catholic scholar that worship was man's highest art form, and greatest privilege, but at the time I did not have the maturity to understand what a penetrating and sweeping statement that truly was. I understand now that we must learn to build, dance, and sing unto the Lord first, as God's priests and kings on "Manhole," before we can build great and lasting civilizations. It may be many years before Christians in the protestant ghetto can even think in terms of a church such as Hagia Sophia. But, it is hoped that after finishing this essay the reader will never look at a church building again, no matter how symbolically effaced it is, without seeing it quietly whisper the ancient names of God.

## IV. RECONSTRUCTING MISSION

### THE RECLAMATION OF BIBLICAL CHARITY

George Grant

**D**ESPITE an ever-thickening veneer of recovery, the shift from assembly lines to bread lines has become one of the most prominent features of the American economic landscape. According to the Census Bureau, 1980 saw a 12.3% jump in the number of persons living below the official poverty threshold of \$9,862 for a family of four.<sup>1</sup> In 1981, the rise was 8.770%<sup>2</sup>, and in recession-scarred 1982, the figures increased another 8.170%.<sup>3</sup> In 1983, longterm unemployment (more than six months without work) hit a post-World War II record of 2.6 million persons, one-fifth of all the unemployed workers currently on the dole.<sup>4</sup> And the much ballyhooed recovery did little to slow the slide of the bottom third of the economy into dire privation, as another half million were added in 1984.<sup>5</sup> The additional tragedy of an estimated three million homeless poor scattered about in our alleyways, warehouses, and the public parks only compounded an already obstinately complex crisis.<sup>6</sup>

The Messianic State has failed. Her war on poverty is a dismal reminder that gross mismanagement, fiscal irresponsibility, misappropriated authority, and escalating calamity are the inevitable results of untethered socialism.<sup>7</sup> And so the soup lines grow. The flop houses fill to overflowing. The park benches are crowded at night as well as during the day. The newest token of socialism's failure is an indigent's cardboard box.

---

1. *Washington Post*, February 3, 1981.

2. *Detroit Free Press*, July 27, 1982.

3. *Wall Street Journal*, January 11, 1983.

4. *USA Today*, January 12, 1984.

5. *New York Times*, November 9, 1984.

6. *Newsweek*, January 2, 1984.

7. Murray Rothbard brilliantly documents the failure of the federal war on poverty in *Man, Economy, and State* (New York: NYU Press, 1975).

Sadly, the church has failed as well. There is no room for us to exult in statism's demise. We have no cause for victory-provoked gloating. For victory eludes us still.

Instead of modeling alternatives, the church has been idle.<sup>8</sup> Instead of providing answers, the church has been silent. Instead of reconstructing culture, the church has been indifferent. Instead of establishing dominion, the church has been in retreat.

Although Christian Reconstruction has been undertaken with verve in a number of areas, most notably in law, government, history, bio-medical ethics, and economics, vast realms remain untouched. Such is the lot of Biblical charity.

If the goal of building a Christian civilization out of the rubble of contemporary American culture is to be achieved in any measure, reconstructionists must tend to this all too obviously untended issue. We must hammer out a theology of Biblical charity. We must develop committed churches. We must tailor the various outreaches and programs to specific local needs. And we must effect alternatives to the State's flailing efforts. In short, we must develop a functioning model of Biblical charity . . . not just in theory, but in the tough realm of practice.<sup>9</sup>

Much of what follows is the fruit of work toward just such an end in Houston, Texas. We never had the luxury of sitting back and formulating our policies and programs at ease. We were in the midst of a crisis. At one point in 1982, we had between 30,000 and 60,000 homeless, dispossessed poor camped about town in tent cities, living out of the backs of their cars.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, nearly 15% of our metropolitan region was facing the trauma of unemployment.<sup>11</sup> Social service agencies

---

8. It must be admitted that a new social awareness has begun to emerge among evangelicals, but its impact has proven to be minimal at best. Note John R. W. Stott's comments in *Involvement* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1985).

9. To that end, note my book, *Bringing in the Sheaves*, which develops, supports, and documents the assertions and concepts of this article. Published by American Vision in Atlanta, the book is part of a comprehensive project that includes study guides, video tapes, workbooks, newsletters, seminars, youth materials, and audio cassettes, all designed to help families and churches hammer out Biblical models of charity.

10. *Houston Chronicle*, November 30, 1982.

11. *USA Today*, January 10, 1983.

were buried beneath an avalanche of need. We had to do something. So we did.

We made mistakes. Lots of them. Sometimes we learned from them; sometimes we, for quite some time, didn't. Eventually, however, a pragmatic model was constructed that fit both the Biblical precepts we'd discovered through diligent study, and the obvious need we'd confronted through diligent labor,

What we've achieved in Houston is not the panacea for all social ills from now 'til evermore; but it is a start. What we've learned in Houston is that functioning models of Biblical charity are not only necessary, they are possible. What we've learned in Houston is that small churches, starting with little or no money, little or no resources, little or no staff, and little or no experience, can put together a formidable challenge to the modern notion that poverty is a problem too big for anyone but the government to handle. What we've learned in Houston is that we can really make a difference in our world, if we only take seriously our high calling as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

### *Laying Foundations*

Anabaptism is the current darling of the American evangelical church. "Experts" as far ranging as Martin Marty and John H. Yoder and Harvey Cox have statistically documented the overwhelming "Baptistification of the church in America." Invariably, the reason given for this socio-theological drift from reformation moorings is simply that Anabaptism has addressed the tough issues of our times. They have answers. They have alternatives. They have models. No matter that those answers, alternatives, and models have been hewn from the fantasies of humanistic humanitarianism. No matter that those answers, alternatives, and models are the result of theological and exegetical gymnastics. No matter that those answers, alternatives, and models are propagated by yellowed journalism, reddened ideology, and blackened opinionation. No matter that those answers, alternatives, and models are simply a cover for more statist intervention.

Anabaptism's influence has been especially felt in the area of charity. Discussion of wealth and poverty is its forte. Ana-

baptists, like Sider,<sup>12</sup> Wallis,<sup>13</sup> Simon,<sup>14</sup> Gish,<sup>15</sup> Roos,<sup>16</sup> Taylor,<sup>17</sup> Gunderson,<sup>18</sup> and Schwartz-Nobel,<sup>19</sup> are virtually the only voices emanating from Christendom on the issue of compassion and welfare. That must change. Now. But in order for reformed churches to formulate answers, alternatives, and models, we must first do the hard work of hammering out a solid theology of Biblical charity. We must lay foundations.

Those foundations begin with the Scriptural distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor. "No theory of helping the poor may be said to be Christian if it does not discriminate among the poor. The old distinction, now despised among social workers, between the deserving and undeserving poor, is a reflection of a Biblical theme."<sup>20</sup>

This distinction becomes more than evident as we note the Law's provision for gleaners as opposed to sluggards (Leviticus 19:9-10, 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:19-21; Proverbs 6:6-11, 19:15, 21: 25-26). Standing within the covenant, the gleaner had the privilege of provision and care. Standing outside the covenant, the sluggard did not. Willing to labor long and hard, the gleaner was the recipient of regular charity. Unwilling to lift a hand, the sluggard was not.

Comprehending this distinction leads us to conclude several things without which no notion of charity can hope to be Biblical: first, in Scripture, "the primary source of regular charity to the poor was the practice of gleaning."<sup>21</sup> Biblical charity knows nothing of promiscuous handouts to sluggards.

12. The infamous Ron Sider, author of *Rich Christians* (IVP).

13. Jim Wall is, editor of *Sojourners Magazine*, and author of *Agenda for Biblical People* (Harper).

14. Arthur Simon, founder of Bread for the World, and author of a book from Paulist Press of the same title.

15. Art Gish, contributor to *Wealth and Poverty: Four Christian Views of Economics*, edited by Robert Clouse (IVP).

16. Joe Roos, publisher of *Sojourners Magazine*.

17. John V. Taylor, author of *Enough is Enough* (Augsburg).

18. Gary Gunderson, editor of *Seeds Magazine*.

19. Loretta Schwartz-Nobel, author of *Starving in the Shadow of Plenty* (McGraw-Hill).

20. Herbert Schlossberg, *Idols for Deduction* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1983).

21. David Chilton, *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt Manipulators* (Tyler, Texas, Institute for Christian Economics, Third revised ed., 1985) p. 56.

Secondly, this meant that, "recipients of charity had to be diligent workers."<sup>22</sup> Clearly, "this was indeed charity, but charity in which the recipient had to work, in that gleaning the fields was hard, back-breaking work."<sup>23</sup> Third, "the lazy and improvident could expect no saving intervention by a benevolent bureaucrat."<sup>24</sup> If he worked, he ate. If he chose to laze about, then he and his family went hungry. Fourth, charity was dispensed privately, by the landowners, not by an overarching state institution. "Welfare in the Bible is almost invariably private in nature."<sup>25</sup>

No one who has read the Scripture with an eye toward accuracy can deny that God's people have an obligation to help the impoverished.<sup>26</sup> But it is not an indiscriminate obligation. It is not a blinding, binding responsibility. Biblical charity discriminates. Its discrimination is not arbitrary; rather, it is in accord with the limits of God's Law.

