

# Christianity & Society

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THE BIENNIAL JOURNAL OF THE  
KUYPER FOUNDATION

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VOL. XVIII, No. 2

WINTER 2008

*Islam: Unitarianism v. Trinitarianism*

*Secular Humanism in the Roman Empire*

*Origin & Development of Secular Humanism*

*The New World Disorder*



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*by Stephen C. Perks*

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# CHRISTIANITY AND SOCIETY

THE BIENNIAL JOURNAL OF THE KUYPER FOUNDATION

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# EDITORIAL

*Christianity & Society* BACK IN PRINT

*Christianity & Society* is now back in print. It is available on the internet from the print-on-demand publisher Lulu.com. To obtain a copy of the last three issues of *C&S* (Vol. 17, Nos 1 and 2, and Vol. 18, No. 1), which were previously only available as PDF files on the Foundation's web site, go to [www.lulu.com](http://www.lulu.com) and type "Christianity-&-Society" into the search engine. The browser will take you to the *C&S* page and you can purchase the journal from there. This issue should be available from Lulu shortly after it appears as a PDF on the Foundation's web site. The cost of the journal is £3.33. This is the production cost charged by Lulu only. The Kuyper Foundation receives no income from Lulu from the sale of these journals and makes no profit on them in any other way. You will have to pay for postage on top of the costs of the journal. Postage costs will depend on where you live. From now on *C&S* will appear both as a PDF file that can be downloaded free of charge from the Kuyper Foundation's web site, and in a printed version that can be bought from Lulu.com. Please do not try to order the printed version from the Kuyper Foundation. We do not supply it. Lulu.com is the only supplier for the printed version of the journal.

## MP3 FILES OF THE JULY 2008 BRUNEL CONFERENCE

MP3 files of all the talks given at the 2008 Kuyper Fellowship Weekend at Brunel Manor in South Devon in July are now available for downloading from the Audio-Visual page of the Foundation's web site ([www.kuyper.org](http://www.kuyper.org)). The titles of the four talks are: "Islam" by Stephen Hayhow, "Secular Humanism in the Roman Empire" by Joe Paul, "The Origin and Development of Secular Humanism" by Dave Paul, and "The New World Disorder" by Stephen Perks (all published in this issue of *C&S*); there is also the sermon preached by Stephen Hayhow on marriage on the Sunday morning.

## BRUNEL WEEKEND 2009

The dates for the 2009 Kuyper Foundation Fellowship Weekend are: Friday 24th to Monday 27th July. The venue will be Brunel Manor in South Devon again.

The speaker for the weekend will be Michael W. Kelley, who will be well-known to our readers through the many excellent articles and essays that we have published over the years (see the current instalment of his *Impulse of Power* in this issue). The subject matter will be the cultural mission of the Church (i.e. the broad cultural mission of Christians as the body of Christ on earth, the Church as an *organism* not merely as an institution, nor the cross-cultural mission of the Church). All details will be on the Kuyper Foundation web site's "What's New" page in due time.

The cost for the full weekend, full board, will be £140 (including Sunday night Bed and Breakfast. Those not stay-

ing for Sunday night will pay £112, plus £4 if staying for the Sunday Cream Tea). There will be the usual discounts for children. This is a very good price and the accommodation and food are excellent. This is the amount that Brunel Manor charge us. The Kuyper Foundation does not put a mark-up on this price to cover the other costs that the conference entails. This means that the conference is subsidised by the Foundation. Nonetheless, donations coming into the Foundation over the last few years have reduced significantly. We need an increase in donations if we are to maintain the work we are doing and go forward with the work we are planning. Please consider donating to the Kuyper Foundation. Information on how to give can be found at the back of the journal (pp. 63 and 64).

All booking information will be on the web site's "What's new" page in due time, but you can book a place at the 2009 weekend now by contacting the bookings secretary, Julie Pike, at the following email address: [thepikeclan@hotmail.com](mailto:thepikeclan@hotmail.com), or tel. (01727) 863316. You will need to give your contact details and information about your party.

## EMAIL ADDRESS PROBLEMS

Over the years the amount of spam emails we have received directly as a result of displaying the Foundation's email address on the web site has become intolerable. The [scp@kuyper.org](mailto:scp@kuyper.org) address has therefore been deleted. The new email address can be found in the information panel on the first page of the journal. The web site no longer displays an email address, but visitors to the site can email us from the "Contact us" form on the site.

## GOSPEL TRUTH PODCAST [www.gospeltruthpodcast.com](http://www.gospeltruthpodcast.com)

Last, but not least, I should like recommend a new internet podcast service. It is called *The Gospel Truth Podcast*, and it is produced and presented by the dynamic trio of Richard Lalchan, Luke Larner and Joe Paul. The podcasts contain a mix reviews of current events, mainline and not so mainline news stories and lesser-known absurdities thrown up by our delinquent culture, along with discussion of important biblical issues relevant to our society and stories of general Christian and Church interest. The following quotation is from The Gospel Truth web site:

Christianity is not just a collection of nice thoughts or a good way to live. It's the truth . . . The Gospel Truth. Tune into The Gospel Truth Podcast as we encourage each other to declare the truth of our sovereign God and live it out in our lives. Listen to some lively debate and more importantly, get involved! Send your questions, stories, testimonies, thoughts or whinges! to [studio@gospeltruthpodcast.com](mailto:studio@gospeltruthpodcast.com) or post messages on our discussion forum via our Facebook group.

The Gospel Truth Podcast is a great mix of good humour and serious discussion from a Christian perspective and a welcome tonic for Christians suffering from the side effects of being exposed to the inane drivel that passes for mainline current events broadcasting in today's world. It won't cost you anything and it does not come with a government health warning, so why not give it a try.—SCP

# ISLAM: UNITARIANISM v. TRINITARIANISM

by Stephen Hayhow

*“White founts falling in the Courts of the sun,  
And the Soldan of Byzantium is smiling as they run;  
There is laughter like the fountains in that face of all men feared,  
It stirs the forest darkness, the darkness of his beard;  
It curls the blood-red crescent, the crescent of his lips;  
For the inmost sea of all the earth is shaken with his ships.  
They have dared the white republics up the capes of Italy,  
They have dashed the Adriatic round the Lion of the Sea,  
And the Pope has cast his arms abroad for agony and loss,  
And called the kings of Christendom for swords about the Cross.  
The cold queen of England is looking in the glass;  
The shadow of the Valois is yawning at the Mass;  
From evening isles fantastical rings faint the Spanish gun,  
And the Lord upon the Golden Horn is laughing in the sun.*

(Lepanto, G. K. Chesterton)

## I. INTRODUCTION: THE CURRENT RESPONSE

THE resurgence of Islam is just that, a resurgence. It is not a unique problem; it is not a new problem. We have forgotten, and so we do not associate the Reformers with having to deal with the onward march of Islam; rather we think of struggle with Rome and the task of the Reformation of the Church. In reality, the Reformers had problems on two fronts: Rome *within*, and Islam *without*. Between 1500 and 1585 there were over 120 Islamic incidents, sieges, landings and encroachments, around the Mediterranean alone.

Under Suleiman I (1494–1566), in 1529 the Muslim expansion reached as far as the gates of Vienna. This was the first attempt by the Muslim Ottoman Empire to capture the city. Whilst unsuccessful, it was followed by 150 years of tension leading up to the battle of Vienna in 1683. Suleiman I (The Magnificent) had led Ottoman armies to conquer the Christian strongholds of Belgrade, Rhodes, and most of Hungary before his conquests were checked at Vienna in 1529. By this time he had annexed most of the Middle East, as well as large swathes of North Africa as far west as Algeria, and his fleet dominated the seas from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean. But this siege of Vienna of 1529 was only the culmination of a long period of trouble for the east.

Therefore, Emperor Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire convened an Imperial Diet in Augsburg in 1530 with the purpose of uniting the Empire against the Ottoman Turks, who had besieged Vienna the previous autumn. But Luther, still under the Imperial Ban, was left behind at the Coburg fortress while his elector and colleagues from Wittenberg attended the diet. *The Augsburg Confession*, a summary of the Lutheran faith authored by Philip Melancthon but

influenced by Luther, was read aloud to the emperor. It's purpose? Unity in the face of the Muslim advance.

*The modern threat is a more pernicious one*

The fleet is not visible from Dover, invasion is not imminent. But the *threat* is just as real. A key aspect is European population. According to Mark Steyn (*America First*) the populations of Europe are dying. Here are some population growth rates (a growth rate of 2 means that the population is only just replacing itself each generation; a growth rate of 1 means that the population is halving every generation): Ireland 1.9; Germany and Austria 1.3; Russia 1.2; Italy 1.2; and worst of all, Spain 1.1. Eastern Europe is in bad shape too. Britain is on the moderate side of decline. Elsewhere it's not great either: USA 2.11, but Australia 1.7 and Canada 1.5. Spain's 1.1 means that the population is almost halving with each generation. Meanwhile, Muslims are having large families and thereby are increasing.

*The West's Immune System*

The progress of Islam in our time is a demonstration that secular humanism has no immunity system. It is unable to withstand the incursion of other worldviews. Here is an example from the *New Criterion* (March 2008), on a story carried by Reuters about rioting in Copenhagen:

DANISH YOUTHS RIOT FOR SIXTH NIGHT Gangs of rioters set fire to cars and garbage trucks in northern Copenhagen on Friday, the sixth night of rioting and vandalism that has spread from the capital to other Danish cities, police said on Saturday.

Five youths were arrested in the capital on Friday after 28 cars and 35 garbage trucks were burned, Copenhagen police duty officer Jakob Kristensen told Reuters.

Danish media said arrests in other towns brought to 29 the number of people police were holding. Scores of cars and several schools have been vandalized or burned in the past week. Police could give no reason, but said that unusually mild weather and the closure of schools for a winter break might have contributed.

Not until the end of the article does the report add, “Several hundred Muslims gathered in central Copenhagen on Friday to protest against publication of the cartoon. Most Muslims consider depictions of the founder of Islam offensive.” By not identifying the “youths” in the beginning as *Muslim* youths, a false impression is given. This double-speak reveals secular humanism’s inability to address the issue. This is a form of willful blindness, a desire *not* to see and not to understand things as they really are—it is a flight from reality—all in the name of the ideology of multiculturalism and tolerance.

In all this we need to identify the really crucial issues: the crux of the matter is that the struggle between Islam and the West, Islam and Christianity, whilst nothing new, is a contest between *Trinitarianism and Unitarianism*.

## II. THE CRUX: TRINITARIANISM *v.* UNITARIANISM

In the 1930s Hilaire Belloc authored a little book called “*The Great Heresies*” in which he described Islam under a chapter called *The Enduring Heresy of Mohammed*. Note the *enduring*. The Ottoman Empire was recent history. But Belloc described his purpose as follows, “I shall describe the consolidation of it, its increasing power and the threat which it remained to our civilization. It very nearly destroyed us. It kept up the battle against Christendom actively for a thousand years, and the story is by no means over; the power of Islam may at any moment re-arise.” Belloc sought to answer the question: why was Islam so attractive, and transferable? He perceptively noted that it is Islam’s very simplicity: the fact that there were no complex doctrines or confessions and little required in terms of ritual and rite. Belloc’s conclusion was: “It began as a heresy, not as a new religion. It was not a pagan contrast with the Church; it was not an alien enemy. It was a perversion of Christian doctrine . . . he advanced a clear affirmation, full and complete, against the whole doctrine of an incarnate God. He taught that Our Lord was the greatest of all the prophets, but still only a prophet: a man like other men. He eliminated the Trinity altogether.”

Islam is Christianity without the incarnation, which means Christianity without the Trinity. It is Unitarianism, with its own distinct flavour.

We will concentrate upon the differences between how one’s doctrine of God works its way out into all other areas of life, belief and culture. The discussion here is really between Trinitarianism and Unitarianism. As Christians we confess the one true God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.” (2 Cor. 16:14). The background to Paul’s *triune* blessing here is the threefold Aaronic blessing: “The LORD bless you and keep you; The LORD make His face shine upon you, And be gracious to you; The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, And give you peace” (Num. 6:24–26).

It is the threefold LORD, who is Father, Son and Holy

Spirit. As G.K. Chesterton said, “God is a society.” God is love, because God is a relationship—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Before God created all things, there was something going on—God was relating.

### *What is the Muslim Doctrine of God?*

The Bible warns us that we become like the gods we serve: “Those who make them are like them; So is everyone who trusts in them” (Ps. 115:4–8). How does serving and worshipping the god Allah work itself out in the people and culture of Islam?

### *The meaning of Allah*

Allah is one, pure unity. Islam is consistently unitarian. But because Allah is unity and the only unity, there are many consequences. Surah 59 ends like this: “He is Allah, besides whom there is no other god. He is the Sovereign Lord the Holy One, the Giver of Peace, the Keeper of Faith; the Guardian, the Mighty One, the All-powerful, the Most High! Exalted be he above the idols! He is Allah, the Creator, the Originator, the Modeller. His are the most gracious names. All that is in heaven and earth gives glory to Him. He is the Mighty, the Wise One.”

Samuel Zwemer, in *The Muslim Doctrine of God*, noted that there are ninety-nine names for god in the Koran: 7 names describe his absoluteness and unity; 5 speak of him as creator; 24 characterise him as gracious and merciful (but if Allah loves, he loves the repentant one: you repent and Allah will love you); 36 names speak of his pride, power and absolute sovereignty; 5 describe him hurting and avenging; and 4 are moral attributes. This way we see where the emphasis is.

But first we must understand the origins of belief in Islam. Long before Mohammed the Arabian Kaaba, the temple at Mecca, was known as *beit-Allah*, the House of Allah. This paved the way for Mohammed and his monotheism of Allah. Allah was the chief God of the pantheon, the Kaaba with its 360 idols (Zwemer, pp 24–25). Herodotus (Lib. III Chap. 8) tells us that in his time the Arabs had two main deities, *Orotal* and *Alilat*. The former is “god most high” and the latter a pagan goddess mentioned in the Koran. George Grant points out the history: “The symbiotic polytheism of the Meccan religion of *hejaz*, with the god Allah at the head of the pantheon, was absorbed by Mohammed into his Saracen system. Similarly, the ancient and revered *Ka’ba*, the huge rectangular reliquary in the Meccan sanctuary, was transformed from a pagan temple into the focus of Moslem pilgrimage, the *Hadj*” (*Blood on the Moon*, p. 41). Grant indicates that Islam, rather than a pure religion delivered from heaven, has been a synthesis.

Where does this confession take us religiously, culturally and sacramentally?

### 1. *This unitarian doctrine means a reduction to power and abstraction*

Because, for Islam, *will* is at the bottom of everything, rather than the character of the Triune God, then the assertion of the divine will is all there is. Samuel Zwemer quotes Alexander MacClaren at the beginning of the book, “*there is no charm in the abstract doctrine of the unity of God to elevate humanity*”. Allah is thus “power,” an abstraction. He is not

the father, but the transcendent, almighty one, he is raw power.

First, this has a political consequence: because it is unitarian, the Muslim view of the state and society is monolithic—there is no room for diversity. Power and unity are central. R. J. Rushdoony summarises, “Mohammedanism, because of its “unitarianism”, has been primarily a monolithic statist order, Islam. Its denial of freewill and espousal of rigid determinism is related to this theological premise. Since plurality has no ultimate reality in Mohammedanism, the freedom of the many is an academic question; the one will of Allah governs all reality” (*The One and the Many*, p. 11).

Therefore, Muslims tended to view Allah *apart from* his attributes, and there is no sense that man is created after the *imago dei*, the “image of God,” because there is no image of God. In the Bible the *Imago dei* is the Son of God, which opens up new possibilities for understanding what man is, and what it means to be a redeemed man or woman.

The sovereignty of Allah is almost arbitrary, because it is not rooted in righteousness so much as in pure *will*. This is the difference between Reformed and biblical theology and Islam. Therefore the will of Allah underpins righteousness, rather than his being and character. Allah is only called “holy” once in the Koran (Surah 59)—but this does not refer to moral purity, but to “*the absence of anything that would make him less than he is*” (Zwemer, p. 59). Therefore, references to purity in men refer to outward, ceremonial purity and not much more.

Secondly, this leads to a problem of impersonalism at the heart of Islam. It means that Allah is essentially impersonal, remote and totally transcendent. Serge Trefkovic summarises the problem: “Allah’s absolute sovereignty means that his “closeness” to man does not imply a two-way relationship; man’s experience of Allah is impossible. Any attempt to verbalize such a notion would imply heretical encroachment on his absolute transcendence” (Trefkovic, *The Sword of the Prophet*, p. 59). Thus Johannes Hauri noted, “Mohammed’s idea of the world is out and out deistic. God and the world are in exclusive, external and eternal opposition. Of the entrance of God into the world or of any sort of human fellowship with God he knows nothing.” This is important to grasp for it impacts on the Islamic view of revelation, “Unlike the Christian faith in God revealing Himself through Christ, the Koran is not a revelation of Allah—a heretical concept in Islam—but the direct revelation of his commandments and the communication of his law” (Trefkovic, p. 81).

Thirdly, the Islamic world and life view is of necessity non-covenantal. Covenant has no place in Islam because Allah is will, power. Man is not created after the image of Allah. Thus the Koran is not a revelation of *Allah* but only of his commands and will—he does not reveal *himself*, only his instructions. This Unitarianism works itself out in an impersonalism, the remote, totally “*other*” god.

Therefore, there is no *covenant with creation* and therefore Allah can be quite arbitrary towards it. There is no room for “freedom” because there is no relationship—only power. There is a tendency towards *abstraction, creator v. creation*, rather than Creator/creation.

## 2. This leads to a particular understanding of Sin

There is very little about the nature of sin, and nothing of its origin to be found in the Koran. The words for sin in the

Koran mean “permitted” and “forbidden”, there is nothing about guilt and transgression—sin is a violation of the pure *will* of God, not the character and attributes of God. The sixteenth century Reformer, Philip Melancthon, wrote in an introduction to the Latin Koran, that Mohammed “*was inspired by Satan, because he does not explain what sin is and sheweth not the reason of human misery*” (Zwemer p. 50). Zwemer notes that there is no idea of moral purity or rectitude: “All the commentaries I have seen leave out the idea of moral purity and use at the most the word *tahir* as a synonym; this means ceremonially clean, circumcised, etc. . . . It is no better if we study the Koran’s use of the word *tahir*. That, too, has only reference to outward purity of the body” (p. 59).

This leads to two conclusions: there is no inner sanctification. Holiness resides on the outside. Or, as Zwemer states it, “Islam is pharisaism translated into Arabic” (p. 52). Secondly, this means a very shallow idea of sin. There is no omniscience of God that penetrates the man, the heart; everything is external. That means no deep penetration of the inner life. There is no word for conscience and Allah looks at what men are doing, not at what men *are*. Not surprisingly, there is no deep psychology.

## 3. The absence of Narrative

There is no story in the Koran. The Penguin edition of the Koran has been re-arranged for ease of reading. You can do that because there is no *historical* sequences as such. But you could not do that to the Bible. On the other hand, the Bible is the story of the world—it is the world history that forms the core of the whole story of the world. It reveals our origins, our fall and our redemption. There is process, a gradual unfolding of God’s plans and purposes *in history*. But the Koran is not a story and therefore history is de-valued. There are, of course, snippets of history, but no unfolding and consistent telling. The Koran is not the history of the world, as the Bible is. Abstraction in the godhead leads to abstraction on the ground.

## 4. Islam is a religion of no sacraments, signs or symbols

There is no sacramental theology in Islam—there is no bread and wine, no water in the name of the Triune God, no type and symbol. Compare the Koran and the Bible: first we move from old covenant typology, and we embrace new covenant symbolism. The Bible *ends* with the highest symbolism and typology—*The Book of Revelation*. That’s the final word. The Bible closes knee-deep in symbolism, allusion and typology. The Bible does not, as many think, move from symbol to reality. Rather, it moves from one level of typology and symbolism to a new level. This means that symbolism and type are central. *But the Koran is the direct word*. It does not inhabit a world of symbols, types and images. It is the word made *plain*. If everything is as it is, this implies a rather superficial view of reality. Poetry and symbolism help us to unpack the mystery of life, of marriage, love, beauty.

## 5. Islam cannot produce a vibrant, living culture

Is it no wonder that Islam has not produced much great art. Look at any book on Islamic Art and what you will find is the art of abstraction. The exception is architecture, much of which is quite stunning and beautiful, but apart from this, the range is limited. Pick up a book on Muslim art and it is

concerned with geometric patterns and shapes, and as striking and beautiful as they are, there is no representation, no place for art and development of high culture.<sup>1</sup> As Leithart has noted, art requires a Triune situation: because art has to be from someone *to* someone or *for* someone. Art is not self-absorption, but creation for another. It is interesting that Islam has produced a very limited art—mainly abstract, geometric patterns. Robert Letham adds, “*Bernard Lewis points to the aversion of the Islamic world to polyphonic music—where different performers play different instruments from different scores, which blend together as one musical statement (Trinity, p. 445).* There is no singing in the Mosque, no music in worship. There is no musical culture in mainstream Islam, because if Allah is the solitary, removed one, there is no one to do anything for. If he is creator, then there is no receiver, *whereas*, in the Trinitarian situation, we move from Father to Son, by the Spirit.

#### 6. *Evangel*

Islam is a bare religion; its simplicity is its power and its weakness. As Belloc saw so clearly, Islam is the heresy of simplicity. How can this help us bring the gospel to real-life Muslims, the people next door? What we must not do is adopt either a right-wing, “those other people” mentality, nor a left-wing multiculturalism that naively believes that all religions and all cultures are morally equal.

(1) We need to show the love of Yahweh, the love they can never know or conceive of in Allah. Harshness and bitterness of an excessive confrontationalism must be left behind.

(2) Emphasise Christ, emphasise grace and real mercy of the gospel. Confess the incarnation, that God became flesh, through incarnate love. It is because God is Triune that the gospel is so powerful and compelling.

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1. We have a similar problem in our own camp: Why have Reformed Churches and evangelicals produced so little great art? Why have Lutherans and Catholics produced art and literature, but Calvinists less so? Peter Leithart has proposed a first attempt at an answer here. It does go some way in answering the point. Leithart locates the problem in the triumph of Zwingli’s abandonment of the union of symbol and reality through his sacramental theology: memorialism. This is what he says: “Here is a thesis, which I offer in a gleeful fit of reductionism: Modern Protestants can’t write because we have no sacramental theology. Protestants will learn to write when we have reckoned with the tragic results of Marburg, and have exorcised the ghost of Zwingli from our poetics. Protestants need not give up our Protestantism to do this, as there are abundant sacramental resources within our own tradition. But contemporary Protestants do need to give up the instinctive anti-sacramentalism that infects so much of Protestantism, especially American Protestantism.” “Symbols separated from reality and reduced, as they are in much Protestant theology, to “mere signs,” cannot do anything, whether in reality or in fiction. They exist as sheer ornament, or, at best, as pointers to some something in some real realm of reality that can do something. But if this is so, then the moment of grace, whether in fiction or reality, never enters this world, into the realm of what-is. Without a sacramental theology, and specifically a theology of sacramental action, Protestant writers cannot do justice to this world or show that this world is the theater of God’s redeeming action” (<http://www.credenda.org/issues/18-2liturgia.php>). Add to this a tendency towards abstraction (decretal theology v. covenant) and “system” and we are pretty close to the truth. We have a problem: we have not let our Trinitarianism loose. But the problem for Islam is deeper: it has nothing to let loose.

(3) We need to show Muslims that the gospel goes deep—it addresses the *heart*, not merely our behaviour.

(4) Live out Trinitarian love and service, self-giving and kindness—Christian personalism; we need to show the gospel to our Muslim friends and neighbours.

(5) Talk about the reality of sin and guilt as *heart problems*, not merely pieces of behaviour/actions, and then you can speak about the reality of forgiveness, acceptance and deliverance from sin and the new life in Christ.

#### Conclusion

George Grant summarises the present challenge: “The most convulsive conflict of the past century—and indeed, the most convulsive conflict of the past millennium—has undoubtedly been between Islam and Civilization; it has been between Islam and Freedom; it has been between Islam and Order; it has been between Islam and Progress; it has been between Islam and Hope; it has been between Islam and the Gospel. While every other conflict pitting men and nations against one another has inevitably waxed and waned, this furious struggle has remained all too constant. The tension between Islam and every aspiration and yearning of man intrudes on every issue, every discipline, every epoch, and every locale—a fact that is more evident today than perhaps ever before.”

*Cervantes on his galley sets the sword back in the sheath  
(Don John of Austria rides homeward with a wreath.)  
And he sees across a weary land a straggling road in Spain,  
Up which a lean and foolish knight for ever rides in vain,  
And he smiles, but not as Sultans smile, and settles back the blade . . .  
(But Don John of Austria rides home from the Crusade.)*

(*Lepanto*, G. K. Chesterton)

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# SECULAR HUMANISM IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE

by Joe Paul

WHEN the Roman Republic fell in the closing decades of the last century B.C. there was not just a change of government, or political system but a revolution in thought, and more importantly *religion*. The beginnings of humanism, and more importantly secular humanist statism, born in Greece hundreds of years before, finally came into full fruition with the principate of Augustus Caesar and the Roman Empire.<sup>1</sup> It has often been stated that the Roman Empire brought an end to democracy in the Roman world and that statesmen such as Cicero were outraged by the tyranny of a single man ruling the Empire. Although this is true in part, it was not seen by many at the time to be the case. The traditional Republican aristocracy were recognised by most as a tyrannical, corrupt bunch with only their own concerns in mind.

When the Roman Empire began to form under Julius Caesar he was seen as the people's leader. A man who was to put Rome's needs first, instead of those of the aristocracy. In reality the Republicans fought against the setting up of the Empire because they didn't want to lose power, not because they believed the Republic was better for the people of Rome. Of course over time, freedom, liberty and the right to believe and act as one wished was taken away from the Roman citizen, but this all happened under the pretext of a more protective, caring government.

The freedom of religious belief so rigorously put forward by the Roman State was obliterated in reality by the coming into fruition of the religion of secular humanism. The old "religions" of Rome and its provinces were replaced by the cult of the Emperor, which signified the religion of Rome as put forward by man's autonomous reason. A religion, despite what is claimed, is that which binds, gives legitimacy and is the source of the laws, aims and aspirations of a person or society. The Roman gods and various cults provided a post death insurance policy, but no direction for life. The inevitable void left by this state of affairs was eventually fully filled by the Roman State after it became an Empire. And when a religion applies itself fully to its task it ends up taking control of every aspect of life completely. When this religion is not the one true religion of Christianity and the god of that religion is the State, tyranny and oppression are the inevitable consequences.

As we shall see in the following article, the Roman Empire under the pretext of tolerance and opportunity and help for

all became utterly intolerant of any opposition to its total dominance of life. And Christianity as it grew and spread had to deal with many hidden religious problems.

The very end of the last century B.C. saw the birth of two world religions. The first was caused by the Roman revolution that brought down the republic and the Augustan settlement that eventually followed. From about 23 B.C. the civilised world was ruled by the Roman Empire. Just a few years later saw the birth of Christ and the beginning of the worldwide spread of the gospel. It is, I believe, very significant that these two events came to pass so close together. The Roman Empire was in direct religious opposition to Christ and the Church, and over the next two centuries or so the Roman Empire became what we would recognise today as a secular humanist State. The only true religion it recognised was that of the state itself as identified by the Emperor and the will of the people.

When the Roman republic fell (although the changeover was gradual over many decades), there was a real break in the nature of the government and Empire. The Emperor Augustus who reigned between 27 B.C. and 14 A.D. was seen as the saviour of the world, and Ethelbert Stauffer says this about his advent: "And Virgil raised his voice again, celebrating Augustus's assumption of power as the fulfilment of his prophesy in the days of the civil war (this is the man, the one who has been promised again and again) as the universal advent. It was Virgil's theological and political testament. He died shortly after, but his confession of faith lived on. It was the faith of his people and the confession of all peoples: Augustus is the world's saviour who was to come."<sup>2</sup>

The Roman Republic was in contrast an old fashioned ancient empire. Remember almost all of the territory Rome conquered, it did so when it was a republic, and its main concern was the benefit of Rome itself and almost solely the aristocrats that owned the land and sat in the senate. The laws of citizenship were very restricted and for the most part the non-Roman peoples in the Empire, apart from paying their taxes, had very little contact with the State. All this changed with Caesar and his party. Masses of laws were passed for the benefit of the people, the dole was increased and expanded, citizenship was given to many more people and even foreigners were allowed to sit on the senate. Although Caesar was from an aristocratic family, his party was referred to as the peoples party or the popular party and

1. For an excellent description of this see Charles Norris Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture* (Liberty Fund, (1940) 2003).

2. Ethelbert Stauffer, *Christ and the Caesars* (SCM, 1955), p. 82.

the man on the street of the day had a part to play in the eventual changeover. Cochrane says this in reference to the universality of the Empire: “Amid the wreckage of empires founded on tyranny and exploitation the Roman Empire stood alone as the project of a world-community united by ties of the spirit. As such, it was genuinely political; it went beyond race, beyond color, and, in all but a few exceptional instances, beyond religion as this was envisaged by antiquity. From this standpoint it might appear that *romanitas* transcended all purely natural bonds . . . But while local and racial differences continued to exist, citizens of the Empire discovered a bond of community with one another on the plane of natural reason. It was on this account that the Roman order claimed a universality and a finality to which alternative systems of life could not pretend.”<sup>3</sup>

The religion of the Roman Empire was one of supposed toleration, but although “secular in nature” the Empire was religious in every true sense. It would not tolerate any challenge to its authority, and this of course was proved when Christianity grew in influence. The traditional gods of Rome and the Empire became less and less significant as Caesar and the law of Rome became more and more the centre of religion. Although the gods of various provinces were allowed and even financed by the State, the Emperor came to be the personification of those gods and his deity and the deity of Rome was constantly pushed, and the propaganda of the day emphasised this greatly.

How did this new world religion propagate itself? Law is the ultimate expression of religious authority. It is also the best way to spread the message of a religion and control people’s ability to rebel against that religion. Today we have a law-obsessed society where we are almost constantly breaking a law or changing a process due to a change in law. Naturally the Roman Empire understood law and its authority to create law to be central to its religion. From the time of Caesar onwards, laws and legislation were massively increased and many economic reforms were put in place. When the State tries to be the Saviour of man over and against God, it has to control every aspect of society just as God truly does. *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe* says this about an edict of Roman law in the time of Diocletian: “This edict is significant not so much for its results, but as a symbol of the change that had come over the life of the mediterranean world since the setting up of the principate by Augustus 300 years earlier. A world of free private economic activity had given place to one of state control. Machinery had been devised for the organization of production and trade. Forms of free association had been transmuted into organs of rigid regimentation. The imperial authorities, once content merely to provide facilities for the trader, to act as “night watchmen for the business man”, now sought to direct his whole life and his very movements from place to place.”<sup>4</sup>

The Roman Empire tried to control every aspect of life from economics, trade and education, to peace and justice. Only a religion like Christianity could truly oppose this, since the Bible teaches an all encompassing way of life. The other traditional religions of the Empire, which were mainly cultic pastimes, could happily live alongside the religion of Rome. So when the gospel era began, people had a choice between

the existing saviour or a new one in Christ. Velleius, a courtier under Tiberius, Emperor at the time of the crucifixion, wrote this about the age of the Augustan settlement: “There is nothing that man can desire from the gods, nothing that the gods can grant to man, nothing that wish can conceive or good fortune bring to pass, which Augustus, on his return to the city, did not bestow upon the commonwealth, the Roman people and the world. The civil wars ended . . . foreign wars suppressed, peace re-established, the frenzy of conflicts everywhere lulled to rest, validity was restored to the law, authority to the courts, prestige to the senate; the power of the magistrates was reduced to its former limits, except that two were added to the eight existing praeters. The traditional form of the republic was revived. Agriculture returned to the fields, respect to religion, to mankind security of possession, old laws were carefully amended, new legislation enacted for the general good: the senatorial panel was rigorously, if not drastically, revised.”<sup>5</sup>

Much like our humanist State today, the Roman Empire claimed neutrality in many aspects of its administration and claimed to be the answer to man’s problems without impeding them from worshipping whatever gods they wished, as long as they supported and recognised the authority of the State. But the reality is that there is no neutrality in any aspect of life. Christ said, as recorded in Mt. 12: “he who is not for me is against me,” and Paul wrote to the Church in Rome, “for whatever is not from faith is sin.” Therefore to support the Empire’s ideals and goals was to serve another god. This is not to deny our responsibility to respect the authorities put over us by God, as commanded in Romans 13, but to remember that all other powers are in opposition to Christ’s kingdom and their laws and aims are based on a different religion to ours. Isaiah proclaimed of Christ’s coming: “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; And the government will be upon his shoulder. And his name will be called wonderful, counsellor, mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over his kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgement and justice from that time forward, even for ever. The zeal of the lord of hosts will perform this” (9:6–7).

Unsurprisingly then the church and the Christians of the day had a huge task in separating themselves from the influence of the secular State. The very strength of secular humanism is its apparent toleration of people’s religious opinions and its supposedly neutral laws and administration. Of course due to the Church’s refusal to submit to much of the State’s authority, most notably their refusal to sacrifice to the Emperor, which they saw as an act of idolatry, the Roman Empire did persecute the Christians to a greater or lesser extent at different times. Nevertheless the Christians did not always recognise the inherent falsity of the Roman system, despite its opposition to the Church, but desired for the toleration that was given to the cults around them. Origen, Tertullian and many other Church fathers often noted how the spread of the gospel was enabled and greatly helped by the peace, justice and unity brought about by the Roman Empire.

Although the reality was that the Empire stood in absolute opposition to Christ’s Kingdom, and therefore was a great hindrance to the Church’s task of bringing all the nations

3. Cochrane, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

4. Frank William Walbank, *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe* (CUP, 1987), Vol. 2, p. 71.

5. Cited in Cochrane, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

under God's law, as commanded in Mt. 28, this caused much of the confusion and blending of laws and principles that occurred from the time of Constantine and the beginning of the Christian Roman Empire.

The State (and the Roman Empire was no exception), pervades every area of life so completely that its influence becomes very engrained in our minds without our even knowing it. The early Church had great difficulty in separating itself entirely from State influence even though it recognised its opposition to Christianity. William Ramsey says this about the subtlety of Roman administration: "But all the more surely and truly were the Christians under the influence of Roman administrative forms and ideas, that they were entirely unconscious of the fact. The secret of the extraordinary power exerted by the Roman government in the provinces lay in the subtle way in which the skilful administrative devices, shown by it for the first time to the provinces, filled and dominated the minds of the provincials. After the Roman system was known, its influence took possession of the public mind, and is apparent both in every new foundation for administrative purposes, and even in the gradual modification of the previously existing organisations. Those institutions of the Church which belonged to its Jewish origin steadily became more and more Roman in character."<sup>6</sup>

In many cases the Church actually took on aspects of the Roman system and indeed even supported and upheld much of Roman justice and culture. Often the Church simply wanted toleration and freedom from persecution, or for a Christian Emperor. As is so often the case today Christians were so distracted by the religions and cultic behaviour that was so obviously all around them, that the true religion of Rome often went unnoticed. Henry Chadwick says this: "From the time of Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria the Christian programme had been to accept and uphold the positive value of the best Greek philosophy and of the peace keeping Roman government, but to be vehemently opposed to pagan cult and myth."<sup>7</sup>

One of the many areas influenced by Roman culture was the Church's leadership and authority structure. There is a lot of mystery surrounding the change from apostles and prophets to a hierarchal system of elders, presbyters and bishops. Chadwick's comment is this: "Sixty or seventy years later Ignatius was speaking of Antioch and the Asian churches as possessing a monarchical bishop, together with presbyters and deacons. In his time there were neither apostles nor prophets. The exact history of this transition within two generations from apostles, prophets, and teachers to bishops, presbyters and deacons is shrouded in obscurity, though our sources give occasional glimpses of the process."<sup>8</sup>

Although the exact process will never be known, by the end of the second century a very Roman system was in place. Frend says this: "*Though exceptions were many, the clerical career had become designed to rank in equal step with the grades of the imperial civil service, just as the bishoprics were becoming coterminous with civil boundaries.*"<sup>9</sup> Rushdoony also claims that the bishops'

and ministers' ceremonial dress was borrowed from the Roman magistrates, though he references no source for this. Another influence that Roman theory had on the Church was the monastic system, which of course has influenced the Church ever since in many ways, not least of all in modern Church piety. Rushdoony says: "The Romans tended to identify chaos with the body and its appetites, and reason with order. The roots of western asceticism are extensively bound up in this dialectic rather than biblical Christianity . . . To submit to the pleasures of the flesh, however enticing, was to submit to chaos and to dethrone order. The older Romans were thus distrustful of sex."<sup>10</sup>

But the main problem caused by the Church's failure to fully recognise the religious nature of the secular State came into fruition when the Empire became nominally Christian under the Emperor Constantine in 313 A.D. As already noted, the unconscious but very powerful influence of Roman administrative systems was too strong to be completely eradicated and turned over to Biblical principles. Although the influence of Christianity on the Roman system made great differences to the Church's freedom to grow and have influence in every area of society, the unstoppable progress of the humanistic Roman State system made the tyranny of statism inevitable. As William Ramsey writes: "Politically the Church was originally a protest against over-centralization and against the usurpation by the imperial Government of the rights of the individual citizen. It ended by being more centralized than the Empire itself; and the Christian Empire destroyed all the municipal freedom and self-government that had existed under the earlier Empire."<sup>11</sup>

This is not to say that the Christian Church or Christian Empire was more tyrannical than the previous Empire. Not at all. The Christian influence improved much of life for ordinary people, as we shall see. But two parallel systems advanced together. Not only did Christianity continue to have more and more positive influence on society and give true Christian charity to many people, but the secular arm of the State continued to increase and pervade more and more of life. This was due simply to the subtlety of secular humanism and its all-embracing nature which is hard to escape. The secular religion of Rome was hidden beneath the official religions of the Empire, so when the Empire's official religion was changed to Christianity, much of its secularism remained intact.

Although the Church, particularly in the West, stood up for godly principles against the Christian Emperors, and more than the eastern Churches recognised the Bible's authority over and above the Emperor's, the Church still carried many Roman forms and ideas into modern Europe after the fall of the Empire in the West in about 410 A.D. In other words, the Church as it expanded through Europe and also into many countries never ruled by Rome, brought with it much more than just Christian teaching; it brought the only culture and law system it knew, and that was the Roman one.

What about the Church's positive response to the Roman State, and what brought about so much persecution? More importantly, what can we learn and take encouragement from when we study the early Church? In many areas Christians were unwilling to compromise their faith, and this made them a very dangerous element in society as far as the State

6. Sir William Ramsay, *The Church in the Roman Empire Before A.D. 170* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1897), p. 362.

7. Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (Penguin, 1993 Revised Edition), p. 153.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

9. W. H. C. Frend, *The Early Church from the Beginnings to 461* (SCM press, third edition 1993), p. 238.

10. Rousas John Rushdoony, *The One and the Many* (Thoburn Press, 1971), p. 95.

was concerned. Although the Bible teaches us to obey the authorities and “live peaceably with all men,” as Paul wrote, this was never to be at the expense of God’s laws, and the command in Mt. 28 to disciple all nations to Christ. This often meant the early Christians had to disobey Roman law or subvert its authority. As Ramsey writes: “Placed amid the uncongenial society of the Roman Empire, the Christian Church found itself necessarily in opposition to some parts of Roman law and custom; negatively it refused to comply with them, positively it even enacted laws for itself which were in flat contradiction to the national laws (as when Callistus, Bishop of Rome, ordered about 220 A.D. that certain marriages should be legal, though the state considered them illegal). The Church was a party of reform and of opposition to the government policy, carried sometimes to the verge of revolutionary movement.”<sup>12</sup>

Paul the Apostle himself condemned the Church at Corinth for using the Roman law courts to settle disputes. “Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints . . . if then you have judgements concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the Church to Judge?” (1 Cor. 6:iff.). As God’s own laws are still applicable for all of life it is wrong to expect justice from our humanist courts. In fact the Christian courts became so popular they were often used by non-believers sick of the lack of justice given them by their own courts.

All this naturally caused persecution, as the Roman government, acting out its humanist beliefs, tried to be the saving power in all of life. The Church, believing all things to be under the authority of Christ, started many social reforms of its own, based on the principles set out in the Old Testament, being against not just the Roman “religious beliefs,” but against the societal system that stemmed from them. Ramsey writes in reference to this: “It would be a mistake to look for the reason of the antipathy towards the Christians in their disobedience to any single law. The Christians were so diametrically opposed to the general tendencies of the Government and of the ancient social system, they violated in such an unshrinking, unfeeling, uncompromising way the principles which society and philosophy set most store by, that to prosecute them under any one law, or to think of them as ordinary criminals guilty on one single count, was to minimise their offence in an apparently absurd degree. It was true that a Christian was guilty of treason against the Emperor, and as such deserved death; but to put his crime on that footing was to class him with many noble and high minded Romans, who had been condemned for the same offence.”<sup>13</sup> He goes on to say how other followers of foreign religion were simply contemptuously tolerated. But the Christians were a very real threat; they proclaimed another saviour to the rest of the world and claimed all things began with him.

So what did this look like in practice? Aside from their law courts, the early Christians looked to build a whole new society within the Roman one. They established Schools, hospitals, orphanages, workshops and shelters for the poor. They tried to help people in a truly biblical way, such as by providing the poor with work rather than the State handouts of food, which they were used to. Such an emphasis on practical help and charity in the Church’s own back yard

had a huge effect on the surrounding area as Ramsey states of Basil of Caesarea’s monastery. “The one at Caesarea, with its church, bishop’s palace, and residences for clergy, hospices for poor, sick, and travellers, hospitals for lepers, and workshops for teaching and practising trades, was so large as to be called the ‘New city.’ Such establishments constituted centres from which the irresistible influence of the Church permeated the whole district.”<sup>14</sup> And Frensd says also, “Work was done with the deliberate aim of serving the community. Schools for children and hospitals were established and staffed by monks. There was scope for the learned to study as well as for the craftsman and laborer.”<sup>15</sup> The Roman government had much reason to persecute the early Church, as not only did it oppose so much of what the Roman State did, but openly and practically took steps to set up an alternative culture within its very walls.

People often say that we should be thankful to God that we are not living under persecution today in this country (open persecution for saying we are Christians I mean), but the sad truth is that we do very little that would warrant persecution. If the Church today behaved like the early Church we no doubt would be! Instead we happily support everything the State does apart from matters relating to a few “religious issues.”

But the great encouragement is that the early Church managed in many ways to have a real and lasting effect on the Roman world, which in our laws particularly we still benefit from. And until fairly recently our schools, hospitals and orphanages were still Church-run institutions. By the time of Constantine the Great, the Roman Empire was falling apart; it was ravaged by wars, economic collapse and crime. Although the Christian Roman Empire was by no means perfect it rescued the Empire from complete disintegration and it was the many practical forms of Church life that outlasted the Empire entirely.

Our modern secular humanist State is failing, as is becoming more and more apparent every year, with crime on the rampage, morals declining, economic chaos and much more we could mention. The Church today needs to step into the breach and proclaim a full and practical gospel of hope to this ravaged nation. If the Church doesn’t, Islam or another variation of humanism will take over instead.

### Conclusion

Christianity in the opening centuries had a direct rival just as it does today; the all-encompassing, all-powerful State. Our modern European bureaucratic State is the most blatant opposition to Christianity since the Roman Empire, and although seemingly more subtle the evidence is plainly there to see. And in a sense we are in a better position now to understand the task that the early Church had than we have been in the last 14 centuries. We live in uncertain times, but history shows us there is very little new under the sun. Despite the opposition that the early Christians experienced, the Church still grew and took over more and more of the State’s social responsibility, and our task is the same today, to fulfil what was proclaimed in Psalm 8 of Christ and his earthly kingdom: “What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you visit him? For you have made him a little lower than the angels, and you have crowned

11. Ramsay, *op. cit.*, p. 445. 12. *Ibid.*, p. 177. 13. *Ibid.*, p. 351.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 461.

15. Frensd, *op. cit.*, p. 195

him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet.”

The Roman Empire, being the first fully worked-out secular humanist State, has had a great amount of influence on governments, leaders and philosophers ever since, not least Hitler and Napoleon, who of course used many Roman emblems and symbols to propagate their ideals. Still today the Roman Empire is considered a time of cultural and administrative excellence. Nothing sums up better the picture of the Empire brought down to us than the words that the historian Edward Gibbon wrote in the eighteenth century: “If a man were called to fix the period in the history of the world during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous, he would, without hesitation, name that which elapsed from the death of

Domitian to the accession of Commodus. The vast extent of the Roman Empire was governed by absolute power, under the guidance of virtue and wisdom. The armies were restrained by the firm but gentle hand of four successive Emperors whose characters and authority commanded involuntary respect. The forms of the civil administrations were carefully preserved by Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, and the Antonines, who delighted in the image of liberty, and were pleased with considering themselves as the accountable ministers of the laws. Such princes deserved the honour of restoring the republic, had the Romans of their days been capable of enjoying a rational freedom.”<sup>16</sup> *C&S*

16. Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (BCA: 1979, one volume abridgement by D. M. Low), p. 1.

## GRACE & LAW

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—Walter J. Chantry

# SECULAR HUMANISM: ITS ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT

by David Paul

WHEN we speak of Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and many other named religious faiths, we as Christians have no difficulty in recognising the difference between these and our own beliefs. If we were to read the Shruti or Smriti sacred books of Hinduism, or the Theravada and Mahayana scriptures of Buddhism or the Muslim Koran, they are alien to our trust in God's word—we would dismiss such writings as false and idolatrous.

But when we mention the word Humanism a confusion pervades the mind of the Christian. We can't quite identify what the word means or exactly what it stands for, and how to recognise it. We accept that all these other religions are humanistic in that they are false—man-centred with idolatry at the heart of it—but they are only one aspect of humanism. This is the easy bit; they say what they stand for, and they don't pretend to be anything other than what they claim.

Now humanism, or secular humanism, comes in many shades and forms. Like a chameleon it changes to suit the conditions and environment it seeks to invade. Paul writes to the Ephesian Church warning them: "finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemings of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand. Stand therefore having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints" (Eph. 6:10–18). The point being, that the devil is a schemer, a trickster and a liar, and unless we root ourselves in the word of God, which is the "sword of the Spirit" we will be taken in, because behind what may be presented as true, fair and right is a more sinister and less obvious agent at work.

It is at this point that we need to examine the events of the last 220 years or so, to begin to understand why we have arrived at the situation we find ourselves in today.

In the latter years of the eighteenth century throughout Europe, certain minds were developing humanism in a political and religious form which was about to burst onto the Western world scene at the time of the French Revolution, a time that history books in our schools tell us much about—"bloody guillotines," "starving peasants," Aristocrats, corrupt kings and clergy, "equality" and the "rights of man"—but little about the "schemers," crafting their philosophy into a political/religious format that ordinary people will accept. The repercussions of this event are not consigned to history but pervade our culture, society and the Church today throughout the Western world.

But while aristocratic and dissenting heads were rolling in France, a Revolution was already taking place in Britain.

Celebrating the centenary of the 1688 Glorious Revolution, in November 1788, The London Revolutionary Society—a group of politicians, and some members of the established Church, plus high ranking whigs—at their annual dinner resolved, as the basis of its faith, that all civil authority was to be derived from the people, that its abuse justified resistance, and that freedom of election, freedom of the press, freedom of conscience, and trial by jury, were inevitable. And so amongst these and other revolutionary societies which had long existed in several English towns, they celebrated a festival of Political Liberty.<sup>1</sup>

Three years later, William Godwin, a son of an East Anglian dissenting minister who had turned from Calvinism, through Deism, to unbelief, embarked on writing a book based on his sentiments of "liberty." By 1793 *Political Justice* was published. His system is founded on two propositions as described by P A Brown: "Man is the creature of circumstances, but chiefly of those which can be modified: education, social environment, and political control. Secondly, our actions are voluntary, in the sense that they are preceded and controlled by an intellectual judgement. Once awakened to its powers, the human reason is inevitably propelled along the road to perfection, though at present it is deflected in a thousand ways by the forces of Society and the State."<sup>2</sup> Along with Paine, Wollstonecraft and Burke, the optimism of these theorists of reform is founded in confidence in the power of human reason.

At this time an evangelical revival had been taking place

1. P. A. Brown, *The French Revolution in English History*, p. 43.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 46f.

in England, though political ideas went generally unchallenged. Whilst Christians were concerned with personal salvation, piety and church attendance, they had failed to realise what was happening in the minds of men. The impact of this revival had limitations.

William Wilberforce in his book *Practical View of Christianity* published in 1797, observed that all was not well with the Church. “England,” he writes, “is a Christian nation in name and intellectually. Intellectual infidelity has never been powerful and its champions not read. But infidelity as a disease of the heart is everywhere. Morally England is not Christian, for the majority of those who call themselves Christians make no effort to practise the Christian life. Their virtues and their moral code do not differ from those of other men. They do not condemn a man for his opinions, so long as he is sincere in holding them; evil is judged only by its effects on society; amiable temper, social usefulness and family virtues are substituted for the one business of Christian lives, ‘to secure our admission into Heaven.’”<sup>3</sup>

Christianity was becoming less and less a national religion and more and more a personal experience. Owen Chadwick makes this statement: “But religion of the heart was not a recess which State or Society could penetrate.” He further says: “Christian conscience was the force which began to make Europe ‘secular’; that is to allow many religions or no religion in a State, and repudiate any kind of pressure upon the man who rejected the accepted and inherited axioms of Society. My conscience is my own. It is private.”<sup>4</sup>

Many societies and political groups had developed at this time in England, but it was illegal to publish this kind of Revolutionary thought. As a result there were trials and imprisonments, which resulted in riots in many towns, and a number of booksellers were prosecuted for dealing in this popular material, and of course progress was very slow in reaching the masses as most of the population were illiterate.<sup>a</sup>

The main distraction at this time was “The Great War” against the French. People generally were extremely patriotic and this overshadowed their complaints. But having said this, a gradual shift in religious thought was taking place.<sup>a</sup> Christianity was becoming progressively internalised and liberalism was on the increase as part of National Culture.

These new liberal and secular ideas brought in what we now know as the Modern Centralised State. Its sovereignty overshadows the Monarch, where local customs are trampled upon and government representatives replace local arrangements with legal enforcement.<sup>a</sup>

Let’s briefly look at how all aspects of society and life were affected by the new faith.

By the end of the eighteenth century science was mainly concerned with the solution of productive requirements relating to advances in chemistry, and was closely linked to the workshop and the needs of industry. However, by the later nineteenth century elite academics had split science into a superior *pure* discipline as distinct from the *inferior* practical part. Changes were occurring. Out of this industrial revolu-

tion came economic and progressive classes of financiers, manufacturers, entrepreneurs, landlords, administrators etc., all affected by the new “enlightenment” with their confidence in their control over nature and with their new found “rational” minds—ready to change the world for ever.<sup>5</sup>

Provincial Societies sprang up all over. Such men as the potter Josiah Wedgewood, the engineer James Watts and business partner Matthew Boulton, the chemist Priestly, the printer Baskerville and biologist Erasmus Darwin (grandfather of the more famous one) flocked into the Lodges of Freemasonry.<sup>6</sup>

Across the Channel, Freemasonry was cultivating a more sinister revolution. Soaking up the philosopher’s gospel like a sponge, these societies of the new bourgeoisie formed the *Declaration of the Rights of Man* (1789). It laid down that all citizens have a right to co-operate in the formation of Law, either personally or through their representative. “The source of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation.”<sup>7</sup>

A statement from the Jacobin Republic in year two will be familiar to our twenty-first century ears, as Eric Hobsbawm says: “Most significant of all the official statements was that the happiness of all was the aim of the Government and the people’s rights were to be not merely available but operative. It was the first genuinely democratic constitution proclaimed by a modern State.”<sup>8</sup> Out of this, eventually, came the idea of the “Welfare State.”

In the post Napoleonic period, the revolutionary spirit excelled throughout Europe. It was deeply rooted in secret Masonic/brotherhood type organisations. There is no doubt that the old systems were wanting, but in practice the new ideology created great stress. Hobsbawm continues: “The legal revolution, from the peasants’ point of view, gave nothing except some legal rights, but it took away much. Thus in Prussia, emancipation gave him two thirds or half the land he already tilled and freedom from forced labour and other dues; but it formally took away: his claim to assistance from the Lord in times of bad harvest or cattle plague; his right to collect or buy cheap fuel from the Lord’s forest; his right in extreme poverty to ask the Lord’s help in paying taxes; and his right to pasture animals in the Lord’s forest. For the poor peasant it seemed a distinctly hard bargain. The free land market meant that he probably had to sell his land; the creation of a rural class of entrepreneurs, that the most hard hearted and hard headed exploited him instead of, or in addition to, the old Lords. Altogether the introduction of liberalism on the land was like some sort of silent bombardment which shattered the social structure he had always inhabited and left nothing in its place but the rich: a solitude called freedom.”<sup>9</sup>

All these great ideas of freedom were conceived, cultivated and hatched in the cafes of the Palais Royal, Paris, described as a place of counter morality where the propagation of pornography was rife, prostitution commonplace, and a den of sexual and political freedom.<sup>10</sup>

After the slaughter had finished, on the site of the Bastille, an enormous sphynx-like statue of Nature was constructed to celebrate the first anniversary of the overthrow of the monarchy. It was called the Feast of Unity and Indivisibility where a vast crowd gathered to sing A Hymn to Nature.<sup>11</sup>

3. *Ibid.*, p. 180f.

4. Owen Chadwick, *The Secularisation of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 43.

a. Please refer to the works listed in the other footnotes, excluding *Sacred Causes*, and *Fire in the Minds of Men*.

5. Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution 1789–1848*, p. 33f.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 34. 7. *Ibid.*, p. 80. 8. *Ibid.*, p. 91. 9. *Ibid.*, p. 193f.

10. James H. Billington, *Fire in the Minds of Men*, p. 23–29.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

Headed by Philip of Orleans' Freemasonry it gave the new revolutionary tradition a religious language with its ceremonies and songs—a secular version of baptism and communion evolved.

On the *Champ de Mars* a great mountain was built and the last great festival of *The feast of the Supreme Being* took place on June 8th, 1794. Half a million participants revelled in idolatry to the Enlightened way.<sup>12</sup> This celebrated the submission of the Church. On August 14th, 1792, all clergy were compelled to take the oath: "I swear to be faithful to the nation, to maintain with all my power, liberty, equality, the security of persons and property, and to die if necessary for the execution of the Laws." Non-compliers were threatened with deportation to New Guinea unless they left the country within a fortnight: if they did they faced ten years imprisonment. Many were incarcerated until the prisons were so overcrowded that ad-hoc jails were established in abbeys and convents. Suspected of giving support to the Prussians who were over the border and threatening, Parisien militants panicked and stormed these jails murdering between 2 and 3 thousand prisoners including 3 bishops and 220 priests.<sup>3</sup> The Revolutionaries had developed a call to *de-Christianise* France.

A new religion had been born. One such writer in favour of the change in faith wrote: "How was the Christian religion established? By the preaching of the apostles of the Gospel. How can we firmly establish the constitution? By the mission of the apostles of liberty and equality. Each society should take charge of the neighbouring country districts. It is enough to send an enlightened and zealous patriot with instructions which he will adapt to the locality. He should also provide himself with a copy of the Declaration of Rights, the Constitution, the *Almanach de Pere Gerard* (by Calot d'Herbois)—a good tract against fanaticism, a good journal and a good model of a pike."<sup>14</sup>

So armed missionaries of Reason marched throughout Europe spreading the message of "liberty." Religious terminology became common-place; it just transferred into a political context. In 1792 Mirabeau wrote that "'the Declaration of the Rights of Man' has become a political Gospel and the French Constitution a religion for which people are prepared to die." Tens of thousands did die—those who did not comply—many tortured to death.<sup>14</sup>

And so the conditioning of the mind began: from pre-school onwards, alternative catechisms were constructed through the implementation of Education Programmes. The idea of the Polytechnic or modern University was first founded in France in 1795 and spread through Europe and eventually to Britain. It was at this time that attempts were made to provide theories of Evolution: *Les Epoques de la Nature* in 1778 by the zoologist Comte de Buffon, James Hutton's *Theory of the Earth* in 1795, and Erasmus Darwin's *Zoomania* in 1794 accelerated in the decade of the French Revolution.<sup>15</sup>

These new prophets of Reason and Light gloried in the new faith. Men like Rouseau and others idealised primitive man in that he somehow lived in harmony with fellow men and nature. Kant, in 1795, among his last writings expressed his belief in the possibility of universal peace through a world federation of republics which would renounce war. (The word Sociology was invented by Auguste Compte around

1830).<sup>16</sup> By the 1840s it was accepted amongst Romantics of all kinds that "the Folk"—i.e. the pre-industrial peasant or craftsman—exemplified the uncorrupted virtues and that his language, song, story and custom was the true repository of the soul of the people. The word "folklore" was an invention of this period, and to the socialist primitive society was a sort of model of *Utopia*.<sup>17</sup>

One of the survivors of the *Terror* who kept his aristocratic head was the idealist Saint Simon, an early light of European central socialist planning and one of the precursors of those today who desire global governance, world parliaments and world peace. He was described by some as an "unhinged genius." Having achieved all he could, he decided to kill himself, and having fired 7 bullets into his head succeeded only in blinding himself in one eye.<sup>18</sup>

So the free liberal State was now well established. National Police forces were founded throughout Europe, the first being France in 1798.

Christian pietists had little to counter the secularist faith and the new "working classes" saw the Church as irrelevant (this comes to light in *The British Religious Census* of 1851). Secularisation was rapidly increasing and by the end of the nineteenth century, through the new labour movements, the working classes had been captured.

The new Science found itself in increasing conflict with the Bible. Books appeared denying the authenticity of Scripture and the divinity of Christ: for example, Lachmann's *Novum Testamentum* and David Strauss's *Life of Jesus*.<sup>19</sup>

Numerous apologists for secular humanism appeared. Chadwick explains: "As early as 1767 the French materialist d'Holbach on his attack upon Christianity, said, 'Religion is the art of making men drunk with enthusiasm, to prevent them thinking about the oppressions committed by their rulers.' In the *Halla Jahrbucher* of 1841 Bruno Bauer published an article on 'The Christian State and Our Age', where he contended for a state neutral in religion and with its laws dependent only upon the rights of man. Bauer wished to demolish the idea of a Christian State, and in passing, explained how the theological aspect of state order had 'an effect like opium' in putting to sleep the instincts of men for freedom. Bauer again states 'that no state could be emancipated unless every one gave up religion. If Jews are to find equality they must surrender their Judaism while everyone else surrenders their Christianity. Then there will be a secular state and a secular society.' Bauer thought that if you make a state secular, it will follow that Society is secular."<sup>20</sup>

In the 1840s public education systems were ushered in. Britain was yet to yield. In Europe public railway systems were being planned. Larger judicial administration, civil service, tax collectors; yes, the bureaucrat was born "to service and maintain an increasing government machine—the great creature needed food, and so the level of taxation increased in its many forms."<sup>21</sup> By 1840 government expenditure in Liberal Britain was four times as high as in autocratic Russia.

With this social and political change a new language was evolving. By the early 1800s the phrase "working class" was born. A few years later the word "socialism" appears. A champion of the cause came—Robert Owen. Between

15. Eric Hobsbawn, *op. cit.*, p. 348.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 344.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 321.

18. Michael Burleigh, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

19. Eric Hobsbawn, *op. cit.*, p. 272.

20. Owen Chadwick, *op. cit.*, pp. 49–55.

21. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

13. Michael Burleigh, *Earthly Powers*, p. 64ff.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 81.



1820–1850 the British movement created a dense network of institutions for working class self education and political education, e.g. Owenite “Halls of Science.” By 1850 there were 700 of them, and in 1840 the first documented use of the word “communism” in a German newspaper appeared.<sup>22</sup>

The Western world was being prepared for Charles Darwin. Church agencies were taken over by secular ones, particularly in education and welfare.

At the same time within the Church itself independent evangelicalism was becoming popular and also other independent Church groups. In 1851 about half the Protestant worshippers in England and Wales attended services other than those of the established church. In the US by 1850 almost three quarters of all churches belonged to Baptists, Methodists and to a lesser extent, Presbyterians.<sup>23</sup>

Revivalism of the previous century led to the expansion of Protestant dissent. They then perpetuated a trend for Christians to become more inward looking and a kind of retreat mentality began to set in.

The world was out there! Leave it well alone!

According to the 1851 religious census, 5 million out of a population of 18 million did not attend church services, and those conspicuously absent were the urban working class.<sup>24</sup> And, as the century progressed, so society became more secular in England. Chadwick makes this point: “The working man was going to become a standard bearer of social progress. He was going to be less idealised than Marx sometimes imagined, but through him lay the road towards a classless society, or at least non-hierarchical society. In the sense of relentless march towards the light, which Marxism gave him, he was to have little or no sense of using the churches, his attitude to religion might be friendly, or favourable, or hostile; religion he could use. Churches he hardly felt that he could use. The Social Movement of the nineteenth century would drive a wedge between religion and the traditional societies which religion enshrined and created.”<sup>25</sup>

More anti-Christian books began to appear on book-stalls, and where once the Church supplied teachers in the community, a new teaching profession began to establish itself. The word “evolution” became part of the English vocabulary, although no-one could explain what it meant. It was accepted blindly since other more educated scientists can be trusted to know what they are talking about. We must just believe. And so the nature of education began to change. For indoctrination of the masses to be successful, you first need an intellectual elite to invade the minds of those who teach, and then eventually to permeate through the population until it is ingrained in the thinking of every member of the nation.<sup>26</sup>

Science was now becoming stronger as a “neutral” discipline, and consequently an avalanche of books invaded the market, writers like Darwin, Buchner, Vogt, Owen and Huxley. So by the 1860s doubts were settling in the Christian Church across Britain, France, and Germany, and increasingly accepting a general idea of evolution.<sup>27</sup>

The French historian Ernest Renan said that “All truth is now scientific. Our age sees the method of natural

science as the way to truth.” His book *The Life of Jesus* was the most famous book written in France during the nineteenth century and until 1900 he was the most famous of writers. He humanised Jesus and made him “superhuman.”<sup>28</sup>

The German historian Treitschke could only understand the idea of a Christian nation in terms of the State being secular.<sup>29</sup> In Hegel’s view the State was primary. Christianity no longer had the supreme place in the turning of moral ideals into practical behaviour. It has a place, but subordinate to the state. The State, he believed, is the divine will, working as the Spirit develops the world’s true form and organisation. He goes on to say that “the state’s highest duty is to perpetuate itself.”<sup>30</sup>

It has been argued that Protestantism was a direct cause of the process of secularisation. Well, perhaps in part. The rise of pietism in the eighteenth century caused a withdrawal by Christians into their sacred and safe structures, leaving the world to go its own way. Yes, the Reformation weakened Papal control, but by the nineteenth century neither Catholicism nor Reformed biblical Christianity dominated Western culture. Into the void swept secularisation.

And so by the end of the nineteenth century, rather than compete intellectually, Christian evangelicalism tended towards the mystic and sentimental. This is reflected in many of the songs and hymns of the time. A basic simplistic minimalism was generally what they had to offer the Church and the world.

Whilst the Church concentrated on personal salvation and individual piety, the old Christian State was being dismantled by Christians themselves. Campaigns for disestablishment happened throughout the British Isles in Victorian society. People were quite happy to have a secular State and yet have a more Christian society. Unwittingly the Church was aiding the Secularist cause and supporting it. The transition was well under way, but there were some encouraging voices.

In December 1878, Pope Leo XIII in his *Quod apostolis numeris* condemns the “sect” of secularists, communists, and nihilists. He wrote: “They say that authority comes not from God but from the people, and the people is subject to no divine sanction and will obey no laws but those which suit itself. God has set up different orders in society, and as for princes, obedience is always due to them, unless they command what is against the Law of God.”<sup>31</sup> In November of the same year, the right-wing deputy, the Comte de Mun, spoke in the Paris Chamber of Deputies. He said: “The revolution puts the human reason as sovereign, in place of the Law of God. From this flows all the rest - especially the pride and rebellion which is the source of the modern state. The state has taken over everything. The state has become your God. We are not willing [he said to the Republicans opposite] to join you in making obeisance to this idol of a state. The counter-revolution, that is the opposite of what you stand for. It is the doctrine which founds society on Christian faith.”<sup>32</sup>

In the same decade Archbishop Manning of Westminster, deeply concerned, wrote to his friend P.M. Gladstone: “Of this I am sure as of the motion of the Earth. My belief is that faith is gone from society as such, morals are going; and politics will end in the paralysis of the governing power.

22. Michael Burleigh, *op. cit.*, p. 243.

23. Eric Hobsbawm, *op. cit.*, p. 275f.

24. Michael Burleigh, *op. cit.*, p. 368.

26. Owen Chadwick, *op. cit.*, chapter 8.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

27. *Ibid.*, chapter 7.

28. Michael Burleigh, *op. cit.*, p. 221; Owen Chadwick, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 131.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 110.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 110f.

The end of this must be anarchy or despotism. How soon I do not know. France is there already; Italy will be; and England will not stand forever. I have been a fearless radical all my life, and am not afraid of popular legislation, but legislation without principles is in strict sense anarchy. I see no principle now but the will of the majority; the will of the majority is not either reason or right. My belief is that society without Christianity is the commune. What hope can you give me?"<sup>33</sup>

Christianity was becoming less and less a national religion and more and more a personal experience. By the early years of the twentieth century European man was ripe for another onslaught of militant humanism. Just prior to the 1917 Russian Revolution, whilst the world was locked in war, the Russian Orthodox Church claimed:

- 100 million members
- 200,000 priests and monks
- 75,000 thousand churches and chapels
- 1,100 monasteries
- 37,000 primary schools
- 57 seminaries
- and 4 university-level academies, not to mention

thousands of hospitals, old-people's homes and orphanages.<sup>34</sup> A few years later and all these institutions were swept away, the churches were emptied, vandalised or put to secular use, many of the clergy were imprisoned or shot, and the first concentration camp of the Gulag was opened in a monastery in the arctic regions.

Pope Pious XI recognised that Communism was "a new gospel that offers Bolshevism and atheistic Communism as a message of salvation and deliverance for humanity."<sup>35</sup> Communism as a secular State religion was now on the world scene, and soon to follow, its fascist adversary was being conceived by European intellectuals.

South America, Mexico, Spain, Portugal, Eastern Europe in general, as well as Germany and Italy, experienced the Jackboot. Mussolini stated, "Fascism is not only a party, it is a regime, it is not only a regime, but a faith, it is not only a faith, but a religion that is conquering the labouring masses of the Italian people."<sup>36</sup> He also said "Fascism is a religious conception in which man is seen in his immanent relationship with a superior Law and with an objective Will that transcends the particular individual and raises him to conscious membership of a spiritual society."<sup>37</sup> The individual was always subordinate to the mighty State and his value was only recognised providing he advanced its greatness.

Hitler believed that he was "doing the Lord's work," "creating and securing the conditions for a really deep and inner religious life." He stated that Christianity was the unshakable foundation of the moral and ethical life of the people.<sup>38</sup> Two thirds of the population of Germany were Protestant. Many Christians were taken in by this—the Nazi-Protestant Christian movement had nearly 600,000 members. There was no Catholic equivalent. In fact the Protestant League was the first Christian organisation to give its support to the Nazi regime. It was not until after the war between 1945–49 that about 55,000 Protestants were involved distributing food and clothing and processing details of around 10,000,000 dispossessed people throughout Europe. But Hitler's doctrine

was emphatic. He said: "The State has the absolute, direct and immediate rights over everyone and everything that has to do with civil society in any way."<sup>39</sup>

Since the war the dismantling of biblical justice has accelerated. Everything evil has increased. Throughout the twentieth century, over 100 million lives have been lost due to this futile experiment with mankind which has failed abominably. Man now has rights rather than responsibility—the ridiculous word "equality" is part of our international language.<sup>40</sup> Micheal Buleigh writes: "The idea that Britain is a 'multi-faith' society has become so ingrained, often with the explicit encouragement of the Establishment, that it is easy to forget how this development happened. This is mysterious, because what seemed a promising celebration of difference has turned out to be highly divisive."<sup>41</sup>

The absurd has become the normal, and the ridiculous commonplace. The Netherlands, which were at one time so heavily influenced by biblical Christianity, have dissolved their wisdom to such a level that their immigration authority have released a video to immigrants in order to describe what "Dutchness" is. It consists of snippets from the life of William of Orange, tulips and windmills, naked sunbathers and a gay wedding.<sup>42</sup> That says it all!

More importantly and closer to home, our own nation in reality fares little better than its European cousins. After the war in 1945 a huge programme of nationalisation began; education, industry, transport and the monolithic Welfare State. The once Christian nation was being strangled and contorted into a secular haven for modern man, where the restraints of the Bible can be disposed of, its laws and guidance jettisoned.

The State comes of age herding its willing members into institutions of education and training, indoctrinating them with a new religion. The Church, now pacified and neutered, is compliant and willing. Like a tiger with rubber teeth she protests about various "moral" issues—abortion, marriage, divorce etc., but she need not fear. She is still free to hold services, meetings, conferences, conventions and rallies. We can preach the gospel good news; as long as our faith extends no further than the confines of the church's sacred walls no one will complain.

Our public culture is dominated by secularists. In the media they make fast and easy work of any bishop or churchman sent out to remonstrate about any subject you care to name. Of course so many clergy share common ground in their liberal doctrine, demonstrating that they have already surrendered the terms of engagement to the humanists.

### Conclusion

The fact is that we in this country are heavily influenced by the ideology of the Revolutionary mind, Christians included. We cannot seem to distinguish between biblical teaching and secular doctrine. We need to see that the Bible teaches us about every aspect of our lives—family, Church, government, education and all things else. The Christian mind has been captivated by a false premise. Over the last two centuries our thinking has changed; Christians have been seduced into believing that the Bible has nothing to say about most of life and culture, except personal salvation, spiritual experience

33. *Ibid.*, p. 125.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 190.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

34. Michael Burleigh, *Sacred Causes*, p. 40.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 100, 171f.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 357.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 424.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 476.

on a daily basis and various amendments to our morality. We lament the state of our nation, yet rely upon the pagan institutions to indoctrinate our children, who then spend years in universities when they could be working and building businesses on a Christian ethic. We have surrendered to our humanist masters and become slaves in a monolithic State that exists only to serve itself.

Christians are called to serve God. This is not fulfilled merely by going to Church meetings on a Sunday, and meetings in the week, but by the whole of our lives being put into the service of our Saviour (see Dt. chap. 6). Until the Christian Church wakes up and implements a Christian world-view, starting with our own lives, we will not claim back any lost ground, we will not be taken seriously and we will not honour our God and glorify Christ in the earth.

If you think that State education is a good thing, that welfarism is something we can never live without, that more and more laws are necessary to control people and restrict their freedom, that the State is a neutral institution and that the Bible has little or nothing relevant to say on any of this, that God's laws are archaic and redundant, then you have the spirit of Humanism and have already surrendered to the Baalish ideology of the humanist religion.

Finally, Paul's warning to the Colossian church is a relevant reminder: "Beware lest anyone take you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead in bodily form and you are complete in him who is the head of all rule and authority" (Col. 2:8). *C&S*

## THE DECENT DRAPERY OF LIFE: *A Study in Sexual Morality and Gender*

By Robin Phillips

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*The Decent Drapery of Life* attempts to defend biblical morality by showing the consequences of the alternative. However, rather than simply lamenting the decadent condition of our society, Phillips goes deeper to show that the results of the sexual revolution have actually been antithetic to its own goals.

Starting at the time of the Enlightenment and working through to the present day, the author observes that a consequence of rejecting the biblical worldview has been to rob men and women of the ability to properly enjoy themselves as God intended. The reductionism of sexuality and gender wrought by the materialistic paradigm has created a new network of secular taboos. The result is not only that gender has been neutralised, but the spice has been taken out of life.

As the argument unfolds, it becomes clear that the biblical approach is not simply the ethical option: it is also the most erotic. The alternatives to Christian morality, which our society has been desperately trying to make work, not only fail to achieve their own goals, but are ultimately boring by comparison.

*The Decent Drapery of Life* should help the Church at a time when chastity is "in" but coherent thinking about chastity is at an all time low. The book is well researched, drawing on a large body of philosophical and historical literature, in addition to anecdotal sources. Written for teenagers to help them think in fresh ways about old truths, every chapter ends with questions for reflection and a list of materials for further reading.

"Having read this book I think it will be a valuable and helpful resource both for those who are struggling to understand the moral principles of Christianity in a confused age and for those who are trying to explain the Christian position and the contemporary situation to the confused and misled. It will also be very useful in Bible study classes and house groups."—Stephen Perks

- If you would be disturbed to discover that the sexual revolution created more taboos than it eradicated, DO NOT BUY THIS BOOK!
- If you are comfortable believing that gender differences are culturally conditioned, DO NOT BUY THIS BOOK!
- If you are secure in the illusion that feminism liberates women to enjoy themselves, DO NOT BUY THIS BOOK!
- If you find it convenient to believe that modesty is for those who are uncomfortable with their bodies, DO NOT BUY THIS BOOK!

# THE NEW WORLD DISORDER

by Stephen C. Perks

DURING the early stages of World War Two, Britain went through a period subsequently called “the phoney war” in which, although Britain was officially at war with Germany, nothing happened. No shots were fired, no bombs were dropped and British people on the whole did not find their way of life significantly affected by being at war with Germany. The war seemed to be a phoney war.

There is an interesting point of comparison with this today in the relationship that exists between the West and Islam. Officially the West is not at war with Islam, and the British government seems to be at pains to reassure everyone that Islam is a religion of peace, despite historical and contemporary evidence to the contrary. However, the reality of the situation is that Islam is conducting a war against the West, both ideologically and physically. This hostile situation can only be described as a phoney peace. But unlike those who ruled Britain during World War Two, who recognised the enemy (and not merely the threat of violence posed by a few extremists in the German army), our politicians today are too weak and feeble-minded to face the truth. Psychologists call this “denial.”

Of course, this does not mean that all Muslims are terrorists, nor that all Muslims want war with the West, nor that all Muslims approve of the terrorist activities of modern Islamic fundamentalists. Doubtless many Muslims want to live in peace with the West, and even have a view of Islam that stresses peaceful co-existence as the right attitude to the non-Islamic world. But neither did war with Germany mean that all Germans were members of the German army or the SS, nor did it mean that all Germans wanted war with Britain, nor did it mean that all Germans approved of the activities and philosophy of the German government. We know that there were many Germans, both within and outside Germany, who did not want war, who wanted to live in peace with the rest of Europe and thoroughly disapproved of the philosophy and activities of the Nazis. But this did not change the fact that there were enough Germans who did want to subjugate Europe to the yoke of German rule by the force of arms to make German aggression possible, and most importantly (this is where the greatest point of comparison lies), that there were enough Germans who were prepared to *acquiesce* in the philosophy and activities of the Nazi Party to enable it to rise to power and turn the possibility of German aggression into a reality that terrorised Europe. Had those who ruled Britain during World War Two adopted the same attitude towards Germany at the outbreak of the war that our present rulers have adopted

towards Islam, the modern history of Britain and Europe would have been very different.

There is of course a significant difference. Britain has not declared war on Islam and British people, and the people of Western nations generally, do not want war with Islam. But Islam has already declared war on the West. Islamic teaching divides the world into two groups: the House of Islam (*dar ul-Islam*), i.e. those subject to Islam, and the House of War (*dar ul-harb*), those who are not subject to Islam. The goal of Islam is conquest of the House of War, and that means unequivocally the Islamisation of the West, by force if necessary. Therefore the prophet taught that “I am commanded to fight against men until they bear witness that there is no God but Allah and that Mohammad is God’s messenger; *only by pronouncing these words can they make their property and blood secure from me.*” (Please note the words in italics.) This saying is recorded in many hadiths (sayings of the Prophet recorded by his followers).<sup>1</sup>

The importance of the hadiths for Islamic doctrine is not generally appreciated by non-Muslims in the West. It is generally thought that the Koran is the main source of Islamic teaching and in particular that *sharia* law is based on the Koran. This is incorrect. Abbas Zaidi, writing from Pakistan in the Spring 2000 issue of *The Salisbury Review*, stated the matter clearly:

In many countries, like Pakistan, Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia, the hadiths are taken to be on a par with the Koran and along with the Koran have been made into the supreme source of Muslim law. Also, in many cases the Koranic injunctions have been put aside in favour of the hadiths. The Taliban and the Wahabis never allow the Koran to be read in a local language; but the hadiths are always available in local languages. Why? Because you can justify anything from the hadiths: from the honour killings of women to the killing of Shias, Ahmedis and Christians. The Islamic jurists say that any Muslim who turns apostate [i.e. abandons the Islamic religion—SCP] must be killed “in accordance with the Islamic Law,” but in the Koran, Allah explicitly says that if anyone becomes an apostate it is “between him and Me” and that such a person will be dealt with on the Day of Judgement. Interestingly, those Muslim intellectuals who have, now and in the past, pleaded against the validity of the hadiths have been declared non-Muslims by the Saudi-funded Islamic inquisition.<sup>2</sup>

1. *Sahih Bukhari*, Vol. 1, Bk 2, no. 24; Bk 8, no. 387; Vol. 4, Bk 52, no. 196; Vol. 9, Bk 84, no. 59; *Sunan Abu-Dawud*, Bk 14, no. 2635; Bk 19, no. 3061.

2. *The Salisbury Review*, Vol. 18, No. 3, p. 40.

