

# CHRISTIANITY AND SOCIETY

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THE BIENNIAL JOURNAL OF THE KUYPER FOUNDATION

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VOL. XIX, No. 2

WINTER 2009

*The Quest for Atonement*

*Pierre Viret and A Reasonable Economy*

*Incompatible Views of the Church:  
High, Low and Emergent*

*Faith in the President:  
What does Obama really believe?*

*Which Wilberforce?  
Contrasting Evangelical Reconstructions*

*The Legacy of Thomas Chalmers*



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EDITOR

STEPHEN C. PERKS

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# EDITORIAL

## REGULAR PUBLISHING SCHEDULE OF *Christianity & Society* TO CEASE

by Stephen Perks

THIS issue of *Christianity & Society* will be the last regular issue to be published, at least for the time being. From 2010 onwards *Christianity & Society* will be published on an intermittent basis. The volume numbering system for the journal will cease with this issue, Vol. XIX, No 2. Future issues of the journal will be identified as “Special Issues” and numbered from issue 20: i.e. the next issue will be Special Issue, No 20, the following one Special Issue, No 21, etc. The number of the first Special Issue, therefore, will take over sequentially from the previous volume numbering system, but future issues will not be published on a regular twice-yearly basis as previously. There may be one issue in one year, two in another, and possibly none the following year. The serialisation of Michael Kelley’s book *The Impulse of Power* will continue with future Special Issues.

Why is this change being made?

There are a number of reasons that have coalesced to bring about this change. First, we simply do not have the material coming in to keep the journal going on a regular basis twice yearly. Before the age of the internet, and now the age of blogging, people who wanted their research publishing submitted it to journals. We used to stockpile essays for *Christianity & Society* up to a year or even two years in advance of publication because there was that much material coming in. This is no longer the case. Essays get published immediately on the internet on web sites or blog sites. It is getting difficult to attract enough good material to keep the journal going on a regular twice-yearly basis. If in the future we do start receiving enough material we shall consider the option to resume publication of the journal on a regular basis. Until that happens the journal will appear on a more intermittent basis—i.e. when we have the material for it.

Second, given the first point above, we need to move on to other things. On the whole things do not stay the same. Times change, things move on, and we must too. This means that other projects that we have been wanting to develop can be given more time and effort. It is simply time to move on to other things. Among the projects we want to develop is the film-making project previously advertised in this journal. In addition there are apologetics projects that we wish to pursue, for example, an apologet-

ics ministry based around street theatre. The work of the Kuyper Foundation is not coming to an end therefore; it is merely changing its emphasis, a change necessitated by the changing nature of the society in which we live and work. The web site, and possibly blog sites, are also areas for further development. All these things demand time, effort and funding and therefore we need to move on.

Third, mention was made above of the changing nature of the society in which we live and work and the need for our emphasis to change in order to maintain our engagement with society. It has to be recognised, however much we may abominate the fact—and I do abominate it—that British society (possibly even Western society generally) is becoming semi-literate. The number of people who can be reached by intelligent literature is declining drastically. People want the equivalent of children’s picture books, not literature, and the form that these picture books are increasingly taking is interactive ones, e.g. computer programmes, internet sites, blogs, Face Books, and also, though not interactive, cinema films and TV programmes (though the latter, TV programmes, are now losing out to computer programmes and internet sites, perhaps less so cinema films in the form of DVDs). These things are effectively hi-tech adult equivalents of children’s picture books. There is nothing I should like more than to continue our work as essentially a literature ministry, because it is cheaper, less time consuming, and more practical to get information out in this way. But it presupposes something that we no longer have: a literate society. To give a couple of examples, I organised a few years ago a Think Tank meeting for local Christians in the area in which I live, the purpose of which was to discuss relevant issues facing the Church and society. When I gave a leaflet advertising this event to one person the response I got was “I am put off immediately.” When I asked why, I was told “The word ‘think’. I don’t want to have to think about things.” Now, this person was preparing to go out as a Christian missionary to the Third World. A discussion group that involved thinking was anathema to this person. A literature ministry that requires people to think about what they are reading is even less likely to get through to people. For example, when I recently tried to organise a non-fiction reading group, I was told by one person whom I approached as a possible member of the group: “I got through college without reading any books, why should I start now?” If you didn’t laugh at this you’d have had to cry! Though, to be fair, this was one of the more articulate responses I received. “Uurgh!” was the spontaneous chorus of disapproval I received from one group of people to whom I was foolhardy enough to announce my hideous plan.