In his seminal work, entitled *Idols for Destruction*, Herbert Schlossberg states that, "Christians ought not to support any policy toward the poor that does not seek to have them occupy the same high plane of useful existence that all of us are to exemplify. 'Serving the poor' is a euphemism for destroying the poor unless it includes with it the intention of seeing the poor begin to serve others, and thereby validate the words of Jesus that it is better to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). Whereas humanitarian social policy keeps people helplessly dependent, Christians should seek to remove them from that status and return them to productive capacity."<sup>27</sup>

Amen. And amen.

Biblical charity does not attempt to smooth over economic crisis by making privation somewhat more acceptable. It attempts to solve economic crisis. Biblical charity does not attempt to help families adjust to their situation. It attempts to change their situation. Biblical charity does not strive to make

---

22. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

23. R. J. Rushdoony, *Politics of Guilt and Pity* (Fairfax, VA: Thoburn Press, 1970).

24. Chilton, p. 57.

25. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender* (Tyler, Texas: Geneva Ministries, 1981) p. 134.

26. See chapters 3-5 in my *Bringing In the Sheaves* (Atlanta: American Vision Press, 1985).

27. Schlossberg, pp. 314-315.

poverty and dependence more comfortable. It strives to make productivity and independence more attainable. Any program of welfare that does not take this into account hurts more than it helps.

This is one of the reasons why the federal government's war on poverty is such a dismal failure. By asserting its universal responsibility to care for the poor, by centralizing the criteria of poverty, by bureaucratically administering relief, by reducing the importance of local conditions and accountability, and by institutionalizing the apparatus for care, the State has created "a permanent welfare class which owes its survival (it thinks) to the continued generosity of the State."<sup>28</sup> The war on poverty will never be met with "anything except devastation and defeat simply because it does not (and cannot) help people get on their feet. It is but a salve to momentarily succor mortal wounds. It is but a drop in the bucket.

When the church, in its zeal to procure mercy for the broken and justice for the downtrodden, goes awhoring after more statist intervention, the result is inevitably more statist malediction.<sup>29</sup> And, when the church simply mimics the government by promiscuously dispensing groceries and other goods and services, the end result is little better.

A handout does not charity make!

Every effort must be made to ensure that our helping really does help. A handout may meet an immediate need, but how does it contribute to the ultimate goal of setting the recipient aright? How does it prepare him for the job market? How does it equip him for the future? How well does it communicate the Law of God and the precepts of Biblical charity? The kind of evangelical myopia that envisions the Scriptural duty to the poor as a simple transfer of funds simply misses the boat. Adherents of such short-sighted thinking obviously do not comprehend the first thing about Biblical charity or economics.

Biblical charity is not built upon the flimsy foundations of

---

28. North, p. 137.

29. See Charles Murray's brilliant description and documentation of this in *Losing Ground* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), as well as the multitudinous works of Thomas Sowell, Walter Williams, Murray Rothbard, George Gilder, and Gary North.

guilt-edged sentimentality. It is built upon God's Law.<sup>30</sup> It is built upon a bootstrap ethic of hard work, determination, productivity, and personal responsibility.

Sustaining a life through a handout or two is quick and easy. But such short-term efforts create a permanent welfare under-class. Equipping a life through counsel, training, accountability, and referral is time-consuming and difficult. But such long-term efforts create self-sufficient, productive workers. Thus, anything less than the time-consuming and the difficult is an unadulterated waste. Anything less deserves our boisterous repudiation. Anything less is something other than Biblical charity.

### *Erecting the Framework*

Once the foundations of good theology have been laid, a viable framework for Biblical charity must be erected. It is not enough to know that the State has failed. It is not enough to understand the dangers of Anabaptism. It is not even enough to formulate dynamic theology dissertations and affirmations. Application must be undertaken.

Unfortunately, a couple of fired-up theologians and pastors are extremely limited in the amount of application they can undertake. In order for Biblical charity to become viably functional, whole congregations must become involved. The fired-up theologians and pastors must reproduce their convictions in those people that God has placed within their sphere of influence. What Biblical charity needs is not so much dynamic spokesmen, but diligent disciples. What Biblical charity needs is committed congregations. And, in order to have committed congregations, a comprehensive missions strategy will have to be implemented in each of our local bodies.

This comprehensive missions strategy will need to involve several different aspects of church life, or actually, every aspect of church life:

First, the preaching program of the church must be mobilized to motivate, equip, and educate the saints so that they can then undertake the work of the ministry (Ephesians

---

30. Note 'the battle of the blueprints' in *Wealth and Poverty. Four Christian Views of Economics*, edited by Robert Clouse (Downer's Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1984),

4:12). But all too often, our preaching, the primary means of reproducing Scriptural convictions in others, has been entirely inadequate. Our focus in homiletics has either been doctrinal and exegetical to the near exclusion of specific, pragmatic application, or is awash in an existential piffle, drivel, and swill. As a result, our sermons have lost their life. They are either dry or soppy. They are either intangible or incorrigible. But, either way, they lack both heart and art. The chief end of preaching is to proclaim God's Truth and, thus, to give Him glory. To be sure, there is no glory in either dead orthodoxy or flash-in-the-pan contentlessness.

In order for Biblical charity to see resurgence in our day; in order to mobilize our congregations for Good Samaritan effectiveness, our preaching must emphasize both content and passion. Our homiletical art must match the level of excellence in our homiletical exposition. Men's minds must be informed, and their hearts must be stirred. A sermon's intent is not simply to transfer information or to provoke metaphysical fireworks. It is to motivate. It is to change. It is to ignite zeal. It is to reproduce convictions. It is to set into action the army of God. It is to lay the foundations for a Biblical worldview and an optimistic militancy among God's own.

Why not encourage your pastor to undertake a series of sermons on the subject of Biblical charity? Perhaps an exposition of Ruth? Or, if he is hesitant, maybe you could begin to give him a few books on the subject. Keep him informed about the works of compassion that faithful followers of Christ the world over are undertaking. Encourage him. Support him.

When the pulpits of America begin to sound the strains of the Good Samaritan faith, a vast army of motivated, dedicated warriors for Truth will emerge. When missions-oriented sermons ring forth once again, then we will have committed congregations.

Second, the worship of the saints must become missions-oriented if Biblical charity is to become a reality.

Of course, much of the work of stirring a congregation's soul rests on the shoulders of liturgy. It is not the sole responsibility of the sermon. In fact, the whole service of worship, from the beadle to the benediction, should ideally work together toward that goal. Of course, the chief end of worship is not to be entertaining or enthralling or enthusing. It is to

give God glory. But there is no glory in dead orthodoxy. Sadly, our churches have uncritically copped either historical or contemporary liturgical forms with no eye toward theological, or cultural, or situational appropriateness. Thus, there is little motivation and even less glory.

In order for Biblical charity to see resurgence in our day, worship must receive the same kind of careful scrutiny it received in the 16th-century during the Reformation. Creativity must combine with doctrinal and historical faithfulness. Vision and conviction must hammer out forms that will unite the people of God in determined activity for the Kingdom.

A whole catalogue of hymns has been gathered over the years that underscores the precepts of the Good Samaritan faith. Why don't we begin to sing such classics as *Bringing In the Sheaves*, *Where Cross the Crowded Ways*, *Ne're Empty Handed*, *Rise Up*, *O Men of God*, *To the Work*, *Make Me A Channel of Blessing*, and *Forward Through the Ages* once again? Why don't we loose the motivating and equipping power of worship against the forces of privation?

The Book of Revelation makes clear that the activity of God's people in worship actually, and ultimately, changes the course of history (Revelation 4-5).<sup>31</sup> To slough through worship means that we will have to slough through history. To participate dynamically in worship means that we will be able to participate dynamically in history. Worship, then, must be marshaled to the task of defeating the scourge of poverty.

Third, the missionary implications of the sacraments, especially the Lord's Supper, must be recovered. James B. Jordan reminds us that, "Historically, the church has particularly remembered the poor in connection with the Lord's Supper. That's because this is God's gift to the starving. It is not the gift of philosophy or of theology, of ideas or inward feelings. First and foremost, it is the gift of food! Thus, for instance: the Christian Reformed churches traditionally have a special collection for the poor right after the quarterly communion meal. And the historic churches take up food and clothing for special gifts at Christmas and Easter, that all may feast."<sup>32</sup>

---

31. David Chilton, *Paradise Restored* (Tyler, Texas: Reconstruction Press, 1985), Chapters 17, 19, 24.

32. Private Letter, February, 1985. The various articles written by Jordan over the past few years in Geneva Ministries' newsletters, *The Geneva*

Thus comprehended, the Lord's table, where we reap His bounteous grace provisions, becomes a continual provocation to missions. Thus comprehended, the Lord's table becomes an ever-present reminder of our earthly task.