Islam sees itself at war with the non-Islamic world, and it considers all means necessary to achieve conquest of the House of War as legitimate. This is so because Islam has no doctrine of common law. Those who are not in the House of Islam have no protection from Islamic law. They are outlaws, i.e. beyond the protection of Islamic law. This is why apostates (i.e. Muslims who convert to another religion) in Islamic countries can be murdered with impunity.<sup>3</sup> Muslims do not deny the nature of the conflict between the House of Islam and the House of War. Why then do Western politicians deny it at every turn and seek to convince people that Islam is a religion of peace? Fear? Such whistling in the dark will not save us from the fearful consequences of failing to face the issue. Is it political correctness and an ideological commitment to the absurd doctrines of multiculturalism (i.e. the creation of a multi-religious society) that blinds our leaders to the truth? But multiculturalism has been an abysmal failure.

What is clear is that our leaders have no real answer to the situation we face, and this is because they do not understand the problem in the first place. The modern debate on violence originating in religious fanaticism is unbalanced, lacks historical perspective and assumes the veracity of secular humanist ideology, which is often infused with ill-considered propaganda. It is religion that provides the foundations for all civilisations. Without a stable religious foundation no civilisation can survive. British civilisation, and indeed much of Western civilisation generally, is collapsing because the religious foundations upon which it was built have been shattered by the liberal secular humanist agenda, which has systematically attacked and uprooted the Christian values that underpinned our way of life for so long. But secular humanism is also a religion. It has its own world-view, with a particular understanding of the origin, nature, meaning, value and purpose of life. While it is true that much violence has been committed in the name of Christianity and Islam throughout history, it is secular humanism that has proved to be the most intolerant and persecuting of all religions. The secular State has been responsible for more deaths, both in war and as a result of the various secular humanist inquisitions and witch-hunts carried out in the twentieth century, than all other religious persecutions in history put together. Current estimates put the number of those killed by the secular State during the twentieth century between 110 million people<sup>4</sup> and 231 million people.<sup>5</sup> Even the Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm acknowledged that the twentieth century was “an era of religious wars, though the most militant and bloodthirsty of its religions were secular ideologies of nineteenth century vintage, such as socialism and nationalism, whose god-equivalents were either abstractions or politicians venerated in the manner of divinities.”<sup>6</sup>

3. For case studies of the murder of Christians in Pakistan see “The Murder of Christians in Pakistan—Three Case Studies” in *Christianity & Society*, Vol. xiv, No. 4 (October, 2004) and “Persecution of Christians in Modern Pakistan: More Case Studies from CLAAS in *Christianity & Society*, Vol. xvii, No. 2 (October 2007); both available as a PDF downloads from [www.kuyper.org](http://www.kuyper.org).

4. Gil Elliot, *Twentieth Century Book of the Dead* (London: Alan Lane/Penguin Press, 1972), p. 1.

5. Milton Leitenberg, *Deaths in Wars and Conflicts in the Twentieth Century* (Cornel University Peace Studies Occasional Paper No. 29, Third Edition, 2006), p. 1.

6. Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914–1991* (London: Michael Joseph, 1994), p. 563.

But secular humanism is weak in that it has failed to provide a stable foundation for our civilisation. Nor is this a problem that can be corrected. The spiritual and moral relativism that lies at the heart of secular humanism’s core values makes it impossible for secular humanism to function as a stable foundation for civilisation. Consequently it is not able to withstand the onslaught of a religion like Islam, which does not kowtow to its politically correct and multicultural shibboleths and is determined to bring the whole world under the yoke of Allah. Like its offspring, multiculturalism, secular humanism is a temporary phenomenon, a staging post in a process of transition from one civilisation to another. Eventually the secular humanist multicultural society will buckle under the dominating influence of a religion that does provide a stable foundation for civilisation.

What then is the answer to the situation we now face? Islam is a religion. It cannot be defeated by military means. This does not mean that Western States should not use the force of arms to secure their borders, defend their people against acts of terror and war and bring to justice and punish those who commit such acts. But this is a more limited goal than the defeat of Islam. Islam is a *false* religion, as is secular humanism, and both can only be defeated by the revival of the *true* religion. Without a return to Christianity as the true religion the nations of the Western world will not be able to survive the corrupting and destructive influences of secular humanism, nor will they be able to withstand the challenge of Islam. And in this we see the judgement of God upon the nations working itself out in history.

This is not the first time that Islam has challenged the West. Christendom has repeatedly faced the challenge of Islam on its eastern and southern borders. In the eighth century Islam conquered most of Spain and this was followed by Islamic conquests in Sicily and parts of Southern Italy. The Muslims were finally defeated in Sicily in 1091 and Islamic power in the Mediterranean began to wane thereafter. But it was not until 1492 that the last Muslim city in Spain, Granada, was recaptured by Christian forces. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries Islam made conquests in the Balkans and parts of Greece. Constantinople finally fell to Islamic forces in 1453 and Greece was ruled by Muslims for nearly four hundred years. Vienna was besieged by the Ottoman army in 1529 and the threat of Islam against the eastern border of Europe was only brought to an end by the battle of Vienna in 1683 and the subsequent defeat of Islam in Hungary and Transylvania. Islam has always been the greatest *external* threat that Christendom has faced. Why?

Islam is the scourge of God upon the apostate nations of the West. The moral relativism and godlessness of secular humanism has brought the modern Western world to its present state of disorder. The new world order that contemporary Western politicians are seeking to create has been, and continues to be, a disaster; it has created more problems than it has solved. The domestic and international disorder we currently face is the social and political consequence of the godlessness, decadence and amorality of Western society. Islam functions in this situation as the scourge of God upon the apostasy of the West. This state of apostasy, and the social disorder that inevitably accompanies it, cannot last indefinitely. The nations of the West face a choice: they can kiss the Son and receive his blessing, or they can continue in their rebellion against the Lord Jesus Christ and perish by the way (Ps. 2:12). There is no third option, and despite

the myopia of our religious and political leaders, the writing is all too clearly on the wall for everyone to see. This is precisely what the challenge of Islam in the modern world demonstrates.

It is secular humanism that has brought the modern world to its present state of disorder. But secular humanism is a kind of Christian heresy in that it is the prodigal offspring of Christendom, initially borrowing its values, its moral, intellectual, social and cultural capital from the heritage that

Christianity has put at the disposal of the Western world, but eventually corrupting these values and putting the social, intellectual, cultural and moral capital they have created to godless ends. The answer to this situation is repentance, i.e. a change of mind, on the part of the West regarding the Christian faith it has rejected. Only a return to the faith upon which Western civilisation was built can deliver us from this state of disorder and its inevitable consequence: the scourge of Islam. *C&S*

# THE IMPULSE OF POWER: FORMATIVE IDEALS OF WESTERN CIVILISATION

by Michael W. Kelley

PART II: MEDIAEVAL MAN: “THE GRAND SYNTHESIS”—*Cont.*

## 4. THE GROWTH OF HIERARCHY: THE INSTITUTIONAL CHURCH IDEAL

MONASTICISM, which governed much of the faith and practice of Christianity for nearly a millennium and a half, was a major influence in shaping Western civilisation. Having begun in the second century of our era, it endured throughout the Middle Ages, the period when Christianity’s predominance in the West was unquestioned. Although it first appeared in the Greek East, its peculiar vision of the Christian life soon spread rapidly into the Latin West and eventually settled with consummate success in the Frankish and Germanic lands of north-western Europe. By the time of the High Middle Ages (1050–1300), hundreds of Monastic houses dotted the landscape of Europe, and thousands had renounced all in order to take refuge within their walls and practice the stringent asceticism demanded by the Monastic ideal. The history of Christianity’s influence in the West cannot be properly understood without appreciating how Monasticism fashioned its life and creed.

But despite Monasticism’s widespread success, it was not the only part of Christianity’s cultural stamp to leave its imprint upon the formation of Western society. The development of the *institutional* Church had an impact as great as that of monastic withdrawal, for in the West the Church developed as more than just one institution *in* society. When Christianity had attained religious domination, the Church,

as its organisational framework, emerged with a purpose to determine the shape of all aspects of society.

It would be a mistake, however, to view the history of Christianity in the West as indistinguishable from the history of the institutional manner in which it sought to express itself. The formation and growth of the Church did not necessarily flow from nor abide by the essential contents of the Christian faith, but quite often deviated from it. Many Christians were frequently at odds with the organised Church, which could appear remote and formal, and grew to be bureaucratic and domineering. These contentions arose primarily because the idea of *Church* in Western civilisation often has had little to do with anything taught in Scripture and much to do with pagan notions of social organisation as these were conceived of by men whose aspirations and ideals derived from ancient imperial Rome. If the development of monasticism can be traced back to pagan dualistic influences that derived from the Gnostic *counter-culture* of the ancient world, the ideas which gave shape to the institutional Church were borrowed from the other end of the spectrum, from the dominant imperial and aristocratic ideals of institutional order that were the social cornerstone of Roman civilisation. The Church adopted, without much dissent, the governing methods that were the hallmark of the *political* system of the

Roman Empire, and, in so doing, embraced the aristocratic and hierarchical idea of rule that had been the ideological prop of Roman social control throughout its history. It was when Christianity had become a legally permitted religion of the Empire at the *conversion* of Constantine in the early fourth century, and subsequently gained undisputed sway as the sole legitimate religion at the end of that century during the reign of Theodosius, that it undertook major steps in this direction. In time, the Church came to be viewed as the New Rome, with all the ambitions of the Old Rome, whose purpose was to govern, that is, to *rule*, the “total society” of the world—the *Universitas Christianorum*.<sup>1</sup> And like the Old Rome, a governing elite—the clergy, especially the bishops—would view themselves as possessing the natural prerogatives of leadership.

An empire needs an emperor. Since the capital of an empire determines where the emperor resides, and since Rome was itself the venerable capital of an ancient empire, now taken over by Christianity, then by such reasoning, the bishop of Rome should be seen as the highest authority over Christendom. The Church in the West, under the influence of Rome, would manifest its power and prestige in the growth of a “papal monarchy.”<sup>2</sup>

However, before advancing this claim, two qualifications must be admitted: first, although the Church sought to fashion itself institutionally after the image of imperial Rome, it did so at a time when an older Rome, in the traditional, secular sense still existed. And while later Emperors might view themselves, ostensibly at least, as *Christians*, they also saw themselves to be not so much *in* the Church as *over* the Church. The governing authority belonged to the *secular* order, not the *spiritual* order. The Emperor was the head and all the clergy were his servants. There remained no room for a *clerical* emperor or pope. For many, this sentiment remained strong well into the Middle Ages. Consequently, when the Church endeavoured to erect a *papal monarchy*, a tense struggle ensued between the two sides—spiritual and secular—regarding who or what was to be the highest ruling power over all of society. As a result, the idea of a total society ruled by the Church, that is, by the clergy-bishops at the head of which was the Pope in Rome, never quite achieved the goal as it was intended. All the same, the ideal remained an article of faith and was fiercely pursued to the end of the Middle Ages.

Second, the idea of the Church as a total society ruled by an aristocratic clerical elite, to the extent it was achieved at all, was only gradually realised over centuries. It was principally from the time of the *Carolingian revolution*—begun in the middle of the eighth century with the *anointing* of Pippin as king by Pope Stephen II, but reaching its truest proportions only with the crowning of Charlemagne as Emperor on Christmas day, 800—that we are able to observe the widespread establishment of a clerical class, on vast feudal estates, being granted baronial status with its attendant administrative, judicial, and *political* duties, and accorded the honours and wealth associated with these. Nevertheless, the seeds of this development can already be found germinating nearly as far back as the Church’s beginning. From its

early years, many, and certainly her anointed spokesmen, conceived of the Church as an agency of *rule* and regarded universal obedience *to the Church* as the highest ideal to which every true Christian ought to submit.

This story is far too complex and tangled to recount in so short a space as a single chapter. Yet some attempt to explain why the Church became so politically powerful and sought to dominate the whole of society for so many centuries must be included in any analysis of Western culture and history. We seek to capture some sense of the early history of this development and how it was expressed in the minds of those personalities who acted, or sought to act, in terms of the Church as an agency of rule.

Having said this, however, we must keep in mind that history alone is not sufficient to explain the vision of the church in the minds of its ruling elites. It is also necessary to consider that we are dealing with an *ideology*. Ideologies are rarely the products of history as such, rather they are more the attempts to give shape to history according to some mental image constructed in advance, as something to which the actions of men and times are made to conform as to a pre-devised plan. For “Ideology,” as Georges Duby perceptively observes, “is not a reflection of real life, but a project for acting on it.” And when, as he also comments, it concerns the Church the language that fashioned its project was nothing less than “the rhetoric of power.”<sup>3</sup>

#### I. *Ecclesia Universalis*

Before tracing the origins of the Church as a total society ideal that took shape in the West, we shall first need to consider the *ideology* of society as it had reached its fullest development in the High Middle Ages; for that ideology, far from making a sudden appearance, was but the final outworking of a type of thinking that had taken centuries to realise. By observing its mature formulation we can better understand the direction the development of the concept took from the outset.

From the confrontation in the High Middle Ages between the *spiritual* and the *temporal* powers regarding who should possess the highest authority over all of society, the issue of the Church became an intense focus of theoretical reflection. While no doubt it may be presented as a dispute of equal concern to both sides, the actual conflict itself was provoked primarily by those of the clerical class (including the monastic elites) who saw their interest in defending the papal primacy against that of the so-called *secular* emperor. A battle, then, was fiercely waged between pope and emperor over who held final authority to *rule* the total Christian society. Often this issue has been made to appear as a struggle between Church and State. Such thinking, however, is anachronistic. The dichotomy of Church and State belongs to a later period of history. It is out of place in the mediaeval view of things. Instead, the dispute was over which *side*—clerical or laical—of the *Ecclesia Universalis* had been granted the divine right legally, morally, even politically, to regiment the life and behaviour of each and every member, and to decide upon

1. The term is found in Paul Johnson, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Atheneum, 1976).

2. Colin Morris, *The Papal Monarchy: The Western Church from 1050–1250* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

3. Georges Duby, *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982 trans. Arthur Goldhammer), pp. 8f., 92. No understanding of the ideal which shaped the nature of the Church in the Middle Ages could be complete without a careful reading of this indispensable work.

the uses to be made of every institutional arrangement of that society. The ideology that emerged from this contest, dominated as it was intellectually by clerics, was fashioned primarily to serve their interests as a group and ultimately the pope, the chief cleric and the highest power and authority in all of Christendom.

Since it was the clerical class who had for centuries possessed a monopoly of learning, we should not be surprised to find that it was they who first conceived of the Church as an ideal of authority and power that favoured their interests as a ruling order. At the same time, the basic features of that learning came from the classical world which, since the days of Origen and Clement in the late second and early third centuries, had continued to shape the thinking of those who attained leadership in the Churches. By far the most influential pagan mind was Plato, but primarily as he was interpreted through the lenses of Neoplatonism.<sup>4</sup> Down to and including the High Middle Ages it was Neoplatonism that influenced the way men thought of the Church along with the gradations of authority and power that were visualised to exist within it. While much came from Scripture when men spoke formally concerning the Church, substantive thinking was already shaped for the most part by a cosmic vision of order thought up on a Neoplatonic basis. Thus, the concept of the Church did not derive so much from Scripture as from a pagan philosophy that sought to define the total nature of all existence and the relationship of higher beings to lower beings in a descending order of arrangement. Along with these metaphysical premises an idea of authority was posited to conform to the same essential hierarchical structure. To be sure, under Christian influence, the language of this philosophical perspective underwent a transformation, thereby adapting it to certain Scriptural principles. Nevertheless, the basic philosophical idea remained. We can observe the basic traits in this outlook from various statements in one of the most seminal studies on this period—Otto Gierke's *Political Theories of the Middle Ages*.

Gierke noted that all thinking on the nature of society, on the Church in particular, began from a reflection on the *whole* and descended to the *part*, which was conceived of as a derivative of the whole. Every matter was shaped within the framework of a "divinely ordered Universe" from which followed the notion "of a divinely instituted Harmony which pervades the Universal Whole and every part thereof. To every Being is assigned its place in that Whole, and to every link between Beings corresponds a divine decree."<sup>5</sup> Such philosophical thinking is bound to stress the oneness of all things. Hence, Gierke comments, "Now the Constitutive Principle of the Universe is in the first place Unity." Unity, then, was the dominant theme, unity not merely in mind, but unity of organisation, in law, in government, indeed in every department of social life. Such unity determined the nature of the *Ecclesia Universalis* regardless of the particular part played by each individual and each communal type. Unity in every respect was the predominant ideal of the

Church. Everything must be subordinated "to the aim and object of . . . the Principle of Unity." Whatever threatened unity was viewed as the worst of evils. Since God is one, therefore the world, as a perfect reflection of the oneness of the being of God, must be one. The microcosm of the world mirrors the macrocosm of God who created it, and every part of the world is a further microcosm of the macrocosm of the world itself. All plurality must reflect the harmony of the divine reason which permeates the Universe.<sup>6</sup>

Of course, the world, of man's life especially, is many-sided and diverse. In particular, several orders or classes of men exist in society and each has its own special function to perform. Besides unity, then, there exists plurality. But in the Christian-Platonic philosophical perspective unity takes priority over plurality. "Everywhere the One comes before the Many." More to the point, "all Order consists in the subordination of Plurality to Unity (*ordinatio ad unum*), and never and nowhere can a purpose that is common to Many be effectual unless the One rules over the Many and directs the Many to the goal."<sup>7</sup>

These twin notions of unity and subordination underlie the concept of the Church as a total society in the mediaeval mind. Nowhere was this more true than in the social arrangement of mankind. Every particular must find its goal and norm in the service it renders to the ruling unity. This unity is the Church. In order to achieve its aim it must possess one governing authority. But it is precisely at this point that matters become complicated, for running through this twofold principle of unity and subordination is a more pervasive duality. It, too, would bear upon the way mediaeval men viewed the organisational nature of their society as well as the locus of rule or government that would ensure that unity took priority over plurality. And it bore in particular upon the way the clerical class understood its own place in the imagined hierarchy.

This prevalent duality was that between heaven and earth. In mediaeval thinking this entailed the distinction between the realm over which God rules and the realm over which man rules. To be sure, mediaeval man, because his thinking was influenced by Scripture, thought of God as the ruler over *all* things, of heaven and earth alike. God was the universal monarch over the whole of Creation. Once again, Gierke states, "The Middle Age regards the Universe itself as a single realm and God as its Monarch. God therefore is the true Monarch, the one Head and motive principle of the ecclesiastical and political society which comprises all Mankind."<sup>8</sup> But the idea of how God rules was attached to concepts borrowed from pagan antiquity. It is not through his word and Spirit that God rules, but through analogous institutions in the earthly realm. God rules by conferring rule on a like *human* monarch. Such an earthly ruler stands in the place of God and exercises his authority over the whole of society in an analogy of God's rule over the whole of Creation. Here we have what Walter Ullmann termed the "descending thesis of government."<sup>9</sup> It was a theocratic theory in which all power and authority was granted directly to a single officer who was responsible to God alone and all others were placed in unquestioned subjection to his authority.

4. See David Knowles, *The Evolution of Medieval Thought* (London: Longman, 1991, second edition, ed. D. E. Luscombe and C.N.L. Brooke), pp. 18, 27, 28. It is not actually until the thirteenth century that Plato was replaced by Aristotle as the dominant pagan mind in the thinking of mediaeval men, and only then after considerable "official" opposition had finally been overcome.

5. Otto Gierke, *Political Theories of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987 trans. F. W. Maitland) p. 8.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

9. Walter Ullmann, *A History of Political Thought: The Middle Ages*, (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965), p. 13.



Thus, while God ruled over everything, his rule over the lower order of the world was indirect. Here he bestowed his rule on a particular individual who acted in his place over the affairs of men. Consequently, “there was,” says Gierke, “a tendency to exalt the person of the Ruler. In his own proper person he was thought of as the wielder of an authority that came to him from without and from above. He was set over and against the body whereof the leadership had been entrusted to him. He was raised above and beyond the Community.”<sup>10</sup> The earthly monarch stood in the place of God and was responsible to no one but God. Furthermore, whatever he decided or decreed was to be obeyed with unquestioned devotion as if one were obeying God directly. In other words, a chain of command existed and the thought that man should obey God by believing and obeying his word played almost no role in the mediaeval theory of rule. Man was obedient if he submitted to the institutional arrangements of society and to the persons or person who occupied positions of power at the top.

In such a scheme there could be only *one* person who occupied the supreme power to rule the “total society” in God’s place. As there was one monarch in heaven, so there could be but one monarch, as the *incarnation* of divine power and authority, on earth.

It is at this point that a serious problem arises. For to whom, or to what institution, was such absolute rule to be granted? We can appreciate the difficulty involved only when we consider further the two-sided nature of man’s existence in the world. For, “along with this idea of a single Community comprehensive of Mankind, the severance of this Community between two organized Orders of Life, the *spiritual* and *temporal*, is accepted by the Middle Age as an eternal counsel of God.”<sup>11</sup> Here we find the distinctions, so pervasive in mediaeval thinking, between sacred and secular, clergy and laity, priest and king, *sacerdotium* and *regnum*, internal and external order. Both are aspects of the *Ecclesia Universalis*. Together they make up the total order of society. There was a third order, the peasantry, but they did not count all that much. They certainly played no role in the conception of *rule*.<sup>12</sup> That was solely a prerogative of the other two orders (peasants were not even considered a part of the laity or the secular order). But the mere fact of these two orders created a problem for the ideal of unity, for upon which order was the *higher* rule conferred? From which order came the *monarch* to be God’s plenipotentiary on earth? He could only come from one. Consequently, one order or the other received the primacy over the total Christian society. In the mediaeval mind all other social issues and problems turned upon this most crucial of questions.

While the clerical class accepted the firm distinction between the two orders, the hierocratic logic insisted that the spiritual order be set over the temporal order, and that the head of the spiritual order, the pope, stood as God’s earthly monarch. From God, through the pope, through the Church-spiritual, through the Church-temporal, was the line of the descent of authority and power to be properly traced. In this

way unity was assured. This was God’s eternal arrangement, so it was maintained, for the social life of man.

Such, then, was the ideology of the Church as it came to shape Western civilisation. It was conceived of as an *imperium* or a total governmental order, a top-down society. Only a pervasive sense of Christian morality and charity prevented it from exercising complete totalitarian powers. Furthermore, the rise of feudalism as a system of mutual obligations and rights worked as an effective check against the total centralisation of power. The reality did not often resemble the theory. The temporal power, represented by the emperor-idea, which took its origins in the mediaeval West from the crowning of Charlemagne, but which went even further back to Constantine, always acted as a brake, a counter-ideology, to the notion of the priority of the spiritual order over the temporal order. In time, many would even reverse their relationship and claim the supremacy of the secular authority over the total society. That claim would be given a sinister twist when the humanistic aspect of thought in mediaeval thinking broke free from its synthesis with Christianity and began to chart the course of Renaissance and, eventually, of Enlightenment. Still, for centuries the Church idea was rooted in the attempt to establish an institutional arrangement in which clerical authority was the source of order, and obedience to the Church meant submission to the bishops, especially to Rome and the pope.

## 2. *The Church to Constantine: Second & Third Centuries.*

The formation of the Church-idea cannot be studied like other doctrinal issues that confronted Christianity in the early centuries of its existence. For instance, unlike the great controversies surrounding the doctrine of the Trinity or the two natures of Christ, no life and death battles were fought over the doctrine of the Church in terms of its institutional organisation. Consequently, no significant body of writing about the Church in any specific sense came into existence as a permanent record of the thinking of the early centuries on the nature of its institutional idea. At best, we can piece together a notion of the Church primarily from those who occupied prominent positions in it and who sought to give expression to a principle of authority thought to be inseparable from it.

One thing is certain: Christianity, everywhere it spread in the early years of its existence, can be seen to have taken shape in some type of Church community manifesting a principle of leadership and authority, with organised and regularised forms of assembly and worship. Much of what is known in this respect derives from the post-Constantinian years and emerges from those great city Churches that were most involved with the doctrinal and moral issues of the day, Churches like Alexandria, Antioch, Carthage, Rome, and eventually Constantinople. Others come into view from time to time, but with less frequency and overall historical significance. Even so, what the men of these early centuries thought about the idea of Church can be grasped not so much from any specific teaching or writing on the subject as by observing what procedures they followed and what administrative practices they applied. The concept of the Church, which only solidified ideologically in men’s minds when Christianity became the dominate religion of the Roman Empire, was more the product of how the Church actually functioned than of it ever having derived from

10. Gierke, *op. cit.*, p. 33f.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

12. Duby, *The Three Orders*: “... first, there were those in possession of ‘authority,’ responsible for waging spiritual warfare; second, possession of ‘power,’ responsible for waging temporal warfare; and third, all those who did not carry the sword, the emblem of power, and yet did not pray, whose only right was to keep silent, and whose only duty was to obey, passive and abject: the ‘serfs’ or ‘slaves’—*servi*.” (p. 80)

a carefully thought-out doctrinal (i.e. scriptural) point of view.

Though much of what is known of the structure and organisation of the Church is post-Constantinian, nevertheless it can be said that earlier traces of the formation of the Church are not altogether lacking. This is apparent from roughly the mid-second century when information about the Church and its activities, following the apostolic period, first emerges into the light of history. Almost as soon as we can study anything with some depth the Church already appears pretty much as it will remain for the next several centuries. That is, the institutional structure of the Church, wherever we meet with it, looks to be a settled affair and, with the exception of heretical counter-Churches, especially those of the Marcionite persuasion, almost no objection is voiced concerning whether or not the Church is properly following Biblical direction. Everywhere it is assumed to be so. The only problem confronting the Church was the question of the *true* Church versus the *false* Church as these were held to exist where orthodoxy and proper episcopal authority were maintained or subverted by heresy.

In the second and third centuries, the Church did face the problem of persecution from the pagan Roman world, particularly from its ruling elites, and as a result experienced a difficult crisis in maintaining itself in any institutional guise whatsoever. No doubt, the experience of persecution helped to contribute to an idea of the Church. The pressure of these events would have convinced many that in order to survive it was necessary to band together and rally to some leader who could defend the substance of the faith before the hostile ruling powers. When the Churches finally did emerge from this experience the authority of the bishop as the organised leader was considerably enhanced.

However, the rule of the bishop was not the product of this experience alone. It had already arisen as the principal form of rule in the Churches which looked to the example of the secular idea of authority in the ancient world of Rome in general. Already in the second century, before persecution became an official response to the spread of Christianity, the Church in every location had begun to pattern itself after the administrative example of Roman governing practice. In the words of A. H. M. Jones, eminent scholar of late Roman antiquity, "The basic organization of the church had been formed long before the Great Persecution. Each Christian community, or church in the narrower sense, was ruled by a bishop whose powers were autocratic." Furthermore, as we shall see, "The church in the ecclesiastical organization normally corresponded to the city in the secular administrative scheme."<sup>13</sup> The seeds of a hierarchical Church formation were planted early. Explaining the causes, however, poses no small difficulties.

It is clear from the pages of the New Testament that the evangelistic work of the apostles in the mid-first century was geared to the founding of Churches in various locations. Churches were often described by the name of the city where they were begun: Corinth, Ephesus, Rome. But, not always! It is difficult, for example, to know exactly where the Galatian Churches were located. And writers like James or John (I, II, III) are even less clear about whom they were addressing. Still, it seems evident that the goal of the spread of the gospel

was to plant Churches. We are even given to understand that such Churches were to exhibit certain characteristics of organisation, including a principle of leadership, so as to present an effective witness and to ensure proper worship and instruction in Scripture.

A major feature of modern scholarship regarding this phenomenon has been to aver that the early Church was initially a type of Jewish synagogue with oversight by a group of elders. Perhaps so. It does not imply, however, that the Church thought it could organise on just any basis. The apostles were keen to provide authoritative direction in the matter of the institution of the Church. They knew that their own time was limited but that the Church would last until the end of history. They were, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, intent on leaving an organisation in existence that, by God's grace, would continue to multiply and be transmitted to whatever future generations God had purposed to bring into existence. That the Church assumed a permanent, institutional form only as a result of a changed expectation by primitive believers in the immediate return of Christ and the eschatological end of the world is a fancy of the modern critical imagination.

When we leave the New Testament era we encounter a nearly sixty-year evidence gap referred to as the sub-apostolic period. It extends from the Jewish uprising and destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. to the second Jewish war and destruction of Jerusalem in 135 A.D.<sup>14</sup> When we emerge on the other side we begin to discern the lineaments of a church order that are essentially what will develop during the next several centuries. That is, we discover the existence of well-organised gatherings run by a clerical order over which the *bishop*, as the principal leader, possessed vast power. Under the bishops, one finds *presbyters* and *deacons* as a distinct sub-class of a clerical system that is beginning to look like a professional group set apart from the laity as a whole. It is weak by comparison with what it will become, but an unmistakable change has occurred.

One of the chief reasons for this transformation was a shift in the composition of the members of the Church from being predominately Jewish-Christian in character to almost exclusively Gentile-Christian. This alteration also marked a change in the cultural thought-patterns that influenced the vision of the nature of the faith and especially the meaning of Scripture as a total covenant word. For with the transmission of Christianity to a larger Gentile world there entered into

14. There seems to be a singular exception in this case. As Elaine Pagels indicates, a letter is attributed to a certain Clement (Bishop of Rome, c. 90–100) who, in writing to the Corinthians, denounces them for having removed certain of their leaders from office. In Clement's eyes this is "a rebellion" and [he] insists that the deposed leaders be restored to their authority." For Clement, rebellion against leaders in the church is rebellion against God. Why so? Pagels gives the following explanation: "Clement argues that God . . . alone rules all things: he is the lord and master whom all must obey . . . But how is God's rule actually administered? . . . God, he says, delegates his 'authority to reign' to 'rulers and leaders on earth.' Who are the designated rulers? Clement answers that they are bishops, priests, and deacons. Whoever refuses to 'bow the neck' and obey the church leaders is guilty of insubordination against the divine master himself." She goes on to claim that in this letter for the first time "we find here an argument for dividing the Christian community between 'the clergy' and 'the laity.' The Church is to be organized in terms of a strict order of superiors and subordinates." See, Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), p. 34f. Segments include references to Clemens Romanus, *1 Clement* 3.3.

13. A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire, 284–602* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), Vol. II, p. 874f.

the thinking of many churchmen much that reflected the older pagan cultural milieu. This was especially evident in the kind of Church-idea that began to emerge. The Church began to assume an organizational form that was patterned on the type found in the secular Roman world. It reflected the belief in a natural ruling aristocracy as a top-down principle of command and control. Gradually the bishop became less a pastor or minister, a servant of the Church, and more a bureaucratic voice of power. This development was uneven and not entirely without some warrant in the face of attacks coming from outside the community of the faith. However, it would not be accurate to claim that the Church developed its system of government solely in response to external pressure. In the area of organisation certain ideas, those which held that Roman governing methods were the best given their success in the secular empire over which Rome ruled, were too ingrained and taken for granted in the absence of a cogent insightful understanding of Scripture.

To appreciate better why the Church in the Gentile communities developed as it did we need to understand something of the broader society into which Christianity entered. Roman society in the period of late antiquity (from about A.D. 200 and even earlier) was increasingly an urban society. The vast majority of the population lived in major city centres which at this time were swelling in numbers. A movement from the countryside to the city had been going on for some time, but in this period increased substantially.

It is in this urban context that Christianity first took hold and swiftly spread. It was especially among the new immigrants, who were often poor and propertyless, that Christianity initially made rapid gains. Many of these people were part of the unplaced and displaced segments of a social order that was undergoing tremendous upheaval. Rome had always been an aristocratically dominated society. It continued this way well into late antiquity. However, since the reorganisation under Augustus, the participation of not only the plebes but the patricians in the governing affairs of the Empire declined and was replaced primarily by a permanent bureaucracy appointed by and solely responsible to the emperor. At the same time that changes were taking place politically, there was also a widespread shift in economic conditions. As fewer people could directly benefit from the cultural heritage of Rome, so too, for many, particularly the traditional small landholders, the means of livelihood became impossible to sustain. Wealth moved increasingly in the direction of the great estates, and a widening gulf opened up between the rich few and the many poor. This mass movement to the cities was for some a desperate attempt to find a new life in the growing commercial enterprise zones and mercantile world that were fast becoming the chief characteristics of the great urban centres.

The growth of the cities produced a large underclass, one that was rootless and lacking in a sense of traditional community or close ties of family and friendship. From a strictly sociological viewpoint, Christianity attracted great numbers of these people precisely because it filled this void. It offered a new sense of community and attachment. It would be improper, however, to infer that this was the only reason that Christianity gained many converts among these classes. Throughout history mankind has manifested a strong desire for religious certainty and some sort of salvation, and Christianity's strength undoubtedly lay in the truth in contrast to the pagan religions of old Greece and Rome. At

the same time, it contributed a new idea of community. It especially ripened in the urban centres as *Church*, for it was in the cities that the characteristics of the Church concept began to take shape.

In various locations these Churches found themselves the objects of hatred and suspicion, sometimes from a clique of the people, at other times from public officials who regarded the new faith as undermining civic morale and traditional values. Often the church in a city was viewed as a dissident society against which actions needed to be taken to halt its expansion and harmful influence. The church needed to assuage hostility against itself. It needed a spokesman who could deal with the unfriendly authorities and who could articulate the faith in clear and concise terms. Naturally, that person was almost always the local bishop. Out of this experience, a traditional Roman custom that carried over into the Church community acquired new life, the tradition of dependence on a great man—a *patronus*—who could intervene with the government to secure benefits which the ordinary subject could not hope to get on his own. In turn, the patron would expect loyalty and devotion to his status and power. Thus, as Judith Herrin writes, “From this humble beginning as the nominee of a particular community, the position of bishop developed into a more exalted one, with special rank in the hierarchy of the whole community of Christians.”<sup>15</sup>

Thus, a direction was set early. In time the bishop assumed still greater prominence. Eventually, “The communal nature of Christian groups . . . was replaced . . . by a ranked society . . . [with] various stages of office advancing to the episcopacy.” At the same time, the Church began to organise itself in imitation of the secular government. That is, “this urban and episcopal character created an ecclesiastical government in parallel with the secular one . . .”<sup>16</sup> Bishops took charge of city and provincial territory which was co-extensive with that of the secular authorities. They came to have jurisdiction over a *diocese* in which many Churches were established. During the course of this development the nature of the bishop's task changed from that of pastor over a particular congregation to that of administrator of a district. This idea of the bishop as an administrator offered a greater appeal to the governing and aristocratic classes of the Roman world and thereby brought more members of them into the Church, along with their wealth. When this occurred the Church began slowly, but ineluctably, to acquire landed property together with its revenue. This trend brought the Church into greater prominence politically, for its trained clergy were beginning to appear as useful for more than just pastoral duties. The Church began to take an interest in the preservation of ancient patterns of social organisation, for it reflected those patterns itself.

At first, the Church used its growing wealth for ostensibly charitable and welfare purposes. At this early period, the Church would not have accepted the need for rich adornments and splendid Church buildings. Its wealth must be used to assist the poor, the suffering, the helpless. Its success in this endeavour was another major reason for its rapid increase in numbers and influence. Still, the method of organisation that gained sway would grow to manifest a different purpose from its original aim to spread the gospel, convert the

15. Judith Herrin, *The Formation of Christendom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 58.

16. Herrin, *The Formation of Christendom*, p. 59.

heathen and perform works of mercy. Herrin notes, “Due to its urban environment and administrative responsibilities, the episcopal church was destined . . . to grow further and further away from the Christian teaching of poverty and the denial of worldly goods. It became more like an additional arm of secular administration . . .”<sup>17</sup> Much of this lay in the future, but already the second, and particularly the third, century saw movement in this direction on a scale, perhaps, greater than we may imagine.

While a strong leader and an eloquent spokesman, around whom the faithful could rally in the face of opposition from the pagan world, helped make possible a type of Church organisation that tended to concentrate power and authority at the top with the bishop, while the growing administrative requirements of a Church, which began to acquire property in land and to *govern* territories in which many small Churches resided, also worked to elevate the status not only of the bishop but of a growing clerical professional class, still another contributing factor in the development of a hierarchical Church was the widespread influence of Gnosticism.

We have already had occasion to speak of Gnosticism in the previous chapter with respect to the rise of monasticism. No less important is the direct bearing that Gnosticism had upon the nature of the organised Church as it became necessary for Churches in various areas to respond to the Gnostic threat. Gnosticism was a very seductive heresy, which those not well-grounded in Scripture could easily be tempted to follow. It was clever in its use of Scripture and offered a type of redemption for many who found themselves cut loose from their traditional moorings. Gnostic communities often competed with the Church for the loyalty and devotion of many people so affected. Within the Church they competed against the bishops for the loyalty of the members, until they were driven out. The Churches found themselves in a quandary as to how to deal with this threat.

Instead of combating this heresy by developing an effective argument grounded in Scripture, the Churches responded by declaring the problem to be one of the proper recognition of the authority of the Church. Those who wandered off to follow after heresy were leaving their obedience to the true Church. But the authority of the church was the authority of its local bishop. Thus, the two were equated, and the bishop became the focus of unity in doctrinal matters. The argument, then, was that in order to counter false Gnostic thought Christians needed to maintain *unity* with the true bishop and his authority in doctrine. By such reasoning, the earlier notion that the bishop was God’s representative on earth acquired even greater weight. His authority was God’s authority, and submission to his proper authority was equivalent to submission to the truth. To bolster this idea another notion was advanced. The bishop possessed his authority by reason of having inherited it from the apostles. He succeeded to the place of authority in the location where they had founded it. As the apostles had received their authority originally from Christ, so those who succeeded them, who sat in their seats, derived their authority from them. Only

by maintaining unity with a bishop in his inherited office was the Church assured of being the true Church.

The important element in this line of reasoning is that the notion of *inherited* authority takes its place alongside that of Scripture itself. Here was introduced the concept of *tradition* that rose to equal the Bible as authority for the Church. Tradition originally meant succession to apostolic authority. This authority was exactly the same as that of the apostles. In Chadwick’s description we see something of what this implied: “The succession argument carried the implication that the teaching given by the contemporary bishop of, say, Rome or Antioch was in all respects identical with that of the apostles.”<sup>18</sup> The bishops of these and other Churches were in possession of the exact same authority the apostles themselves possessed during their time on earth. Their words carried the same weight and required the same obedience as that of the apostles.

At first, what they proclaimed generally followed Scripture, so there was no basic conflict between what the apostles said and what a bishop said on his own. But there was nothing in the succession theory to prevent him from adding his own doctrinal words to those of the apostles when it seemed suitable and then claiming obedience to these to be the mark of the true Church! If the bishop’s authority is as direct from God as was that of the apostles, the idea of a closed canon of Scripture is readily diminished in his thinking and speaking. In response to the need to counter the widespread influence of Gnostic ideas a concept of authority in the Church was introduced which in time would rival and even replace that of Scripture.

An important factor that contributed to this development, one that also emerged from the sub-apostolic period, was the need the Church felt to distinguish and separate itself from Judaism, to which it seemed related in the eyes of many. As both were based upon a large portion of the same Scripture, Christianity was seen as a mere splinter from Jewish thought and religion. As Pelikan indicates, “What was offensive about Christianity in the eyes of Gentiles was, to a considerable extent, what it had inherited from Judaism.”<sup>19</sup> To the Roman governing authorities the Jewish devotion to the law of Moses was viewed as a source of political trouble, the reason for their persistent rebellion against imperial control. Since Christianity revered these writings as well, it was viewed with equal suspicion. Christians were concerned, then, that they should not be viewed as a Jewish sect.