For these reasons we have to move on to ways of getting the message across to people that they will respond to, since we have to engage with people if we are to communicate with them effectively. It is no good pretending we do not live in a semi-literate society. If we do communicate the message of the gospel effectively to our society in a way that most people can understand, and the result is the re-

Christianising of the nation, this will eventually produce a literate society, because wherever Christianity has gone this has been the result. Christianity is a religion of the book. But the Church has failed to be salt and light in our society for over a century and the consequence has been the re-paganisation of the nation, and the growing educational dumbing-down and illiteracy of our society has been one of the results of this. You might as well preach in Latin as ask many people, non-believers and believers alike, to read Christian literature, such has been

the result of the de-commissioning of the nation that has taken place in Britain over the past century or more.

While we do not intend to stop our literature ministry (there were monasteries where literature and learning were valued and preserved even in the Dark Ages), the things mentioned above do mean that we have to move on to other things *as well* and in the process reassess our emphasis. This, at least for the foreseeable future, means that the journal will be published on an intermittent basis. *C&S*

## JOE PAUL, SERVANT OF THE LORD, 1984–2009

It is with very great sadness that we have to announce the death of Joe Paul, faithful friend, supporter and trustee of the Kuyper Foundation. Joe Paul drowned in the Mediterranean sea on Thursday 15th October while on holiday in Turkey. Joe had gone swimming with his wife, Joanna, when the currents took them out to sea and they got separated. Joanna was rescued by a boat but Joe was nowhere to be seen. His body was eventually found a few miles from the popular beach from which they had gone swimming.

Joe was home schooled as a child and given a Christian education by his parents. He became a builder through working for his father's building company and then started his own building business a few years ago. Joe, who was 25, got married to Joanna just over two years ago. Joe was a

committed Christian and worked tirelessly in promoting the Christian faith in his life and work and through his involvement with his church, the home and study groups that he led, his involvement in the Gospel Truth Podcast, and in his involvement with the work of the Foundation. He spoke at the 2008 Kuyper Foundation Fellowship Weekend on the subject of "Secular Humanism in the Roman Empire" (this talk can be accessed from the Kuyper Foundation's web site audio page and was also published as an essay in *Christianity & Society*, Vol. xviii, No. 2, which is available from the journal page of the web site at [www.kuyper.org](http://www.kuyper.org)).

Our prayers and sympathies are for Joanna and his family and friends. They will all miss him acutely, as shall we.—SCP

## GRACE & LAW

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# THE IMPULSE OF POWER: FORMATIVE IDEALS OF WESTERN CIVILISATION

by Michael W. Kelley

## PART III: MODERN MAN: “THE NEW PAGANISM” 6. THE RENAISSANCE: THE NEW MAN IDEAL

### 1. *The Meaning of the Renaissance*

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the study of the past underwent considerable modification with the introduction of so-called *scientific* history, with the result that the world of learning witnessed a vast outpouring of research and interpretations based, it was supposed, upon more *objective* and rationally reliable analyses of the past than had until now been possible. This development had important implications for Western history in particular, for in conjunction with this more rigorous approach to the study of the past, the history of Western civilisation was increasingly subjected to sharp re-evaluations of the periods into which it had been divided. The usual broad categories—ancient, mediaeval, modern—might still apply, but as scholars examined the past in ever more detail, these divisions seemed to them quaint and conventional. Consequently, along with a proliferation of new insights and re-interpretations allegedly based upon rational procedures and standards, many sub-divisions within these wider classifications began to appear which seemed to require a new understanding of each historical era. Sometimes a segment of history would seem to overlap two periods, making it more difficult to decide where the division between eras should be recognised. Earlier demarcations, it was often claimed, lacked clarity and *scientific* accuracy.