Fourth, the Sunday School also must be utilized as a dynamic prod for missions once again. Instead of being a dilapidated vehicle for watered-down moralisms, the Sunday School could serve as an intensive training camp for dedicated Kingdom activists. Rescued from banality, Sunday School could be the platform from which strategies are plotted, tactics are launched, and reclamation is begun.

Why not start a weekly elective Sunday School class or training union series to explore what Scripture has to say about poverty and the appropriate Christian response to it?<sup>33</sup> If we start small and take our learners along in smooth, carefully plotted stages, it won't be too terribly long before we have a whole slew of Christians chomping at the bit, raring to jump headlong into the battle against hunger, hopelessness, and the welfare trap.

Fifth, special events and meetings must be held periodically to stir the passion for, and instill the vision of, Biblical charity. Since most churches already schedule special revivals or Bible conferences or prophecy seminars or missions conferences each year, why not devote some of the time to the problem of poverty and its Scriptural solutions? Why not invite a speaker or two who have actually begun the work of the Good Samaritan faith to detail the ins and outs, the ups and downs of their ministries?

During the heyday of foreign missions, just before the turn of the century, missionaries visited in our churches on a very regular basis, sharing their experiences and inspiring many to follow in their footsteps. Why not renew that old and venerable tradition? But, this time, why not mix in a few "home missionaries" who are working with the poor as well as those called by God to foreign fields? The distressing trend away

---

*Papers* and *The Geneva Review*, are especially helpful in understanding the proper place of liturgy and the sacraments in the church and for the formulation of its ministries.

33. See the study guide for *Bringing In the Sheaves*, which has been designed to translate the concepts of Biblical charity into a Bible study or Sunday School format. Entitled *Blueprint for Charity*, it is available from American Vision in Atlanta.

from an emphasis on missions has impoverished the church and has diminished the motivations of our congregations to fulfill the Great Commission. But special meetings, conferences, and seminars can help change all that.

Sixth, the deacons of the church must be mobilized for the work of missions. Since their Scriptural task is almost exclusively defined by the work of Biblical charity,<sup>34</sup> they are a natural starting place. Capture the hearts of the deacons, and you've captured many a church. Encouraging deacons to read books on Biblical charity, or having time set aside in each deacons' meeting to study the Scriptural injunctions concerning the care of the poor, would go a long way to achieving that end. Or, what about having a deacons' retreat where a pastor, an evangelist, or a Biblical charity pioneer can lead in an intensive training session? Or, perhaps a series of Saturday morning prayer-and-study breakfasts, where the issue of welfare and poverty and the church's response can be discussed?

If the church is to be motivated to undertake the monumental task of building alternative structures of Scriptural compassion, the deacons' support is critical. Don't push. Don't shove. But, by all means, don't bypass the deacons.

Seventh, the youth of the church must be enlisted in the work of missions. Many of the great revivals the church has experienced throughout history, and many of the great missions movements, began with the young. But, aside from that very obvious lesson, church history also teaches us that any effort that ignores the youth is a short-lived effort, lasting only one generation. That simply won't do in the case of Biblical charity. Its complexity and magnitude requires us to think in multi-generational terms.

The punch-and-cookies approach to youth ministry is a tragic waste of time, money, and lives.<sup>35</sup> Why not involve the youth of the church in Biblical charity projects instead? Why not orient the youth ministry to the service of others? Why not channel the standard youth ministry fare of fund-raising, missions trips, fellowships, etc., into the fulfillment of the Good Samaritan mandate? Why not unleash the creative and productive labors of Christian kids on problems that really matter?

---

34. See Chapters 3 and 5 in *Bringing In the Sheaves*.

35. See the youth book for the *Bringing In the Sheaves* package entitled *Faith at Wink*, also available from American Vision.

After all, if we win the hearts and minds of the next generation, we've won the future.

Eighth, even counseling can be enhanced by giving it a missions orientation. It is a common understanding among pastoral counselors that service to others is the best therapy that a person can engage in. Many difficulties that Christians bring into counseling sessions have as their best solution discipline, activity, selfless giving, and dedication. In the work of Biblical charity, people can exercise their spiritual gifts. They know they are accomplishing something important. Body life begins to flower spontaneously. Involvement intensifies. What better way to infect a congregation with the Good Samaritan faith? What better way to begin to motivate Christians to action?

Ninth, other media also must be marshaled to the cause if we are to have committed, convicted congregations forming the framework for Biblical charity.<sup>36</sup> Though preaching, teaching, worship, the diaconate, the youth, etc., are central, the performing and graphic arts must by no means be ignored. Nor must we slight newsletters, books, video tapes, audio cassettes, films, radio broadcasts, data basing, and cable television.

Obviously, these suggestions only touch upon the many and various ways that congregations can be motivated to take action on behalf of the poor. In fact, no matter how many pages might be devoted to the subject, we could no more exhaust the possibilities than we could drain the deep. But the point is, and hopefully it is a point well taken, any and every means the church has at its disposal must be dispatched to the end of stirring up families with a zeal to flesh out the Good Samaritan faith.

Biblical charity requires an army. A couple of people here and a couple there simply won't cut it. Our objective is to entirely supplant the federal welfare folly with genuine Scriptural forms. But it will take the framework of entire congregations, entire families, a whole host of dedicated, committed believers to do it.

Nothing short of a comprehensive missions strategy, encompassing every aspect of church life, can hope to enlist that kind of response.

---

<sup>36</sup>. See my forthcoming book, *Symbiosis: Biblical Balance in Art, Music, and Ideas*.

If, on the other hand, we are unwilling to make the sacrificial effort necessary to motivate our congregations and ultimately to roll back the debilitating effects of welfare by equipping the poor through Biblical charity, we'd better admit it. We'd better stop complaining about the federal dole, "if not out of a sense of decency," says Tom Landess, "at least out of a healthy regard for the vicissitudes of modern industrial life and the fickleness of the electorate." That way, "if we run across a battered and penniless stranger while traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho, we won't have to stop and help him ourselves. We can just call the appropriate agency and tell the bureaucrats where along the road to look for the body."<sup>37</sup> We can then wash our Levitical hands clean of blood-guilt and scamper on our merry way.

### *Stop, Look, and Listen*

Once the theological foundations are laid and the community framework is erected, the next step, crucial to the development of a functioning model of Biblical charity, involves the assessment of local needs. Know your community. Look about. Examine the highways and byways of your area with new eyes of awareness and discernment. Do your demographic homework.

What is the local unemployment rate? Is it rising or falling?

Are there dilapidated Torinos and Bonneville, loaded to the hilt with the tattered remnants of precious possessions, dotting the roadsides?

Are there fire-lit camps scattered about the fringes of your town: under bridges, along the river, or beside the lake?

Do abandoned warehouses give sanctuary to the dispossessed against the night.

Are the public shelters, soup kitchens, and rescue missions filled to overflowing?

Have the newspaper want ads shrunk from a thick bundle to a few truncated notes tacked to the end of the business section?

How many retail failures have marred the glittering track record of your local Chamber of Commerce?

---

37. *Wall Street Journal*, January 3, 1985.

What is the vacancy rate at the various apartment mega-complexes in town? And, how busy has the constable been in enforcing evictions?

Know all the whos, whats, whens, wheres, and whys of your community. Talk to people. Find out what's going on at the social service agencies that maintain nearby offices. Swap stories with other churches. Read the local news. In short, stop, look, and listen.

Every community is different. In order to be effective, therefore, your charity outreach must be precisely tailored to your unique situation. Obviously, a church in a posh suburb of San Jose is not going to be able (or willing) to duplicate the charity programs of an inner-city church in Chicago. A small, rural church in Southern Ohio will want a substantially different approach to implementing Biblical charity than a large urban church on the edge of Houston's industrial complex. Although the Scriptural prescriptions for the exercise of charity are immutable, their applications are extremely flexible.

Except for an occasional evangelistic survey,<sup>38</sup> reformed churches have left demographics to the domain of the pollsters, the sociologists, the advertisers, and last, but not least, the liberal bottom-rung bureaucrats. Why? Demographic acumen can provide the raw materials for an informed, precise, effective, focused, efficient, and productive charity outreach. <sup>39</sup> No need to administrate by guess and by golly. No need to flail about in uncertainty. No need to mindlessly mimic the "proven successes" of others. No need to duplicate services and ministries ably provided elsewhere. Demographics can take the foundation of good theology and the framework of committed believers, and channel them to appropriate effect. Demographics can mean the difference between a powerful societal and spiritual impact and a "gospel blimp."