While Christians and Jews shared a portion of Scripture, their respective approaches to it were entirely different. For, besides the Old Testament, Christians had the New Testament, which fundamentally altered their understanding of the Old Testament Scriptures. They saw it as a grand prophecy of the coming of Jesus Christ, who was the fulfillment of all that it taught, a view vehemently rejected by pious Jews. Since the Christians presented a threat to the Jewish faith (and to Jewish nationalism) with these claims, and since they were suspect by the Roman authorities, Jewish communities everywhere, but especially in the east, did much to stir up trouble for the Church. And because the Jews possessed such hatred for the claims of Christ and Christianity, many Gentile

17. *Ibid.*, p. 59. We ought to question, of course, whether the “Christian teaching” on “poverty” and “worldly goods” is scripturally accurate or merely reflects pagan ascetic notions. Much of what passed for Christian teaching in this period was quite suffused with un-biblical influences.

18. Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church*, (Penguin Books, 1990), p. 42.

19. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 14.

believers were filled with no little revulsion for Jews. Many of the writings of the early apologists contain acrimonious criticism of Jewish ideas and religious beliefs.

This confrontation between Jews and Christians had, at least for Christians, serious repercussions for the authority of Scripture, particularly the Old Testament. Not wanting to be identified with Judaism, and thinking to bolster their assault on Jewish unbelief and, at the same time, appeal more favourably to the pagan mind, Christians went to considerable lengths to deny the validity of the Mosaic law in its totality. Rather than seeing how the authority of *Moses* carries over into the New Testament era, which began with the apostles, the Church instead originated a seriously erroneous doctrine, one that has afflicted it for nearly two thousand years. It rejected the validity and authority of the law in Scripture, consequently denying that Scripture has any sense of law at all. The effect was a weakening of the authority of Scripture in general. The Church had to construct a total outlook on life from the New Testament alone, particularly from the writings of the apostles. Although the Church did retain a formal authority for the Old Testament, quite often it interpreted its content essentially allegorically, or, less seriously, typologically. Rarely, however, did it view its content covenantally.

When the problem of authority began to crop up in the Church during the second and third centuries, many, not being able to rely upon the total authority of Scripture as a self-sufficient covenant word, gave credence to the notion of the *authority of the Church* in general, and soon the *authority of the bishop* in particular. The way was opened to an authority for the Church other than God's word. "Whenever antinomianism abounds in history," as Rushdoony comments, "the church's power is vastly enhanced."<sup>20</sup> Coupled with the adoption of Greek philosophical concepts as a means to demonstrate the truths of revelation and convince pagan Gentiles of the superiority of Christianity, it becomes understandable why the Church lost its Scriptural moorings and developed in the West as a total society ideal, inwardly formed as a monastic culture but outwardly ruled by a clerical elite. In time the Church would seek to take over the older Roman imperial vision of a unified and top-down control.

Although the early Church set aside the validity of the law in order to distance itself from Judaism, it did retain from the Old Testament the idea of the *priesthood*, which also remained a part of the Jewish heritage. In the Old Testament the Levitical priesthood was a special office conferred upon Aaron and his male descendants. They alone were endowed with the privilege of approaching the holy sanctuary and offering sacrifices. They, and their Levitical relatives, were in charge of instructing the people in the lawful requirements for life and worship. The priest necessarily occupied, at least in later thinking, both Jewish and Christian, a ranked status, one that was not only superior in the social sense, but also stood higher in terms of direct communion with God. The people could not expect to achieve the same degree of intimacy and contact. As the priesthood in the Old Testament mediated between God and his people so, too, the bishop, as the New Testament equivalent of the Levitical priest, must mediate for the people.

This thinking misunderstood the special limited place

of the Aaronic priesthood in redemptive history. It was only to serve in a temporary capacity until the final priest, Jesus Christ, should come and perfectly accomplish God's purposes for his people. Moreover, the priesthood, while it required a special office under the older testamental system of redemption, was not ultimately what God had intended. For Moses, in transcribing God's own words, declares to Israel as a whole: ". . . you will be for me a *kingdom of priests* and a *holy nation*." (Ex. 19:6) But it is the New Testament Church in particular for whom the priesthood covenant (*holy nation*) becomes especially realised. As Peter wrote, speaking of the whole Church, "you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood . . ." (1 Pet. 2:5) The whole Church is a priesthood, and every member a priest. There is no longer a special office to be designated by the term *priest*. Consequently, no mediatorial role between God and the people belongs any longer to a special human agent. The only mediator is Christ in heaven. And only his word and Spirit rule the life and faith of the believer.

But the early Church adopted the notion of the Levitical priesthood, in its strictly Old Testament sense, in order to give greater prominence to the special place and authority of the bishop. No better example of this sort of thinking could perhaps be found in the pre-Constantinian Church than in the writings of Cyprian, bishop of Carthage (*circa* 248–258), who was one of the earliest to speak of the Christian clergy as if it were a Levitical priesthood. The bishop was above the people and through him God imparted his grace to the Church. There could be no Church without a designated bishop, and no Church could appoint its own bishop.<sup>21</sup> Only other bishops could elect a fellow bishop. No bishop not properly ordained can be legitimate and thus no Church without a properly ordained bishop is a true Church. Everything began to turn on the authenticity of the bishop. As the bishop was God's *special* priest, so no real contact with God and with his salvation was possible apart from submission to his priest. The bishop alone interpreted the Scriptures; he alone could administer the sacraments. In short, "The bishop is in the church, and the church is in the bishop." The final purpose of the bishop is to ensure unity and to guarantee institutional ecclesiastical integrity. The result of this doctrinal development was to exalt the Church institution and its clergy, to "limit God's redemptive and sanctifying workings in history to the institution."<sup>22</sup> All other areas of life—the family, the state, work, technology, learning—except where they came within the purview of the institution of the Church and the needs of its clergy, were all but excluded from any broader implication for covenant and dominion service under God.

Cyprian, however, was no innovator. His thinking was shared by others. What is more, Cyprian, like his fellow bishops, saw the existence of bishops as a collectivity. As yet

20. Rousas John Rushdoony, *Law and Society, Vol. II of the Institutes of Biblical Law* (Vallecito: Ross House Books, 1982), p. 334.

21. Cyprian writes: "Hence you should know that the bishop is in the Church, and the Church in the bishop, and that if anyone is not with the bishop he is not in the Church; and that those people are vainly beguiling themselves who, not being at peace with the priests of God, creep up stealthily, and trust by underhand means to enter into communion with certain persons: seeing that the Church is catholic and one, and may not be sundered or divided, but should assuredly be kept together and united by the glue which is the mutual adherence of the priest." Henry Bettenson, ed., *The Early Christian Fathers: A Selection from the Writings of the Fathers from St. Clement of Rome to St. Athanasius* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 266.

22. Rushdoony, *Law and Society*, pp. 340, 342.

an *emperor figure* or *supreme priest* was missing. However, in the line of apostolic succession a special niche was already being carved out for Rome. For the Church there was founded by the greatest of apostles, Peter and Paul. To the extent that they obtained primacy over the other apostles, this particular Church acquired a preeminent position. Though this notion was already expressed in the second and third centuries it is dealt with more properly in the post-Constantinian context.

### 3. *The Constantinian Revolution*

The rise to power of Constantine as Emperor (307–337) of Rome brought about a dramatic change in the status of Christianity within the Empire. The nature and extent of this transformation is far more apparent to us today than to those who lived through it, for we are in a far better position to understand the impact of the *legalisation* of Christianity and what it has meant for the development of Western civilisation. Paul Johnson does not exaggerate when he asserts: “The so-called ‘Edict of Milan’, by which the Roman Empire reversed its policy of hostility to Christianity and accorded it full legal recognition was one of the decisive events in world history.”<sup>23</sup>

At the time, all that the Church understood was that it was to be no longer officially persecuted for the faith it practised. Few could guess that Constantine intended not simply to permit one more religious sect the same freedom accorded to dozens of others, openly to practise its worship so long as it remained obedient to Roman authority, but to found the Roman Empire upon an altogether new and vibrant religion. The pagan gods had all but lost their grip upon the heathen world, and the *vision of Rome* that was the chief feature of their religious devotion was losing its moral hold on the consciences of its citizenry. Constantine wanted earnestly to redefine the idea of Rome in terms of a religious faith that was alive and on the move, not dead and decaying. In his eyes, Christianity was that religion. It was not enough merely to legalise it; he was determined to identify it as the official policy of the Empire and to merge the Church with the imperial system of rule, with himself as its head and monarch. Christianity was about to become a State religion. It is this remarkable change in the circumstances of the Church that gives Johnson’s remark such poignancy.

However, while this change in status was not expected—certainly not in the sense that Christianity was to be given standing as the official religion of Rome—it was soon embraced by many Christian writers with nearly unbounded enthusiasm. It brought about a major theological shift in Christian thinking about Rome and a transformed ideological outlook regarding the society of which it was now a part. Christianity had been viewed by official Rome as an outcast, if not an outlaw, religious faith, and Christians had perceived themselves as in perpetual opposition to pagan Rome, the product of Satan and therefore evil, the Beast of the book of Revelation. The Beast sought only to devour the Church and destroy the faith. Persecution in this life was all that Christians could expect. Furthermore, Christians could not be a part of the official Roman world, for service to Rome required attendance at public functions and participation in pagan religious ceremonies which only profaned a person’s

faith. One had to swear undying devotion to Rome. Such an oath would place a person’s commitment to Christ in dire jeopardy, for Rome was jealous of its *divine* prerogatives. Christ and Rome could not both be Lord and master. No compromise was conceivable. There could be no mixture of Christianity with Rome in any sense other than to hope for peace from the tyranny of its persecuting authorities and emperors.

However, when Constantine fundamentally transformed the relationship between Christianity and Rome, he concurrently provoked a refashioning of the idea of Rome in Christian thinking. For with the passing of persecution many were quick to change their minds about Rome. Although Christianity did not become the enforced official religion, and paganism outlawed, until the end of the century during the reign of Theodosius, nevertheless a great change in viewpoint had already been brought about under Constantine. Rome was now given a more favourable place in Christians’ estimation. The *pax Augusta* in particular was seen more positively as having “an important place in the divine plan of salvation.”<sup>24</sup> No longer was the Empire simply the Beast and therefore merely the work of Satan. Instead, it received a new theological definition as belonging to God’s purposes for the world and for Christianity especially. The thought emerged that Rome and the Church did not constitute implacable enemies, but were two sides of the same reality, and therefore should be part of the same *polity*. A new vision of the Church, combined with the older Roman imperial ideal as the product of the divine plan for history, took shape and gave impetus to the concept of the Church as a total governing society and God’s intended agency for world-dominion.

The numbers grew rapidly of those who were captivated by this change in outlook. Fulsome praises were offered not only for the abrupt turnabout in circumstances of those who professed the faith, but more significantly for a Christianity redefined as the new imperial religion and a *Christianised* Rome as the instrument of God’s salvation purposes. Perhaps none was as adulatory in this respect as the ecclesiastical historian, Eusebius of Caesarea. In his mind, not only Rome, but Constantine in particular, acquired a special place in the divine programme of redemption.<sup>25</sup> Constantine was God’s instrument of change and the one entrusted with divine authority to rule the new “Christian times.”<sup>26</sup> The Constantinian revolution was to bring about a blending of politics with the Church, a gradual transformation of the Church into a new instrument of political administration. One consequence was to elevate the bishop’s office as an agency of political power and bureaucratic control.

What this great change meant for the rise of the Church at Rome in particular has now become apparent. Upon no other Church did Constantine lavish such attention and good will as he did that of the Church at Rome.<sup>27</sup> Constantine was not responsible for the primacy that the *bishop* of Rome began to claim for himself, but he did defer to the belief, already current in the second century, that Rome occupied a special place among the Churches based upon the fiction

23. Johnson, *A History of Christianity*, p. 67.

24. R.A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St Augustine* (Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 50.

25. Timothy D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 249, 254.

26. Markus, *Saeculum*, *passim*.

27. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, p. 49.

of apostolic succession, and the claim to possess the *keys of St. Peter*, the greatest privilege in Christendom. By the third century, the see of Rome had begun to acquire property and was beginning to have a reputation for being well-endowed. With Constantine the grants of largess to Rome went far beyond anything previously experienced by the Church. Almost overnight the Church at Rome became one of the largest, if not the largest, landowners in Italy, certainly in the environs of Rome itself.

This material prosperity was to affect the role of the clergy, since the needs of the administration of properties compelled a broadening of the meaning of *clergy*. Addressing the growing problems of administration demanded the creation of a whole series of minor orders. Under the bishop ranked presbyters, deacons, sub-deacons, acolytes, exorcists, readers and doorkeepers. The clergy became a vast civil service in which one made one's way through advancement and promotion. At the same time, the clergy was elevated above the people and came to reflect the older Roman ideal of an elite aristocracy with its attitude of condescension and self-assured dignity. People were expected to treat the bishop especially with awe and reverence, to stand up when he entered and left. The Church became more absorbed with formal liturgy and a system of penitence, both of which were closely guarded preserves of the clergy. Cyprian had already advanced the notion that a lay person's sins could only be *absolved* by one of the higher clergy. One must seek penitence and forgiveness from the clergy. There was no longer direct access to the Lord of the Church. The Church at Rome expanded this concept with consummate success. Constantine also gave the clergy, especially at Rome, a greater part in the secular jurisdiction as civil magistrates. Church courts acquired legitimate judicial status in civil matters. This prompted prospective young clerics to seek training more in keeping with forensic expertise than with Scripture and theology. Those were sought out for clerical posts who possessed this kind of learning, and such occupations appealed to the aristocratic classes as established careers to which their sons might aspire for other than exclusively religious reasons.<sup>28</sup> For many, ecclesiastical office would become the goal of worldly status and social influence.

In the ancient world buildings and architecture were specifically designed and erected to symbolise the power and prestige of ruling nations or empires. The glory of the earthly city of man was displayed outwardly by means of impressively constructed edifices such as temples, forums, monuments or by other public works, whether purely symbolic or more immediately practical, such as amphitheatres, roads and aqueducts. As the Church gained in stature and worldly prominence in the post-Constantinian decades, it, too, sought to reflect its new-found prestige in symbolic form. Thus, began the construction of the basilica. The Church *building* would provide solid evidence of the Church's new and exalted institutional standing and an enduring representation of its power and authority. "Early Christian architecture" claims Herrin, "was clearly designed to impress, and to this end the use of different coloured marbles, stone, brick, fresco, mosaic, and painted sculpture were judiciously combined."<sup>29</sup> This emphasis upon church architecture would soon substitute for the words and deeds of faith. The grandiose scale on which these buildings were erected suggests that they were

far from having a merely functional task to perform. They were carefully planned to emphasise to the populace the preeminence of the Church, and of the clergy who governed it. They symbolised the fusing of the Church with Rome that the Constantinian change had brought about.

In the fourth and fifth centuries definite voices can be heard to exalt the special place and importance of the Roman primacy, the sound of whose words is scarcely distinguishable from the praises heaped upon the ancient empire of the same name by her pagan spokesmen.

Damasus (Pope, 366–384) was perhaps the first to revel in the majesty of a papal splendor that would illuminate the pages of history for centuries to come.<sup>30</sup> His single aim, it would seem, was to present Christianity as the true imperial religion and to declare Rome to be the capital of a *Christian* empire. Not only did he undertake great building projects in the city, he also implemented an annual civic festival in honor of Peter and Paul, who were now regarded to be the protectors of the *Christian* Rome. This imitation of the pagan past (a new Romulus and Remus) was designed to elevate Rome, along with her bishop, to prominence over the whole Church. As Pope, Damasus lived in personal pomp and luxury, and it was largely with him that popes in Rome began to live in the kind of palatial grandeur which would be expected of a monarch. Damasus moved in high society and hob-nobbed with the aristocratic and patrician ranks; he regarded his office of bishop as possessing noble stature worthy of high honor.

It was about the time Damasus was Pope that bishops at Rome began to wear an episcopal dress which was a conscious attempt to imitate traditional senatorial garb. Under Damasus the weekly Eucharist acquired an exalted ritual and formal ceremonial which came to dominate the worship service, for as with architecture and apparel, the external symbols of the worship service were beginning to take priority over the word of God. It is also from about this time that one begins to see "a spectacular explosion of colour in the vestments and hangings, the use of gold and silver vessels and elaborate marble piscinae, silver canopies over the altar, a multitude of wax candles, and an elaborate censuring with incense."<sup>31</sup> And it was then that the practice began of erecting a screen, or iconostasis, in order to hide all the operations on the altar from the laity and thereby emphasise the separation between clergy and laity.

Damasus is probably best remembered today for his having been the pope who, in 383, commissioned the Latin translation of the Scripture known to us as the Vulgate, and predominant in the West for centuries. It was his secretary, Jerome, the later famous *Church father* and Hebrew scholar, whom he specifically entrusted with this responsibility. The Vulgate was to increase Roman authority and prestige in the West, for to translate means to *interpret*, and Rome's stature would be vastly enhanced by the claim to have provided a Scripture which her own resources, granted by her founding apostles, could alone make possible. Accordingly, with Damasus Rome begins to intervene on a regular basis in the affairs of other Western Churches. His letters "were written in the style of the imperial chancery."<sup>32</sup> From this time Rome increasingly spoke with the voice of superior authority, as the

30. This account is taken mainly from Paul Johnson, *op. cit.*, pp. 99–102.

31. Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

32. W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity*, p. 628.

28. Chadwick, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

29. Herrin, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

mouthpiece of the apostle Peter to whom had been given the *keys* (authority) of the whole Church, an authority not only over other Churches, but even over Church councils.

Perhaps the most celebrated of all those who occupied St. Peter's see in late antiquity was Gregory the Great (Pope, 590–604). Some have seen in Gregory the first of the mediaeval popes, for he typified much that was characteristic of the later papacy. Gregory was in every respect an administrator. More than any before him, he expanded the Church bureaucracy in order to manage the affairs of the papal estates, known as the *patrimony of St. Peter*. As bishop, “we find him employing his considerable energies on such matters as horse-breeding, the slaughter of cattle, the administration of legacies, the accuracy of accounts, the level of rents and the price of leases. He took a direct part in the running of estates scattered throughout Italy, and in North Africa, Sardinia and Sicily.”<sup>33</sup> One wonders that he ever found time to preach and teach!

It was Gregory who organised the clergy into colleges (the basis of the Cardinalate) according to grade and required the wearing of clothes to befit each rank. He greatly expanded the business of the papal chancery and staffed it with scribes and letter-writers, for Gregory spent the bulk of his time corresponding with officials, bishops and abbots, and men responsible for the vast ecclesiastical estates. As Gregory was a descendent of one of the illustrious Roman patrician families, it would seem only natural that one of its offspring should carry on the honour of the family name and his class responsibility for the conduct of the *res publica*.

It is indisputable that Gregory was among the most influential voices to be taken as authoritative tradition throughout both the Carolingian period (ninth–tenth centuries) and the later High Middle Ages. Next to Augustine and the Pseudo-Dionysius, Gregory clearly deserves mention as the most read and consulted of the *fathers* from whom guidance in the construction of the *Christian* centuries was sought. It is certainly with Gregory that the Church at Rome was able to provide the degree of leadership needed to deal with the Germanic nations, then undertaking to settle down in the former Roman west, and to organise a programme for their conversion to orthodox Christianity. The hope was that by such means the way would be opened to extending the authority of *Christian* Rome over that part of the Roman Empire that had slipped out from under the control of the *secular* emperor whose residence had been, since Constantine, in Constantinople. The bishop of Rome was, by his day, the only Roman authority of any stature left in the west.

Gregory shared the Eusebian vision of the fusion of Rome with Christianity and all that that meant for the Church and her clergy. In one important area, however, Gregory departed from the Eusebian formula. He no longer accepted the idea of the secular Emperor as the *sole* head of the church. Two centuries of development, particularly since the emperors in the east were either too preoccupied with political problems or were incapable of providing assistance to the west, had left the leadership in the west increasingly in the hands of the bishop of Rome who, in many respects, assumed responsibility for high matters of State as well as for settling doctrinal issues in the Churches. Naturally, this increased confidence in, and added to the ideological argument for, the primacy of Rome over the affairs of the Church. It even provided

support for an altered idea of authority over the total society. No longer should the *Ecclesia Universalis* be viewed as having one head, but now the concept of *two* heads, or powers, began to take hold. Even so, one must take precedence over the other. The church was beginning to think of a *priestly* authority as the *highest* authority in Christendom.

Nearly a century before Gregory, Gelasius (Pope, 492–96) had sought to articulate what was to become famous as the “doctrine of the two powers.” On the one hand, there stood the *heavenly* power represented by the clergy, especially the bishop of Rome; on the other hand, there was the *earthly* or *temporal* power which rested on the secular emperor and the officials who served him to protect the Empire and the Church from enemies without and within, especially heretics. In this way the activities of those who have high positions in the Church would be properly delimited as to their rightful jurisdiction. However, Gelasius did not have in mind some irreconcilable dualism—he thought in terms of *hierarchy*. By claiming a duality of spheres, he was in fact attempting to define a whole new system of rule for the *Ecclesia Universalis*, that of the primacy of the priestly order over the whole society, and the primacy of the bishop of Rome, especially, as the true monarch or Emperor. Accordingly, he wrote to the Emperor Anastasius as follows: “. . . Two there are, august emperor, by which this world is chiefly ruled, the sacred authority of the priesthood and the royal power. Of these the responsibility of the priests is more weighty in so far as they will answer for the kings of men themselves at the divine judgment . . . who have charge of divine affairs . . . And if the hearts of the faithful should be submitted to all priests in general who rightly administer divine things, how much more should assent be given to the bishop of that see [Rome] which the most High wished to be pre-eminent over all priests . . .”<sup>34</sup>

He went on to make the claim that the two powers necessarily accord with two realms of affairs: the temporal realm, which is the business of the royal power, and that having to do with *divine* matters, the prerogative of the priestly class. Neither should interfere in the business of the other, except when it is necessary, of course, to bring superior divine authority to bear on the conduct of princes by those given the chief responsibility in these matters, namely, the priests.

Salvation matters and *spiritual* concerns, on the one hand, were being divorced from this temporal world and from any biblical kingdom agenda. On the other hand, by the claim that divine matters were spiritual concerns, and hence matters for the priestly class, the way was opened to a divine authority that would be exercised less as a biblical authority and more as that which served to advance the interests of the clerical order and the pope. A Manichean dualism long distorted the concept of the Church together with the type of Christian society ideal that accompanied it, and was the principal cause of a power struggle at the center of further civilisational development.

This Gelasian theory of the *two powers* became, in fact, the doctrine of the Church, a doctrine based upon a presumed division of jurisdictions over the whole world, and indicating what class of elites was accorded rulership responsibility. More than this, it pointed to that person who in particular

33. Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

34. A segment of Gelasius's letter can be found in Brian Tierney, *The Crisis of Church and State, 1050–1300* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), p. 13f.



held from God supreme imperial authority and to him who had absolute power over the entire *Ecclesia Universalis*.

With Gelasius's theory itself, however, a certain ambiguity was present. For the so-called distinction between temporal affairs for which the royal or secular power was responsible and divine matters which belonged only to the clergy would inevitably cause confusion and confrontation. After all, the distinctions themselves derived from a God-ordained order for the world. Would they not *both* belong to divine matters? Would they not both need to be brought together at some higher level in order to maintain the *unity* of God's *Ecclesia*? Theory needed a way to harmonize what clearly seemed irreconcilable.

In Gelasius's mind, as in that of all bishops at Rome especially, there was little doubt that unless one monarch ruled over all aspects of the *Ecclesia Universalis* then a conflict could not be avoided between the sacred and the secular realms of life. Since God rules over all in heaven, his designated monarch must have complete authority over both dimensions on earth. And since the sacred is clearly of greater worth than the secular—because sacred things belong to the *eternal* realm, whereas earthly matters, while of some importance here and now, must eventually pass away—therefore, the chief power and authority under God on earth must be the bishop of Rome, the heritage of St. Peter to whom had been given the *keys*. The pope, then, must be the supreme power and authority on earth for all matters that pertain to the *Societas Christianae*. He alone must rule the temporal as well as the sacred realm.

The history of the Church up to the High Middle Ages was a long and intense struggle to realise the goal of this papal and clerical vision of power and authority. It was not easy, for all that the Church (i.e. the clerical order) had to fight with were *words*, whereas the secular arm of society had *real* arms and just as exalted a view of its own prerogatives

in the total Christian society as that of the priestly class. But the highly trained and vastly better educated clergy's words proved to be extraordinarily effective, particularly when ignorant and credulous multitudes were superstitiously persuaded that such words, coming as they did from such divinely elevated personages, possessed the power either to *cast into hell* or to *open the gates of heaven*. The clergy had done a masterful job of convincing many that it, and it alone, had been given a divine dispensation to absolve sins or to exercise a final judgment upon them. It soon convinced many that the only security for their souls lay in absolute, unqualified, and unquestioned obedience to the clergy, and especially the pope.

The Gelasian doctrine led eventually, over a rough and difficult terrain—for the bringing of the secular world of kings and emperors to submit to such papal overlordship was hardly to be expected without fierce resistance—to the twelfth century doctrine of the *plenitudo potestatis*—the *fullness of power*—of the pope. This doctrine claimed that in the pope alone resided all law and justice which came to him as God's vice-regent on earth, and to no other. He therefore “rules and disposes of all things, orders and governs everything solely as he pleases . . . He can deprive anyone of his right, as it pleases him . . . for with him his will is right and reason; whatever pleases him has the force of law.”<sup>35</sup> At that point the popes no longer thought of themselves as the *vicar of St. Peter*, they were now the *vicar of Christ*. Their authority on earth was total and direct. Scripture was only useful for what it could provide in the way of support for this exalted ideology of power. *C&S*

35. Friederich Heer, *The Medieval World: Europe 1100–1350* (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1962, trans. Janet Sondheimer), p. 275.

## KUYPER FOUNDATION FELLOWSHIP WEEKEND

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# CHRISTIAN POLITICS: THE STATE WE'RE IN<sup>1</sup>

by *Esmond Birnie*<sup>2</sup>

THIS article begins with a consideration of the state of the family in the UK today. This provides a background to a more general review of the relationship between Christianity and politics. The three main sections to the article are:

- the extent of the problem
- how we got to where we are
- a Christian response

I conclude with a comparison and contrast of two “models” of how to “do” Christian politics. One characterises most (though certainly not all) evangelicals in the US and the other is the rather contrasting and largely predominant approach in England.

## I.

### THE EXTENT OF THE PROBLEM: PLAYING UNHAPPY FAMILIES

“We are in the possession of peace, happiness, and of liberty; we are under the guidance of a mild and beneficent religion; and we are protected by impartial laws, and the purest administration of justice; we are living under a system of government . . . the best and wisest which has ever been framed . . .”<sup>3</sup> This description of Great Britain was questionable when it was given, by Prime Minister William Pitt, in 1791. Today, notwithstanding two centuries of unprecedented economic and technological growth, no politician would dare describe the UK so complacently. Significantly, Tony Blair, whilst Opposition leader in 1995 said, “We enjoy a thousand material advantages over any previous generation, and yet we suffer from a depth of insecurity and spiritual doubt

they never knew.”<sup>4</sup> Eleven years later the Conservative Party leader David Cameron similarly hinted at the need for “a new political agenda.” This would recognise the considerable stress (in terms of poor quality of life and work-life balance) on many people and families, and would attempt to prioritise general well being over and above GDP.<sup>5</sup>

The Bible itself, as our ultimate authority, sets very high goals for families. In the Old Testament they were seen as the essential building block not just for the nation but also for the world community (Gen. 1:28, 17:4 and 17:12–13). Families are also a place to school godliness (Dt. 6:7). In the New Testament the family is often used as a model illustrating ultimate and spiritual realities. For example, the parent-child relationship reflects that of the Father and Son within Trinity (Jn 20:17, Eph. 3:14–15), that of husband-wife reflects Christ to the Church (Eph. 5:30–31), and adoption aspects of God’s work of salvation (Rom. 8:15).<sup>6</sup>

Here, alas, are just a few of the disturbing statistics which illustrate the current malaise effecting families in the UK:<sup>7</sup>

- The highest rates of teenage pregnancy and youth crime in Europe.
- Third highest divorce rate in Europe.
- Massive problems of drug and alcohol abuse.
- Working days lost through sickness doubling during 1995–2002.
- The prescription of anti-depressants also doubled during 1991–2002 (to 24 million).
- Increases in suicides (particularly amongst young males).
- Total numbers of crimes, as recorded by the police, increased from less than half a million in 1955 to 2.7 million

1. This article is an amended version of the paper “Playing unhappy families: The state we’re in” given to the Kuyper Foundation Conference “The Place of Christianity in the Public Square,” Hamilton College, Scotland, 28 October 2006. I would like to thank the Kuyper Foundation for their kindness and help and especially Bob Graham, Archie Linnegan, and Alan and Angela Wilson.

2. At the time this paper was given Esmond Birnie was a Member (MLA) of the Northern Ireland Assembly having been an MLA (Ulster Unionist Party) since 1998. Although he lost his seat at the 7 March 2007 Assembly Elections he continues to be involved in Northern Ireland politics at an advisory level.

3. B. Hilton, *A Mad, Bad and Dangerous People? England 1783–1846* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2005), p. 193f.

4. M. Greene, *Imagine How We Can Reach the UK* (Milton Keynes: Authentic Media, 2006), p. 14.

5. Speech to *Google Zeitgeist Europe 2006* on 22 May 2006; available on the Guardian Unlimited Website <http://politics.guardian.co.uk/conservatives/story/O,1780585,00.html>. Incidentally, the way in which Cameron’s speech reduced the Protestant work ethic to a sort of miserable compulsion to work away at all costs suggests that he had not really understood either Protestantism or R. H. Tawney (R. H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966)).

6. D. J. Atkinson and D. H. Field, *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology* (Leicester: IVP, 1995), p. 374f.

7. See Greene, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

in 1979 and to 5–6 million by the mid 2000s.<sup>8</sup> To take just one city, consider Glasgow's record moving from being the "gospel city" of the nineteenth century to today's crime/murder rate.<sup>9</sup>

In short, modern family life often represents "Experiments in living. The fatherless family."<sup>10</sup> And just one more set of statistics; some relating to abortion. UK rates for women 15–44 years old increased from 11 per 1000 in 1984 to 17.8 twenty years later. The absolute numbers in 1984 and 2004 were 136,389 and 185,400 respectively.<sup>11</sup>

## II.

### HOW TO EXPLAIN THIS PREDICAMENT

Behaviour is driven by attitudes (Pr. 4:23). Of course, original sin has been with us since the Fall but the significant thing about the post-modern (or, some might say, "post-Christian") UK is that so many of the traditional restraints have been thrown off. This is not to deny that economic factors (e.g. poverty, debt) or demographic ones (such as increased longevity) *may* play a role in producing part of the situation we have just described. However, attitudinal changes must take the main responsibility (Judges 21:25). After all, some of the primary indicators of social ills (e.g. crime and illegitimacy rates) actually *improved* during most of the 1850s–1930s but have worsened throughout the period since the 1960s. In other words, it is hard to draw a *consistent* correlation between economic prosperity (or the lack of it) and family/social breakdown.<sup>12</sup>

The following are some of the attitudes which are the modern equivalent to the Old Testament situation of, "Everyone did what was right in their own eyes" (Judges 21:25):

(1) *Economism*. If raising economic output per head is all that matters then getting as many persons into employment regardless of the social consequences becomes a goal, perhaps *the* goal, of policy. Thus, significantly, all the major UK political parties (supported by the business organisations and trade unions) have concluded that the best response to the growing number of "lone parents" is to tailor policies and circumstances which allow such parents to enter into and stay in paid employment. Such an economistic outlook also explains why a low level of regulation of science and technological application is seen as a badge of honour in terms for the UK's international competitiveness. There is a consensus that there should be as few legal restrictions on embryo experimentation as possible; hence much of the support for the government's Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill in 2007/08.<sup>13</sup>

8. N. Dennis and G. Erdos, *Culture and Crime Policing in Four Nations* (London: Civitas, 2005), p. xii.

9. M. Burleigh, *Earthly Powers* (London: Penguin, 2005), p. 258. Contrast nineteenth century Scotland with a UN study in the mid 2000s which indicated Scotland to be the most violent country in the world (at least in terms of street assaults; *Holyrood Magazine* (July 2007), "Defining state," p. 39).

10. The title of a pamphlet by R. O'Neill, *Experiments in Living The Fatherless Family* (London: Civitas, 2002).

11. *British Medical Journal* (16 September 2006), "Emergency contraception," p. 560.

12. G. Himmelfarb, "The Demoralisation of Society From Victorian Virtues to Modern Values", *Choice in Welfare Series*, no. 22 (London: Institute of Economic Affairs, 2005).

13. *The Times* (21 January 2008), "Stem cell research is vital and can save lives," p. 18. A Private Members (i.e. backbencher's) Bill

The dangers posed by the economistic viewpoint are old ones. Cotton Mather in 1702 said that "Religion brought forth prosperity, and the daughter destroyed the mother."<sup>14</sup>

(2) *Egotism/extreme individualism*. In this case human rights are seen as the supreme arbiter of policy decisions. Such a rights based approach to public policy tends to magnify "appetites" over against "restraints." All this is contrary to a much older wisdom whereby, for example, John Dickinson in the eighteenth century said that American laws came down from ". . . king of kings, lord of all the earth . . ." and not any mere parchment.<sup>15</sup> Or, consider Burke's flourish to the House of Commons on 6 May 1791 that grand statements of human rights were akin to a ". . . bale of [plague] infected cotton . . ."<sup>16</sup> The great irony is that if we are in a post-modern/post-Christian world and human rights are supposedly supreme then there may be no solid foundation for such rights. If human rights are simply what a majority say then this hardly secures the way against fascism. Hitler, after all, was democratically elected. Similarly, if codes of human rights reflect the current legal consensus it is worth remembering that most lawyers in the old Soviet Union connived at totalitarianism.<sup>17</sup>

(3) *Relativism/pluralism*. If relativism and pluralism are conceded as philosophical prescriptions then Christians and others will be held to have "no rights to impose" their beliefs.<sup>18</sup> Neither, so it will be said, should legislation privilege any particular sets of values or morality. Religion is increasingly dismissed as not just irrelevant but also downright dangerous (e.g. post-9/11 the argument that "fundamentalism equals fanaticism" has gained currency<sup>19</sup>). In a ludicrous manner James Carroll argues American Christian fundamentalists and Islamic ones are ". . . all allies"<sup>20</sup>

Historically speaking we have been here before; at the height of the Roman Empire, according to the great historian Edward Gibbon, "[the range of faiths found in the ancient Empire] . . . were all considered by the people as equally true; by philosophers as equally false; and by the magistrates as equally useful."<sup>21</sup>

(4) *Secularism*. This is a long established phenomenon in many parts of Continental Europe (according to one historian only about 15 per cent of London's working class

introduced in 1985 by Enoch Powell came close to outlawing embryo experimentation but unfortunately various procedural devices (almost certainly supported by Margaret Thatcher's government) led to this Bill being dropped (S. Heffer, *Like the Roman* [London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1998], p. 888, 890f.).

14. P. Johnson, *A History of the American People* (Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1997), p. 71.

15. B. Bobrick, *The Triumph of the American Revolution* (London: Penguin, 1997), p. 207.

16. C. C. O'Brien, *The Long Affair: Thomas Jefferson and the French Revolution* (London: Sinclair Stevenson, 1996), p. 281. Incidentally, Burke was an important influence on Kuyper (J. E. McGoldrick, *God's Renaissance Man* [Auburn, MA: Evangelical Press, 2000], p. 66).

17. C. Douzinas, *The End of Human Rights* (London: Hart, 2000), p. 246.

18. I do accept the argument that it is possible to hold that a plurality of competing worldviews is a pretty accurate *description* of the UK and much of the rest of the world. Relativism is the view that all such views are equally valid (or invalid!).

19. EA, *Faith and Nation*, Report of a Commission of Inquiry to the UK Evangelical Alliance (London: Evangelical Alliance, 2006), p. 7.

20. G. Wills, *Bush's Fringe Government* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2006), p. 7.

21. *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (Harmondsworth: Penguin), chapter 2.

attended church in 1900, which seems low until one considers that the equivalent figure for Berlin was perhaps less than 1 per cent).<sup>22</sup> Kuyper himself was one of the first to identify “modernism” as a sinister “life system.”<sup>23</sup> Even though it can truly be said that “Without Jesus Christ Europe would not have been and never will be anything more than a collection of competing barbarian tribes,”<sup>24</sup> the draft EU Constitution proposed in 2004–05 ignored God and Christianity completely. Secularism became fully apparent in Britain in the early 1960s, which would suggest that we were something of a late starter in this process.<sup>25</sup>

It is true that in the early stages of secularisation, some individuals tried to hold on to Christian morality whilst ditching the theology. As the economist J. M. Keynes wrote to the writer Virginia Woolf, “We destroyed Christianity yet had its benefits.”<sup>26</sup> This trick could, however, not be sustained for more than a generation or two. Sadly, the Churches and Church leaders may have connived in the process of secularisation. What are we to make of Bonhoeffer’s much quoted (because much admired ([!]) aphorism, “. . . we must live as men who can get along very well without him [i.e. God]”?<sup>27</sup> Of course, the importance of religious and ethnic conflict in world politics, very apparent since 1989, demonstrates that the assertion “God is dead” is a lie.<sup>28</sup>

(5) *The cult of the celebrity.* In today’s UK celebrity magazines sell 3 million copies every week. Cultural icons are given a privileged status to dispense their “wisdom” on social issues, although they have neither a sure moral compass or any particular expertise.

(6) *Radical feminism.* This represents a leap from the nineteenth century liberal feminism which sought equality of opportunity between the sexes so as to move closer to equality of outcome. Radical feminism instead attempts to deny any differences between men and women.<sup>29</sup>

(7) *Statism.* There are two interlinked trends here: (i) the State’s share in economic and social life increases and (ii) the State is seen as the ultimate “fixer” of all social ills (perhaps even as a substitute for God). The sad reality is that the modern welfare-warfare State has been peculiarly expensive and bloodthirsty:

ESTIMATED NUMBER OF PERSONS KILLED

	30 B.C.—1900 A.D	1900—1987
State repression	133 million	170 million
War	40 million	40 million

Source: P. V. Elst, *Libertarianism* (Jesmond: Christian Institute, 2003), p. 17.

22. Burleigh, *op. cit.*, p. 263.

23. *Lectures on Calvinism*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1898/1983), p. 11.

24. R. Bewes, *Words that Circled the World* (Tain: Christian Focus, 2002), p. 118.

25. C. G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularism 1800–2000* (London: Routledge, 2001).

26. R. J. Gardiner, *The Victorians* (Hambleton, 2002), p. 50. P. Clarke, *Britain 1900–2000 Hope and Glory* (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 160. One bitter irony is that a number of members of Woolf’s Bloomsbury Group were descendants of the evangelical Clapham Sect.