Of course, those who had *lived* the history had not been as aware of discontinuities as we are who must endeavour to provide an account of past events. The past

would possess no meaning for us *as history* were there no changes to observe, no transformations to evaluate, no developments to record. We are aware, for example, that great intellectual, social and material differences separate the modern world from the mediaeval world. Nevertheless, there are great distinctions between the ancient and mediaeval periods as well. Every period contains characteristics which make it unique, despite the existence of features which might seem notable departures from the overall temper of the times.

Nevertheless, it can be cause for great controversy when a portion of history seems, apparently, to defy period classification. The Renaissance has come to be viewed this way. An interested student of the period is struck by the fierce debates that have become a feature of Renaissance studies over the definition of its period concept. Rarely does any work appear in print without its author pressing his opinion. Does the Renaissance in its cultural manifestations represent primarily a Christian-mediaeval outlook, or is it more properly part of the modern era, in which pious asceticism and other-worldliness have become less attractive and man, glowing with a new Promethean self-confidence, radiates enthusiasm for the life of here and now? Such questions crop up repeatedly.

Some seek a middle ground and are mindful that certain times ambiguously compose *transition* periods and exhibit features of two eras, retaining much of the old while showing an inclination towards the new. For many, this characterisation of the Renaissance seems the most



satisfactory. As a transition period, then, it is synthesis or mixture, understood to be fluid and showing a tendency towards realignment. Transition periods, like this one, lack hard boundaries and solid parameters.

Despite its supposedly transitional nature, we believe that the Renaissance ought to be treated as part of a definite historical era, the *modern* one, because the Renaissance is primarily modern *secular-humanist* in its core ideals. The term *modern* recognises a major redefinition of man away from the dominant Christian-mediaeval, and Augustinian worldview and towards a new, more pagan, anti-Christian outlook, with a new idea of culture and civilisation. Although much of the surface remains mediaeval, the appearance should not obscure the true moral-religious change in Renaissance man.

The Renaissance includes mainly the fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries. During the first two, the Trecento and Quattrocento, it was in Italy that the essential ideals of the Renaissance arose and found cultural expression. By the sixteenth century the Renaissance ideal was no longer merely Italian, nor even primarily Italian, but had become a European-wide phenomenon. Its centre had shifted from south to north, especially to the Netherlands, France, and England. In this period, styled the *high* Renaissance, the last vestiges of the mediaeval past gave way before the first full flowering of a world that was to continue up to the present day.

Our primary concern in this chapter is not with the Renaissance in its historical movements and phases, nor with its cultural residue that is still remarkably visible today. Most people think of the Renaissance primarily in terms of great works of art. Painters, sculptures, architects, poets and dramatists have left behind a wealth of examples of their genius. We have been taught to view their lofty creations as representative of a time when the human spirit, freed after centuries of sterile asceticism and other-worldliness, emerged to emphasise a new self-confidence. Renaissance artists are said to have shown a new appreciation for nature in all its variety, especially human nature in its uniqueness and manifold complexity. Their works, we are told, celebrate life by proclaiming a new freedom to explore novel ideas, to challenge old dogmas, to take charge of one's destiny, to glory in humanity and man's superiority over nature and his surroundings. They eloquently testify to the coming of age of man.

However, rather than create a new culture, these justly celebrated artists only sought to give aesthetic expression to the new cultural and religious temperament. Far more important were the thinkers, writers and statesmen who chiefly formulated the ethos that was central to the Renaissance, and it was during the Italian phase of the Renaissance that the most articulate form of that ethos can be seen to flourish. Their enduring legacy to modern culture was wrought in a moral and religious transformation which, as we shall see, entailed a new ideal of *power*.