Any time the church ventures into unknown and unexplored realms, there will be elements of risk. We will, of necessity, have to learn from our multitudinous mistakes. But, by informing ourselves about the community about us, those risks are reduced and those mistakes are minimized. Demo-

---

38. See "Bread and Butter Evangelism" in the *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, Volume 8, Number 2, for more details on this. In the article, Gary North demonstrates both demographic acumen and networking proficiency.

39. See Chapter 8 in *Bringing In the Sheaves*.

graphic research is, thus, of prime importance.

It is clear that the reformed church in our day needs to pioneer Biblical charity outreaches. We are to jump into the struggle for genuine justice and mercy with both feet. But we are to look before we leap.

That being settled, the program of Biblical charity can proceed to specifics and incidentals. The foundations being laid, the framework erected, and the demographics established, it is now time to turn to such mundania as food, shelter, and jobs.

### *Loaves and Fishes*

Short-term emergency food relief is the obvious stepping off point for the development of a functioning model of Biblical charity. Once all the theological and theoretical homework has been done, it is time to begin a food pantry. Food is easily managed and inventoried. Food is easily disbursed. And, most of all, food is a necessity. In a hungry world, food is priority number one.

The federal response to hunger has, for years, focused on food giveaway policies. The Food Stamp program, the School Lunch and Breakfast programs, the Special Supplemental Food program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), the Summer Food program, the Child Care Feeding program, the Elderly Nutrition programs, the Meals-on-Wheels program, and the FDIC Cheese and Butter Distribution programs were designed to eradicate the awful menace of hunger in our land. But the Messianic State's loaves-and-fishes mentality is bankrupting the entire system. And still a hungry hoard of federal dependents cry out for more. It's apparent that the federal food programs, as monolithic as they are, are inadequate. The State has failed. People are hungry.

In response to the hunger crisis, evangelical have called on the government to add still more food relief programs.<sup>40</sup> They have urged legislators to honor the so-called "right to food."<sup>41</sup> They demand that radical wealth redistribution programs be enacted.<sup>42</sup> Or, for lack of any other tactic, they supplement the federal giveaway debacle by imitating its extravagant ces-

---

40. Glenn Hinson, *Roots of Hope* (Decatur, GA: Seeds, 1979).

41. Arthur Simon, *Bread for the World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975).

42. Ronald J. Side., *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP, 1977).

sionance.<sup>43</sup> Loaves and fishes for everyone. Come one, come all.

Biblical charity also focuses on the food relief, but from an entirely different perspective. It takes as its model the Old Testament provision for gleaners. Thus, an effective distinction has been made between the sluggard and those willing to labor for their sustenance. Instead of trading his dignity for a five-pound block of cheese, the gleaner harvests grain left at the edges of the field. He works. He provides for his family by the sweat of his own brow. To be certain, he is assisted by his charitable brethren, but it is by his labor that fruit is brought forth. The gleaner model is easily transposable to our own situation. Very simply, instead of the church giving the food pantry's provisions away, they are exchanged. Groceries in exchange for work.

Every church has innumerable tasks that could be undertaken by our modern gleaners: yard work, painting, trash pick-up, janitorial tasks, envelope stuffing, minor repairs, etc., etc. If, by some wild chance, there is no work available at the church, then the gleaners can be enlisted for public service: litter clean-up, rubbish removal, and park maintenance. The entire community benefits.<sup>44</sup>

Non-perishable goods can be stored in a small room or closet at the church, or at a centrally located home. When impoverished folks approach the pastor for help, he can gather the groceries while the gleaners are at work on their assigned task. This kind of approach accomplishes several crucial functions at once: first, the deserving and undeserving poor are instantly differentiated. Sluggards won't work. Secondly, administration and staffing are cut to a bare minimum. There is no need for a central bureaucracy. Third, legitimacy is established and arbitrariness is eliminated.

In this way, loaves and fishes are made available to any and all. But only those willing to comply with Biblical standards will consume them.

### *Gimme Shelter*

After food, shelter is charity's priority. A full belly is little compensation if it is cold and exposed. A roof overhead is a

---

43. W. Stanley Mooneyham, *What Do You Say to a Hungry World?* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1975).

44. See Chapter 7 in *Bringing In the Sheaves*.

bare minimum that Biblical charity cannot ignore.

And hopelessness is a real problem.

A helter-skelter of chairs, tables, clothes, dishes, and toys heaped irreverently on a sidewalk; an angry landlord and distraught constables confronting a former tenant, even angrier and more distraught than they: this is eviction. And, sadly, though not a pretty sight, it is an all too common sight.

According to a recent congressional study of homelessness, evictions have increased a hundred-fold over the last five years.<sup>45</sup> Even the recovery-enhanced 1984 saw a 28% jump in the number of tenant expulsions.<sup>46</sup>

Theresa Walden, a regional manager for Harold Farb Properties, the nation's largest apartment developer, reported that, "In the past, most of our evictions have involved irresponsible tenants. They were either loud, or destructive, or chronically late with rent payments. But the recent spate of evictions have involved families that have always been responsible before, they've just fallen on hard times: unemployed or what have you. We try to work with them as long as we can, but after a while, well. . . ."

The National Conference of Mayors estimates that, of the three to four million homeless poor in the United States, only about one million are "chronically, permanently unemployed and homeless." The rest are merely "facing temporary economic setbacks . . . due to eviction, family strife, or other unexpected factors."<sup>47</sup>

They have always been with us. The same beggar who stretched a supplicant palm toward the passing pilgrim outside ancient Jericho can be found today on Colfax Avenue in Denver, still thirsty for wine. The bruised and broken woman who slept in the gutters of medieval London now beds down in a cardboard box on Peachtree Street in Atlanta. The feeble-minded ragman who pillaged the alleys of 17th-century Rotterdam now collects tattered bits of rubbish in shopping bags from MacY's on the corner of 34th and 7th in Manhattan's Midtown. They exist on the fringes, taking meals and shelter when and where they can.

Most of us view their very existence as a shame, a distaste-

---

4.5. *Humble Echo*, January 9, 1985.

46. *Ibid.*

47. *Ibid.*

ful fact of life faced, when it must be faced at all, with averted eyes. But the motley ranks of America's homeless are swelling and the recovery has yet to brighten their plight.

Scattered anecdotes have given way to a monolith of evidence. Though unemployment figures continue to dip to new lows, cities and volunteer groups across the country are swamped with thousands more requests than ever. In Houston, 18,000 received emergency family housing in 1983, 48 triple the number sheltered just a year before.<sup>49</sup> In Detroit, auto sales are stronger, but the city estimates homelessness is up 5070.50 In St. Louis, the Salvation Army alone received 4,155 requests, up 47% over last year.<sup>51</sup>

No region has been spared. Atlanta's first overnight shelter opened in 1979; now the city has 27.52 Salt Lake City's mayor insists his city has become a "blinking light" for wandering homeless, while Phoenix and Tucson complain that hordes of transients have descended on Arizona and must be repulsed.<sup>53</sup> "Our shelters were full in September, long before it turned cold," says Audrey Rowe, commissioner of social services in Washington, D. C.<sup>54</sup> With 100 city beds for about 20,000 homeless, Chicago, like most localities, relies on church and community groups.<sup>55</sup> Unfortunately, the churches and community groups have been either ill-equipped, or unwilling, to take on the ever-escalating crisis.

George Getschow, of the Wall Street Journal, has reported that, "Across the United States, ten of thousands of families and individuals . . . have joined the ranks of the new poor . . . homeless, jobless, and dispossessed. Not since the mass economic distress of the Great Depression, which drove the nation's destitute into tin-and-tent towns called Hoovervilles, have so many working-class people suddenly found themselves in such dire straits."<sup>56</sup>

---

48, Source: United Way of the Texas Gulf Coast, Information and Referral.

49. *Houston Chronicle*, June 2, 1983.

50. *Detroit Free Press*, December 16, 1984.

51, Source: Salvation Army, St. Louis.

52. Source: Salvation Army, Atlanta.

53, *Newsweek*, January 2, 1984.

54. *Houston Chronicle*, June 2, 1983.

55. *Newsweek*, January 2, 1984.

56, *Wall Street Journal*, November 12, 1982.