27. L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1984), p. 11.

28. *The Economist* (3 November 2007), “A Special Report on Religion and Public Life.”

29. D. Conway, *Free Market Feminism*, Choice in Welfare Series, no. 43 (London: Institute of Economic Affairs, 1998).

In short, given this combination of attitudes, “. . . there is a moral and political vacuum in this country” (the view of the head of the British Army in 2006).<sup>30</sup>

## III.

## HOW THEN SHOULD WE RESPOND?

First of all, there are some balances which need to be struck: (a) *Politics has a high place but it cannot substitute for the gospel.* Yes, we should remind ourselves of Calvin’s comment in the concluding chapter of the *Institutes* that politics is “the most sacred and by far the most honourable of all callings.”<sup>31</sup> This certainly, and rightly, stands against the pervasive cynicism found in most Western democracies that *all* politicians are liars, lazy or parasitic! And yet, we must also remember the point made by Don Carson that evangelicals who move off the golden thread provided by the story line of salvation which runs through the entire Bible then tend to become obsessively focused on some narrower and *relatively* peripheral issue (e.g. abortion, alcohol, Sunday observance, ecology, disarmament, Third World etc.).<sup>32</sup> Important though these matters are, they are feeble substitutes for the gospel. Sadly, many “Kuyperians post-Kuyper” seem to have lost some of his own balance of “antithesis” against “common grace” and as a result they over-emphasise social action relative to evangelism or, indeed, any claims to absolute truth on behalf of Christianity.<sup>33</sup>

(b) *There is a high place for the politics of family/sexual morality but a Christian politics must be wider in scope.* Are Christians in politics divided between those who are obsessed about sexual issues and those who are obsessed about other evangelicals being obsessed about sex?<sup>34</sup> Whilst there is a room for division of labour in campaigning (not everyone can be equally active on all fronts), it is a pity that various Christians often seem to be *exclusively* concerned with, say, abortion/homosexuality, on the one hand, or global poverty/the environment, on the other, but are rarely equally passionate and engaged about both.<sup>35</sup> There are some signs that some US evangelicals have begun to adopt a broader and more nuanced approach to public policy concerns. For example, Rick Warren’s agitation may well have influenced President Bush’s policy towards very targeted assistance of basic health care in the poorest African countries.<sup>36</sup> Whereas in the past many US evangelicals tended to dismiss environmental concern as either irrelevant or even theologically dangerous there is now some support for what has been dubbed “creation care.”<sup>37</sup>

30. General Sir Richard Dannatt, Chief of the General Staff, quoted in the *Daily Mail* (13 October 2006).

31. Book IV, Chapter XX, p. 1490 in the 1960 edition.

32. D. Carson, *Gagging of God* (Leicester: Apollon, 1996), p. 482.

33. McGoldrick, *op. cit.*, p. 12. Consider, for example, the fate of the Free University in Amsterdam; Kuyper’s foundation but now indistinguishable from any other “secular” university.

34. In other words, some conservative Christians give the impression that the only cause which matters is opposition to homosexuality (and/or abortion) and equally some other evangelicals are worried that other Christians are perceived as being no more than “anti-gay.” See P. Yancey, *What’s so Amazing about Grace* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), p. 236 for one view, though not one I would necessarily agree with.

35. EA, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

36. *The Economist* (25 June 2005), *op. cit.*, pp. 29–32.

37. See, for example, the position of Richard Cizik of the National Association of Evangelicals (*The Economist* [1 December 2007], “A cross of green”, p. 59).

(c) *Much is possible in the “now” but some things remain “not yet,”* We cannot really create heaven on earth before the return of our Lord. The mistake of dispensational theology has been to push the Kingdom entirely into the future, but the mistake of the liberal social gospel is to reduce it entirely to the “now.”<sup>38</sup>

(d) *There is a limit to what government and legislation can achieve.*<sup>39</sup> “... government cannot make people love one another. I wish it could. I’d sign that law” (George W Bush in 1999).<sup>40</sup> Or, as Lord Griffiths of Eforestfach put it, “A Third Way without religious renewal will founder on the same rocks of secularism that have wrecked both socialism and capitalism.”<sup>41</sup>

So, keeping in mind Plato’s observation, “it is easier to ask questions than to answer them,”<sup>42</sup> here is a consideration of some options for Christians who want to do politics:

(1) *The default option: do nothing.*

Many Christians and Churches have taken this approach. Perhaps they feel some of the trends identified in the first part of this article are inevitable and some of the underlying ideological imperatives considered in the second part are all too strong. Sometimes this do nothing option is no better than downright defeatism and should be condemned as such.

Sometimes, however, it follows from a more nuanced theological approach. There are some Christians for whom “the worse the better.” This is either because things must “wax worse and worse” before Christ returns (2 Tim. 3:1–6 and 3:13) or because the old order, Christendom in fact, is perceived to have been a corruption.

Let us look at such views in more detail: first, the assertion of “worse and worse.” Yes, some parts of the New Testament seem to carry this implication and yet other parts of the New and Old Testament are consistent with an interpretation of growing strength for the Church and righteousness over time (Isaiah 11:9). We may actually have cycles of relative righteousness and relative wickedness throughout human history (certainly found in biblical history; for example, the Judges). Even a pre-millennial eschatology and an emphasis on an imminent Second Coming need not lead to passivity about what is going on in this world (Lord Shaftesbury in the mid-nineteenth century was a pre-millennialist as well as very active social reformer who said that in forty years he had not spent one waking hour without contemplation of the Lord’s Return).<sup>43</sup> Kuyper, interestingly, seems to have been something of a short-to-medium term pessimist regarding the prospects for the world (at least, outside of the Calvinist community in the Netherlands), but this hardly hindered him from political activism.<sup>44</sup>

38. EA, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

39. Carson, *op. cit.* p. 430.

40. D. Aikman, *A Man of Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), p. 3.

41. Bewes, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

42. In his *Republic*. Kuyper himself may well have been stronger on theorising Christian politics than putting it into practice. As I would concede from my own experience the practice is exceedingly difficult. A more positive assessment of Kuyper’s legacy was provided by M. P. Fogarty, *Christian Democracy in Western Europe 1820–1953* (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1957), p. xv, who was full of praise for Dutch Protestantism as “. . . the most instructive political, economic and social movement to be found anywhere in the Christian world.”

43. J. M. Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith* (Leicester IVP, 1986), p. 456. See also Carson, *op. cit.*, p. 407.

44. P. S. Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper’s Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 245–9.

What then of the second argument, that Christendom has fallen and this is a good thing? This is actually quite an old view. It came to the fore in parts of the radical Reformation and has been repeated ever since.<sup>45</sup> It is certainly true that State Churches and officially sanctioned Christianity has shown many faults over the years, but would things have been really better during 300–1800 if paganism had been left in its previous position of dominance in Europe?<sup>46</sup> I think not! In any case, modern “anti-Constantinian” Christians pursue a chimera when they talk about a “religiously neutral State”; I strongly agree with the argument that *no* State can be religiously neutral (it is either “for” God or “against” him).<sup>47</sup> I fear that what is really going on is that anti-Constantinian Christianity is an attempt to put a favourable gloss on the decline in the Church which has already occurred.

(2) *Pick winnable issues*

Kuyper himself provides a good example of this approach given his successful political campaign (1880s–1917) to win state funding for religious schools.<sup>48</sup> Today this approach could mean the Churches engage on certain issues whilst possibly avoiding explicitly “moral arguments” (e.g. condemn human trafficking as a social evil without necessarily majoring on the moral argument against commercial sex). This approach *can* sometimes work. It facilitates alliances with non-believers and it may, in formal theological terms, represent the exploitation of common grace.

There is a big danger in all of this; taken beyond a certain point this approach becomes a cop-out, to the extent that one avoids anything which will generate too much unpopularity. In his biography of the then Prime Minister, Seldon wrote, “Blair’s relationship with God is more important than any other described in this book . . . Few Prime Ministers have been so influenced by their faith . . .”<sup>49</sup> And yet, for all his good intentions and apparent moral vision (particularly for foreign policy), the voting and legislative record of the former Prime Minister seemed largely dislocated from any biblical basis. And perhaps one should not expect much change under his successor (though, one should still give credit where credit is due, e.g. for his initiatives as Chancellor for developing world debt relief). In his Labour Conference speech of 25 September 2006, Gordon Brown said of himself, “And where did I learn these values? My father was a minister of the Church. His motivation was *not* theological zeal but compassion.”<sup>50</sup> It is interesting that “theological zeal” is seen as being inferior to compassion and possibly its opposite; a very post-modern view!

45. J. Coffey, “How should evangelicals think about politics,” *Evangelical Quarterly* (January 1997), LXIV, no. 1, pp. 39–62.

46. As W. Edgar put it, “was 300–1800 just one colossal mistake?” (In S. S. Smith, *God and Politics: Four Views on the Reformation of Civil Government* (Philipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1989), p. 182.

47. S. C. Perks, *A Defence of the Christian State* (Taunton: Kuyper Foundation, 1998). Also, E. Birnie, “In praise of Constantine and the Reformed state,” *Christianity and Society*, Vol. XIII, No. 2 (2003), pp. 16–22.

48. McGoldrick, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

49. A. Seldon, *Blair* (London: Free Press, 2004), p. 515.

50. Emphasis added; *The Times* (26 September 2006), “Peace, brother, Gordon holds out”, p. 6.

(3) *Persuasion*

To do this we need to be organised in our methods and professional in our delivery of presentation. In some way this is a very old approach. After all, Augustine, in his *City of God* outlined how belief in false gods led to unhappiness in *this* life as well as the next.<sup>51</sup> And persuasion has *sometimes* worked. For example, in cases such as the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 (and total abolition of British Empire slavery in 1833) through to the climb down at Westminster in 2005 in terms of proposed legislation to outlaw “religious hatred.”<sup>52</sup>

Of particular relevance is the mass of social science evidence as to the impact of marriage/stable family background on life chances.<sup>53</sup> I have read some of the books by the noted political philosopher John Gray.<sup>54</sup> These provide a remarkably frank exposition by a non-believer who thinks the whole project of “post-Christian” modernity is fatally flawed. Modernism (and post-modernism), according to Gray, have retained the Christian notion of “progress” but without the humility consequent from the concept of the Fall. The results have been terrifying.

We must, however, note the “blinding” effect of sin (2 Thes. 2:11). Sadly, the powers that be may not listen to our case no matter how reasonable (one example could be official disdain within the UK for some sort of abstinence based sex education).<sup>55</sup> Gray, again, makes an interesting comment: “One cannot engage in dialogue with religious thinkers in Britain today without quickly discovering that they are, on the whole, more intelligent, better educated and strikingly more freethinking than unbelievers.”<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, all of this may not be enough to win arguments. Thus we have a situation where “The real nuttiness in our society is that an open commitment from a public figure to organised Christian religion is now seen as shameful, while every sort of faulty moral reasoning is accorded great respect.”<sup>57</sup> So it was that former Prime Minister Tony Blair admitted, after leaving office, that he had always felt he had to be coy about his religious beliefs.<sup>58</sup>

One danger of rampant secularism is that not only may Christians be unable to implement their beliefs in the public sphere, but they may even be told that they cannot

hold such beliefs in the first place. Consider, for example, the experience of the unfortunate Rocco Buttiglione, who in 2004 was struck down by the European Parliament as candidate for the EU Commissioner for Justice. His crime in the eyes of a largely secularist Parliament was not that he said that he would discriminate against homosexuals (he had in fact pledged to apply all existing equality legislation) but that he had dared to venture that homosexuality was a sin.<sup>59</sup>

We do need to think more about our theology of co-belligerence. Yes, the Bible shows some (probable) non-believers being used by God for his good purposes (e.g. Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus) and since then there have been other examples (e.g. Constantine to end persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire and Pitt and Palmerston to end slave trade within the British empire). Kuyper provides a good example of using co-belligerence with those outside of his Reformed framework (he worked closely with the Dutch Catholic party to form a political bloc with a combined 55 per cent of the national vote).<sup>60</sup> Admittedly, Kuyper has since been criticised for being ambiguous as to how far co-operation could occur with the non-believer and non-Reformed; for not, in fact, resolving the tension between antithesis and common grace.<sup>61</sup> We do need to be clear that co-belligerence falls short of full alliance and to be aware of its dangers.<sup>62</sup>

Historically there have been a number of notable examples of fairly successful co-belligerence between Christians from a Reformed background and those from a Catholic one. For example, Kuyper’s alliance with the Dutch Catholic party and, more recently, the way that the so-called “Religious Right” has operated in the US (though see my comments on the latter below). Some commentators, coming from a fairly secularist viewpoint have seen the latter as a sinister development.<sup>63</sup> There is the danger that theological distinctives may get watered down for the sake of working together,<sup>64</sup> but this is hardly inevitable. My own view as to the correct *modern* Reformed assessment of the contemporary Roman Catholic Church is similar to that of Wayne Grudem.<sup>65</sup>

(4) *Proclamation*

Here we spell out what is right and what is wrong regardless of immediate public reaction because this is the biblical thing to do. Kuyper said, “. . . God’s holy ordinances shall be established again in home, in the school and in the state.”<sup>66</sup> Almost certainly in the modern UK such a “fundamental” [–ist!] approach will generate a lot of hostility, but should we really tactically retreat on the “human sexuality issue” or, much better, see this as the twenty-first century’s doctrinal line in the sand?<sup>67</sup> Luther put it well, “If I profess with the

51. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1984), p. xxxiv.

52. *The Economist* (24 February 2007), “Breaking the chains”, pp. 63–75. However, in the case of the successful defeat of the religious hatred legislation it was notable that Christians were joined in their lobbying by the fairly secular exponents of a sort of British equivalent of the American First Amendment freedom of expression argument; satirical comedians for example.

53. For example, *Does Marriage Matter?* (Civitas, 2004). See also, *Irish Times* (19 October 2006), “Evidence is that traditional family is best.”

54. For example, *Heresies* (London: Granta, 2004).

55. *Economist* (2004, May 15), “Under sexed and over here,” p. 34.

56. *Op. cit.*, p. 45.

57. M. Gove in *The Times* (27 November 2007), “Don’t condemn Blair for his Christian beliefs,” Part 2, p. 8.

58. *The Blair Years*, Programme 3, BBC TV, 2 December 2007. An illustration of the conventional derision of Christian values was the contempt shown by some of the media for the then government in Poland because its conservative Catholic stance on issues like abortion was deemed “offensive” to much of the rest of the EU (*The Economist* (1 December 2007), “The Polish farewell,” p. 56). Similarly, consider some of the hysteria regarding what Ruth Kelly as an *Opus Dei* supporter might or might not do as a Whitehall Minister in various Departments during the mid 2000s (*The Times* (24 January 2005), “Sound instincts,” p. 16).

59. *The Economist* (3 October 2004), “Charlemagne Real Politics at last,” p. 52.

60. McGoldrick, *op. cit.*, p. 55 and Heslam, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

61. McGoldrick, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

62. F. Schaeffer, *The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Downers Grove: Crossways, 1970), p. 37, and EA, *op. cit.*, p. 126. See also, D. Strange, “Co-belligerence and common grace,” *Cambridge Papers*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (2005).

63. Wills, *op. cit.*, pp. 21–25.

64. Some might ask whether the Evangelicals and Catholics Together (ECT) initiative, which began in the mid-1990s, is an example of this.

65. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, (Leicester: IVP, 1994), p. 866f.

66. *Op. cit.*, p. iii.

67. Kuyper, *op. cit.*, p. 27, perceptively predicted “[Modernism] . . . cannot rest until it has made woman man and man woman.”

loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely the little point which the world and the devil are at the moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ.”<sup>68</sup> History indicates that we should not give up hope of some good results no matter how dark things look at the moment; there may sometimes be long cycles of decline-renewal-decline in the morality of societies though these may take decades or even centuries to work themselves through.

We should, of course, note there limits to the possible success. As Gibbon put it about the Roman Empire, “A censor may maintain, he can never restore, the morals of a state.”<sup>69</sup>

Crucially important is the example we ourselves set. Gibbon attributed the success of the early Church to “pure and austere morals.”<sup>70</sup> American evidence suggests sadly that evangelicals/fundamentalists on average do *not* have any greater family stability than non-believers.<sup>71</sup> Also, an emphasis on judgment has to be wedded to loving grace. President Clinton is alleged to have said in 1993, with reference to the way in which some US fundamentalists and evangelicals had attacked him, “why do Christians hate so much?”<sup>72</sup> Indeed, “In no other arena is the church at greater risk of losing its calling than in the public square.”<sup>73</sup> In other words, we have to proclaim the right arguments and we also have to proclaim those arguments in the right way.

#### THE “ENGLISH” AND “AMERICAN” MODELS OF CHRISTIAN POLITICS

In conclusion, and at the risk of over-simplification, I am going to argue that Christians wishing to engage in “Christian politics” are presented with two competing models which I will style as the “English” approach and the “American” (I am, of course, not arguing that all evangelical/conservative Christians within each country fall into each category, but a significant number do).<sup>74</sup>

First of all, what are the differences between the two? On average the evangelical political profile in the US is more right wing, more nationalist (or patriotic, if you prefer) and more pro-Israel than its English counterpart.<sup>75</sup> This American style of “Christian politics” has of course been much criticised, especially on the European side of the Atlantic; “. . . much of the animus driving the prophets of godlessness is a hatred of the American Christian right and a fear of its power . . .”<sup>76</sup> In contrast, the English approach (reflecting the general tenor of politics in Great Britain) is more left of centre and tends to have no particular view on the politics of the Middle East. It is, however, worth stressing that the

alignment of US evangelicals to the Republican party, whilst now statistically significant, is a relatively recent phenomenon (only becoming obvious as late as the presidential election of 1980).<sup>77</sup> Historically, many evangelicals/fundamentalists, especially in the US South, were supporters of the Democratic party. That party was, after all, founded by Andrew Jackson<sup>78</sup> who was of Scots-Irish Presbyterian ancestry and Jennings Bryan, certainly a fundamentalist, was several times the (unsuccessful) Democratic candidate for the presidency. Significantly, it does seem that many of the evangelicals/fundamentalists who “converted” to the Republicans in 1980 (and subsequently came out for G. W. Bush in 2000 and 2004, though not in sufficient numbers for Bush Senior in 1992) did so because of their conservative beliefs on social issues, but they have retained their often populist economic views (e.g. suspicion of free trade and big business).

However, perhaps the key structural difference between Christian politics in the two countries is that in the US evangelicals are now disproportionately aligned with just one political party (the Republican) whereas their English counterparts vote for the major national parties roughly in the same proportion as the rest of the electorate.<sup>79</sup>

What then are the possible strengths of the US approach (notwithstanding a tendency in Europe to dismiss it out of hand)<sup>80</sup>? First of all, a higher profile for a Christian input into politics; secondly, some evidence of legislative change and, thirdly, an associated confidence that it is possible (under God) to make a difference. But there are weaknesses. By aligning so heavily with just one political party there is a danger that evangelicals can sometimes be taken for granted (they have, after all, nowhere else to go electorally speaking).<sup>81</sup> Secondly, it needs to be asked what is being promoted; how far, for example, has it really been conservatism? President George W. Bush’s administrations do seem to have been characterised by a kind of “big government conservatism.”<sup>82</sup>

Indeed, it might well be asked how much difference the US evangelicals have *really* made. Bush did outlaw federal funding for most types of stem cell research and one particular

77. M. D. Tanner, *Leviathan on the Right: How Big Government Conservatism Brought down the Republican Revolution* (Washington: Cato Institute, 2007), p. 44. *The Economist* (25 June 2005), “Special Report: America’s Religious Right,” pp. 29–2. Survey data taken by the University of Akron in the early 2000s suggests a positive correlation between conservative beliefs on doctrine amongst both Protestants and Catholics and approval ratings for GW Bush (*The Economist* [5 June 2004], “Belief and the ballot box,” p. 44).

78. Jackson was the first “outsider” to break into a political establishment which has previously been dominated by established settlers into either New England or Virginia. Interestingly he delayed his public profession of Christian faith until after he left the White House lest he be accused of doing it simply for political advantage (B. Kennedy, *Our Most Priceless Heritage: The Lasting Legacy of the Scots-Irish in America* [Greenville: Ambassador International, 2005], p. 33).

79. M. Eden “Agreed in principle” in M. Eden and D. F. Wells, *The Gospel in the Modern World* (Leicester: IVP, 1991), pp. 157–172, and especially p. 159: “. . . it is disconcerting to find no evidence that the voting behaviour of the 13 per cent who describe themselves as very religious is distinctively different from the rest of the population.”

80. Although generally a carefully constructed and well considered document, EA, *op. cit.*, p. 41, manages to dismiss the American approach in a very cursory manner.

81. Although, crucially, they do have the option of staying at home and not voting at all if they perceive the Republicans as insufficiently “sound.”

82. In terms, for example, of some of the most rapid growths in public spending on education and welfare during the entire post-Second World War era (Tanner, *op. cit.*).

68. F. Schaeffer, *The Collected Works*, (Downers Grove: Crossways, 1984), Vol. 4, p. 333.

69. *Op. cit.*, chapter 10.

70. *Ibid.*, chapter 15.

71. Yancey, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 226.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 229.

74. My possibly cavalier approach is compounded by the loose use of the term “evangelical” but I am not going into the debate as to the definition of evangelicalism (liberal versus conservative and the contrasts to fundamentalism). I say “English” quite deliberately because things would be somewhat though not entirely different in the other UK nations (P. Clarke, *op. cit.*, p. 2).

75. Esmond Birnie, “What has Jerusalem (or Ramallah) got to do with Geneva?” in *Christianity & Society*, Vol. xv, No. 1 (April 2005), pp. 30–33.

76. *The Times* (24 December 2007), “Man and God,” p. 14.

type of abortion. He then seemed to drag his heels regarding a Federal anti-gay marriage constitutional amendment or the appointment of Supreme Court Justices likely to vote down the *Roe versus Wade* judgement which legalised abortion, though his powers were always limited in any case.<sup>83</sup> The President did intervene in the Terri Schiavo euthanasia dispute and pushed the development of federal funding of “faith based organisations.”<sup>84</sup> Arguably, the political engagement of US evangelicals has been too dependent on a limited number of leading personalities. Once they go what are the evangelical voters to do?<sup>85</sup> Whilst *some* realism is a necessary part of any political engagement, US evangelicals need to be cautious about pursuing power and apparent “success” at all costs. Some evangelicals have displayed a tendency to support whoever is likeliest to win regardless of that candidate’s track record on “moral issues.” So, for example, whilst previously Pat Robertson attributed “9/11” to Divine displeasure at America’s moral bankruptcy, in the Autumn of 2007 the Rev Robertson dented his credibility by endorsing Rudolph Giuliani, arguably the most socially liberal of the Republican candidates, for the nomination in 2008.<sup>86</sup> As one commentator put it well, “There are no perfect candidates. We had one 2000 years ago, but we crucified him.”<sup>87</sup>

What then of the “English model”? In terms of strengths it has escaped whatever discredit might come from too close an alignment with a single party. However, there are significant weaknesses. Humanly speaking, the English evangelicals seem to exercise little real influence for change at the level of Westminster legislation. If anything, the spreading of evangelical membership across the main political parties in Great Britain is associated with an invisibility of impact.<sup>88</sup> One commentator has argued that it is actually a good thing that evangelicals are spread across the main London political

83. *The Economist* (3 November 2007), *op.cit.*, pp. 17–8 and (25 June 2005), *op. cit.*

84. C. Coleman, *Alleluia Alleluia! An Irish Journalist in Bush Country* (Dublin: Liffey Press, 2005), p. 95. On the office of Faith Based and Community Initiatives see J. Wallis, *God’s Politics: Why the Right Gets it Wrong and the Left Doesn’t Get It* (London: Lion, 2005), p. 252 and (more critically) Tanner, *op. cit.*, p. 87ff.

85. The dilemma facing US evangelicals in 2007–08 was which of the Republican prospective candidates to back in the presidential Primaries. On the range of social and moral issues the most conservative candidate (notwithstanding a mixed previous voting record) initially appeared to be Governor Mit Romney who also happens to be a Mormon. It was this situation which precipitated the surprise entrance into the field of the Baptist minister and Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee.

86. G. Barker (*The Times*, 9 November 2007), “And lo, a voice said: Rudy, you are the chosen one”, p. 19.

87. *The Economist* (24 November 2007), “Faith, hope and populism, The candidates: Mike Huckabee”, p. 55.

88. I detect an irony; the recent EA inquiry on the constitution and politics (EA [2006], *op.cit.*, p. 9) was very bland on the issue of Church Establishment accepting a, “. . . slow, natural attenuation . . .” but Gordon Brown’s Labour was (at least on paper) much more forthright in defending the position of the Church of England (Department of Justice (2007), *The Governance of Britain*, p. x). As a recent example of the tendency of English religious leaders to seem to want to surrender whatever Christian influence still remains in British public life see Archbishop Rowan Williams’s comments on the possible introduction of some elements of Islamic *Sharia* law (*The Times* (11 February 2008), “John Donne’s pulpit: The Archbishop must think about the media as well as the message,” p. 14); “For many Christians, there must be real sadness that the Archbishop attracted attention for his views on Islam, homosexuality, Iraq and the *Simpsons*, but it’s difficult to recall a memorable intervention of his where the central issue was Christian doctrine” (M. Gove (12 February 2008), “Perils of abandoning our moral heritage,” *The Times* 2, p. 9).

parties as some sort of leavening influence but he concedes any such influence for good is weakened if evangelicals cannot agree on what are the fundamental principles to be derived from the Bible to be applied to political decision making.<sup>89</sup> The sort of acceptance of marginalisation and even defeatism which I implied is characteristic of some Christian political engagement can be a feature of the English model. True, the English model may well score better in terms of trying to persuade and in modelling a gracious approach to opponents,<sup>90</sup> but it is much less clear if there is sufficient grit to continue in fundamental opposition and to endure any unpopularity which might ensue when dialogue is clearly not producing favourable outcomes.<sup>91</sup>

President L. B. Johnson is said to have once threatened to cut off the arms of his advisers so that they could no longer say “on the one hand this, on the other hand that.” I apologise for finishing my article in such a qualified way but perhaps the true position is a very complex one. I would venture that it is possible to learn from the strengths and weaknesses of both the English and American approaches because both have attractions whilst neither is perfect.

On paper the Americans might appear in a stronger position notwithstanding the level of criticism of that approach coming from this side of the Atlantic (and some of the critics have been fellow evangelicals who are, presumably, operating from within the confines of the English model<sup>92</sup>). On some sort of admittedly crude measure of influence on legislation the American position over the last twenty or so years might appear better than the English one (albeit, in neither case would the lists be particularly long!). One irony is that whereas G. W. Bush has often been criticised for allowing excessive influence to the “Religious Right” there is plenty of evidence to suggest the opposite view, that in practice he has often not fulfilled the high hopes which many evangelical/fundamentalist voters for the Republicans had in either 2000 or 2004.

In 2003, US Army General William Boykin said of Bush, “Why is this man in the White House . . . because God put him there for such a time as this.”<sup>93</sup> One wonders what the General thinks in 2008? Tellingly, Wills points out that when in 1999 Bush said that Jesus was his greatest political

89. M. Eden, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

90. This seems to have been very much the style of Evangelical Alliance in its engagement with UK government in recent years; try to persuade non-believers of the necessity of certain moral values in the public sphere (e.g. truthfulness, tolerance, hope) and keep open dialogue with the legislators even when disappointed by what they may be proposing (EA, “Your voice in Parliament,” *Idea* (London: Evangelical Alliance, [November/December 2007]p. 7). “If our starting point is opposition, we make a serious tactical mistake. To be seen to fight the idea of human rights is not just counter-productive and politically naive, it may also undermine our Christian witness”, Joel Edwards General Director EA (in EA, “Towards a fairer society,” *Idea* (London: Evangelical Alliance [July/August 2008], p. 5). I have doubts about this assessment of the compatibility between Christianity and the “human rights industry” and EA are probably also wrong to assume that over-blown human rights are at all popular with the British public.

91. It is probably significant that the secular media now seem to expect any “awkward squad” summoned up by legislative liberalisation with respect to, say, abortion, homosexuality or stem cell research to be largely populated by Catholics but not to any noticeable degree by evangelicals.

92. See “How right is the Religious Right?” in EA, *Idea* (London: Evangelical Alliance [November/December 2007], p. 26f.).

93. Wills, *op. cit.*, p. 33.



philosopher, no journalist then asked him what legislative programmes or policies this implied.<sup>94</sup> In fact, inherent in the American approach is the danger that power will corrupt and evangelicals/fundamentalists allied to the Republican party will begin to seek power for power's sake (though, who is to say that those operating within the English model have not also from time to time compromised too much because of their loyalty to party or ideology).

American evangelicals and fundamentalists would probably have more bargaining power if they were not so estranged from one of the two main political parties. The "Catch 22" dilemma for them is they may feel they cannot vote Democrat until the nature of that party changes, but will that nature change until significant numbers of evangelicals re-engage with it?<sup>95</sup> Obviously, a lot of discernment as to how to move forward from where we are at will be necessary.

What I am saying here might seem similar to some of the arguments of the US evangelical Jim Wallis.<sup>96</sup> Wallis is certainly right, "... God is not a Republican or a Democrat."<sup>97</sup> He may even be correct that there is a gap in the political market for someone or a party which was conservative on moral issues and "radical" on economic ones; a sort of twenty first-century Jennings Bryan. However, Wallis is vague on the detail of the policies he would actually apply with respect to abortion and homosexuality (presumably so as not to offend political allies) and he still seems enthralled to the sorts of anti-poverty programmes which were tried and failed in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>98</sup> He fulminates against neo-conservatism

94. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

95. For a few decades now much of the Democratic leadership has not "done God"! In the 2004 Presidential primaries Howard Dean infamously said that the New Testament book of Job was one of his favourite parts of the Bible.

96. Wallis, *op. cit.* He self styles himself (p. 67) as a "... nineteenth century evangelical ..." though it is not clear what this means in practice. It is doubtful how much overlap there would be between the views that Wallis is espousing today and the sort of approach to social and political issues favoured by, say, Hodge, Warfield or Machen in the decades on either side of 1900.

97. Wallis (2005), *op. cit.*, p. xx.

98. On abortion he quotes with favour the line adopted by Clinton in 2000 whereby it should be, "... safe, legal and fair" (p. 300, what happens if there is a contradiction between at least the second and third of these terms?). On "gay marriage" whilst he is certainly right that this is in no way the cause of the crisis facing the heterosexual, nuclear family in the US, he seems altogether too sanguine (here he aligns with Tony Campolo's proposal for entirely separating off the legal recognition of marriage from any religious blessing and then allowing the various Churches, including evangelical ones, over time to evolve an approach as to which "partnerships" they should bless; p. 334). I would concede Wallis may be right in part on the need to target tax credits and cuts more on low income families (p. 246). He also repeatedly slams Bush for supposedly slashing social spending (Wallis attributes this to the budget costs of an "immoral" foreign policy, p. 242). The great irony is that under G. W. Bush public spending (even leaving aside defence and "homeland security") has grown at a rate higher than under, say, Presidents Clinton and Johnson (Tanner, *op. cit.*, p. 145).

as a sort of religious nationalism and fears the US is now a "new Rome" [i.e. Roman Empire under the judgment of God].<sup>99</sup> However, his own foreign policy proposals mix naivety (the Iraqi people could have toppled Saddam through civil resistance)<sup>100</sup> and danger (the US should submit to some sort of international policing authority).<sup>101</sup>

Perhaps underlying the contrast between the two models is a different view of what one might reasonably expect from Scripture in terms of informing the debate about public policy. On paper at least evangelicals on both sides of the Atlantic both acknowledge the all sufficiency and authority of the Bible across the *whole* of life. However, there is probably more openness in America to the belief that the Bible could and should inform debate not only on obviously "moral issues" (abortion, homosexuality etc.) but also the wider range of government policy making (although in practice American fundamentalists and evangelicals may adopt a surprisingly wide range of views on issues such as tax policy or the Iraq war). In contrast, within the English model there is reliance, with varying degrees of precision, on biblical principles which apply with varying degrees of directness to policy in areas such as the environment, fiscal matters etc. If more theological and hermeneutical spade work is done then over time this particular gap between the two models might narrow as the American confidence in a distinctively Christian political programme became a distinctively Christian "third way"<sup>102</sup> as opposed to a baptised version of the policies of one of the political parties and as the biblical principles in England became more clear (with, ideally a growing consensus developing as to what they were). I would further recommend that evangelicals who wish to engage politically immerse themselves in the technical complexities for whatever area, be it international debt, the environment etc., they wish to get involved in.<sup>103</sup> Some knowledge of the past may also be instructive, notably of periods such as England between roughly 1810 and 1840 when evangelicals *were* confident that Christian principles *could* be applied to all areas of government policy.<sup>104</sup> However, is such work being done and would the Christian political activists, admittedly often very busy people,<sup>105</sup> be sufficiently attentive to listen? *C&S*

99. Wallis, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

100. *Ibid.*, p. 110.

101. *Ibid.*, p. 164.

102. See P. Miller, *Into the Arena: Why Christians Should be Politically Involved* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1992), pp. 139–52, though he writes, "The *myth* [my emphasis] of the Third Way states there is a uniquely Christian programme in politics ..." (p. 139).

103. For one attempt to do so see Esmond Birnie, "Too much globalisation or too little? Christianity, Poverty and the World Economy," *Christianity and Society*, Vol. xvi, No. 1 (2006), pp. 30–41.

104. Hilton (2005), *op. cit.*

105. "The trouble is that most of us don't read it [the Bible] these days," President Richard Nixon in 1972 quoted in J. Aitken (1993), *Nixon: A Life*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, p. 408.

# FROM SEXUAL REVOLUTION TO GENDER REDUCTION<sup>1</sup>

by Robin Phillips

ETHICS follow metaphysics as surely as night follows day. Better still, like summer follows spring, because it can sometimes take quite a while for a society's metaphysical orientation to trickle down into its ethics commitments. But sooner or later it always happens. While an individual's ethics may be inconsistent with his worldview, left for long enough society as a whole will always end up reflecting the implications of the dominant worldview.

This was a principle recognised by most of the leading figures of the so-called "Enlightenment." Fearing that their philosophical commitments to materialistic determinism<sup>2</sup> could—if consistently applied—lead to ethical relativism at best and social anarchy at worst, the thinkers of eighteenth-century Europe were keen to preserve some of the basic tenets of Christian morality. This essay will show how their various attempts not only failed but unleashed a sexual revolution that would eventually culminate in the contemporary climate of gender reductionism.

## Following Nature

Having dispensed with the God of Christianity and his revelation, Enlightenment thinkers attempted to find another suitable base to sustain many of the same ethical imperatives. The concept of nature seemed to provide just such a base. "Nature" soon became a popular barometer for determining right and wrong. This is best seen in Diderot's famous *Encyclopédie*.<sup>3</sup>

1. This essay is an extract from Robin Phillips' recent book *The Decent Drapery of Life*. See advertisement on page 17.

2. For a discussion of the ideological pedigree to Enlightenment materialism and determinism, including the role which Newtonian Physics played in the process, see my book *The Decent Drapery of Life*.

3. The *Encyclopédie* was a textual embodiment of all Enlightenment thought. This ambitious project consisted of seventeen volumes, put together in France under the supervision of Diderot between the years of 1751 and 1772, and attempted to catalogue the whole of human knowledge. It was a noble undertaking, aimed at creating "a universal and rational dictionary . . . to bring together the knowledge scattered over the surface of the earth," as Diderot put it. Not only did the *Encyclopédie* give the latest facts about everything under the sun, it was full of "enlightened" interpretation. Put another way, it was rather like a massive editorial on all aspects of life. So controversial were many of the viewpoints that the writers were frequently in trouble with the censor. Indeed, Diderot even had to spend some time in prison as a result of his controversial opinions. Nevertheless, the message of the

To see how the *Encyclopédie* used the idea of "nature", it will be useful to look briefly at an article Diderot penned on the subject of political authority. In this article Diderot argued for a contractual view of government, which affirms that the power of the sovereign is granted only by the consent of the people, a point Rousseau would later defend in his controversial book *The Social Contract*. Diderot writes, "No man has received from *Nature* the right to command others . . . If *Nature* has established any authority, it is paternal control . . ." Similarly, in De Jaucourt's article "Natural Liberty" he speaks of "A right which *Nature* gives to all men" to act however they wish—both with themselves and their possessions—within the boundaries of "natural" law.

As we can see from these quotations, "nature" has become somewhat personified (a rather surprising fact when we consider that the Enlightenment also reduced nature to depersonalised matter). It is apparently a force, system or condition which establishes normatives that we ought to heed.

Using nature as an ethical yardstick soon began to backfire and lead to many of the very problems it promised to solve. How can we know what is natural? It is on this point that the eighteenth-century thinkers tended to be rather mute. And they can hardly be blamed if each person had a slightly different understanding of what it meant to be natural. For example, Rousseau understood being "natural" to mean something totally different—in some cases, opposite—to the outlook advocated by Diderot and his associates. For Rousseau, being natural included everything from vegetarianism to cold baths, breast feeding to frequent exercise. It also meant returning to the more primitive conditions associated with the "Noble Savage" paradigm. Championing the imperatives of "nature," Rousseau opposed Diderot and his *philosophes* by advocating a more intuitive feeling-based approach, as indicated in his words, ". . . consult your own hearts while I speak: that is all I ask."<sup>4</sup>

It is significant that, for the most part, Rousseau's criteria for determining what is natural were based on his own feelings and what he termed the "internal sentiment." In his writings we find most starkly the circularity in which nearly all the

authors did get out. Their message was that we should view reality in a whole new way, with man rather than God being at the centre.

4. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile* (Everyman, 1911), p. 228.

eighteenth-century philosophers were trapped: whatever he considers to be good must be natural and whatever he considers natural must be good.

### *Is Everything Natural?*

It would be an exaggeration to say that this religion of nature allowed people to legitimise any action with the appellation “natural.” Nevertheless, there began to be a slow movement in exactly that direction as a corollary to determinism.

The deterministic way of viewing the universe was reflected in Diderot’s “skeptical prayer.” After spending an entire book looking squarely at the consequences of the materialist worldview, he closes with the following prayer: “O God, I do not know if you exist . . . I ask nothing in this world, for the course of events is determined by its own necessity if you do not exist, or by your decree if you do . . . Here I stand, as I am, a necessarily organized part of eternal and necessary matter—or perhaps your own creation . . .”<sup>5</sup>

Elsewhere we find Diderot arguing that since man is a part of nature, whatever he does is, by definition, “natural.” He implied further that deformity, whether moral or physical, cannot really be said to be unnatural since it is purely a matter of human judgment with no objective validity.<sup>6</sup>

To take the determinist’s premise to its logical consequence does seem to entail that it is impossible to act unnaturally. In a determinist’s world, everything we do must be natural because everything we do is the inevitable result of mechanical forces beyond our control. Hence we find Voltaire writing, “When I am able to do what I will, I am free; but I will what I will of necessity . . .”<sup>7</sup> Similarly, in a letter to an opponent, Voltaire draws the consistent corollary of the determinist’s position, namely that whether one loves truth or does harm, he is acting in accordance with his pre-determined nature: “I necessarily have the passion for writing this, and you have the passion for condemning me; both of us are equally fools, equally the playthings of destiny. Your nature is to do harm, mine is to love truth, and to make it public in spite of you.”<sup>8</sup> We thus begin to get a sense for some of the practical difficulties that began to arise out of the materialist/determinist philosophical matrix. As time went on, the effects of this new philosophy began to be felt acutely in a myriad of practical areas, not least in the areas of gender and sexual morality.