We may divide the Italian Renaissance into two phases: the first from the early pioneers at the beginning of the

fourteenth century up to the 1450s; the second, from around 1450 until the end of the century when Italy became the battleground of the major European powers. Early in the first stage one city, Florence, became the birthplace and principal centre of the Renaissance. From Florence emerged three figures to lead the way, Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio. Petrarch would leave the deepest impression. By the end of the fourteenth century, Florence and Florentine ideas stood at the centre of what has been called the *civic humanism* phase of the Renaissance, a period, defined by a new vision of the humanities, and of republicanism and civil liberty, which was marked by appreciation of the models of ancient Athens and Republican Rome. In time, Florence and her ideas would be challenged by the sinister power of the Visconti of Milan who represented a different type of Renaissance man. For men of this type, the Renaissance ideal was to be found in great men of power such as the Caesars, who knew how to impose their will by force and to resolve all disputes and conflicts, thus to achieve the well-ordered society as well as wealth and glory for themselves. This type of Renaissance man would triumph over the earlier sort by the mid-fifteenth century. Even Florence would bow to the power of the Medici. Thus began the second phase of the Italian Renaissance, when philosophers like Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola, with the help of a new variant of ancient paganism, Egyptian Hermeticism, propagated a concept of man as a *magus*, one who claims the ability to tap the *power* of the universe to achieve every human ambition.

The term Renaissance means *rebirth*. Rebirth of what? For the principal thinkers, rebirth meant a reawakening after a barren time. The new age was a new enlightenment, an emergence from darkness and ignorance. What was reborn was what had been lost or smothered by the preceding age. Renaissance men saw themselves as having rediscovered the knowledge that was "needed to overcome [man's] alienated condition and create a perfect society."<sup>1</sup> The age of darkness, a concept invented by Petrarch (1304–1374), to whom we shall return, referred to the Middle Ages, an age of credulity and superstition which had been preceded by a classical age of wisdom and understanding. The possibility of rebirth lay in recovering that luminous ancient legacy and bringing it to the forefront of learning. The Renaissance, like all cultural revolutions, would hardly have succeeded without control of the educational agenda. The new programme of learning, the *Studia Humanitatis*, would become the chief means to inculcate a new idea of man and society inspired by the classical period. By means of this recovery, man would be in a position to control his life and circumstances, to create for himself the *good life*. Thus, while the Renaissance drew from the past, its orientation was towards itself and its vision of knowledge as the means to forge new and

1. Stephen A. McKnight, *Sacralizing the Secular: The Renaissance Origins of Modernity*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), p. 1.

better conditions for man and society. Stephen McKnight writes: “The most distinctive feature of modernity is the underlying conviction that an epochal break separates it from the preceding ‘dark age.’ Integral to this epochal consciousness is a new confidence in man’s capacity for self-determination, and this in turn derives from the conviction that an *epistemological breakthrough* provides man with the capacity to change the conditions of his existence.”<sup>2</sup>

Such comment makes clear why the Renaissance belongs more to the modern era than to the Middle Ages.

How does this Renaissance view differ from the outlook of the Middle Ages, if the earlier era also based its educational curriculum, as we indicated earlier, largely on ancient classical authors? Were not mediaeval men cognisant of antiquity? Did they not know or appreciate what the pre-Christian pagan thinkers taught about man and the nature of his experience? The answer, of course, is that they did indeed know, and accepted, much from ancient pagan authors. This was true throughout the Middle Ages, but especially in the High Middle Ages after the discovery and study of new materials on Aristotle from the Moslem world. Indeed, men in the *Christian* Middle Ages were eager to learn much from the classical sources and to synthesise that learning with the heritage of the *fathers* of the church and the doctrines of the faith.

Here is the reason the Renaissance exploitation of the classical past differed fundamentally from that of the mediaeval period: Renaissance man no longer was interested in synthesising the ideas of classical man with the intellectual tradition of the fathers and the faith. For mediaeval man, the classical heritage was *useful* so long as it bolstered an essentially *Augustinian* faith and theology, whereas Renaissance men wanted to replace the Augustinian-mediaeval view with an altogether different faith, one based upon the ancient pagans alone. Furthermore, the metaphysical features of the Augustinian and mediaeval view, ideas of a God-imposed hierarchy and imperially structured system of rule and order, were jettisoned in favor of a concept of man-made civil society as the product of civic virtue and social engineering. In the new Renaissance cosmology, it is not God who stands at the centre, but the universe, infinite, mysterious, a vast playground for human will and self-purpose.