It is estimated that there are now nearly three million homeless "new poor" in America today.<sup>57</sup> They crowd into tent cities, living out of the backs of their cars, under bridges, or, at best, in abandoned sub-standard shelters. In Pittsburgh, homeless men sleep in caves above the Allegheny River.<sup>58</sup> In Los Angeles, homeless men and women go door-to-door in suburban neighborhoods, peddling fruit.<sup>59</sup> In our nation's capital, homeless women sleep on Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House.<sup>60</sup> In Houston, the state director of the AFL-CIO tells the jobless to stay out of Texas: "There are no jobs here," he says, "and there are no beds."<sup>61</sup>

Though far from being a "Grapes of Wrath" situation, the crisis is still a formidable one. On the East Coast, Baltimore has nearly 10,000 homeless,<sup>62</sup> Philadelphia has 8,000,<sup>63</sup> New York City has 36,000,<sup>64</sup> and the nation's capital has nearly 8,000.<sup>65</sup> In the Midwest, where unemployment has been especially devastating, there are reportedly 8,000 homeless in Detroit,<sup>66</sup> and another 10,000 in the Hammond metropolitan area.<sup>67</sup> The West Coast has suffered with more than 2,500 homeless new poor in Seattle<sup>68</sup> and over 20,000 in the Los Angeles/Orange County region.<sup>69</sup> Because of the mass exodus of workers from the post-industrial Midwest and Northeast, the Sun Belt has been especially hard hit. Small cities like Abilene and Humble struggle under the burden of 2,000 homeless new poor,<sup>70</sup> while the Dallas/Fort Worth metropolplex and San Antonio face catastrophic conditions with nearly

---

57. Compare *Newsweek*, January 2, 1984, with Getschow's article, and Mike Hardin's five-day series in *The Columbus Citizen-Journal*, November 23-27, 1982.

58. Mary Ellen Hombs and Mitch Snyder, *Hopelessness in America* (Washington, D. C.: CCNV Press, 1982).

59. *Ibid*, p. 126.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 125.

61. *Houston Post*, June 26, 1983.

62. *USA Today*, 1983.

63. Source: Community for Creative Non-Violence.

64. Source: Community Service Society of New York.

65. Source: Community for Creative Non-Violence.

66. Source: Coalition on Temporary Shelters.

67. *New York Magazine*, February 21, 1983.

68. *USA Today*, 1983.

69. *Wall Street Journal*, November 12, 1982.

70. Source: Humble Evangelical to Limit Poverty.

15,000 each.<sup>71</sup> Even cities like Phoenix and San Jose have not escaped. There, hopelessness has claimed nearly 5% of the entire population.<sup>72</sup>

So, where are they? If there really is starving in the shadow of plenty, why aren't we more aware of it? Why are the statistics so difficult to believe?

The fact is, the poorest of the poor are invisible. Or, at least, very, very hard to see.

The invisibility of the poor is due in part to the suburbanization of our culture. "We don't go to their neighborhoods. They don't come to ours," explains University of Houston political scientist Donald Lutz. "The suburbanization process has geographically stratified America. Thus, the poor are out of sight, out of mind." Except for the hard-luck human interest stories that have become standard holiday fare, the poor almost never cross our path. The poor are invisible because of where they are.

But many of the poor are invisible because of who they are as well.

Thirty-five percent of all those living below the official poverty line in America are elderly.<sup>73</sup> Despite Social Security benefits, Medicaid, and Medicare, many of these elderly poor suffer severe privation in one form or another. Some have dropped out of the social care system, too immobilized by illness to travel the distance to the post office, or the grocery store, or the benefits center. Alone, afraid, and afflicted, is it any wonder that the elderly poor all too often are shuffled off, by time and circumstance, beyond our line of sight? Invisible.

Another 45% of the poor in America are children.<sup>74</sup> They don't form lobbying groups. They don't march on Washington. They don't picket the unemployment offices. They don't crowd into the public shelters on cold winter nights. They don't line the sidewalks of Times Square wrapped in tattered rags that have known too many springs. Like most children, they trot out each morning to meet the school bus. Like most children, they spend their days walking the corridors of America's public schools — except that they are poorly clothed, often

---

71. *Dallas Times-Herald*, July 13, 1982.

72. *Newsweek*, December 27, 1982.

73. *Wall Street Journal*, March 7, 1983.

74. Bread for the World, Background Paper #63.

ill, and unkempt. They are also hungry. And, more likely than not, invisible.

Another 7% of the poor in America are mentally ill.<sup>75</sup> Due to overcrowding, understaffing, and budgetary restriction, state mental hospitals release thousands of the psychiatrically-impaired into the general population each year. Many of them have nowhere to go, so they end up in tenement houses, or abandoned warehouses, or out on the streets. But, always, just out of sight. Invisible.

What can be done? Without the aid of federal megaspending, what can a few small reformed churches hope to accomplish?

Our experience in Houston has shown that we can actually accomplish much, even in the face of catastrophic conditions, if only we'd apply the principles of Biblical charity. Shelter can be had in exchange for a bit of creative thinking and lots of hard work.

One tactic that is especially effective and can be immediately implemented is what David and Ruth Rupprecht call "radical hospitality."<sup>76</sup> Open your home to the homeless. Shelter the dispossessed in the life-giving environs of your family. Almost any middle-class family in America can find room somewhere for temporarily housing the impoverished. Of course, time limits, house rules, and accountability structures must be clearly and precisely laid out in order to protect privacy and sanity, but when all is understood, "radical hospitality" is a beautiful expression of Biblical charity.

Another tactic that is effective for short-term emergency housing is the large community shelter. Various federal and local shelters, most notably in New York City, evidence the pitfalls in this type of approach to the problem of homelessness. Even so, a privately financed, carefully administrated shelter can stand in the gap during times of extreme cataclysm. A church gym, a fellowship hall, an educational building, or even a church sanctuary can be transformed into a haven of hope with just a few cots and blankets. Again, though effective only on a very temporary basis, community sheltering is a good example of Biblical charity at work.

---

75. Source: Community Service Society of New York.

76. David and Ruth Rupprecht, *Radical Hospitality* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1983).

Perhaps the best tactic and the most effective in times of dire hopelessness involves creative lease arrangements with apartment complexes. This tactic is one that deals with the problem of shelter over the long-term. Landlords can be approached by churches involved in Biblical charity and a deal can be negotiated whereby tenants exchange work for all deposits and the first few months rent. A family with no money, no job, and no hope can suddenly find themselves gainfully employed (at least part-time) and adequately housed. The landlord, on the other hand, has a hungry, willing crew of workers to upgrade the maintenance of the property, as well as a high occupancy rate and insurance for the future.

Any number of other creative tactics can be developed in order to house the homeless. Of course, there will always be a certain percentage of the American populace that will remain homeless, no matter what we do. Bag ladies, hobos, and derelicts abound. Our responsibility is not to clear the streets, it is simply to make available the live option of Biblical charity.

#### *Bringing Home the Bacon*

Food and shelter are necessities. Biblical charity, thus, must begin with them. However, without some means of perpetual support, food and shelter become only stop-gap measures. People need jobs. So, once physical necessities have been somewhat covered, Biblical charity goes to work on the job market.

Considering the current shape of American industry, that is no easy task.<sup>77</sup>

But, then, neither is it an impossible task. There are jobs to be had out there.<sup>78</sup> If we can just find them and match them to the deserving poor in our midst, then the work of Biblical charity will have gone full circle. There are any number of ways that this can be accomplished.

First of all, the church can simply post jobs from around

---

77. Even though futurists like John Naisbitt have predicted widespread labor shortages in the decade ahead, there is a dramatic mismatch between where the jobs are and where the workers are. And, even when logistics can be worked out, there is a further mismatch between job skills and job prerequisites.

78. The smallest number of job listings in the *Houston Post*, in recent years, came in December, 1982, at 2,341. That's a lot of jobs!

the community on a bulletin board. The jobs can be collected at random. See a "help wanted" sign at the grocery store? Just call it in to the church office. Know a friend of a friend of a friend who's hiring warehouse help? Quick, post it on the job board. Anywhere, any time jobs come to your attention, post them on the board. The deserving poor will work. We simply need to facilitate them a bit. That's Biblical charity.

Next, if the job market is so tight that the job board yields little fruit, perhaps it's time to exercise a little entrepreneurial zeal. Gather together a crew of skilled and unskilled laborers and begin to seek out small projects: remodeling, painting, auto repair, roofing, small appliance repair, carpentry, or landscaping. Put the willing to work. Do whatever is necessary. Take out a small ad in the paper. Post notices at community gathering places. Get the word out that you have willing, diligent, hard-working crews who will do just about anything within reason and the limits of expertise in order to bring home the bacon.

Barter. Trade. Finagle if you must. But find work for the willing. Stop the cycle of welfare, food stamps, and AFDC. That's Biblical charity,

#### *Precautions*

Besides bringing in the sheaves, any Biblical charity outreach is bound to bring in its share of thieves as well. There is nothing you can do to avoid that. But there are several things you can do to minimize their effect on the ministry.

First, take every precaution to protect the families involved in the ministry from harm. Never leave them vulnerable. Never leave them in the lurch. Never leave them to their own devices. "Guard the flock" (Acts 20: 28). All applicants for aid should be thoroughly screened. They should be apprised of the conditions and responsibilities that they'll be expected to keep. And don't make exceptions. If a person, no matter how deprived, refuses to abide by the Scriptural principles laid out by the ministry, he simply is not eligible for aid. No amount of whining or crying or moaning or groaning should sway you from this firm conviction. For safety's sake, stick with the rules.