5. From Diderot’s *Interprétation de la nature* (1754), cited by Norman Hampson, *The Enlightenment: An evaluation of its assumptions, attitudes and values* (Penguin Books, 1968), p. 95–96.

6. See Hampson, *op. cit.*, p. 123. Schlossberg recognised the ethical implications of the materialist/determinist position when he wrote, “Since human beings, along with everything else, are assumed to be all material—“we think with our bodies”—their behavior results purely from external contingencies, not on any supposed sense of moral value . . . The organism simply acts as the prior contingencies have programmed it (him) to act. Moral categories, therefore, are superfluous in understanding human behaviour. They may serve a useful function only as they become tools for the shaping of behaviour by the controllers. The moral life, in short, is a delusion, and it often functions only as a hindrance to the survival of the human race.” Hebert Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction* (Crossway Books: 1990), p. 149.

7. From Voltaire’s *Philosophe Ignorant*, cited in Hampson, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

8. Cited in Lucas, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

### *Nature and Sexual Morality*

It should not be surprising to find that a worldview which reduced man to chemistry and replaced our responsibility before God with our responsibility before a vacuous “nature” began to have implications in the area of morals.

Since determinism implied that anything was natural as long as you were doing it, it followed that nature could be used to defend the sexual taboos of Christian society as well as a more licentious approach. It should hardly come as a surprise if the naturalness of the latter and not the former began to dominate popular thinking as the eighteenth century progressed.

In one of the *Encyclopédie* entries, Diderot’s personified Nature speaks not merely in defence of sexual enjoyment, but elevates it almost to the status of a moral imperative. Anticipating objections, Diderot wrote, “If there is a perverse man who could take offence at the praise that I give to the most noble and universal of passions, I would evoke Nature before him, I would make it speak, and Nature would say . . .”<sup>9</sup> Nature then speaks and, of course, she cannot help but be on Diderot’s side. “Nature is satisfied” only when the sexual impulse is allowed to reach its climactic fulfilment.

### *The Real Sexual Revolution*

As Diderot’s comments suggest, the appeal to Nature could easily become equivalent with simply letting one’s passion have free rein. Yet few eighteenth-century thinkers went so far as to advocate that. In all fairness, most champions of the Enlightenment were unprepared for, and even disturbed by, the ramifications their ideas began to have in the area of sexual morals. It did not take long for such ramifications to begin manifesting themselves. Jonathan Israel observes that while the political consequences of Enlightenment philosophy did not fully kick in until the 1790s, the sexual consequences of this new philosophy began to be felt as early as the mid-1700s.<sup>10</sup>

Like most developments in the Enlightenment, the seeds for this sexual revolution had been planted back in the seventeenth century through such unsuspecting vessels as Locke and Spinoza. Referring to the new ideal of sensual pleasure that emerged in the mid-eighteenth century, Lawrence Stone suggests that this came as “an unanticipated by-product of Lockean philosophy.”<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Israel tells us that though Spinoza took little interest in sexual issues, yet the materialistic system he espoused gave an intellectual basis for the movement of sexual liberation.<sup>12</sup>

People often refer to the 1960s as the “sexual revolution.” I would like to suggest that the real sexual revolution occurred in the European Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. While it may have not been as widespread as the sexual revolution of the sixties, it nevertheless contained all the seeds that would eventually produce the sixties.

This does not mean that everything was rosy in pre-Enlightenment Europe. Mediaeval and Renaissance texts are filled with explicit and vulgar references to sexual intercourse, adultery and genitalia which rival anything produced in the

9. *The Enlightenment, Texts I, ibid.*, p. 24.

10. Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

11. Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800* (Penguin Books, 1977), p. 327.

12. Jonathan Israel, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

Enlightenment. The difference is that during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance there remained an underlying Trinitarian consensus.<sup>13</sup> This consensus gave sexual morality an ideological justification (whether it was followed or not). This helps to explain the incredible tension we find in courtly love literature between Christian and pagan models of morality.<sup>14</sup> To the extent that the Enlightenment rejected the Christian worldview, it undermined the basis for this continuing tension. Instead of sin being treated as sin even by those who embraced it, the very idea of sin became a category mistake for the consistent materialist.

We now need to consider more closely the approach to sexuality implicated by a materialist worldview and why such implications were so revolutionary.

#### *Materialist Sexuality*

Enlightenment materialism had asserted that all conditions and forces in the universe are reducible to matter.<sup>15</sup> It thus denies the existence of non-material properties in the universe. Almost by definition, this leaves men and women without a soul or spirit, both of which must be discarded along with God, angels, a belief in miracles and all such remnants of a pre-enlightened humanity. Man is simply a machine—a complex machine, to be sure, but a machine none the less.

Now if this account of the human being is correct, then just as it is impossible to ascribe to man any transcendent significance, so it is equally difficult for the materialist to ascribe to sexuality any significance beyond the purely biological. Once you introduce into sexuality categories the idea of significance, let alone God-given parameters, it is difficult to avoid the implication that there must be some non-material explanation behind it all—that is, an explanation external to the “closed system” of Nature’s predetermined cause and effects.

Thus, if Diderot had been more consistent with his materialism, he could not have praised sexual pleasure the way he did in the *Encyclopédie* article cited earlier. This passion, which Diderot terms “the most noble and universal of passions,” can be no more noble than our urge to go to the toilet. It is a biological fact, perhaps even a biological accident, and that is all. There can be no special meaning behind it any more than there can be any ultimately special meaning behind any aspect of the materialist’s universe.

The situation that thus arises is expressed in figure A below:

FIGURE A



Although figure A expresses a logically inevitable progression, in practice the Enlightenment’s philosophers were not ready for such radical consequences of their ideas. Many of them still felt, like Diderot, that sexuality was somehow set apart from the ordinary, that there was more than predetermined mechanical forces at work when a man and woman embraced. Furthermore, the old taboos of Christian doctrine still exercised an unconscious primacy over the newly “enlightened” minds, and few wanted complete moral chaos.

#### *Utilitarian Morality*

While a consistent application of the new philosophy did reduce human beings and their sexuality to an impersonal machine, various philosophers characteristically tried to temper the severity of this conclusion.<sup>16</sup>

The attempts to provide an alternative code of morality that would be consistent with the materialistic worldview usually relied on pragmatic, utilitarian and sociological considerations. (At the risk of oversimplification, utilitarianism is the view that an action is right if it produces the greatest amount of happiness for the maximum amount of people.) All such considerations boiled down to either asserting that the individual will be happier by following the rules of sexual morality, or that society will run smoother. Moral codes and sexual modesty may not be natural, but they are profitable; sexual restraint may not be intrinsic to the human condition, but it is good sense in our culture.

Under this scheme of things, there may be good utilitarian reasons for keeping one’s libido under control, or almost under control. This was a position adopted by many who were disturbed by the growing licentiousness of society. Though they believed that traditional codes of morality could not be rationally defended, nevertheless they saw that society would run smoother if people adhered to them. This is similar to the way Hobbes, in the seventeenth century, had theorised that the prohibitions against stealing had evolved out of the fact that man discovered thieving to be a nuisance and a hindrance to all human endeavour. In the interests of social cohesion, therefore, man decided it was reasonable not to steal. This is a good example of the Enlightenment method of taking man as the starting point and then working everything out in relation to man rather than in relation to an external objective standard.

Similarly, we find Benjamin Franklin (an all-round child of the Enlightenment) giving advice to young men to leave the women alone, because the appearance of virtue is an important business asset and also because the institution of marriage was the most likely source of happiness. However, Franklin added, if you must engage in extra-marital sex, it

13. See Rodney Stark, *For the Glory of God: How Monotheism Led to Reformations, Science, Witch-Hunts, and the End of Slavery* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

14. See Denis De Rougemont, *Love in the Western World* (Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1940). In Andreas Capellanus’ famous handbook on courteous behavior, *The Art of Courtly Love*, he explains that “chivalric” behaviour applies only in relation to aristocratic women. Raping peasant women, he says, is fine. Similarly, male chivalry throughout European history has happily coincided with wife-beating, visits to prostitutes, etc.

15. “What most atheists do believe is that although there is only one kind of stuff in the universe and it is physical, out of this stuff come minds, beauty, emotions, moral values—in short the full gamut of phenomena that gives richness to human life.” Julian Baggini, *Atheism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

16. The physician La Matrie was atypical in advocating an outright hedonism as the corollary of his belief that man was a purely material entity, “an organic machine whose illusion of possessing an independent soul or mind was produced simply by the interplay of its physical components.” Richard Tarnis *The Passion of the Western Mind* (Pimlico, 1991), p. 310.

17. “And as in the Dark all Cats are grey, the pleasure of Corporal

is better to go for the elderly women. This is because older women present no risk of accidentally producing children. Further, older women are wiser in the ways of the world and, having “ceased to be handsome” they strive to maintain their influence over men through being tender and amiable. After all, Franklin points out, all women look the same in the dark anyway.<sup>17</sup>

Spinoza had argued similarly that in one’s own interest you ought to avoid scandalising the community, “but equally, in his naturalistic philosophy, sexual pleasure, the libido, in so far as it is life-enhancing is a good thing and, in principle, in no way different outside marriage than within it.”<sup>18</sup>

#### *Hume and the Economics of Modesty*

While various philosophers were seeking a pragmatic basis for morality, it is a credit to his genius that the Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711–1776) managed to find an economic argument for sexual modesty. His argument starts with the observation that men go through enormous expense, fatigue and restraint for the sake of their offspring. “But,” he pointed out, “in order to induce men to impose on themselves this restraint, and undergo cheerfully all the fatigues and expenses to which it subjects them, they must believe, that the children are their own, and that their natural instinct is not directed to a wrong object, when they give a loose to love and tenderness.”<sup>19</sup> How then can men be assured that their offspring are really their own? Given the manner in which copulation occurs, Hume reasoned, a female will always know who the father of her children is. But how is the man to be assured of the paternity of his children? Only by restraining the behavior of woman through cultural taboos. “Men have undoubtedly an implicit notion, that all those ideas of modesty and decency have a regard to generation; since they impose not the same laws, with the same force, on the male sex, where that reason takes not place.”<sup>20</sup>

Hume’s argument raises an important question: if our ideas of modesty and decency only exist to restrain women in order that men may know they are the fathers of their children, then is there any point to codes of propriety among males? Hume deals with this question, and it is interesting that in the end all he can appeal to are “the general notions of the world . . .” These general notions suggest that though standards may be a bit looser for the man, nevertheless men ought to *usually* abstain from *complete* sexual indulgence *most* of the time.

[A]ccording to the general notions of the world, [men] bear nearly the same proportion of the obligations of women, as the obligations of the law of nations do to those of the law of nature. It is contrary to the interest of civil society, that men should have an *entire* liberty of indulging their appetites in venereal enjoyment; but as this interest is weaker than in the case of the female sex, the moral obligation, arising from it, must be proportionally weaker. And to

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Enjoyment with an old Woman is at least equal and frequently superior; every Knack being by practice capable of Improvement. Better to make an old woman happy than to debauch a virgin.” From Benjamin Franklin’s letter “Advice to a Young Man” in *The Autobiography*, edited by C. Van Doren (New York: Pocket Books), p. 268.

17. Israel, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

18. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book III “Of Morals” (Fontana/Collins, 1972, first published in 1739), p. 291.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 293.

prove this we need only appeal to the practice and sentiments of all nations and ages.<sup>21</sup>

Notice the recurring theme that society works better if people adhere to standards which, in themselves, have no real justification. It is a purely pragmatic approach to morality. Sexual ethics thus become rather like good party politics: it may be practically useful to adopt certain patterns, but we cannot claim that it represents right behaviour in any objective sense.

When the happiness of public society becomes the only justification for sexual ethics, there is no reason in principle why I should not give into my own passions in order to promote personal happiness. In this regard it is significant that the loophole Hume gives to men (i.e. that men bear “nearly” the same obligations of women, that men should not have “entire liberty”, that the moral obligation in men is “proportionally weaker” to the female) was more than large enough for the libido of any man to slip through. In his own life, Hume did not hesitate to take advantage of this philosophical loophole.

#### *Form without Content*

This approach to sexuality is similar to how people also began to approach religion in the eighteenth century. Though the materialist philosophers in the Enlightenment all agreed that the doctrines, practices and claims of institutionalised religion were absurd, a good many of these philosophers also felt that society needed these institutions to give the common people an incentive for morality. In other words, though religion might be based entirely on fables, it was still a necessary component to a cohesive society. This was no doubt why Voltaire, though an outspoken opponent of biblical Christianity, still built a church for the workmen on his land.

Clinging thus to the forms of religion and morality without the content, the result was not dissimilar to the way our own era has developed a pseudo-morality around the need for “safe sex”, with the Chastity Movement affirming the *thou-shalt-nots* of Christian doctrine on entirely utilitarian grounds.<sup>22</sup> Though the Enlightenment considered the Christian taboos about extra-marital sex to have no rational basis, still it was better for society if those taboos were generally adhered to—which, of course, they weren’t. Mankind has never needed much encouragement to indulge in this area, and the new philosophy provided the perfect justification. Israel tells us that “in general, the more radical the philosophical standpoint, the more emphatic the levelling and egalitarian tendencies implicit in ideas which, in turn, generated a growing impulse not just towards the emancipation of woman but of the human libido itself.”<sup>23</sup> As we see from this quotation, the issues to do with sexuality were inexplicably linked with questions about the emancipation of woman. The traditional codes of modesty could not be challenged without also raising questions about our sexual identity in general. What does it mean to be a man or a woman? Do these categories also require a re-thinking in

21. *Ibid.*, p. 294. The italics have been retained from the original.

22. See Katie Roiphe, *Last Night in Paradise* (Little, Brown and Company, 1997), final chapter, particularly, pp 186f., 192.

23. Israel, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

light of the materialist/determinist worldview? Such were the questions that began being asked in the aftermath of the Enlightenment.

#### *A Woman is But an Animal*

There are many ways that men and women are different. Although the physical differences between the sexes are perhaps the most striking, men and women have different natures. There is a whole network of tangible and intangible differences associated with masculinity and femininity which go beyond mere biological distinctives.

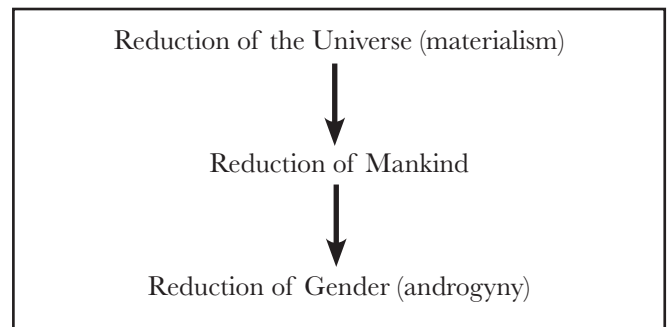
At least, that is what people generally thought prior to the Enlightenment and it is also the view taught in the Bible.<sup>24</sup> However, just as the materialist account of the universe, and by extension of the human being, made it impossible to ascribe to sexuality any transcendent significance, so it was equally difficult to ascribe to gender differences any significance beyond the purely biological.

As the “metaphysical drapery” was removed from the universe and from mankind, it became necessary to think through traditional assumptions about gender. If, as materialism taught, the human person is nothing more than a collection of physical particulars, then are the differences between men and women merely physical? Was it still rational to speak of men and women possessing different natures?

Questions such as these had profound social and political implications during the eighteenth century relevant to how men and women related to each other as well as their respective roles in society. The very idea that the sexes would have different roles, responsibilities, strengths and weaknesses had assumed that these differences went beyond mere physical dissimilarities. On the other hand, a philosophy that reduced men and women to nothing more than billions of particles—leaving them with no soul and no extra-physical component—could not at the same time logically maintain that the differences between the sexes were anything more than anatomical. The corollary of this was that the ancient customs and notions that the eighteenth century inherited concerning relations between men and women were believed to be flawed not simply in actuality, but in very principle. Israel tells us how “Several writers took up the point that if woman’s subjection to man within marriage, the family, and law, is not after all ordained by a providential God and has no basis in Revelation, then the entire system of relations between the sexes prevailing in Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and other societies lacks justification or basis . . .”<sup>25</sup>

It is true that the treatment of women in Europe during and prior to the eighteenth century left much to be desired. Indeed, many aspects of how the sexes related to one another needed realigning with a correct understanding of Christian ethics. Instead, the Enlightenment radicals tended to get rid of any basis by which the roles between the sexes could be philosophically grounded. Nor should we expect anything less from a worldview that removed from men and women any reality outside their material construction. In this way, the unavoidable consequence of materialism turned out to be a reductionist approach to gender. The situation before us can be expressed diagrammatically as follows.

FIGURE B



It is important to realise that the progression expressed in figure B is that of grounds and consequence, not cause and effect.<sup>26</sup> Holding to a materialist metaphysic does not cause one to also hold a reductionist view of gender in the same way that dropping an apple causes it to fall to the ground in a world governed by gravitation. But a materialist metaphysic does cause a reductionist view of gender in the sense that adding two apples to two apples causes there to be four apples. That is to say, the reduction of gender is a logical necessity once a materialistic worldview is affirmed, but this tells us nothing either way about whether a materialist will live consistently with this necessity. And indeed, the process of complete gender reductionism has taken all the time from the Enlightenment until now to reach fruition. The full realisation of this development comes when the very idea that there are different roles for men and women is considered severe heterodoxy.

#### *Burke and the Wardrobe of Decent Drapery*

A parallel problem to the reduction of gender occurred with questions relating to royalty: if all people are merely the product of material particulars, then is it rational to assume that the King and Queen are anything special? This is a question Edmund Burke faced when he wrote his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Reflecting on the discourteous way the queen of France had been treated by the revolutionaries, Burke put the entire philosophy of the Enlightenment in a nutshell:

All the decent drapery of life is to be rudely torn off. All the super-added ideas, furnished from the wardrobe of a moral imagination, which the heart owns, and the understanding ratifies, as necessary to cover the defects of our naked, shivering nature, and to raise it to

24. See *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, edited by Wayne Grudem and John Piper (Crossway Books, 1990).

25. Israel, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

26. Ground/consequence is the mode by which we describe a chain of argument: you have certain premises which act as grounds from which the consequence follows. So if I say, “Grandfather didn’t get up this morning, therefore he must be ill,” the first part of the sentence is the ground and the next part (starting with the “therefore”) is the consequence. The grounds precede the consequence and are the ideas or reasons from which the consequence logically follows. Grandfather not getting up in the morning is the reason for thinking that he must be ill. Cause/effect, on the other hand, is also about one thing preceding another, but in this case the relation is between events that occur in time rather than about thoughts and ideas—i.e. “Grandfather is ill, therefore he didn’t get up this morning.” His illness is the cause of his not getting up. You can see from the two examples I chose (which are actually owed to C. S. Lewis in his discussion in *Miracles* chapter 4) that the word “therefore” can be used in both modes, as can the words “because” and “reason.” Since there is an overlap of vocabulary, it is crucial always to identify which mode is being used and not to confuse the two.

dignity in our own estimation, are to be exploded, as a ridiculous, absurd, and antiquated fashion. On this scheme of things, a king is but a man, a queen is but a woman, a woman is but an animal—and an animal not of the highest order. All homage paid to the sex in general as such, and without distinct views, is to be regarded as romance and folly.<sup>27</sup>

A woman (to say nothing of a man) is but an animal. Burke is not caricaturing current notions, he is extending them to their logical consequence. Because materialism sees human beings as mere physical systems, the division between man and the animals is simply one of complexity. Hence, all Diderot could admit was that “Man” merely “seems to stand above the other animals . . .” (Emphasis mine.)

Though materialists often slipped into unconsciously predicating transcendent categories to man, thereby giving him the kind of dignity to which Burke refers, we must always return to the fact that, according to their own worldview, the ontology of human beings includes nothing that has not arisen from natural causation—in other words, nothing that is extra-physical. What Wall said of Shakespeare<sup>28</sup> is the last word on all of us: we are nothing more than random collections of molecules put together by chance in a random universe.

#### *Rousseau and the Return to Modesty*

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), like Burke, realised some of the problems inherent in the materialistic worldview. “Stop, stop, stop!” he seemed to cry out, “these ideas are making society worse, not better!” But though Rousseau may have laid his finger on the pulse of the problem, he did not have any solutions to offer.

One of the main areas that concerned Rousseau was the effect the new philosophy had in respect to modesty, particularly female modesty. In Book V of *Emile*, where Rousseau sets forward his ideal for female education, modesty plays an important role.

Rousseau argued hotly that if modesty is not an imperative given by nature, but only an invention of social laws to protect the rights of fathers and husbands (recall Hume), then “modesty is nothing.”<sup>29</sup> Though Rousseau did affirm that modesty served a pragmatic function, he argued that fundamentally its basis was the God-given instincts of our nature.

27. Edmund Burke, from *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, in *The Best of Burke: Selected Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke* (Regnery Publishing, 1963), p. 551.

28. Someone once asked George Wall who Shakespeare was. Wall, a thoroughgoing materialist, replied that Shakespeare was a random collection of molecules that existed four hundred years ago.

29. “Popular prejudices! some cry. Silly errors of childhood! Illusion of laws and education! Modesty is nothing. It is only an invention of the social laws to protect the rights of fathers and husbands, and to maintain some order in families. Why should we blush at needs given to us by nature? . . . Why, the desires being equalled on both sides, should the demonstrations be different? Why should one of the sexes refuse more than the other tendencies which they have in common? Why should man have on this issue different laws from the animals?” *Lettre à M. d’Alembert sur son Article Genève* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1967), p. 167. Translated and cited by Shalit, *A Return to Modesty*, pp. 109–110.

#### *Rousseau and Gender Differences*

Central to Rousseau’s teaching on modesty was the notion that men and women are made differently. In reaction to the growing view that all gender differences were the result of custom rather than creation, Rousseau argued that men and women are born with different natures. As he writes, “. . . where sex [gender] is concerned man and woman are unlike; each is the complement of the other . . .”<sup>30</sup>

Rousseau’s representation of gender falls down the line of the typical polarities, with man being active and woman being passive; man being strong, woman being weak; man being bold, woman being bashful and reserved, etc. He believed that these gender differences necessitated that men and women will have a different function in society, which in turn necessitates that the education of one sex will significantly differ from the education required for the other sex. (Hence the need to write *Emile*, which was a treatise on education.)

History has ascribed to Rousseau a derogatory attitude towards females. Even where this may have been partly true, the basis of the contemporary critique has rested on the assumption that merely to predicate gender differences necessarily entails a pejorative attitude towards women. But Rousseau’s approach was not derogatory; indeed, by the standards of his day, his views on female education were comparatively advanced (i.e. contrary to the status quo, he believed women should have physical exercise and religious education.) He was keen that we should not think that one sex was inferior to the other, “as if each sex, pursuing the path marked out for it by nature, were not more perfect in that very divergence than if it more closely resembled the other.”<sup>31</sup>

While Rousseau’s position would seem to present a solution to the Enlightenment’s reduction of gender, it actually raised more questions than it solved. Since Rousseau’s “natural religion” gave no criteria for determining in practice whether one set of gender codes or sexual ethics is preferable to any other, the difference between his approach and that of the materialists was purely theoretical. Though Rousseau did try to show the practical outworking of his philosophy, we have no reason, on the basis of his worldview, to accept his suggestions over any other set. This is because Rousseau’s system, like so much eighteenth-century thinking, simply referred everything to a vacuous “nature” for legitimisation.

It is true that Rousseau went further than most in trying to show *why* nature could be appealed to as an authority. Rousseau makes it clear that the authority of nature rests in the higher authority of God, whom he calls “the Author of Nature.” But in Book IV of *Emile*, Rousseau argues that God is unknowable.<sup>32</sup> Although he taught that God was unknowable, Rousseau effectively bypassed such epistemological limitations in his own claim that God had certain designs and intentions with the created order—an assumption on which his whole ethical theory hinged. Having

30. Rousseau, *Emile*, Book V, (London: Everyman, 1995), p. 384.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 385.

32. Rousseau calls God “the Incomprehensible” (*Emile*, 1911, p. 218) and writes that “he evades the efforts of our senses; we behold the work, but the workman is hidden from our eyes” (*ibid.*) It might be urged that Rousseau holds the position that Hume has Philo criticise in his *Dialogue Concerning Natural Religion*, namely, a belief in God which, because it emphasises God’s infinity and unfathomability, is only semantically separated from scepticism and agnosticism.

dispensed with the Christian scriptures, Rousseau offered no alternative criteria to show that God intended modesty and not immodesty to be the natural condition of mankind. He thus left himself vulnerable to one of his harshest critics: Mary Wollstonecraft.

#### *Wollstonecraft and the De-Sexualising of Modesty*

Rousseau's ideas were attacked by one of his female contemporaries, a woman named Mary Wollstonecraft. Wollstonecraft has subsequently been considered one of the forerunners of feminism. Reading between the lines of Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, it is clear that she had an androgynous agenda ("androgyny" is a term that refers to the homogenising of gender distinctions). She disapproves, for example, of women who "remind [men] that they were women" through what she terms "mock modesty,"<sup>33</sup> arguing that women should be allowed to acquire more understanding in order that they might not "always remember that they are women."<sup>34</sup>

Naturally, if women were to strive to be the same as men, as Wollstonecraft desired, then sexual modesty would have to be one of the first things to go. This is because modesty acts as a signal that women are different from men (in an environment of only women, there is not the same need for modesty, just as in an environment of only men, there is not the same need for male modesty). Hence, the revealing heading for chapter 7 of her book "*Modesty—Comprehensively considered, and not as a sexual virtue*" ("sexual" here means pertaining to gender).

In her critique of Wollstonecraft, Wendy Shalit points out how Wollstonecraft considered modesty from many different standpoints: delicacy of mind, moderate estimation of one's talents, a kind of polite reserve, and so on. What she carefully avoids, however, is any acknowledgement of modesty as Rousseau understood it: a sexual (gender-related) virtue for women. The only kind of modesty which Wollstonecraft's androgyny allowed her to take seriously are those forms which are the same between men and women, such as delicacy of mind, polite reserve, etc. She is clear that "the reserve I mean, has nothing sexual in it, and that I think it equally necessary in both sexes."

Why was Wollstonecraft keen to eliminate the sexual modesty that Rousseau advocated for women? Shalit has suggested that the reason lies in the fact that a gender/sexual related modesty gives men and women an abiding awareness that women are women, the very thing Wollstonecraft was keen to avoid.<sup>35</sup> This reduction of modesty to a sexually neutral virtue was an unavoidable consequence of Wollstonecraft's androgyny.

Since that time, men and women have continued to quest after an ideal of gender neutrality, with some very unexpected results. Keep in mind the dispute between Rousseau and Wollstonecraft as we move on to see how our own culture has tried to come to terms with these same problems.

#### *The Time Bomb*

We have already considered the way the Enlightenment severed sexuality from the restraining influences of an

allegedly outdated ethic. At the same time, we saw that it was customary to temper the implications of this move with a utilitarian pragmatism as ambiguous as it was ungrounded. However, once it was conceded that mankind was merely matter, that men and women were as much a product of determinism as the motion of the stars, a sexual time bomb was necessarily set in motion. It is in our own age that this time bomb has gone off.

This is not to deny that there were immediate practical consequences of the new thinking, as we have already seen. However, in the eighteenth century these consequences were mainly manifested in a straightforward increase of sexual licentiousness. Our age, however, has seen more than merely a quantitative increase in sexual promiscuity; rather, we have undergone a complete qualitative upheaval in what it even means to be sexual.

#### *The Deconstruction of Gender*

The synthesising of the gender polarity was one of the hallmarks of the twentieth century. Starting from the true premise that many of the roles and differences assigned to the sexes have been culturally conditioned, it has become commonplace to assume that all gender differences are culturally limited. Reflecting on this reductive approach to gender, David Wells pointed out that "It is true, of course, that manhood and womanhood are partly cultural creations. They are matters of cultural nurture. What much of our current belief assumes, however, is that they are *only* matters of nurture, not of nature at all, and that our most fundamental identities as men and women are matters of choice and of construction."<sup>36</sup> Even the idea of gender is being increasingly seen as a social construction, as reflected in Andrea Dworkin's statement that, "The discovery is, of course, that 'man' and 'woman' are fictions, caricatures, cultural constructs . . . demeaning to the female, dead-ended for male and female both."<sup>37</sup>

In 1993, Robert S. McElvaine wrote an article for the *Los Angeles Times*, in which he lamented how the term "sex" is gradually being replaced by the word "gender" in its basic meaning, while increasingly being used only in its secondary sense as an abbreviation for sexual intercourse. McElvaine put this down to the fact that "sex implies that there are biological differences between males and females, a heresy that one faction of feminists calls 'essentialism.' Most often, those who insist on speaking of gender contend that sex identity is entirely a product of culture. They say that any differences between the 'genders' are learned—'constructed' is the currently accepted terminology. The old one-liner, 'Susan is of the female persuasion,' is now taken seriously in many quarters."<sup>38</sup> If gender is determined, not by our chromosomes, but by social pressures, then it is potentially as fluid as culture itself. This seems to be the view expressed in the curricula of the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States, a leading distributor of sex-education material for the American public schools. In their "Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexuality Education: K-12,"

36. David F. Wells, *Losing Our Virtue*, (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1998), p. 90.

37. Andrea Dworkin, *Woman Hating* (New York: Dutton, 1974) p. 174.

38. Robert S. McElvaine, "Perspective on Language: What Ever Happened to S-x?" *Los Angeles Times*, July 22, 1993.

33. Wollstonecraft, extracts from *Vindication of the Rights of Women in The Enlightenment, Texts II, op. cit.*, p. 263.

34. *Ibid.*

35. Shalit, *op. cit.*, p. 111.



they state that gender identity “refers to a person’s internal sense of being male, female, or a combination of these” and “may change over the course of their lifetimes.”<sup>39</sup>

Family therapist Olga Silverstein expressed a similar sentiment when she urged “the end of the gender split” since “until we are willing to question the very idea of a male sex role . . . we will be denying both men and women their full humanity.”<sup>40</sup>

Simone de Beauvoir was more succinct: “Women are made, they are not born.”<sup>41</sup>

Since women have been “made” by society, the corollary to becoming more enlightened is that we should strive to *unmake* the female. This is exactly what the influential psychologist Sandra Bem has suggested. “When androgyny had been absorbed by the culture,” wrote Melanie Phillips, paraphrasing Bem’s views, “concepts of masculinity and femininity would cease to have distinct content and distinctions would ‘blur into invisibility’.”<sup>42</sup>

Susan Moller Okin is equally wistful when contemplating a future without gender: “[A] just future would be one without gender. In its social structures and practices, one’s sex would have no more relevance than one’s eye color or the length of one’s toes.”<sup>43</sup>

It is true that the above quotations represent an extremism that is not yet mainstream. Most academics and lay people still acknowledge that the categories of masculinity and femininity do have content, while fiercely opposing any assumption of what “manhood” and “womanhood” mean in practice (rather like saying, “there are apples and there are oranges, and they are not the same thing, but don’t presume to describe the differences in flavour!”)<sup>44</sup> Even though feminists who deny any differences at all between males and females are still considered radical, few would acknowledge that sexual identity has a fixity that transcends both biology and culture. This is a consistent outworking of Enlightenment reductionism.

39. From [www.siecus.org/pubs/guidelines/guidelines.pdf](http://www.siecus.org/pubs/guidelines/guidelines.pdf)—SIECUS Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexuality Education Kindergarten–12th Grade. Regis Nicoll has noted the irony that while gender is being presented as a fluid, ever-changing matrix, sexual orientation is increasingly seen as static. Hence the oft-quoted maxim, “People do not choose their sexual orientation, they are born that way.” “Only in the *Alice in Wonderland* world of the cultural elite,” writes Regis, “could something as patently innate as gender be considered a malleable product of personal feelings, while sexual preference is considered an unalterable fact of life.” See his article “Gender Benders” at <http://www.cruaproject.org/articles/Gender.pdf>.

40. Olga Silverstein, cited by David Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America* (Basic Books, 1995).

41. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshly (New York, 1961).

42. Melanie Phillips, *The Sex-Change Society: Feminised Britain and the Neutered Male* (The Social Research Foundation, 1999), p. 172. See Sandra Bem, *Beyond Androgyny: Some Presumptuous Prescriptions for a Liberated Sexual Identity*; in Sherman, J.A. and Denmark, F.L.: *The Psychology of Women: Future Directions in Research* (Psychological Dimensions Inc., 1978). It is interesting to observe the result when Bem tried to raise children according to this ideology. See Sandra Lipsitz Bem, *An Unconventional Family* (Yale University Press, 2001). Also see Wendy Shalit’s comments on Bem’s book, “Among the Gender Benders” in *Commentary*, Jan. 1999.

43. Cited by David Blankenhorn, *ibid.*

44. What makes this ironic, one reader wrote, is that nowhere in my book have I identified the “content” of masculinity and femininity. This is a valid objection. Readers wishing to study the content of manhood and womanhood from a Christian perspective should consult John Piper and Wayne Grudem’s book *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991).

### *Ashamed of Manhood and Womanhood*

In the eighteenth century, it may have seemed as if the philosophy of the Enlightenment would liberate gender. Over two hundred years later, we see that all it achieved was to make us ashamed of gender, especially those aspects of gender which make men and women different. Hence, wherever there are distinctives between the genders, we can be sure to find a campaign for their elimination. In Britain, the Department of Health has issued a guide to pregnancy in which men are told that “expectant fathers can suffer morning sickness too” and postnatal depression.<sup>45</sup> In America, “A single dad wrote in *The Washington Post* that he felt excluded from advertising aimed only at moms and kids. He wanted advertisers to understand that slogans such as ‘Choosy Moms Choose Jif’ hurt his feelings. *He’s choosy, too!*”<sup>46</sup> Not to be beat, extremist feminists in Sweden have argued that men should sit down to urinate to bring out their “gentle” side.

The pervasive attempt to achieve a gender-neutral vocabulary is probably the most concrete example of the attempt to eliminate anything and everything from our environment which threatens to remind us that women are women and men are men. Hence, the publication of such books as *The Elements of Nonsexist Usage*,<sup>47</sup> or the thousands of pounds the UK government spent educating their staff how to avoid “gendered” terms such as “seamstress.”<sup>48</sup> Is gender really as scary as all that?

Apparently it is. “Gender issues” are supposedly just as much a threat as landmines, heroin smuggling and extreme poverty. When the British Foreign Office had to make schemes to help the war-torn state of Afghanistan, the government instructed diplomats to give a higher priority to “gender issues” than to the more pressing dangers imposed by drugs, mines and general deprivation. The Foreign Office responded by producing a report entitled *Inclusive Government: Mainstreaming Gender into Foreign Policy*<sup>49</sup> which, according to *The Week* magazine, would assist workers in helping Afghan tribesmen to get in touch with their “feminine side.”

In a world where men are ashamed to be men and women are ashamed to be women, it was inevitable that eventually people would begin believing that gender is not rooted in biological fixities at all, but is a fluid category that can be constructed. This means that someone with a male body can choose to be a woman and someone with a female body can choose to be a man. That is the assumption behind a government-funded body in the UK known as the Gender Recognition Panel. Established by the Gender Recognition Act 2004, this panel assesses people’s claims to have the gender on their birth certificate amended.

45. *The Pregnancy Book*, 2006 edition, published by the Department of Health.

46. Cited by Kathleen Parker in *Save the Males: Why Men Matter, Why Women Should Care* (New York: Random House, 2008), p. 104. See William J. McGee, “Mothers, Mothers, Everywhere—and Nary a Plug for Dad,” *Washington Post*, May 8, 2005. Also see Parker’s hilarious discussion about the 2005 newspaper story “French Men Yearn For Pregnancy” (Parker, *ibid.*, p. 105).

47. *The Elements of Nonsexist Usage: A Guide to Inclusive Spoken and Written English*, by Val Dumond (Prentice Hall, 1990).

48. The author of *The Elements of Nonsexist Usage* had to seek long and hard for a gender-neutralised substitute for “seamstress,” reported Keith Waterhouse in the *Daily Mail*. Eventually they came up with “sewer.”

49. The document can be read at [www.fco.gov.uk/Files/kfileGender.pdf](http://www.fco.gov.uk/Files/kfileGender.pdf)

Exactly what the terms “man” and “woman” still mean after they have been emptied of all their content remains unclear. What is clear, however, is that there has been a pervasive attempt to neutralise gender at every level. Rather than being able to glory in our identity as men and women created in the image of God, we are made to feel ashamed of the very concept of manhood and womanhood.

This is a world where women have been “liberated” to be the same as men, where we are taught that all gender-specific roles (even those which set out to show special honour to women) are seen as oppressive. Wendy Shalit cites the instance of a 55-year-old businessman named Tony which is all too typical: “I was out with my wife and one other woman and when I got the other woman’s coat for her and reached to help her with it, she practically ripped the coat out of my hands, said ‘Nobody has ever done that for me!’ and stomped off and waited, fuming, by the door.”<sup>50</sup>

### *The Disenchanting of Sex*

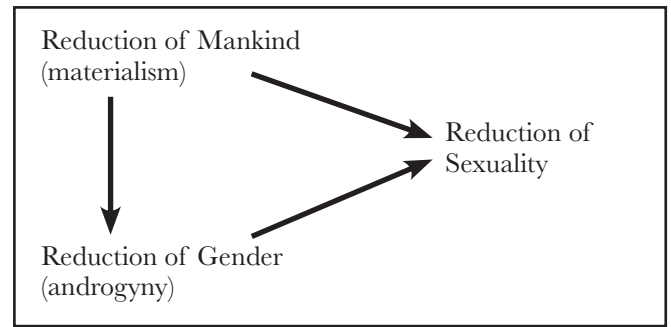
It will be helpful to review the ground we have covered so far. We saw some of the problems a determinist faces in trying to decide what behaviour is “natural.” If man is just a predetermined machine, then anything we decide to do must be “natural” for us. We then went on to explore some of the implications this had in the area of sexual morals. In particular, we saw how it unleashed a sexual revolution during the time of the European Enlightenment. From there we went to consider how key Enlightenment thinkers were unhappy with the practical implications their ideas were having in the area of sexual morality. As an alternative, they proposed utilitarian substitutes to Christian morality. From there we moved to see that just as materialism affected people’s view of morality, it also affected their view of gender. A corollary of mankind being deconstructed by the materialist hammer was that our identity as men and women was also smashed. We saw how these problems played out in the ideas of Rousseau and Mary Wollstonecraft. From there we went on to explore how some of these same problems have played out in our own era. Our age is more consistent with the implications of the Enlightenment worldview, and thus it is widely assumed that all non-physical gender differences are mere social constructions. This leads to “androgyny” or the “unisex” movement, whereby the differences between the sexes are neutralised.