In many ways the outlooks of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance appear similar, but only if the comparisons are superficial. A great gulf separates the Augustinian-mediaeval view of man as he confronts the world and the ultimate reality of God from the Renaissance view which sees man solely in his relationship to the universe. Frances Yates encapsulates the differences in a comment that, while concerned with her diagnosis of the second phase of the Italian Renaissance, in fact could apply to the entire period: “What has changed is Man, now no longer only the pious spectator of God’s wonders in the creation, and the worshipper of God himself above the creation, but Man the operator, Man who seeks to draw *power* from

the divine and natural order.”<sup>3</sup> In the Renaissance view, *divine* and *natural* blend imperceptibly into one another, and man sees himself as confronting this reality solely to extract its power and tap into its resources, thereby to advance man’s own cause and self-purpose.

Jacob Burckhardt made the central feature of his interpretation of the Renaissance a new attitude about the human individual.<sup>4</sup> There is a new and boundless aspiration on the part of the individual to seek for earthly fame. Man ceases to feel the need to hold in check his ambition as an affront to God and a threat to eternal salvation. Instead, he yearns to achieve glory and distinction as laudable goals here and now, and to be recognised for his accomplishments and their intrinsic worth while he lives. Man refuses to see all activity here as merely preparation for the hereafter, but accepts it as having inherent value and an immediate benefit for himself. This new vision of man no longer sees him as passive and receptive, but as supremely active and creative. The world and man are what man makes of them. Unlike mediaeval men, who accepted the conditions of life as pre-ordained in the transcendent counsel of God, therefore not to be questioned or doubted, Renaissance man looked at life and society as the arena for the realisation of man’s innate potential. The flowering of art and artistic achievement during this period is a reflection of this attitude, and served to promote the ideal of individual fame, both for artists themselves and their patrons. Hence, as Mebane writes: “The concept of the self as a work of art, an idea which became central to Renaissance culture, expresses the tendency of the period to allow ‘art,’ in the broad sense of ‘human creative activity,’ to compete with divine grace as the shaping force in human life and destiny.”<sup>5</sup>

In the Renaissance, man looks at himself as having God-like power to recreate a world that conforms to his own wishes. At the very least, being similar to God himself, man is called upon to assist God in his work of perfecting the world and man. Man does not sit idly by, nor does he pass through life as a pilgrim bound for another world, but sets himself to imitate and support God in his goal of bringing all things to completion. That means, “[t]o realize our divine potential we must, like God, exercise our powers in creative acts through which we reproduce in the external world the perfection we have come to see within our own minds.”<sup>6</sup> The standard of man’s activity is his own inner nature which is essentially divine, but which awaits man’s bringing it to fulfilment.

This implies, in turn, that unlike mediaeval man, men in the Renaissance do not wish to be confronted with any preconceptions, conventions or traditions that would

2. McKnight, *Sacralizing the Secular*, p. 9 (emphasis mine).

3. Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 144 (emphasis mine).

4. Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, Vol. I, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1958) pp. 143–174.

5. John S. Mebane, *Renaissance Magic and the Return of the Golden Age: The Occult Tradition and Marlowe, Jonson, and Shakespeare*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p. 11.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 11.



foreordain their actions or behavior. They want no *external* authority to impose limits upon their activity if it would be perceived as hindering the realisation of their potential. Man must be seen in his *primal freedom*, denying any and all barriers to the shaping of his *divine* destiny. The world is open before him as an object to be brought under his control. Nothing must stand in his way or pre-define his agenda. Man must be free to take the pathway which suits him and to discover his potential in any area he wishes to investigate. The Renaissance fascination with antiquity was not merely a curiosity to discover new ideas, but was also a way of affirming that nothing that any man had ever said or done at any time or place should be considered as untrustworthy knowledge for man. Whatever men have thought or asserted, because it is innately human, is a possible source of wisdom and truth, and to be accepted at face value. It was the Renaissance man's way of claiming that the *Christian* Middle Ages had no monopoly on truth; in fact, that era had only promoted ignorance. A real insight into things human was to be found in consulting the authors of the classical past, whose ideas, it was often asserted, were *more* Christian than those of the mediaeval thinkers.