Second, the poor must be brought into the circle of the covenant. Thus, the poor should be questioned concerning

their church affiliation. If they are members of a church, then their pastor should be contacted. "Perhaps the pastor knows some details that need to be aired. Perhaps the pastor would get his church to shoulder the responsibility of the ones in need."<sup>79</sup>

If the poor are not members of a church, then they should be required to come under the authority of the elders and begin weekly attendance at worship, even if they are not believers. As Ray Sutton has explained: "This would be coming under the covenant in a similar way to the 'stranger in the land' of the Old Testament. By applying the 'stranger in the land' principle the Church avoids 'implicit faith.' As long as he comes faithfully, small amounts of welfare, money, food, clothing, and even housing, could be supplied. The officers of the Church would also check to see if the man is indeed working. The idea is, the greater the commitment to Christ and His people, the greater the benefits. But, if the man does not at least go to Church, and work at some kind of job, no welfare is supplied. Unless this or a similar program is applied, the Church is shifting the irresponsible welfare programs of the State to her own sphere. Of course, an irresponsible Church welfare system is definitely an improvement over an irresponsible State welfare system! Better, the Church should show the world the Biblical and more effective welfare program. If the individual in need is not willing to work and to submit to the covenant of Jesus Christ, in the 'stranger in the land' sense, then he should not be helped."<sup>80</sup>

Third, keep scrupulous records. Get everything in writing. Fill out each application in full. Sign all leases and keep duplicate copies. Operate on a professional basis. If ever you are forced to appear in court, and in this litigious society you never can tell when you'll wind up facing a judge, make certain that you can fully support your integrity. If you utilize computer records, make absolutely certain that you make back-up disks. Never leave yourself open to false accusations.

Finally, make certain that none of your charitable activities provokes dependence. All charity should be temporary. Make that stipulation at the outset. Biblical charity is

---

79. Ray Sutton, "The Theology of Poverty," in *The Geneva Papers*, Number 37 (Tyler, Texas: Geneva Ministries, 1985).

80. *Ibid*,

not ever to be a gravy train for sluggards and “professional bums.” Develop each program in such a way that it naturally “weans” applicants from relief. The purpose of our efforts is not to transfer the poor from one dole to another. Rather, it is to translate poverty into productivity. We must offer efficient, inexpensive, decentralized, and genuinely compassionate care to the disadvantaged, all the while guarding against ingratitude, sloth, negligence, and irresponsibility.

That’s Biblical charity.

### *Charity As Resistance*

The primary incentive for Christians to develop functional outreaches of Biblical charity is ethical. God commands, so we obey.

We don’t offer charity simply because there is a need. We don’t offer charity simply because it is gratifying. We don’t offer charity simply because we feel guilty. We offer charity because the Law of God has much to say about our social responsibilities and charity is one of those responsibilities.

However, in this day of inhuman humanism and statist tyranny, Christians have a secondary incentive to develop such outreaches. As Gary North has so aptly stated, “The modern state has advanced its claims of total sovereignty by two strategies: war and welfare.”<sup>81</sup> Thus, private, family-centered, church-provoked, Biblical charity is a tactic of Christian resistance. Private charity steals from the Messianic State the leverage of benevolence. Power is decentralized. The Messianic State finds that its subjects can go elsewhere for “salvation.”

Biblical charity is cheaper than state welfare. Thus, it confronts the tyranny of overbearing taxes. Biblical charity is more efficient than state welfare. Thus, it confronts the tyranny of entrenched bureaucracies. Biblical charity is private. Thus, it confronts the tyranny of power centralization. Biblical charity is family-centered. Thus, it confronts the tyranny of unaccountability. Biblical charity is local. Thus, it confronts the tyranny of statistical arbitrariness. Biblical charity is temporary. Thus, it confronts the tyranny of poverty subsidization.

---

81. North, p. 134.

Charity as resistance has the added benefit that more Christians are willing to so involve themselves than in virtually any other conflict with the State. Tax resistance is too radical. Computer guerrilla warfare is too technical, Political activism requires too much effort. Squirreling away the "Four G's"<sup>82</sup> requires too much foresight and capital. "Levers, fulcrums, and hornets"<sup>83</sup> are too incomprehensible. And, court battles are simply too much hassle. But charity, well, that's another matter. Most Christians, properly motivated, can somehow be dragged outside the walls of the "evangelical ghetto"<sup>84</sup> to get their hands dirty in the work of compassion.

It would behoove us, therefore, if we genuinely desire to see the Messianic aspirations of the American government squelched, to work hard in developing Biblical models of charity. This, of course, will mean real sacrifices.

We will have to sacrifice the benefits of "free" cheese and butter from the federal government. We will have to sacrifice the benefits of federally-funded food banks. We will have to sacrifice any number of social service amenities like agency networking, fiscal sharing, data-basing, etc., etc., ad nauseum. There is absolutely no sense in crippling our decentralized efforts by making them dependent upon the government's various and sundry ameliorations. Why have a separate program at all if, at the bottom line, the church's charity is subsidized (and thus controlled) by the State?

Charity, in order to be Biblical, must therefore resist governmental action in all of its ways, shapes, and forms.

### *Conclusion*

Biblical charity is crucial for the work of Christian reconstruction. It is crucial for the building of Christian civilization,

But in order to develop functioning models, much work must still be done in our reformed churches.

We must lay foundations of excellent theology. We must build frameworks of committed congregations. We must

---

82. Gary North, *Successful Investing in an Age of Envy* (Sheridan, IN: Steadman Press, 1981) pp. 107-114.

83. Gary North's article of the same name in *Tactics of Christian Resistance* (Tyler, Texas: Geneva Ministries, 1983) pp. 401-431,

84. Great thanks to Franky Schaefer for such a wonderful phrase!

assess the needs of our local communities. We must then meet the specific needs of food, shelter, and employment.

And, most of all, we must begin now.

## CULTURE, CONTEXTUALIZATION, AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Marion Luther McFarland

C ONTEXTUALIZATION is a complex and bewildering subject. To some it means the communication of the gospel from one culture to another; to others it is a new term for an expanded idea of indigenization. To still others it is the coming together, in a dialectical process, of the *Missio Dei* and history resulting in a liberated culture. To some it is the Kingdom of Christ being brought to bear on all facets of culture and the vehicle of this confrontation is the Christian, laboring to see his life-style totally centered on Christ. The result would be that this covenant community, the church, would have a radical and revolutionary effect on its culture (Acts 17: 6). The church, therefore, is struggling to see culture "possessed" by Jesus Christ who is the King of kings and Lord of lords.

### *The Communication Aspect of Contextualization*

In the fullness of time Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was born of a woman. This meant that He left His place in heaven and came to the culture that existed in Palestine at that time. He left one "culture" and entered another. He brought the words and concepts of the 'heavenly culture" and *communicated* them into the thought-forms of another culture. He did this in such a way that heavenly ideas could be understood by earthly man. It is interesting to note that the primary means of accomplishing this "cross-cultural" communication was by Jesus Christ's taking a human body and dwelling with mankind. Dr. Byand H. Kate, in a paper submitted to the World Congress on Evangelization, said that "the incarnation itself is a form of contextualization. The Son of God condescended to pitch his tent among us to make it possible for us to be redeemed (John 1:14). The unapproachable Yahweh whom no

man has seen has become an object of seeing and touching through the incarnation (John 14:9, 1 John 1:1).”<sup>1</sup> For the missionary, therefore, to communicate clearly the gospel, he must enter into the thought-forms of the pagan culture into which he seeks to introduce the message of reconciliation, much in the same way as Jesus was incarnated into the Hebrew culture. This is necessary for any kind of communication to take place.

In the opinion of some missiologists the communicating aspect of contextualization is the extent of it. David Hesselgrave writes that “contextualization, then, is not simply nice. It is necessary. Without it God’s truth would never have broken out of the Hebrew community and into the larger world. Indeed, without it, God’s truth would have remained locked up in Heaven – never committed to, and never inscripturated for, even his chosen people.”<sup>2</sup> This statement is good as far as it goes, but it seems to imply that communication is all there is to contextualization. The communication of the gospel from one culture to another is necessary and important, but it is not all that is meant by the term contextualization.<sup>3</sup>

### *Contextualization Is More than Indigenization*

Some think that contextualization is merely a new term for indigenization. It is more than this. “Indigenization was an early effort in (newly) evangelized nations to utilize the nationals and to incorporate certain native cultural forms which were virtually consistent with Western Christianity. But contextualization is a later breakthrough aiming to adopt the new culture *in toto*.”<sup>4</sup> But before the new culture can be “adopted in toto” it must be judged by the gospel. The gospel must not simply root itself in the soil of each culture, it must also judge the culture. This aspect of judging all cultures is what contextualization is about.

---

1. Douglas, ed., *Let the Earth Hear His Voice* (Minneapolis: World Wide, 1975), p. 1217.

2. *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), p. 85.