That brings us up to our next section, which will carry on exploring how these ideas have played out in our own era, with particular attention to sexuality.

### *The Reduction of Sexuality*

Though it may be a logical necessity that the reduction of gender will involve a corollary reduction of sexuality, human society usually takes its time following the dictates of logic. The seeds of sexual reductionism were planted at the Enlightenment, but it has not been until our own era that they have sprouted to fruition. Today we have a confluence of two ideological streams which have already been expressed previously as figure A and B above. The total result is to produce a reductionism of sexuality that is unprecedented. Look now at figure C below.

FIGURE C



As will be seen, materialism leads to the reduction of sexuality directly as well as indirectly (via androgyny). But how does androgyny lead to a reduction of sexuality? One does not have to look very far to see this dynamic at work, a dynamic best described anecdotally.

In his book *Doesn't Anyone Blush Anymore?*<sup>51</sup> Rabbi Manis Friedman tells about some campers who sought his advice about a camping trip. Friedman was horrified to learn that these campers had no scruples sharing sleeping bags with members of the opposite sex. When he challenged the young people they assured him that “there’s nothing sexual about it.” Now, is it true that there can be “nothing sexual” in just sharing a sleeping bag with someone of the opposite sex, or in other activities that might be mentioned, such as co-ed bathrooms, co-ed wrestling, etc? For many young people today, the answer is, yes; there is nothing sexual in all the above activities. We thus have the supreme realisation of Wollstonecraft’s ideal that women might sometimes forget they are women in the presence of men: in the presence of women, the men of today forget they are with women.

The strangeness inherent in such things as co-ed dorms, co-ed bathrooms, co-ed wrestling and even co-ed sleeping bags, is not that such things exist, but that they can exist without sexual connotations. This can only be achieved to the extent that gender has been emptied of its implicit sexuality. In a world where manhood and womanhood have been deconstructed, this should hardly come as a surprise.

Other examples abound. Bikinis are sometimes defended on the grounds that the women who use them as swimming suits are not trying to be provocative. While this might be challenged, if it is true it only shows how desexualised we have become if the female body can be almost entirely revealed *without* the presence of erotic overtones. We are drifting towards being neuter when the signals of our sexuality are treated as anything less. This represents nothing short of a reduction of sexuality.

### *A World With No Shame*

This point was understood better by the radical pioneers of the sexual revolution than most people today. In his book *The Sexual Revolution*, Wilhelm Reich (1897–1957) described the means for achieving a society without any external sexual morals, “a free society” that “would not put any obstacles in the path of the gratification of the natural needs.”<sup>52</sup> The

51. Manis Friedman, *Doesn't Anyone Blush Anymore?: Reclaiming Intimacy, Modesty and Sexuality* (San Francisco: Harper, 1990).

52. Wilhelm Reich, *The Sexual Revolution* (trans. Theodore Wolfe, Vision Press, 1969), p. 24.

50. *Ibid.*

road to the sexual Utopia he advocated lay in first getting rid of the shyness and embarrassment surrounding sexual matters. In particular, Reich believed that before traditional morality could be completely vanquished, a society must be achieved where people “should lose their shyness to expose . . . erotically important parts of their bodies.”<sup>53</sup>

Reich would be pleased if he had lived long enough to experience a European summer. From advertisements which use sexuality to sell products to the attire we tolerate, sexuality is constantly treated as something merely common. “Profane” best describes the contemporary neurosis, given that the term originally meant “to treat as common.” Theodore Dalrymple hit the nail on the head when he observed that “literal-mindedness is not honesty or fidelity to truth—far from it. For it is the whole experience of mankind that sexual life is always, and must always be, hidden by veils of varying degrees of opacity, if it is to be humanised into something beyond a mere animal function. What is inherently secretive, that is to say self-conscious and human, cannot be spoken of directly: the attempt leads only to crudity, not to truth. Bawdy is the tribute that our instinct pays to secrecy. If you go beyond bawdy and tear all the veils away, you get pornography and nothing else.”<sup>54</sup>

It is revealing that when the sex curriculum was first introduced into kindergarten/primary schools, the teachers experienced discomfort and shyness about the subjects they were forced to address. In time, however, these same teachers started to say that it was no different than talking about an elbow. This is not surprising given the way the subject is presented. Some worksheets show pictures of various private parts and ask the children to circle the differences. Other worksheets compare sexual release to sneezing.<sup>55</sup>

#### *Materialism's Trojan Horse*

Do the people who write these schoolbooks think the children won't know how to reproduce if they haven't worked through all the pages, or is a far more subtle agenda at work? I would suggest that sex education is important in our secular schools precisely because it is one of materialism's many Trojan horses.<sup>56</sup> The way to change someone's worldview is to first change how they think of themselves—in particular, what it means to be a man or a woman. The way to change how we think of ourselves is to change how we talk about ourselves. If our bodies are simply the random constructs of time plus chance, then it is only sentimentality to urge that one part of the body should be treated, or spoken of, differently than any other part. That is why, “in the minds of the sex educators, the genitalia are just like any other part

of the body. After all, what is the difference between [our private parts] and a knee? Are both not simply anatomical structures? . . . nothing is to be hidden, nothing is private, nothing is sacred—all is exposed in the name of sex education.”<sup>57</sup>

As the agendas of androgyny and materialism continue to assert their reductive influences, sexuality becomes completely disenchanted. Earlier, when this area of life was considered “holy ground”, the veil of shyness that properly attended discussion of sexual matters preserved the sense in which this activity, on one level purely functional, is in fact an occasion for significance, reverence, respect and privacy. This reinforced the same worldview that chivalry pointed towards: a worldview which presupposed that God has invested our world, our activities and our relationships with a significance that transcends the purely physical. In treating sexuality as common, materialism presents the ultimate form of sexual repression. It represses sexuality by neutralising its God-given potency, turning it into something tame, benign and common.

#### *What About Ethics?*

To deconstruct sexuality, treating it as just another “subject” no different to knees, sneezing and picture circling, is also antecedent to a change in sex ethics. This is because the materialist approach to sexuality necessarily affects every area of how one views sex-related issues, from dress to the appropriate civil response to crimes of sexual violence.

Camille Paglia has argued that if rape “is a totally devastating psychological experience for a woman, then she doesn't have a proper attitude about sex.” Rape is just “like getting beaten up. Men get beat up all the time.”<sup>58</sup>

As absurd as such statements may at first appear, there is a frightening consistency at work. When sexuality is stripped of its “decent drapery,” when all aspects of our humanity are reduced to gender-neutral categories, then what is left to be called a “woman” has hardly any right to complain that rape is qualitatively different to being beat up. To say otherwise might acknowledge that men and women are actually very different. It would acknowledge that a sexual assault is more than simply another way of being attacked, but is a fundamental assault on one's womanhood.

#### *Becoming De-Sexualised*

In urging us to follow the dictates of “nature” rather than an externally imposed system of morality, the propagators of the Enlightenment believed they were liberating our sexuality, freeing us to be naturally sexual rather than unnaturally repressed. However, it would be some time later before we would witness the consequences of a society that takes this agenda seriously in its widest application. Since the Enlightenment there has been a gradual lessening of all sexual restraints, with high points such as the “free love”

53. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

54. *Ibid.*

55. “One sex education game gives children a large, detailed, explicit diagram of the male and female genitalia, with 20 body parts labels . . . A condom demonstrator (an object shaped like an erect penis) is a common tool of the sex educator. Children are encouraged to unroll condoms on a realistic model of an erect penis. And all this must be done with no sense of shame, for children are only truly liberated when all things sexual are in the open.” E. S. Williams, *Lessons in Depravity: Sex education and the sexual revolution*, London: Belmont House Publishing, 2003, p. 247.

56. This does not mean that all those who write or administer sex education curricula are doing it with sinister motives. Many sex educators are energised by concerns that are at least partially valid, and they remain oblivious to the worldview they are both perpetrating and drawing upon.

57. *Ibid.* Again, Wilhelm Reich would have been delighted if he had lived to see the pictures in contemporary sex education manuals. “Reich made the point that nakedness and exposure of the sexual organs was a crucial element of sex education's attack on conventional morality. He believed that society could only become ‘sex-affirming’ when people lost the shyness to expose their genitals.” (*Ibid.*, p. 260–261).

58. From an October 1991 interview published in *Spin* magazine, 1992, pp. 64–65.

movement of the mid-nineteenth century and, finally, the so-called “sexual revolution” of the 1960s.<sup>59</sup> The total result is perhaps the last thing we would expect: we find that, comparatively speaking, the people of today have become de-sexualised and inhibited in being naturally sexual.

At first this seems a bizarre thing to say. Indeed, it may seem that the opposite is, in fact, a truer description of our age. However, to say that the people of today are de-sexualised is not to imply that they are less sexually active than at other times, it is only to imply that the scope of their sexuality is much smaller. The material, actions or stimuli that, at one time, would have been implicit with erotic suggestion are treated today as things non-sexual. Once there was sexual connotation in a man and woman being alone together in the same room; now, in the university cities you can often find a man and woman housing together without any sexual connotation. Once a woman’s bare knee was provocative; now there are many men who do not even bat an eye to see a woman in a bikini.

Of course, like all generalisations, life has its exceptions. There will always be those for whom our society reserves the term “over-sexed.” Among males, such an appellation may apply to a man who cannot concentrate on beach volleyball because the woman playing opposite is dressed in the equivalent of underwear, or who refuses to shop in stores that display explicit magazines. This is the kind of person who is typically seen to have a problem with his sexuality, not the person who can detach himself in such things. However, such a judgment only serves as an indictment on the contemporary neurosis since it reflects the pervasive assumption—unconscious as it usually is—that healthy sexuality means a detached sexuality, something we can keep safely installed in our back pocket. Lurking behind this mentality is surely the very monster that all libertine movements have sought to eradicate: a *shame* of sexuality. Although we are supposed to have been “liberated” sexually, we are everywhere encouraged to feel ashamed of our sexuality—not having sex, mind you, but *being sexual*.<sup>60</sup> Let’s face it, it can be embarrassing to admit to the kind of

59. One critical reader has asked how the Victorian era fits within the schema of “steady sexual degeneration” from the Enlightenment until now. Here again it is necessary to be clear on what I am *not* saying. In suggesting that present approaches to sexual morality are derivative of Enlightenment ideas, I am not claiming that statistically the rate of moral decay has been steady. History is never as neat and tidy as that. It is true that ever since the Enlightenment its ideas have gradually been disseminating themselves into every area of culture, like yeast working through bread. Along the way there have certainly been ups and downs and the great evangelical revivals of Victorian England and America contain elements of an “up.” (See chapter 3 of *Lessons in Depravity*, *op. cit.*, for a good discussion of sexual morality in Victorian England and the important role that evangelical preaching played in the process.) However, considering Europe as a whole it is clear that this period (1837–1901) continued to bear continuity with the innovations of the eighteenth century. Indeed, this was a time when the principles of the Enlightenment in general and the French Revolution in particular were given concrete embodiment in a series of violent revolutions and nationalistic impulses. (See Eric Hobsbawm’s books *The Age of Revolution* and *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*.) It was also a time when thinkers such as Robert Owen (1771–1858), Francis Place (1771–1854), John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), Charles Darwin (1809–1882), Karl Marx (1818–1883), Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) and many others continued to push the ideology of the Enlightenment into all the nooks and crannies of popular thinking.

60. Even the “free love” movement of the eighteenth century, in trying to get rid of the shame attendant to unrestricted sex, merely displaced that shame onto other aspects of sexual experience. Katie

active, ever-present sexuality that cannot watch your average commercial without feeling visually assaulted, let alone walk down a European beach in the middle of summer.

It is as if everywhere there is an unconscious pressure to become desensitised to sex just as there is a pressure to become gender-neutral. Consider, for example, the justification I have often heard proffered for watching sex scenes in films, namely, “it doesn’t affect me.” The contrast is implicit between “sensitive”—or worse, “over-sexed”—individuals who are affected or offended by such content. However, we see again that the shoe is actually on the other foot. If someone can truthfully say that sex scenes do not affect them, that is the surest proof that it has already had a very marked effect upon them: it shows that they have been affected to the point of becoming able to view such content non-sexually. However, when we reach the point where nothing fazes us, where we can enjoy a beach party with virtually unclad men and women, watch sex scenes in movies or share sleeping bags with members of the opposite sex *and not experience sexual feelings*, then it is we who are the losers. What have we lost? We have lost the ability to be sexual as God originally designed. Those things which ought to be signifiers of sexuality, and therefore kept private, have been emptied of their meaning. In short, our sexuality has become repressed.

#### *Sexual Paranoia*

It seems that a corollary of not seeing sex where it should be evident is that we are forever doomed to see sex everywhere it is *not*. The papers are always full of examples. I read in the paper that in some places it is now against the law for school officials to give children high fives, since even that kind of physical contact is thought to have potential sexual overtones. I read in another paper that a nine-year-old schoolboy in Virginia was accused and arrested for aggravated sexual battery because he pushed up against a girl in the cafeteria. In England a law was passed which prohibits gymnasts and ballet instructors from touching their students (even those of the same sex) without express permission. I am even told that some women feel sexually assaulted if a man gives up his seat or opens a door for them.<sup>61</sup> Then there was the case

Roiphe writes of the experimental community at Oneida, New York, founded by John Humphrey Noyes, where the phrase “free love” was first coined. The members of this community practiced what they referred to as “complex marriage,” meaning that everyone over the age of twelve was essentially married to everyone else. However, Roiphe writes, “the members of the new community simply invented new sins to feel guilty for: the ‘claiming spirit’ of possessiveness, or having sex with too many people or too few or the wrong people in the wrong way. For all of his brave utopianism, John Humphrey Noyes’s vision was not in the end about ‘freeing’ love but about regulating and controlling it. Nearly a century after the Oneida community dissolved into bickering and disagreement, the idea of ‘free love’ would remain a proposition far more complicated than it sounds.” (Katie Roiphe, *op. cit.*, p. 123).

61. Academics also have the tendency to see sex behind every tree. There is a large school of thought which sees the whole tradition of oil painting, from the development of its technique to its appearance inside golden frames, as being a manifestation of the desire of males to take possession of things, particularly females. This was the view articulated by John Berger in *Ways of Seeing* (Penguin Books, 1972). Nor have the musical arts fared any better. I am told that “The exercise of male power to the end of social and sexual control is directly reflected by the practice of writing tonal music.” In particular, the cadence (which is the most basic harmonic progression), “is an analogue of this male desire for dominance” particularly in its “drive towards closure and

when a 14-year-old Cambridgeshire schoolgirl who “pinged” the bra of a classmate was arrested and fingerprinted, had her DNA sampled and was charged with common assault “of a sexual nature.”<sup>62</sup>

As situations and actions which ought to be latent with erotic suggestion are treated commonly, without the respect and honor due to sexuality, so situations and actions which really *are* merely common (such as those cited in the previous paragraph) are thought to be hedged about with sexual connotations. If, as was suggested previously, our society has undergone a de-sexualising process, then this paradox should come as no shock: sexuality will not be repressed, and to attempt to do so only causes it to emerge in other areas. We thought that by removing the restraints placed on our sexuality we would become liberated, but all it has achieved is to put us into real bondage.

But this is exactly the legacy left to us by the Enlightenment. Filtered through a metaphysic of materialism and an anthropology of androgyny, what is left to call our sexuality is so distorted that we hardly know how to handle it. Stripped of what Burke called “the decent drapery of life,” we have nothing to raise to dignify our naked shivering nature.

The Enlightenment told us that man and woman were but animals, the product of impersonal material forces. The problem is not merely that we believed them, but that now it is acceptable to behave like animals.

#### *Modesty and Love*

Earlier we saw that Rousseau argued that the attraction between the sexes, the happiness of marriage, and by extension the smooth running of society, hinged on men and women being different. How Rousseau applied this in practice is more problematic, and we might want to join Wollstonecraft in disputing some of his arbitrary definitions of feminine qualities. However, it is instructive to note that, for all her feminism, Mary Wollstonecraft could not help but agree that the happiness of marriage is an implication of the gender polarity she was so anxious to homogenise. For example, she concedes that her educational agenda—and no doubt the androgynous impetus behind it—will lead to unhappy marriages.

It would be tempting to try to show that Wollstonecraft’s admirable agenda for female education might be easily retained within a framework that still preserved the gender polarity, but that would be to miss the point. In Wollstonecraft’s mind, at least, the two points were inseparable: her educational programme was bound up with an ideology of androgyny. The fact that she recognises these pursuits to be antithetic to the happiness of marriage is very revealing, in that it shows she was not unaware of the implications of the unisex trend. However, this did not worry Wollstonecraft since “an unhappy marriage is often very advantageous to a family, and that the neglected wife is, in general, the best

mother. And this would almost always be the consequence of the female mind being more enlarged . . .”<sup>63</sup>

Later, when discussing the need to restrain the common appetite of passion, Wollstonecraft noted that “Nature, in these respects, may safely be left to herself; let women acquire knowledge and humanity, and love will teach them modesty.”<sup>64</sup> We are hard pressed to understand what Wollstonecraft means by modesty here apart from the kind of sexual/gender related modesty she so painstakingly avoided earlier. It should come as no surprise that, in the context of love at least, Wollstonecraft could not help but lapse into a gender-specific kind of modesty. I would suggest that this is because love is the ultimate argument against androgyny and sexual reductionism.

#### *Feminism and Marriage*

According to biblical ethics, the ultimate expression of love is when lovers give *all* of themselves to each other, as expressed in lifelong commitment and total physical donation. On the other hand, those who have tried to escape the significance of the gender polarity have less of themselves to offer since they are struggling to be less than the man or woman God originally designed them to be. Love, no less than our humanity itself, becomes a casualty of such “liberation.”

This being the case, there is a logical consistency at work in those feminists who have been arguing that romantic love, like gender distinctions, is one of the remnants of an unenlightened society. Notwithstanding the excesses and idolatry often accompanying romantic love, it at least operates on the assumption that gender differences are not only real, but there to be enjoyed. For many feminists, on the other hand, it is a different matter. “. . . romantic ideals,” wrote Amy Erickson, “were simply a means of maintaining male dominance at a time when overt demands of submission were no longer acceptable.”<sup>65</sup>

Andrea Dworkin was even more severe: “Romantic love . . . is the mythic celebration of female negation. For a woman, love is defined as her willingness to submit to her own annihilation. The proof of love is that she is willing to be destroyed by the one whom she loves, for his sake. For the woman, love is always self-sacrifice, the sacrifice of identity, will, and bodily integrity, in order to fulfill and redeem the masculinity of her lover.”<sup>66</sup>

For such feminists, the liberation of our sexuality does not stop with merely rejecting romantic love. Rather, the process completes itself in a full scale pessimism about sex itself, a paradoxical culmination of the Enlightenment’s emancipation project and itself an apt illustration that we destroy those things which we worship idolatrously. This can be seen in the way Catharine MacKinnon, another influential second-wave feminist, compares sexual intercourse within marriage to rape: “What in the liberal view looks like love and romance looks a lot like hatred and torture to the feminist. Pleasure and eroticism become violation.”<sup>67</sup> Elsewhere the

climax . . .” Robert Samuels, “Questions of reception and Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony,” *From Composition to Performance: Musicians at Work, Block 5 Reception* (Milton Keynes: The Open University, 1998), p. 64. Samuels is summarising the work of S. McClary from *Feminine Endings* (University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

62. Cited by Ross Clark, *How to Label a Goat: The Silly Rules and Regulations that are Strangling Britain* (Harriman House, 2006).

63. *Texts II*, p. 246.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 266.

65. A. L. Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England* (London, 1993), p. 7.

66. Andrea Dworkin, *Our blood: Prophecies and discourses on sexual politics* (Women’s Press, 1982).

67. Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Applications of Feminist Legal Theory to Women’s Lives*, (Temple University Press, 1996), p. 39.

Harvard Press author said, “The major distinction between intercourse (normal) and rape (abnormal) is that normal happens so often that one cannot get anyone to see anything wrong with it.”<sup>68</sup>

Even as early as 1934, Naomi Mitchison complained that the feminist movement was creating a generation of women so fostered on a defiant idea of equality that the mere sensation of the male embrace roused an undercurrent of resentment. Commenting on Mitchison’s words, C. S. Lewis observed that “at some level consent to inequality, nay, delight in inequality, is an *erotic* necessity.”<sup>69</sup> He then speaks of the tragic-comedy of the modern woman who is “taught by Freud to consider the act of love the most important thing in life, and then inhibited by feminism from that internal surrender which alone can make it a complete emotional success.”<sup>70</sup>

At the end of the day, gender egalitarianism turns out to be a cheat.

### *Sex: A Big Deal?*

It takes more than merely a rejection of androgyny to enable one to truly enjoy sexual intimacy. One needs to return to the biblical codes of morality overthrown by the Enlightenment. It may seem strange to suggest that the way to truly enjoy a thing is to restrict it, even though our world furnishes numerous examples of this principle. Yet it should not really be surprising that those who are so sexually active that they give no second thought to a one-night-stand, and are consequently treating sex like it is *no big deal* (often being actively *encouraged* to do so<sup>71</sup>), should find the activity less pleasurable than those so-called prudes for whom sex is still a *very big deal*. And according to the Bible, sex *should* be a big deal, and not merely because this makes the experience more fulfilling, though of course it does.<sup>72</sup>

68. Catherine A. MacKinnon, quoted by Christina Hoff Sommers, “Hard-Line Feminists Guilty of Ms.-Representation,” *Wall Street Journal*, (November 7, 1991).

69. C. S. Lewis, “Equality” in *Present Concerns: Ethical Essays* (London, Fount Paperbacks, 1986), p. 19. Emphasis in original.

70. *Ibid.*

71. Nearly all the sex education curriculum today is specifically aimed at convincing children that sex is not-a-very-big-deal. Consider, as a paradigm case, a booklet published in England by a government-funded sex education group. The booklet, titled *Good Grope Guide*, instructs children of 14 and younger on how to have sex, saying that sex can happen “at friends’, watching videos on Saturday morning, or while taking a walk in the park.” The tables have turned to the point that those who are not particularly interested in having Saturday-morning-sex are the ones considered to have a problem, to be not-quite-nice (“Nice girls feel sexy and nice girls make love. That’s a fact of life.” *Good Grope Guide*.) See “Controversial sex book launched” on BBC news, Friday, 4 August, at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/864674.stm>

72. The anecdotal evidence bears this out. Many, many studies have shown, not merely that married women are generally more sexually fulfilled than sexually active single women, but the most strongly religious women are also the most sexually responsive. See Edward O. Laumann, John H. Gagnon, Robert T. Michael and Stuart Michaels, *The Organisation of Sexuality: Sexual Practices in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 363–365; William R. Mattox, Jr., “What’s Marriage Got to Do With It?” *Family Policy* 6:6 (February 1994); Robert J. Levin and Amy Levin, “Sexual Pleasure: The Surprising Preferences of 100,000 Women,” *Redbook*, September 1975, pp. 51–58. Interestingly, “Stendhal . . . asks himself why the most sensitive women—let us call them the ‘high responders’—are always the ones who end up being the most sexually reticent. Stendhal concludes that it’s such a shame the high responders are drawn to modesty, because these are the women who are the most fun to have sex with—the very

This is the legacy that the Enlightenment has left us. Because materialism denied that a transcendent God had revealed himself to his Creation, it placed man as the sole arbitrator of morality. The result was that man turned sex into a god. It is a biblical principle that whenever a thing is worshiped idolatrously, the original thing is destroyed. In removing the restrictions of sexuality and denying the design God created, the sexual revolution ended up de-valuing the very thing it sought to elevate. It was observed in *The Times* that advertisers are finding that sex just does not sell products like it once did. The reason, reported Cristina Odone, is that the advertisers have made sex so banal it doesn’t entice us any longer. It has been like taking a picture in color and turning it into black and white. No wonder young people are now reported as making comments like, “I’m so used to it, it makes me sick.”<sup>73</sup> Nor should we be surprised that in Denmark, where pornography is unrestricted, people are often quoted as saying that sex is boring.

This shows one more reason why the biblical teaching on sexual morality and modesty is so crucial. Central to the very delight of sexual union is the pleasure of being admitted into a place that is not open to anyone else. Sexual intimacy is a gift from God set apart only for those who have entered the covenant of marriage. What it is set apart *from* is the ordinary and the commonplace (hence the importance of modesty and chivalry to protect the value of sexuality); what it is set apart *for* is the covenant of marriage (hence the importance of chastity). Havelock Ellis, though not someone whose writings I would normally want to be associated with, nevertheless stumbled upon the truth when he wrote: “Without modesty we could not have, nor rightly value at its true worth, that bold and pure candor which is at once the final revelation of love and the seal of its sincerity.”<sup>74</sup>

Seen in this way, modesty (not only of dress but of manners, speech and conduct) need not be indicative of an under-sexed temperament, as is often thought; rather, it is an acknowledgement and preservation of one’s sexuality as a gift from God. Modesty and chastity are not matters of negation, but of affirmation: affirming the sacredness and beauty of sexuality and committing to preserve the sense in which it is set apart and cherished.<sup>75</sup> This perspective challenges both promiscuity and prudery, as Shalit has observed:

Whether she decides to have scores of men or none, promiscuous and prudish women in some sense embrace the same flippant world-view, which one might call the *nothing-fazes-me* worldview. As

ones who are, in effect, ‘made for love.’ . . . his quarrel with female modesty, as a man, seems to be: it’s not fair that the high responders should be the modest ones, because then the sensualists are hoarding their sensuality . . . What seems to have escaped him is that it is no accident the sensualists end up hiding behind modesty, because it is modesty which protects their sensuality—for the right man that is. If the sensualists tried to overcome their natural modesty and to become more promiscuous, as Stendhal suggests, then their experiences would have less meaning for them, much of what excites them would be diminished, one man would serve more or less as well as any other—in other words, they would no longer *be* sensualists.” Wendy Shalit, *op. cit.*, pp. 186–187.

73. The words of a 16-year-old boy, cited in “Text and emails spell the death of dating,” *The Week*, 19 June, 2004, p. 15.

74. Havelock Ellis, “The Evolution of Modesty,” *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, Vol. 1, Third ed. (Philadelphia: F.A. Davis), 1899.

75. See Kathleen van Schaijik, “A Different Perspective on the Modesty Question,” *The University Concourse*, Vol. IV Issue 5, March 11, 1999.

types, they represent two sides of the same unerotic coin, which flips over arrogantly and announces to the world when it lands: “*Ha!*—I cannot be moved.” Modesty is prudery’s true opposite, because it admits that one *can* be moved and issues a specific invitation for one man to try. Promiscuity and prudery are both a kind of antagonistic indifference, a running away from the meaning of one place in the world, whereas modesty is fundamentally about knowing, protecting that knowledge, and directing it to something higher, beyond just two. Something more than just man and wife.<sup>76</sup>

We can begin to see how ironic it is that those who pursue modesty are often said to be the ones “uncomfortable with their bodies” or “ashamed of their sexuality.” That is comparable to saying that I am uncomfortable with my expensive silver kitchenware because I refuse to use it on a picnic. Just as my valuable silver is too precious to put to common use, so the treasure of the human body should be too valuable to use in any but the appropriate context.

C. S. Lewis observed that “when a thing is enclosed, the mind does not willingly regard it as common.”<sup>77</sup> Thanks to the Enlightenment, sexuality has come to be common. No wonder we don’t see the need for it to be enclosed any more.

#### *Thank You, Enlightenment*

For hundreds, even thousands, of years, there has been a collective instinct in Western society which told us that sexuality should have boundaries around it. Even when people failed to live by these standards, there was a shared sense that this was a deviation from what was morally normative. That is why sexual impropriety generally used to be cloaked about with hypocrisy. Since hypocrisy is “the tribute that vice plays to virtue” (Matthew Arnold), the loss of hypocrisy is usually a corollary to the loss of moral consciousness. In our own era, because there is nothing to be ashamed about, there is nothing to be hypocritical about.

The only reason that our Western culture ever had these shared assumptions was because our civilisation had been

built on the foundation of the Christian worldview. The Christian roots of our society have been part of the very air we breathed, believers and unbelievers alike.

All this began to change at the time of the Enlightenment. Although the worldview of materialism robbed our sexuality from having any objective or transcendent meaning, the effects of this were not fully felt until our own time, as we have seen. When a civilisation moves from one worldview to another, it often takes hundreds of years for the old worldview to wear off, even in the thinking and practice of those who explicitly reject it. So the materialists of the Enlightenment really had the best of both worlds: they could advocate materialism with the corollary that God was no longer an inconvenient obstacle, while still working on the borrowed capital of thousands of years of Christian tradition.

That state of affairs continued for a long time. Even when Darwinism charged the materialistic worldview with an enormous boost in the nineteenth century, the borrowed capital of the Christian worldview still continued to function in many areas, not least where gender and sexual morality were concerned. Yet gradually the borrowed capital has been running out. For our society this is bad news, but Christians can find something to be glad about. Since it is no longer possible to unthinkingly follow a general Christian consensus, believers have been forced to go back to the foundations of their faith and examine afresh the implications of their worldview.

For many years the church was living on the borrowed capital of the Christian worldview just as much as the world was, without properly working everything through from the first principles of our faith. Now that this borrowed capital has run out, Christians seem to be waking up, returning to their foundations and struggling to articulate a genuinely biblical philosophy of life. Not only is that a good thing, it is something we can thank the Enlightenment for.

Psalm 11:3 asks, “If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?” The answer is, of course, that the righteous can rebuild the foundations. Everything good that the Enlightenment destroyed must be rebuilt. But more than that, it must be rebuilt a hundred times as strong. That is something that is already happening. It is a project that each one of us can be part of as we articulate and apply the Christian worldview to every area of our lives. *C&S*

76. Shalit, *op. cit.*, pp. 182–183.

77. C. S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength* (first published by John Love, 1945).

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# Book Review

## OLD TESTAMENT ETHICS FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD

A fully revised, updated and integrated edition of  
*Living as the People of God* and *Walking in the Ways of the Lord*

BY CHRISTOPHER J. H. WRIGHT

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REVIEWED BY MARK R. KREITZER

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CHRISTOPHER J. H. WRIGHT's book, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, is an outstanding volume that explores and attempts to apply many of the Old Testament's ethical paradigms to contemporary culture. Although the paradigmatic approach is Wright's greatest brilliance, it may also be the volume's weakness, as we shall see. Nevertheless, the work Wright has done in this volume is desperately needed for application both in Third and First-world cultures. As a former missionary to India and social ethicist, Wright integrates a scholarly and practical understanding of both ancient and modern cultures into his work. I use it as a key textbook along with Walter Kaiser's, *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Kaiser 1983)<sup>1</sup> in a Ph. D. seminar on Intercultural Ethics.

First, to his great credit, Chris Wright believes that the State is a proper sphere for applying the universally valid principles of Old Testament law. As a former missionary to India and Reformation-based social ethicist, Wright is biblically correct to adopt a covenantal perspective as a governing motif of Scripture. Many, on the other hand, from a Baptist and Dispensational perspective reject the State as a suitable sphere for Old Testament values. Readers of this journal will mostly agree. If the State is not a proper sphere for God's ethical reign in his anointed one (Christ), then it is a neutral sphere. Neutrality always defaults to the "domain" of the "prince of this age" (2 Cor 4:4; Col. 1:13; Eph. 2:2).

Wright thus is a wholist<sup>2</sup> in that he sees every area of life under the Creator and the Creator's comprehensive rule. He thus explicitly rejects one of the most common dualisms of modernity, that of dividing theology and ethics into two

"non-overlapping magisteria," to borrow a phrase from Stephen Jay Gould. "Theology and ethics are inseparable in the Bible. You cannot explain how and why Israelites or Christians lived as they did until you see how and why they believed what they did."<sup>3</sup> This wholistic approach is necessary to combat both modernity, which explicitly divides the two, and postmodernity, which falsely claims to bring both together.

Wright also establishes his perspective within worldview thinking. He carefully summarises the theological worldview of Israel and, what he terms, the three foundational focal points or "pillars of Israel's worldview."<sup>4</sup> These three he places in a triangular arrangement. At the top of the triangle is the "theological angle," that is Yahweh, the God of Israel and of the whole earth. On the bottom left is the "social angle," which demonstrates how Israel was to live as the chosen, special people of God, who were to be the Lord's model response to the rebellion of Babel. Israel thus was to be a "nation that would be the pattern and model of redemption, as well as the vehicle by which the blessing of redemption would eventually embrace the rest of humanity."<sup>5</sup> Israel's distinctiveness was not to be ethnic but "ethical" (Gen. 18:19).<sup>6</sup>

In his discussion, Wright shows that in complete contrast to the pagan Canaanites Israel was organised to be a "socially decentralized and non-hierarchical" society, "geared toward the social health and economic viability" of the multitudes of "land owning households" instead of a hierarchical elite.<sup>7</sup> Land, hence, was "distributed as widely as possible" in order to preserve a "comparative equality of families on the land" and to protect "the weakest, the poorest and the threatened" instead of a wealthy landowning minority.<sup>8</sup> This meant, Wright states in summary, that "there was resistance in Israel to centralized power and a preference for diverse and participatory politics, which tolerated—indeed sought—the voice of criticism and opposition from the prophets, even if some of them paid a heavy price."<sup>9</sup>

Likewise, he states that there exists "an inseparable link between the kind of society Israel was (or was supposed to be) and the character of God." When Israel turned from God, centralised oppression and injustice was the result even if externally the people claimed they were worshipping him with "lavish gusto."<sup>10</sup> These insights are excellent and worthy of emulation in the development of modern constitutional orders such as that of the original American or the Swiss constitutions.

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3. Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004), p. 18.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

1. Walter Kaiser, *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Academie/Zondervan, 1983).

2. Holism, on the other hand, is a theory developed by former South African Prime Minister and designer of the League of Nations, Gen. Jan Smuts, who was an evolutionary monist. Holism as he developed it, is a theory, which claims that diversity is abnormal and that all things are evolving back to an undivided monad. Former Press Secretary, Piet Beukes, claimed that Smuts was "prone throughout his whole life to lapse into the pantheistic heresy." See Pieter Beukes, *The Holistic Smuts: A Study in Personality* (Cape Town: Human and Rousseau, Ltd. 1989), p. 44.



Last, the final right-hand corner of the worldview triangle is the economic angle, that is “the land,” which God promised and then gave to his people by grace.<sup>11</sup> I will discuss this angle more completely below, but note here that Wright uses all of the three angles to apply Old Testament social and economic ethics to the “New Testament Israel, the Messianic community.” From the New Testament Israel, he then applies Old Testament ethics to a civil order made up of believers and non-believers. “Citizenship of the kingdom of God most certainly has a social and economic dimension,” he writes. This “transcends” the kinship and land aspect of the Old Testament social ethic, but “not in such a way as to make that original structure irrelevant.”<sup>12</sup> Therefore, he seems correctly to affirm, that there is no movement away from at least *some* of the old covenant’s material and physical particularities into Christ, who becomes virtually a platonic category or form. Instead, he implies that there is a movement away from the typical and pictorial to the fulfillment realities—both spiritual and material, which are in the Messiah and under the headship of Jesus the Anointed Messiah-King over all the earth. All this is exceptional as far as he goes.

Wright explains: “To affirm as Hebrews repeatedly does, that what we have in Christ is ‘better’, is not (as is sometimes disparagingly called) ‘replacement theology. It is rather ‘extension’, or ‘fulfilment,’ theology. In the same way, the multinational community of believers in Jesus the Messiah is not a ‘new Israel’ (as if the old were simply discarded). It is rather God’s original Israel but now expanded and redefined in relation to Christ through the inclusion of the Gentiles—as God had promised ever since Abraham.”<sup>13</sup>

I would wholeheartedly agree with this attempt at developing a non-platonic form of amillennial eschatology with a couple of important correctives. First, Jesus Christ is indeed the one in whom all peoples and lands find fulfilment of life both spiritually and physically (i.e. an integral, comprehensive, wholistic perspective). Wright denies that the believing Jews who remain ethno-culturally Jews repossess the title to their own *land when they repent* and begin the process of applying biblical ethics through faith in *Yesu*’ their Messiah. The land promise is not something that is fulfilled in heaven.<sup>14</sup> The already aspect of the land promise is to be fulfilled now in a renewed people and land of Israel in which the believing immigrant alien receives a joint inheritance (see e.g. Ezk. 47:23). The Abrahamic covenant is an unconditional covenant (see e.g., Ps. 105:8–11).

Wright maintains that the land promise is nowhere mentioned in Rom. 9–11. However, this is an argument from silence. If Paul is indeed speaking about the conversion of ethnic Israel in the words “so all Israel will be saved,” as most commentators among the Puritans held, then this conversion is based upon the premise that “all the gifts and calling of the Lord are irrevocable” (Rom. 9:29). That gift of land, then, although ultimately fulfilled in a new earth can still have real fulfillment now as well. The land was part of that unconditional promise-gift, just as the promise of a Seed of David who was to come and rule was an unconditional gift. God promised the land to Israel who is, in the second section of Isaiah, ultimately Jesus (see Jn. 15). Believing Jews abiding in him receive all the blessings of Abraham. By deductive

analogy, then, the believing gentile peoples have title to their own lands as long as they continue in repentance and begin to practise personal righteousness and social justice according to both the paradigms of tōranic ethics and specific universal equity of concrete case laws. After all, Abraham is the heir of “all the world” of peoples and lands (Rom. 4:13, 17–18; see Gal. 3:8–14). Paul also implies this in the argument about the native and alien branches in the olive tree (Rom. 11:17–24).

Although the promise of a king upon the throne was interrupted for 500 or more years after the fall of Jerusalem, God still fulfilled the Davidic promise upon Christ’s obedience. The True Israel, Jesus the Seed, earned both eternal life and also the land for the believing Jews. Being in Christ means that all peoples and their cultures are to receive the Spirit and justification (Gal. 3:14) in their *own land* and within the contextualised confines of their own culture—including the Jews (see e.g. Ps. 86:9; Is. 19:19–25; Zeph. 2:11). There is a genuine unity of the Spirit in Christ of Jews and the gentile peoples (Eph. 2:11–22; 4:3; 1 Cor. 12:12–14).

At the same time their created physical unities as humans remain. Ethno-linguistic and gender-based particularities also still remain, as does the Creator-creature distinction. Christ being “all in all” certainly does not equate me with the God-man as some interpretations of Colossians 3:10–11 might imply. “Being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the one who created him—a *renewal* in which there is no *distinction between* Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.” Being in Christ means that all peoples and their cultures are to receive the Spirit and justification in their own land and within the contextualised confines of their own culture.