The Renaissance embraced the classics of antiquity on their own terms and for their own intrinsic merit, and not as requiring any re-adjustment for a Christian framework. They viewed Greco-Roman civilisation as a golden age of creative genius and great accomplishments by and for men alone. They looked to revive that ancient culture in order to transform their own world-view into one in which the perfecting of man becomes the chief preoccupation. In turn, they viewed this *rebirth* as so epochal in significance, so profound in its renewal of man's confidence in himself and his capability to find his own meaning and to further his own purpose, that, set next to the dark ages of Christianity, as McKnight comments, "The only suitable language to describe the epochal breakthrough is that of conversion and salvation."<sup>7</sup>

If anything marks the character of the modern age, beginning with the Renaissance, it is its anti-Christianity. Nevertheless, it is dependent upon concepts essential to Christianity, but these are invested with profoundly new meaning. For the *conversion* implied by the Renaissance meant a turning away from the Christian heritage, and the *salvation* looked to by Renaissance men was a new spiritual reality in which man was freed from any God other than his own potential, unrivaled divinity.

## 2. *The World of Urban Conflict and Civic Humanism*

Although the Renaissance marks a sharp break with the mediaeval-Augustinian world-view, it was nevertheless spawned in the late Middle Ages in northern Italy and forged amidst the struggle between *Sacerdotium* and *Imperium*, whose unresolvable clash seemed to compel men to look elsewhere for an idea of social order and for

solutions to the disorder that followed their encounters. It is one legacy of the false institutional and cultural ideas of *Christian* monasticism and hierarchicalism that, when men were ready to break definitively from their mold, no real Christian-biblical alternative was available to direct Western civilisation into more genuinely Christian pathways. This void allowed men to turn back enthusiastically to the ideas of ancient pagan Greece and Rome, almost emptying the developing culture of anything discernibly Christian. Perhaps it is too generous to think that much real Christianity had prevailed even in the previous period.

Life in the upper Italian peninsula had never quite conformed to the mediaeval pattern of rule. Since Roman times this region had had numerous flourishing cities. Despite the invasion of the Goths in the late fourth century, the Roman way of life was not totally disrupted. Not until the more barbarous Lombards (Langobardi) arrived in the sixth century did this area undergo social and political upheaval. Even so, a measure of order was soon restored when control was wrested from the Lombards by the invading Carolingian Franks. Once again cities, though on a smaller scale, re-emerged as the chief social characteristic of the region.

Italy was part of the new Western empire, and in theory the will of the emperor was the law of the land. Under the Carolingians, the area was governed by counts and viscounts installed by the King, but the distance from the centre of imperial power allowed these local rulers considerable liberty of action. They quickly entrenched themselves as seigneurs—landed aristocrats—and behaved like petty feudal barons, yet maintained ties with the cities and their growing commercial and trading interests. The Church, of course, was also present, but in northern Italy was less powerful in feudal terms than elsewhere in Europe. When the Carolingian world disintegrated in the ninth century the entire region was left a congeries of independent powers with no clear subordination to either secular or sacred authority. This fragmentation of power was a boon to the cities which discovered that, for the most part, they were left to develop commercially and to govern themselves, free from outside interference or taxation, a fact which history records as the reason for the growth and power of the great Italian city-states.

By the late tenth century, during the reign of the Ottonians, the German empire had recovered enough to reassert its claims of authority in most of its eastern imperial lands, including northern Italy, although the exercise of power was more problematic.<sup>8</sup> To regain a measure of control the Ottonian emperors tried to use bishops as a means of governing the region. Their authority was often checked by strong local interests and by the cities themselves, which were little inclined to submit to outside powers. Secular lords increasingly joined their interests with the quickening economic life of the cities,

8. A condensed discussion of this history can be found in Malcolm Barber, *The Two Cities: Medieval Europe, 1050–1320*, (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 251ff.

7. McKnight, *Sacralizing the Secular*, p. 15.

and found they were compelled to share political power with new men of wealth. This combination promoted local civic interests over imperial interests. In some places the bishops were absorbed into this social realignment. It was, for example, a Visconti bishop who established the power of the Visconti in Milan.