3. For a brief account of the origin of this term, see an article by Harvie Corm in Carl E. Armerding, ed., *Evangelicals and Liberation* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed 1979), pp. 90ff.

4. Hesselgrave, p. 121.

Indigenization did not have that as its goal. To make the mission indigenous the missionary sought to develop a church which was independent of the home church agency and a part of its new cultural setting. Contextualization seeks not only to make the church a part of the culture, but to *change the culture* at the same time. It is assumed that this change is for the betterment of humanity. Harvie Corm quotes Khoki Coe as saying that "in using the word *contextualization*, we try to convey all that is implied in the familiar term indigenization, yet seek to press beyond for a more dynamic concept which is open to change and which is also future-oriented."<sup>5</sup> Indigenization was suited to the church and missions of its day when the world was largely rural and cultural change was slow or non-existent. "Indigenization assumed culture as a static concept, was uniquely suited to a period in which missionaries took a statically perceived message to a static, 'primitive' culture, and never faced the reality of rapid social change or the confrontation of traditional and technological culture that is today universal."<sup>6</sup> Contextualization seeks to change the structures of society in order that they might conform to the intention of God, which is the humanization of society. According to those who originated the term there is always "a prophetic witness to these structures."<sup>7</sup>

Contextualization, is, therefore, more than making the new church "native" or indigenous to its culture. It is possessing that culture in the name of King Jesus with the activity of the new Christian church structured in such a way that it develops a new life-style which reflects that Jesus is truly the Lord of its whole life. This life-style might in fact take on counter-cultural aspects. It must, as it seeks to bring all of culture into conformity to the laws of God. The new Christian is seeking to "demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and . . . take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:4, 5).

---

5. Armerdmg, p. 93.

6. Stephen C. Knapp, "Contextualization and Its Implications for U. S. Evangelical Churches and Missions" (Unpublished paper, Partnership in Mission: 1976), p. 5.

7. *Ibid.*

*Contextualization Defined*

It has been easier to say what contextualization is not than it will be to say what it is. It might be well to start with the purpose behind the term. The basic purpose is to allow various cultures to remain unaffected by any influence other than what God is doing in the world today. It is another way of saying that the Western world (or any foreign culture) must cease exporting Western thought-forms and life-styles in the name of Christianity. Also, it is an attempt to make the Western world aware of the influence that non-Christian thought-forms have had on Christianity (e.g., Greek philosophical structures.)

It has been said that contextualization is always *prophetic*. It is prophetic in that it is the Christian (in God's Name) speaking to the unjust and therefore unholy structures of the present culture, and then seeking to transform it by changing these structures. The assumption is that God is at work bringing about a better world and a progressively humane society.

There is also the aspect of the *dialectical* process which is really the heart and core of the contextualizing activity. This process is the inter-working of the *Missio Dei* and the historical process. This is what was described above as the kingdom of God confronting culture, and out of this dialectical process comes the synthesis which is a humane and just society — not perfect but always struggling toward perfection. As Corm has said, "the heart of the contextualization debate — the gospel in interaction with the culture."<sup>8</sup>

The above definition has been the basic idea of the Theological Education Fund of the World Council of Churches, which first used the term in 1972, in its published work *Ministry in Context*. Stephen Knapp, in his unpublished paper hints that for T. E. F. contextualization is related to the idea of "moratorium" in that it is another way of suppressing the influence of Western Christianity on the rest of the world, namely the Third World. Is it possible that this is really an indirect way of "containing" the Evangelical/Reformed gospel within the "walls" of the West and hence leave the rest of the world to be "humanized" by the W. C .C. universalists? Knapp writes, "One cannot escape the impression that contextualization as it

---

8. Armerding, p. 97.

is now widely understood is merely the latest in a string of accommodations of the Gospel to contemporary thought-forms, in this case historicist and secularist (and in the case of some of the expressions of the theology of liberation, Marxist) ones. One cannot escape the impression that the hermeneutical approaches and their underlying philosophy of mission are rooted in part in an over accommodation to secular critiques of the alienating function of Christianity traditionally understood as well as a pervasive cultural devaluation of distinctiveness and distaste of proselytism.<sup>9</sup> If the purpose of contextualization is really a ploy to “contain” the missionary labors of the Evangelical/Reformed churches then let us forget it and be on our way to evangelize the world as the Lord set forth in Scripture.

On the other hand, the T.E.F. may be saying something that must needs be seriously considered by the Evangelical/Reformed churches. Knapp thinks that there are elements that need our attention. “There is much positive value among the insights of the T.E. F. emphasis . . .”<sup>10</sup> He goes on to point out that the West is guilty of exporting Westernism as well as the gospel. To be true to the Lord and His inscripturated Word this must not continue. Is it, therefore, possible to grasp the basic thrust of contextualization and adapt this to the church’s evangelistic and missionary labors? Again Knapp and others think so. Knapp offers “a ‘first stab’ at a definition of contextualization which preserves the status of Scripture as norm and yet does justice to the inevitable contextuality in the theological process and in the ongoing life of the church in any culture.”<sup>11</sup>

He says that “contextualization is the dynamic process through which the church continually challenges and/or incorporates-transforms elements of the cultural and social milieu of which it is an integral part in its daily struggle to be obedient to the Lord Jesus Christ in its life and mission in the world. Contextualization is not only a sociological inevitability but a theological obligation, if the church is to effectively and concretely live and proclaim the Gospel in the world.”<sup>12</sup>

---

9. Knapp, p. 13.

10. *Ibid*, p. 14.

11. *Ibid*, p. 15.

12. *Ibid*.

In the next section we attempt to expand on the practical struggle of the Christian in seeking to confront pagan cultures with the claims of the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not structured in the way intended by T. E. F. when it first put forth this idea of contextualization, nor are some of the terms used in the same way.

*Contextualization as Kingdom Life-Style*

God is bringing about His Kingdom, but not in the way that those of the T. E. F. think. God's Kingdom is not coming by social action and a growing humanization of the nations of the earth. It is coming as His people are totally governed by His authority; and by this authority they are instructed to promote justice, righteousness, mercy, and love on the earth. It is at this point that the church is the "salt of the earth."

In some ways this idea of "kingdom life-style" is modeled after the idea of "possessio" as suggested by J. H. Bavinck in his *Introduction to the Science of Missions*.<sup>13</sup> It is the Christian who, in his life-style as a "servant of the King," possesses the culture. The Christian in the covenant community is the contextualizer. "The program for such a contextualized ministry demands the development of a Christian mind (2 Cor. 10:3-5). And that requires that we listen carefully to both Scripture and culture, without either acculturating the Bible through allegorizing it into models of Biblicizing our culture through accommodation. It is not content with transforming political, economic, social, and cultural spheres of life until those spheres and their presuppositional framework has been subjected to the judgment of the Word of God."<sup>14</sup> This is the essence of what I call "kingdom life-style contextualization."

Some Christians emphasize the communication aspect of contextualization and others the aspect of indigenization. The latter is that of making the church indigenous, whereas kingdom life-style contextualization is the task of making the whole counsel of God indigenous, and not only indigenous but normative – a truly high goal, but one for which Jesus taught us to pray, ". . . Your kingdom come, Your will be

---

13. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1977), pp. 179-190.

14. Harvie Corm, *Theological Reflections on Contextualizing Christianity. How Far Do We Go?* (Unpublished paper, n.d.), p. 6.

done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10).

In looking at theology and in particular eschatology it is evident that the Christian stands in the last time, somewhere between the "at-handness" of the kingdom and the "not yet" which will occur at Christ's return in judgment, glory, and consummation. In this last age the Christians are related to the King of kings and Lord of lords as His disciples and citizens of His kingdom. Therefore, Christians are both above cultural loyalties and in submission to them: above them in the sense that the Christian's citizenship is in the kingdom of heaven because the bonds of allegiance to the pagan culture have been broken; and in submission to legitimate earthly powers and systems, according to the commands of the Lord (Remans 13:1-7). For the Christian the Scriptures interpret culture and not the other way around.

There is a dynamic process to contextualization. Most of those who are writing on this subject refer to three parts of this dynamic process. For the sake of simplicity they are 1) text, 2) interpreter, and 3) context. Each writer may not use these terms in the same way. For our "kingdom life-style" model I have defined them as follows: *Text* is the inscripturated Word of God. The *interpreter* is the Christian who is being used of God to relate the biblical message to someone in another culture. The *context* is the pagan culture in which the new disciple is seeking to make his new faith the normative factor in his own life and also the total life of his own culture. The practice or implementation of Christ's kingship over the totality of life is that which is of primary importance in contextualization. "At the heart of evangelical contextualization will be praxis."<sup>15</sup> Praxis is the work of the Christian in his culture, not just words. It is the work of changing society by bringing the mercy of God to permeate all that the Christian does.