A second corrective is that although Wright valiantly tries to escape from a platonic eschatology, he does not completely succeed. He speaks of the “rarified spiritual air” of the New Testament and implies that Jesus is the total “completion of the story of Israel.”<sup>15</sup>

He had explained this earlier: “The Old Testament language of inheritance evokes the pattern of relationships between God, Israel, and their land, within which the Israelites of old had found their security. But now that security is enjoyed by all in Christ: believing Gentiles as well as believing Jews. What Israel had through their land, all believers have through Christ.”<sup>16</sup>

Unconsciously, it seems, Wright, along with many amillennialists, treats Christ as the form in which the materiality of the old covenant finds its fulfilment. In one sense it is true that the old covenant was a shadow and Christ is the body that cast the shadow (see e.g. Col. 2:17). It is a mistaken presupposition to think that Paul is using Plato’s categories here. Instead, it is better to see Israel’s land-promise as fulfilled in all the lands of the earth as the gospel is granted to all nations. Israel’s law, therefore, is to be contextualised into all cultures, and even the Hebrew cultus is to be fulfilled in the real wholistic worship of believers in all the varying languages, peoples, and nations in Christ in their own land (see e.g., Is. 19:19–25; Zep. 2:11). Certainly Christ fulfils all things but he fulfills by bringing the whole earth under his majestic rule along with all parts of the peoples’ cultures just as he commanded. He obeys what Israel failed to obey. He believed where Israel failed in faith. He conquers

11. *Ibid.*, notice esp. pp. 18ff.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 195.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 196.

14. See e.g., *ibid.*, p. 187ff.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 213.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 192.

all peoples where Israel failed even a centripetal—let alone a centrifugal—task of being a light to the ethno-peoples. Therefore, a consequently non-platonic, restorative version of amillennialism<sup>17</sup> is much closer to the biblical data than Wright's rendition.

In summary, the three angles are indeed very important though they seem to be somewhat artificially selected and then imposed upon the text. Wright even admits his concern over this seemingly forced application; however, he states that it is "both compatible with the shape of the canon of the Old Testament, and with the covenantal basis of Old Testament theology."<sup>18</sup> It seems to me that an explicitly covenantal approach would have been an even better organising principle. Especially as explained by Meredith Kline, a five-fold covenantal structure<sup>19</sup> could take into account both the details of the case laws and the paradigms of the Old Testament ethics, both oath and sanctions. This could have avoided the *almost* exclusively paradigmatic approach that Wright takes.

Second in my opinion, Wright accurately sees that "God's relation to Israel in their land was a deliberate reflection of God's relation to humankind on the earth."<sup>20</sup> He also states that modern Christians are "justified . . . in taking the social and economic laws and institutions of Israel . . . and using them as models for our own ethnical task in the wider world of modern-day secular society . . . In the economic sphere the Old Testament paradigms provide us with *objectives*, without requiring a *literal* transposition of ancient Israelite practice into twentieth century society."<sup>21</sup>

On the other hand, however, both specific transposition and paradigms are often legitimate. If only paradigms and models are normative without specific, applicative equity, then a severe imbalance must occur in the resulting social/ethical theology. As Walter Kaiser shows, and the Theonomists try to execute, it is this specific equity within each culturally wrapped judicial law that must be put into practice to have balance. This is as it should be. A Christian who understands Trinitarian social theory ought to hold in balance the equal ultimacy of both unifying principles (equity) and concrete application.

Wright consequently would be very greatly helped if he could come to see that although certain aspects of the Israelite body politic have ceased,<sup>22</sup> yet the specifics of the judicial laws' equity can be reproduced and contextualised into every culture impacted by the gospel. In this critique of lack of specificity, I also include Wright's rejection of the Hebrew penology. Any attempt to use Hebrew socio-

economic paradigms without the specific limitations of tōranic definitions of crime and the equity of its punishment schema leads to arbitrary justice. In the long run, this results in the opposite of a just, decentralised, and participatory system, which Wright praises.

On the other hand, however, Theonomists are woefully inadequate in understanding several major paradigms of Old Testament ethics, which Wright emphasises. Wright is absolutely right in rebuking them for this. They would be greatly aided by rejecting their hitherto scornful attitude to paradigmatic matters. Examples of this are several, but the following are some of the major paradigms that Theonomists reject:

(1) A limitation upon the number of hectares owned by any one person or family on the analogy of the division of land to Israelite families and the Jubilee.<sup>23</sup> There is need for widespread landownership and land redistribution on that paradigm.

(2) A regular, constitutionally mandated debt-forgiveness system along with indentured service for non-payment of debt, both of which discourage a consumption-and-debt based economy instead of a saving-and-investment economy.

(3) A constitutionally mandated gleaning system as part of the welfare system.

(4) A mandatory tithe written into a constitutional system for all citizens. Two-thirds of the tithe went to a non-statist ministry, the servants of the titular monarch, whose throne was in heaven. The other third part of the tithe was administered by locally chosen elders and sent to decentralised locations around the land. These were again paid not to the centralized State but to decentralised, local welfare institutions. In the New Testament times, there is no centralised Palace (i.e. the meaning of the word normally translated Temple), and no centralised ministers of the heavenly King. Everything, thus, is decentralised. The paradigmists and the Theonomists, therefore, need each other.

Notwithstanding the preliminary discussion, however, each of Wright's chapters on the various themes of Old Testament ethics are exceptional. Discovering the larger paradigms of Old Testament ethics is where he especially shines. For example, "Ecology and the Earth" develops an excellent antidote to the excuse that since God gave mankind dominion over the earth, humankind can exploit it for himself. The heavens and the earth actually belong to the Lord as Father-King and "all its fullness reveals his glory."<sup>24</sup> "The creation exists for the praise and glory of its creator God"<sup>25</sup>—the Father (through the Son by the Spirit).<sup>26</sup>

The chapter on "Politics and the Nations" is one of the best. Having written a comprehensive work on ethnicity, I was greatly pleased because he does not adopt the standard

17. Some today claim this perspective is Postmillennialism. It is not classic postmillennialism and would better be characterised as neo-postmillennialism or restorative eschatology.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

19. I summarise the theological gist of each of the five points of the covenant structure with the acronym KALOS ("good" in Greek): King, Administrators, Law, Oaths/Sanctions/Witnesses, Succession/Seed. Such a covenantal approach could also have integrated his superb insights into the Kingdom of God with Yahweh as King and men as administrators of God's justice and righteousness in all spheres of life. At least part of this theme he discusses in the theological angle. Using a covenant structure could likewise have included a section on succession arrangements. These arrangements delimit the manner in which the covenantal agreement and its ethics are passed on to the succeeding generations. A discussion of succession arrangements also would allow a systematic presentation of the amount of continuity between the covenants, which he does indeed extensively discuss

20. *Ibid.*, p. 183.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 184.

22. *Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF)* 19:4.

23. There is thus a need for widespread landownership and land redistribution especially in Latin America and increasingly so in the USA with the Federal government holding most of the land. Remember in the UK, Henry VIII redistributed land away from the Church and peasants but to his favourites. This was evil and should be rectified

24. See Pss. 24:1, 19:1; Is. 6:3 (exposition in *op cit.*, p. 115); Dt. 10:14; Job 41:11.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 114.

26. "By recognizing the link between the fullness of the earth (the totality of all created life on earth) and the glory of God means, as Paul reminds us, that human beings are confronted daily with the reality of God simply by inhabiting the planet (Rom. 1:19–20)" (*Ibid.*, p. 116).

platonised version of the future of ethnic diversity. “Ethnic and cultural diversity,” he writes, “is part of God’s creative intention for humanity . . . The inhabitants of the new creation are not portrayed as a homogenized mass or as a single global culture.” Instead, he continues, “there is the continuing glorious diversity of the human race through history . . . (Rev. 7:9; 21:24–26). The new creation will preserve the rich diversity of the original creation, but purged of the sin-laden effects of the fall.”<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately, though, he falls back into the standard platonic-idealistic view of eschatology in his interpretation of the Babel pericope and his prognostication of a future revived Babel at the end of time.

Apart from this, I found, in general, the section of how to apply Israel’s view of the State to contemporary culture greatly helpful, though at one significant point, I believe, he goes astray from Scripture. Let me give a brief synopsis. Wright maps out three political theologies of the State, which he finds in the Old Testament literature. First, he finds a theology of the “young revolutionary federation of tribes,” second, a theology of the “institutional and imperial state,” and third, a theology of the “persecuted remnant preserving religious distinctives in a hostile environment of giant empires.”<sup>28</sup> His counsel to draw out “reflection from all the major periods” of Israelite history is very admirable because Christians of the last 250 years have lived in all three of these contexts<sup>29</sup> and need the counsel of each of these three distinct theologies.

Wright traces next “five different phases” of the Old Testament history, but then he treats them merely as descriptive history. He refuses to take normative lessons from any of the stages that could inform the ethno-nations living in analogous contexts of a socio-political ideal towards which they could aspire. The Puritan and Reformed founders of several of the American colonies and later of their Republic took a different approach. Because they did take this approach—based as it was on solid exegetical evidence and earlier generations of federal or covenantal thinkers—they resisted the British Imperium under their lesser magistrates. This approach took the constitutional order of the Hebrews’ pre-monarchical republican period as their norm. Moses’ advice in Deuteronomy 4 taught the Hebrews that their constitution (the writings of Moses) was to be a light of justice and wisdom to all ethno-nations on earth. Wright unwisely terms this republican period, the “theocracy,” as is common among many contemporary scholars. That term, however, conjures up horrific nightmares among most Westerners, evangelicals included, of theocratic Fundamentalists, turbaned Ayatollahs, or right-wing fanatical militias. However, the pre-monarchical period certainly was not a theocracy in this sense, but instead it was a confederal republic with 12 “cantons” and a very weak central government centered in the Temple-Palace.<sup>30</sup>

Wright’s section on “Economics and the Poor” is also admirable when dealing with the oppression of social systems upon the poor. However, the flip side is that he makes a very weak connection between character and poverty, which both the Pentateuch (see e.g. Dt. 15) and the Proverbs do over and

over again. In this section, however, the author shows a clear prejudice by placing the priority of “the people,” which always ends up meaning the State, over private property. In other words, Wright claims that God gives the State the right to use its “sword authority” (Rom. 13:4–6) as a coercive, redistributory taxing authority. This violates the whole tenor of Scripture and the specific exegesis of Rom. 13:1–8, which limits the State’s taxation authority and sword-right to the full time practice of retributory justice. Scripture never gives the magistrate the right to redistribute wealth Robin Hood like to the favoured class of the poor. The word group translated “justice” in judicial and civil contexts in Scripture is always impartial justice that still proactively protects the justice given to the poor and oppressed because the rich almost always use their wealth to their unfair advantage. Our God, as the perfect Magistrate, never takes a bribe (Dt. 10:17–19). Coerced redistribution of wealth, however, means that the State must take a biased option for the poor and oppressed (*contra* e.g., Dt. 1:16–17; 10:17 and many other passages). The Social Democratic State violates God’s law just as much as does a *laissez faire*, limited civil government that does not constitutionally embed provisions for the marginalised classes—the poor, alien, widow, orphan, and so forth (see e.g., Dt. 10:18–19).

Hear Wright’s whole section: “Access to, and use of, the resources of the whole planet constitute the legacy bequeathed to the whole human race. The creation narratives cannot be used to justify privatized, individually exclusive claims of ownership, since it is to humanity as a whole that the earth is entrusted. This is *not* to say that there can be no legitimate private ownership of material goods; we have already seen how in Israel legitimate property rights were grounded in the belief in God’s gift of the land, and in its distribution to the household units. It *is* to say that such individual property rights, even when legitimate, always remain subordinate to the prior right of all people to have access to, and use of, the resources of the earth. In other words, the claim “I (or we) own it” is never a final answer in the economic moral argument.”<sup>31</sup>

Unquestionably, Wright is correct when he adds that God owns all things and each person or family holds them in trust. His exegesis of Leviticus 25 (e.g. 25:23) is excellent. Surely, he is also accurate when he also adds that God holds each “I” or “we” accountable for their stewardship as his tenants and sojourners upon the land he alone owns. Humans have only been given lifetime long leases upon his land, so to speak. Certainly, it is also true that ownership does not entail an “absolute right of disposal.”<sup>32</sup> Listen also to the following, to which I add a hearty “Amen” if understood within the biblical limits: “Private dominion over some of the material resources of the earth does not give a right to consume the entire product of those resources, because dominion always remains trusteeship under God and responsibility for others. There is no necessary or ‘sacrosanct’ link between what one owns or invests in the productive process and what one can claim as an exclusive right to consume as income in return. There is a mutual responsibility for the good of the whole human community, and also for the rest of the non-human creation, which cuts across the idea that ‘what’s mine is mine and I am entitled to keep and consume whatever I can get out of it’.”<sup>33</sup>

27. *Ibid.*, p. 215. 28. *Ibid.*, p. 219. 29. *Ibid.*, p. 219.

30. The word “temple” means the residence or palace of a monarch. Hence the Hebrew nation was a Republic from the human perspective but from God’s perspective it was a constitutional monarchy run by chosen (elected) elder-representatives.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 148.

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*, p. 149.

The Mosaic laws and their prophetic application without question place active Spirit-inspired controls upon the right of property. However, this does not mean that the collective in the State has the right to add to or take away from the specific equity of God's laws. I agree with Wright that all property does indeed belong to God not the "queen" or the "Republic," the state, or "the people." However, a State always has a tendency to try to play God by setting aside the universally valid principles within each of God's specific laws by trying to fulfil human needs through adding to those laws. Such additions as the progressive income tax, State-controlled welfare, pension, and health systems, and the like violate the equity of numerous statutes that mandate a single legal standard for all residents. Playing god and making one's own laws, after all, was the essence of the Serpent's original temptation.

The Israelite possessed a simple and privatised yet "impressive and systemic welfare programme for those who were truly destitute; that is, mainly the landless and familyless."<sup>34</sup> For example, God commanded that all citizens pay a tenth of their income<sup>35</sup> to the Lord's kingdom. Once every three years, this "triennial tithe law (Dt. 14:28–29)"<sup>36</sup> mandated support for the Levites, who were the full time servants of the Lord "because he has no portion or inheritance among you." It also mandates that this tithe be given for the servants of the King and for the marginalised whom the King has special compassion upon: "At the end of every third year you shall bring out all the tithe of your produce in that year, and shall deposit it in your town. The Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance among you, and the alien, the orphan and the widow who are in your town shall come and eat and be satisfied, in order that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do" (Dt. 14:29 NAU).

God further commanded the Israelites to allow gleaning (Ex. 23:10–11; Dt. 24:18–24), freeing of Israelite indentured servants (a better translation than *slaves*), and cancellation of debts and return of land every 50 years.<sup>37</sup> The Israelite republic and the later monarchy possessed a completely privatized welfare system embedded in their written constitution. This non-statist system was and remains an excellent model that modern social orders ought to emulate in a constitutionally prescribed rule of law, which strictly limits the civil government to retributive justice alone but mandates that all families takes care of the poor and marginalised.

I don't think it is evil, therefore, to literally transpose the specific equity of these laws into a constitutional system designed to be like the paradigmatic Hebrew system.<sup>38</sup> These duties, it seems to me, were constitutional responsibilities

34. *Ibid.*, p. 173.

35. There were two aspects of the tithe mandated by God. The first was to go to the Temple two out of three years in order to pay the tithe. Every third year the tithes went to the local storehouse in order to support the Levites as ministers of the Kingdom represented by the palace-temple (e.g., Lev. 18:24), and to support the poor alien, orphan, and widow (Dt. 14:28–29). At Jerusalem, the celebrating family-units were also to eat the tithe sacrifice, giving the Levite their due and also inviting the Levite and by implication the poor to the feasts. Normal Tithe: Lev. 27:30–33; Num. 18:21, 24, 26. Taken to Jerusalem: Dt. 12:17 (9–19) 14:22–27, 26:12; 2 Chron. 31:5–6; Neh. 10:37; 13:12; Mal. 3:10. Third Year local tithe: Dt. 14:28–29, 26:12–15. Christ's teaching: Mt. 23:23; Lk. 11:42.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 174, see also p. 173.

37. *Ibid.*, see especially p. 168–180.

38. See e.g., E. C. Wines, *The Hebrew Republic* [Book II of *Commentary*

of the covenanted families of the social order. Therefore it was not the State's duty to administer them. In other words, the individuals, families, and private associations were responsible to administer these specific welfare commands of God, not the State. It is part of the mythology of modernity that the State's responsibility equals the covenanted people's responsibility.

The magistrate within the sphere of the civil government merely possesses the responsibility to prosecute those citizens who violate the welfare statutes. The penalty was, and ought to be now, a judicial cutting off from all privileges of citizenship if the responsibility was (and is now) not accomplished. Consequently, a constitution ought to mandate what Wright affirms was "the *kinship/family structure of society*." That structure was (and still ought to be in my opinion) "the key factor in preventing poverty and restoring people from it."<sup>39</sup>

The ecclesial order ought to be *constitutionally* mandated to have a secondary responsibility as was modelled in the Hebrew paradigm. The civil magistrate only had (and ought to now have) merely an impartial—albeit a proactive impartial, prosecutor's role. The result would be a more Christianised civil order and Christianised civil covenant than the modern social democratic order. In such a Christian order, the responsibilities of each of the three divine institutions (family, ecclesial, and magisterial) are spelled out specifically in a written and agreed upon constitution.<sup>40</sup>

That constitution and a Christian common law provide the overarching rule of law and spell out the rights and responsibilities of the individual, the family (including the extended family), the civil rulers in the judicial, legislative, and executive branches, and the ecclesial sphere. That last sphere ought to include the right of non-graven image worshipping religious groups, such as Jews, Jehovah Witnesses, Mormons and private charities to be the recipients of tithes in a long transition period until the gospel again (re)triumphs in a land.

Wright, however, in my opinion, shows a definite bias toward the collective-in-the-State in his inference: "The right of all to use the resources of the earth seems to be morally prior to the right of any to own them for exclusive enjoyment."<sup>41</sup> It seems to me that this conclusion contradicts our Lord's own statement summarising private property, which is built directly on the commands of Moses: "You shall not steal and you shall not lust/covet." A person's property belongs to God first then the individual and may be used for his/her own exclusive enjoyment within the moral parameters of the law of God. That law mandates a tithe for the work of the Kingdom, gleaning, etc., all of which are God's welfare system. This must include, as it has historically, Christian hospitals, schools etc. for the poor, legal resident alien poor, and so forth. Theft by the State (or king) in the name of the people is just as evil as theft by an individual in his own name. The story of Naboth's vineyard (1 Kg. 21) clearly condemns the right of the sovereign to redistribute property, especially to himself or his friends. In a parable, Jesus summarised a landowner's right. Notice how he bases his judgment on

*on the Laws of the Ancient Hebrews*] (Uxbridge, MA: American Presbyterian, 1980).

39. *Op cit.*, p. 173, emphasis in original.

40. See in this respect the very important work by South African Calvinist philosopher, H. G. Stoker, *Die stryd om die ordes* [The struggle of the [social] orders] (Pretoria: Calvyn Jubileum Boekefonds, 1941).

41. *Op cit.*, p. 148.

the universal principles of justice found both in the law and in each person's conscience. Although the landowner here is certainly God, yet the principle is based on the human equivalent: "When they received [their pay], [the workers] . . . grumbled at the landowner, saying, "These last men have worked *only* one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the scorching heat of the day." But he answered and said to one of them, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what is yours and go, but I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye envious because I am generous?" (Mt. 20:11–15 NAU).

Therefore only God has the right to regulate private property and he certainly regulates it with a concern for the poor and oppressed, as Wright aptly shows. Citizenship in a commonwealth ought then to be directly tied to obeying the third-year tithe for the poor, to the mandatory gleaning laws, to laws forbidding any interest for the innocent poor, and so forth. A Christian civil government, such as most of Europe used to have and Britain still claims [nominally] to have, ought to enforce this. "Being cut off" from the social covenant, that is, losing at least citizenship rights, is a strong penalty. So, I agree. Both covenants do indeed claim that "care for the poor [is] the litmus test of covenant obedience to the whole of the rest of the law."<sup>42</sup> However, it must be regulated both by Hebrew paradigms and the specific equity of Hebrew case laws.

The main difference I have with Wright is that he opens the door for the use of biblical mandates by both social democratic and revolutionary socialist activists. Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, for example, and the Sandinistas in Nicaragua both claim certain biblical mandates as a foundation for their view of Christian socialism. Both the Mosaic and the new covenants recognise that the State possesses *only one* divine authority, for which it must give its full time attention—the completely impartial use of its sword of retributive justice. Justice can only be defined by God in his revelation if the magistrate is the "servant/minister of God" (see Rom 13:1–8). The magistrate must carefully understand and contextualise God's revealed justice in his cultural situation.

However, stating this, I must immediately add that impartial retributive justice is never to be passive. Many times God commands the magistrate to actively protect the poor and marginalised with impartial justice (see e.g. Ps. 72, and Ps. 82). This indicates that the State must exercise its sole right of retribution up to and including capital punishment. Retribution is according to a single, legal standard, which equally protects, rewards, and punishes all individuals as God instructs (Rom. 13:1–7). Here the theologians shine, though they are syncretised with an alien ideology just as Wright is syncretised with the opposite ideology, as we shall soon see.

He is thus weakest in dealing with specific Old Testament and New Testament commands, especially those that would explicitly limit the scope of civil government to impartial justice and a single law standard. These especially forbid the State to rob family wealth and property apart from necessary taxation to accomplish defence and retributive justice and forbid anything but a single rate for taxation. Property and inheritance taxes, which end up making the State the owner

of all land and inheritance is forbidden by the equity of biblical legislation. Progressive income taxation and multiple rate consumption taxes based on various levels of income, also favorites of social democrats, are clearly forbidden by the biblical statutes. Dr. Wright seems to neglect these aspects of Old Testament ethics, possibly because they support a private property based, free market system within the confines of moral law more than a social democratic form of polity.

Both covenants, however, plainly presuppose that all the laws of God are "eternal," "spiritual," and "holy, righteous, and good;" "Every one of Thy righteous ordinances is everlasting" (Ps. 119:160; see Ps. 119:128,137–138,143–144,152, 172 NIV; see Mt. 5:17–20; Rom. 3:31, 7:12; 1 Tm. 1:7–10).

The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy. They are steadfast for ever and ever, done in faithfulness and uprightness.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise. (Ps. 111:7–8, 10 NIV; see Ps. 119:86, 89, 97–104)

Based upon these and similar passages, many would conclude that (1) the law within man's created conscience (i.e. Creation design-norms; Rom. 1:32, 2:1–15), (2) the equity of the judicial or casuistic laws (see e.g. 1 Cor. 5:1,<sup>43</sup> 9:20f;<sup>44</sup> 2 Cor. 6:14,17; 1 Tim. 5:18; 1 Pet. 1:16), (3) the moral law (i.e. the Decalogue, see e.g. Rom. 7:1–3; Eph 6:1ff; Jas. 2:11), and (4) the new covenant "law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2) are the same universally normative standard. I agree. However, Scripture's clarity and specificity, depth of application, and cultural universality certainly do increase as covenantal revelation progresses. Yet even the Mosaic ceremonial laws, whose external forms are no longer mandatory, have an eternal and abiding significance that is profitable today. Walter Kaiser lists many New Testament passages which use the restorative, ceremonial law in a fulfilled, new covenant form.<sup>45</sup> All aspects of the law reveal more of the perfection that is found in Christ. In discussing this last aspect of the law, here again, Wright's volume shines.

Last, having said all of this, Wright, along with most UK evangelicals, seem to be enamored with modernity-bound, social democratic models of justice. Social Democracy as a model is built upon a collectivist model but differs from other such models only by its dedication to bringing in an increasingly socialised economy by the ballot box. On the other hand, most US evangelicals in the pew are attracted (though often not in practice) to the Classic Liberal concepts of justice that led to free market economic theory. Social Democracy's concept of justice has an implicit trust in the sovereign collective. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Classic Liberalism and its modern cousin Libertarianism trust in the sovereign individual. By their trust, each end of the spectrum betrays who their true god is and what their presuppositional partiality is. Both ideologies implicitly or explicitly depend upon the strength of man, either collective

43. Paul derives the phrase "has his father's wife" from Lev. 18:8; see also Dt. 22:30, 27:20.

44. Paul cites the casuistic "Law of Moses" from Dt 25:4 and applies the equity to his context.

45. See Walter Kaiser, *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Academie/Zondervan, 1983), pp. 221–235; *Belgic Confession of Faith*, 25; WCF 19:1–4. See e.g., Rom. 15:16; 1 Cor. 5:7f., 9:13; Phil. 4:18; Heb 9:18–23, 12:28, 13:15; 1 Pet. 2:5, etc.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 174.

man or sovereign individual man. Both inherit his curse: “Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind And makes flesh his strength [lit. “arm, shoulder, strength], And whose heart turns away from the Lord” (Jer. 17:5–6).

Christopher J. H. Wright is no exception to this polarisation. I say this even though he valiantly tries to escape the implications of his bias toward the collective. His bias is not to the Many but to the One. In other words, Wright—along with most of his British evangelical peers and many American evangelicals such as Ron Sider—leans toward statist, social market economics, which uses coercive, progressive taxation to reproduce something of what they believe the Old Testament Jubilee laws sought to effect.

In taking this stand, Wright betrays an antipathy against a private property based, free-market economic system. He betrays his bias, for example, when he indicts the social agenda of much of the American Reconstructionist movement for something akin to Libertarianism, though he doesn’t actually use that latter term. He claims that it is “oddly selective in what it says modern civil rulers must apply and enforce from Old Testament law and what it says they must not.”<sup>46</sup> He alleges that this “betrays . . . its ideological bias toward unfettered, free-market economic capitalism.”<sup>47</sup> Most likely a principle reason for this objection is that most of these American advocates of capitalist economics reject any abiding significance for the Hebrew Jubilee practice and other justifications for the redistribution of wealth by a central taxing authority. Actually, however, this law protected the smallest of the kin/territory units in Israel by providing an inalienable and equitable distribution of land.<sup>48</sup> The Jubilee laws protected the huge class of yeoman farmers, which compromised the Hebrew equivalent of the middle class. It also clearly teaches that land ownership ought to be very widespread and not concentrated in the hands of an aristocratic class. God’s plan is excellent but not Wright’s modern paradigmatic application of that law to contemporary times.

I believe Wright is correctly indicting these evangelical American social thinkers—Reconstructionists among them—for having a bias toward the opposite form of modernity from that which he holds. US evangelicals as a whole—though not the majority of their literati and academici—often lean toward an individualised faith, individualised property and consumption rights, and desire a drastically limited amount of taxation. Often those who lean towards the collective complain that those individualistic American evangelicals do not possess enough real concern for the poor and oppressed. If they did have such concern critics such as Ron Sider and Jim Wallis claim that they would express it by supporting increased taxation that would be redistributed to the poor, sick, and needy. There is some justification for this judgment. US Evangelicals give far less than a tithe to the wholistic work of the Kingdom and they do, by and large, support less instead of more welfare taxation. However, many of these same limited-State, US evangelicals have made and are still making efforts to redress the problem, witness the multitude of pro-life clinics, adoption agencies, rescue missions, children’s homes, Christian schools, and so forth. So it seems that many are seeking a third alternative to statist programmes and selfish non-concern for the poor.

Therefore, while Wright accurately complains about

the “ideological bias” of Christian libertarians, still he also demonstrates an implicit adoption of modernity’s ideological dualism. He—like the vast majority of the US evangelical intelligentsia—has an implicit bias toward the collective as the instrument of wealth redistribution and creation of justice. Both Christianised Classic Liberalism/Libertarianism and Christian Socialism fail. Both have an implicit emphasis upon human epistemological autonomy, in other words, each person has a right to examine the evidence on his or her own, weigh it up, and choose. Neither swing of the pendulum has escaped dualism with its normal philosophical bias toward the One or an inverted bent toward the Many. This is quite ironic because the chief Reconstructionist author, R. J. Rushdoony, for example, has written a magisterial volume on the Trinitarian presupposition, which solves the dilemma of either opting for the One or the Many: *The One and the Many: Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy*.<sup>49</sup> As a result, at least the Christian libertarians of the Reconstructionist stripe make a valiant effort to break out of autonomy and dualism.

The irony remains that Rushdoony and several of his followers label themselves Christian Libertarians. This term is as oxymoronic, in my opinion, as is the term Christian Socialism. In the US, Rushdoony’s appellation for himself betrays his chief interlocutors just as Abraham Kuyper’s statist economic and social policy or for that matter Ron Sider, the author of *Rich Christians in the Age of Hunger*<sup>50</sup> betray their chief interlocutors, socialist thinkers. No man thinks in a vacuum. Both sides, however, never escape the one-many dialectic common to the Western dualism, instead of acting consistently on complete human dependence upon the word of God in every area of life and a Trinitarian foundation.

Both stumble in some way, thus, in their common goal to develop a Christian response to such contemporary human dilemmas as global warming, centralisation of wealth, globalisation, Third-world poverty, Islamic Jihad, and so forth. Both American evangelicals, who overwhelmingly support the Republican Party and UK evangelicals, who tend to support Labour Party socialism are more or less conservative appearances of modernity-bound Christianity.

In short, then, my thesis is this: a scriptural view of the *missio Dei* must include a culture transformational ethic based on biblical tôranic wisdom, a covenantal view of society and redemptive history, and an applied Trinitarian social theology. We need a completely developed third alternative to Christian Libertarianism and Christian Social Democracy. This alternative must then become part of the warp and woof of a scriptural missiology if evangelicalism desires to make the same impact on, for example, the many Indonesian, Indian, or Chinese cultures as Puritanism made upon Anglo-American culture. We must thus consequently reject all forms of dualism.

Now to be fair, two thirds of this thesis Chris Wright is explicitly attempting to accomplish in this volume. He desires to fill the autonomous, lower story realm of “the many” with biblical content based upon Hebrew tôranic wisdom—both at the social system level and personal level. His bent toward a Christianised social democratic doctrine does ask excellent questions of the Old Testament ethical texts and

49. Rousas J. Rushdoony, *The One and the Many: Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy* (Fairfax, VA: Thoburn Press, 1978).

50. Ron Sider, *Rich Christians in the Age of Hunger: Moving from Affluence to Generosity* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1973/2005).

46. *Ibid.*, p. 408.

47. *Ibid.*

48. *Ibid.*, see esp. p. 200.

he develops a reasonably balanced perspective concerning the large principles of kindness to the poor, sick, and those living on the margins of modern post-industrial economies. Indeed the special compassion for these groups of people are inescapable themes of the law and the prophets, of our Lord and his apostles and prophets. Christian Libertarianism, on the other hand, is excellent with applying specific tōranic wisdom into the market, the State, and family. We need both perspectives.

Second, Wright accurately fastens to US dispensationalism the dualist label “practical Marcionism”<sup>51</sup> because of its thralldom to the particular American form of individualised Capitalism and lack of interest in Old Testament ethics. “Dispensationalists,” Wright carefully states, “say that *no* Old Testament law is morally binding since the coming of Christ, unless specifically *endorsed and recommended* in the New Testament.”<sup>52</sup> Wright, on the other hand, very seriously desires to apply to social systems in the First-World and Third-World cultures the whole covenantal system given to the Israelite people as a light to and model for the nations (see Dt. 4:5–8). He states in agreement with the Reconstructionists: “It is my view that the Reformed, covenantal understanding of the unity of the testaments and of the fulfilled, redefined nature of Israel in the New Testament is a more adequate framework for biblical interpretation than dispensationalism.”<sup>53</sup>

In summary, then, dispensational theology possesses a strong discontinuity hermeneutic. As a consequence of this hermeneutic and the resulting ethic, dispensationalism does not have a comprehensive theological basis for developing a comprehensive social theology and a culture-transformational missiology. A discontinuity bias is a weakness, for example, of Walter Kaiser’s, *Toward Old Testament Ethics*,<sup>54</sup> even though he is trying hard to escape it.<sup>55</sup> Yet Wright, in the name of rejecting both “Theonomism” and dispensationalism rejects the classic covenantal continuity approach of the Puritans who developed the *Westminster Confession* and of the Low German and Dutch Reformed movement, which developed the *Three Forms of Unity*. Furthermore, we need to remember that the English common law (and to a certain extent the Byzantine-Roman *Corpus Iurus Civilis* [Justinian Code]) were attempted contextualisations of biblical law and penology in their respective legal systems.

However, ironically again, Wright’s form of Christianised social market (or moderate social democratic) thought is also a form of this same error though not nearly as egregious as that of dispensationalism. Wright’s failure at this point is a grave weakness because he does not give a consistent biblical hermeneutic for his attempt to develop a covenantal third-way alternative between total individualism and complete collectivism. Wright complains that theonomists want “civil authorities in all societies . . . to enforce the laws and penalties of the Mosaic Law,”<sup>56</sup> yet he doesn’t discuss and refute the biblical material in the Old Testament and New Testament, which lead the theonomists to that conclusion. At least the chief ethical theorist of the theonomy movement, Greg Bahnsen, tried to develop such a biblical defence and

hermeneutic, though I don’t agree with several of his key conclusions. Wright summarises: “Theonomists argue that *all* Old Testament laws are perpetually morally binding, unless explicitly abrogated in the New Testament. Theonomists have the same essentially ‘all-or-nothing’ approach to the law as dispensationalists do, except that whereas to the question ‘How much of the Old Testament law is authoritatively binding for Christian?’ the dispensationalists answer, ‘None of it,’ the theonomists answer, ‘All of it—and not just for Christians.’”<sup>57</sup>

Certainly, then, Wright has not broken out of the bias for the One (just as many US dispensationalists may have an inverse bias to the Many) and hence, he too, could be accused of holding to a moderate form of “practical Marcionism” or social antinomianism. Although I must add, Wright’s form is much, much more balanced and helpful than dispensationalism for reasons I will address shortly.

Third, Wright correctly criticises the theonomist movement for not maintaining the classic moral, civil, and ceremonial distinction, reflected for example in the Westminster and Belgic Confessions. Yet while Wright packs each type of law in their correct crate, he doesn’t make much use of, for example, the “general equity” concept found in the Westminster Confession’s discussion of the “judicial laws.”<sup>58</sup> Both the *Westminster Shorter and Larger Catechisms* and the *Heidelberg Catechism*, for example, make use of the general equity concept in a similar way. Though Wright briefly discusses the concept in interaction with Calvin’s use of the law, Kaiser better develops the concept. Wright misunderstands Calvin’s use of the concept and then approves his misunderstanding: “What matters is that the ‘general equity’ (Calvin’s own phrase) that characterizes Israel’s civil law should be preserved even if the literal form is no longer binding. If the essential principle of the Decalogue commandment is taken seriously, then matters of practical justice, fair treatment of the poor, protection of boundaries and so on will fall into place with appropriate legislation, just as they did in Israel.”<sup>59</sup>

Kaiser’s works better show how the universally valid principles within the judicial laws can be discovered and applied to society by using a ladder of abstraction and then of re-contextualisation (concretisation). He discovers this ladder exegetically. In other words, Scripture itself teaches that all of the Decalogue is capsulised in the two great commandments but concretised in the case of judicial laws. For example, even Chris Wright’s own commentary on Deuteronomy, along with several others, shows that the structure of the book follows the Ten Commandments in order. Each of the judicial laws is an exposition of the general equity of a specific commandment. Each judicial is en clothed within the specific Hebrew social and political context. Some of that specific context, such as walled cities, cities of refuge, kings, and tribal boundaries, is clearly part of the “body politick”<sup>60</sup> abolished with the end of the Jewish commonwealth.

It is these commands that must be de-contextualised by finding a principle and then recontextualised into a new culture with the same principle. However, for the rest of the judicials, so much of the context is common (“general”) to all human social and political contexts that there can be a virtual one-to-one cross over from the ancient to the present culture. For example, all cultures have seduction, criminality, sexual

51. *Ibid.*, p. 401      52. *Ibid.*      53. *Ibid.*, p. 405.

54. Walter Kaiser, *Toward Old Testament Ethics*, *op cit.*

55. Kaiser wishes to apply the equity of biblical law only to the family and ecclesial spheres but not to the civil government.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 404.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 403.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 395.

58. See WCF 19:4.

60. WCF 19:4.

sin, accidental and deliberate causes of death, and oaths in court. Because Wright does not take this into account, he is free to recommend possible confiscatory taxation legislation that does not preserve the “literal form” of the Old Testament law because it is “no longer binding,” but preserves, in his opinion, “practical justice [and] fair treatment of the poor.” His view, then, could open the door to such things as affirmative action, carbon replacement taxation to preserve God’s environment, and central government control of all medicine. All of these can be shown from solid exegesis to be a violation of the apodictic principles of impartial justice, equal protection of a single legal standard, and compassion upon the poor and oppressed.

Both sides, then, need to deliberately and consciously presuppose the “equal ultimacy of the one and the many” (C. A. Van Til)—the Trinitarian presupposition. This means that both God’s oneness and manyness in the Godhead, and his oneness and manyness as reflected in his Creation, are both true at the same time without any logical priority given to either one or the other. Only upon a conscious Trinitarian presupposition can theology and missiology break out of the dilemma and constant pendulum swing they are trapped in. Unfortunately, Chris Wright doesn’t make use of the similar Trinitarian insights of Colin Gunton, on the British side of the Atlantic.<sup>61</sup> This Trinitarian insight has led C. A. Van Til and his disciples—Rushdoony for example—on the North American side to seek balance even though, I contend, they don’t achieve it.

61. Colin E. Gunton, *The One, The Three, and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

A solution, then, of the one-many dilemma can be reached only if we carefully listen to both interlocutors dealing with the dilemma: the individualist and the collectivist, the Christian Libertarian and the Christian Social Democrat. Only as a researcher carefully hears both sides’ exposition of Scripture, based upon each side’s own unique questions springing from their bias, can one approach the biblical equality of the two principles. Reading both sides with Trinitarian and covenantal eyes, therefore, is a must because the Scripture itself presupposes the equality of the one and the many and its redemptive history is driven by covenantal thought. Only with both theological insights—along with a strong view of Creation—can evangelicals move forward in mission with a unified front, something Paul implies will be totally alarming to the idolatrous world (Phil. 1:27–28). Creation, covenant, and the “equal ultimacy of the one and the many” (C. A. Van Til) should be explicitly incarnated into society by Christians resulting in a *Trinitarian covenantal* civil society.

A society with many diverse, yet strictly delimited social spheres in biblical balance is the biblical goal for Christianised cultures, I am convinced. Dispensationalism, and much of Reformed social thought, has given up on this goal as unattainable. Each sphere dwells under the Triune God’s sovereignty and is filled with specific biblical-tôranic wisdom. Abraham Kuyper, Herman Dooyeweerd, and several of their disciples have led the way in this (e.g. C. A. Van Til, R. J. Rushdoony, Herbert Schlossberg, Francis Schaeffer, E. Calvin Beisner, Stephen Perks, Michael Schluter, David Chilton, and even Chris Wright). Each, of course, has his strengths and weaknesses, balance and bias. *C&S*

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	<b>The HSBC Bank Plc</b>	<b>Taunton</b>	<b>40-44-04</b>
for the credit of	Beneficiary's Name		Account Number
	<b>The Kuyper Foundation</b>		<b>7 1 1 7 9 1 0 1</b>
the sum of	Amount	Amount in words	
	£		
commencing	Date of first payment	and thereafter every	Due date and frequency
			until further notice in writing and debit my account accordingly
Account to be debited		Account Number	

Signature(s) ..... Date .....