#### *Text*

Kingdom life-style contextualization starts with making the gospel "transcendental" from its cultural context. This means that the gospel is to be the pure gospel that God has revealed. It is to be raised above the cultural context of Galilee, Samaria, and Judah. It is also to be raised above the cultural

---

15. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

context of the cross-cultural missionary. In other words, he is to purge the gospel of all Western embellishments. This is true not only of Western embellishments but of all carrying of one culture to another when the gospel is taught. The gospel and only the gospel is to be communicated from one culture to another.

Another aspect of the "text" phase of contextualization is that the Christian must know the text. He must know the Scriptures. He must know the *whole* counsel of God. Otherwise he will be satisfied to convey only the "simple gospel," the "core" of the Scriptures. Some Christians (and missionaries) are content with teaching what is called the "simple gospel" and leaving out any application of it to the total life. The basis for this mistaken idea is that the church is interested only in "saving" people from hell and helping them to "cope" with life until they are taken from this earth in physical death. Often the result is "christopagans" or "baptized pagans"! It goes without saying that God's glory is certainly not enhanced but diminished. Biblical Theology helps the Christian to see that there is no such thing as a "core" to the gospel. "The demands of the gospel of the kingdom are too comprehensive for a peeled away core."<sup>16</sup>

For the Christian to avoid this problem of a superficial knowledge of God's Word, he needs principles of biblical interpretation. He needs the principles that God gives and not principles developed by human reason alone.

In the Bible, God has set forth the framework of *covenant*. This is the "mechanism" by which God and redeemed mankind are related. All mankind is related to God in the relationship of Creator/created. This means that *God* has a *claim* on all humanity. God also structured the God/man relationship in such a way that man would have a '(claim" on Him. This structural framework or mechanism is that of *covenant*. God announced to Adam this covenantal relationship by informing him that if Adam obeyed God He would bless him in special ways. That covenantal promise consisted primarily of man's eternal well-being in God's fellowship. If, however, Adam disobeyed this would result in a curse, namely death and separation from the presence of God. The first covenant that God announced to man was the "covenant of life by the works

---

16. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

of obedience." Adam broke this covenant by eating the forbidden fruit. Now man became a covenant breaker; i.e., he broke any claim he had upon God when he disobeyed God. The result was spiritual death and separation from the fellowship of God.

God did not leave man to his just consequences. God pursued man (Adam) and announced to him the contents of another covenant — the covenant of redemption/reconciliation by a substitute sacrifice. In this covenant God promised that a child of the woman would destroy the Serpent. The child of the woman would be bruised but the evil one would be destroyed. Adam and Eve did not understand all of the implications of God's promise. The two aspects that they did understand were that God was taking *complete* care of them, and that the cost of this care was a bruising of the woman's child. This meant that those who trusted God's promises would again have a *claim* on God. The covenant community could go to God and say that he promised to care for them competely, and thus "hold" God to His covenant promises. God has a claim on mankind as Creator and man has a claim on God because of His covenant promises in providing the One who would take the consequences of disobedience upon Himself. God has promised to take care of those who will keep a covenant relationship with Him. Because of God's promised provision for man's disobedience he can now enjoy God's fellowship and can ask Him for anything and everything necessary to life as sons and daughters of God. This, in essence, is the covenantal relationship that mankind can have with God. Any person can enter this relationship by promising to keep and maintain this covenant relationship with God. To maintain this covenant relationship man must be obedient to God in all of His commands. "This is love for God: to obey His commands. And His commands are not burdensome . . ." ( 1 John 5:3).

The text that is to be conveyed to all cultures is the whole counsel of God rightly divided (2 Tim. 2:15). It is our conviction that the covenant promise of Christ is the form in which Scripture is structured. Furthermore, it is also our conviction that what is known as Reformed Theology is the system that God sets forth in His word; and lastly, the principles of Biblical Theology are the basic exegetical framework for a safe and proper study of Scripture.

*interpreter*

The interpreter stands as a bridge between the text of Scripture and the context of the pagan culture. He must know well the text and also the context. To know the context (pagan culture) the Christian needs to avail himself of all areas of research that will help in understanding the pagan culture. This includes anthropology, economics, sociology, etc. Contextualization also means that these sciences are not used indiscriminately. These scientific disciplines must themselves be contextualized. They must be re-formulated on the basis of Scripture. There is no such thing as a system of thought without basic presuppositions. In other words, for science to be used it must itself be based on the creator-God of Scripture. It will not do to use a science whose basic premise is the centrality of man when the purpose of contextualization is to bring about the centrality of the God of creation. Hence the "tools" of contextualization must themselves be contextualized. "The conceptual frameworks themselves must be formulated in terms of the Scriptures."<sup>17</sup> The interpreter, therefore, must know the text and must be certain that his tools are also of the Lord.

*Context*

The context is the pagan or non-Christian culture. To determine the way that God's will is to be lived in any culture the Christian must look to *both* the Scripture (text) and the immediate culture (context) in which he is living. By looking at both the text and the context the Christian comes to an understanding of how God is to be obeyed in that particular cultural setting. This contextualization that the Christian is engaged in "does not view culture as merely a threat to the purity of the faith and life. It views culture as an *indispensable and God-given tool* for faithfulness and obedience in the present, the vehicle through which the Gospel and the church come continually into concrete expression in the world. *Every command of Christ through the Scripture is de facto a command to contextualized. Whether it is a command to love one's neighbor or to disciple thenations, it has not been obeyed until one has struggled with the necessity of utilizing, rejecting, or transforming cultural forms in the process of response and obedience.*"<sup>18</sup> A number of things are at work in this dynamic proc-

---

17. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

18. Knapp, p. 15.

ess. One is that culture is accepted as God-given but in the need of transformation, rejection, or utilization by the Christian community. Second, this transformation comes only as the Word of God is freed from any cultural overtones that are unconsciously part of the thinking of all Christians. "Perhaps the most fundamental 'message' of the 'contextualization' discussion for the church in the West is the need to recognize that every expression of the gospel is culturally formed and to that degree, subject to some distortion and in need of correction from other cultural perspectives."<sup>19</sup>

The end result of contextualization, however, is not mere abstraction and speculation. It is *praxis*. It is the Christian *at work* seeking to transform the culture (context) into a Garden of Eden. It will not be completed until Christ returns, but it must be the labor of every Christian in every part of the world. As the Lord expects His people to strive for perfection and holiness, He also expects His covenant community to strive to bring the Kingdom of God on earth. Neither of these will be fully complete until Christ returns. In the meantime each Christian is to be about the business of the King. "The covenant authority of the Word of the great King lays its comprehensive claims upon the total life of the people of God. It will not let us merely profess our allegiance to covenant. It will curse us when we do not walk by covenant in the cultures of the world. The Bible's own understanding of its hermeneutical role in the process of contextualization forbids us the bondage of abstractionism and any culturally privileged status quo. It calls us to the task of the renovation of creation in the name of the last Adam."<sup>20</sup>

It is really Christ who has accomplished the task of contextualization as He came from the culture of heaven "conquering and to conquer." For the disciple in every part of the world: he must labor on until Christ comes in the fullness of the Kingdom of God. For the Christian church: she must make disciples of all nations by teaching them the whole counsel of God. She must then teach the new disciples that they are builders of a new culture by a kingdom life-style, remembering that the process never ends. Imaginative innovation has its place if a genuinely Christian life-style is to emerge.

---

19. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

20. Armerding, p. 113.

Contextualization is like proclaiming the “truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth” to another culture or your own culture. The result is the transformation of culture (and people) to be conformed to the King of all culture, and hence, the answers to our prayers, “Thy Kingdom Come .“

## PUBLICATION SCHEDULE

**Christianity and Civilization** is an annual symposium published by Geneva Ministries. There is no subscription price, but those who wish to receive advance notice of future issues can do so by being placed on the mailing list of Geneva Ministries, 708 Hamvasy Lane, Tyler, Texas 75701.

Essays in **Christianity and Civilization** are intended to be scholarly, but not technical, and are aimed at clergy and serious laymen. The perspective of **Christianity and Civilization** seeks to be thoroughly Biblical, comprehensively catholic, and distinctively Reformed.

The topic for the 1986 edition of **Christianity and Civilization** is "Piety and Pietism." Manuscripts will be reviewed for publication until 1 July 1986. Anyone wishing to submit a manuscript for consideration would be wise to clear the topic in advance with the editor, James B. Jordan. Manuscripts should be between 20 and 40 pages in length, typewritten or clearly printed from a computer, and double spaced. A "Style Sheet for **Christianity and Civilization**" is available from Geneva Ministries. It is imperative that each writer consult this style sheet before submitting a final draft of any manuscript. If accepted, **Christianity and Civilization** will pay the author \$100 upon publication. Shorter manuscripts (under 20 pages) receive \$50. Suggestions concerning the reprinting of important documents or published articles, if accepted, are worth \$35, if accompanied by a clear photocopy of the recommended piece.

Although the author is paid for his work, copyright remains with the individual author.