The burgeoning wealth of the Italian city-states aroused the covetous ambitions of imperial aspirants. Starting with Frederick Barbarossa in the mid-twelfth century, repeated unsuccessful attempts were made to compel the region's submission to armed force. With great energy the cities of Lombardy and Tuscany resisted every effort by imperial armies to impose royal-appointed rulers over them. Nevertheless, because of jealousies and fierce rivalries between the cities themselves, imperial ambitions were able to make headway with some factions. The proponents of the imperial party became known as the Ghibellines. During the same period, the papal struggle for the control of ecclesiastical investiture of bishops and elimination of simony (the purchasing of Church office) in ecclesiastical appointments, a reform begun nearly a century earlier, would, but for almost entirely political reasons, give rise to an opposing faction called the Guelphs. In Italy "the Guelph party shattered . . . the last props of German feudal and imperial dominance."<sup>9</sup> As real power became entirely local, northern Italy became a political chaos in which city-states warred with one another in a ruthless struggle for regional control.

Amid the turbulence of the eleventh and twelfth centuries important social changes were taking place. There was rapid growth in the birth rate, and the sudden surge in population caused scarce land for the small and mid-sized peasant to become even scarcer. To live off the land became increasingly difficult, since Italy was not a region with large stretches of arable land. Steady movement to the cities swelled urban populations. Major land values soared. However, the productivity of agriculture rose rapidly as well, and trade and manufacture mushroomed, absorbing the influx populations from the land into the growing craft industries and trades. This change increased the influence of the cities in the politics of the region, and shifted the balance of power from the land to the commercial centres.

The effect of this social change was to raise the demand by cities for self-government, and a system of *communes*, government by locally chosen nobles and respected citizens, emerged. However, the local nature of government fostered intense attitudes of self-interest, and cities became bitter rivals for the control of local advantage. Implacable conflicts over tolls, customs, riverways, seaways and the traffic of commerce and trade became endemic.<sup>10</sup> Each city viewed its neighbours with jealous suspicion. Each commune claimed monopoly over certain manufactured items and deeply resented competition from other com-

munes. Instead of developing commercial ties, they fought fiercely with one another for control of territories and exclusive rights to economic resources.

Even more threatening to social order than the feuds which cities carried on with their neighbours were the disturbances suffered as competing factions within the city fought for control of communal affairs. Mercantile interests grew up around prominent families which vied with one another over the direction of policy, especially as policy chiefly concerned the need constantly to raise taxes in order to wage the necessary warfare with the neighbouring community. These *families* and their many dependents often gained control of a district where they exercised a monopoly of power. The leaders formed *consorteria* and went through the streets with armed retainers for their own protection and to intimidate rival families. The streets became battlegrounds. Each family, to secure greater control of its neighbourhood, erected *towers* from which to keep watch on enemies, and to gain advantage in attack or to protect against one.

Against this background of civil turmoil merchants and craftsmen formed into guilds to protect themselves in the environment of fractious communes. It became impossible to carry on any trade or occupation without joining one of these organisations. Economic privileges and success were dependent upon political power. In the words of professor Martines: "Guilds were not just casual and friendly occupational organizations . . . They burst upon the scene to satisfy urgent needs. Many turned themselves into armed groups. They sought the control of their craft and product, but the route often lay through politics and some form of violence."<sup>11</sup>

The result of this experiment in self-government followed the usual historical pattern. The breakdown of order seemed to demand more centralised power. To check the fractious rivalries, communal government in the thirteenth century gave way to centralised government—the *podesta*—a council with a strong executive. This change occurred in typical historical fashion, as an urgent demand of the *people*. Workers, artisans, small manufacturers combined with the petty nobility and ruling elites to put an end to neighbourhood divisions. Some prominent families, out of a sense of rank, privilege, and self-esteem tried in vain to resist including the *populo* in the counsels of government. However, the *people*, to succeed, had to rely on the paid services of some powerful man or group of men. The effect nearly everywhere was the defeat of popular government and the creation of government by the *strongman*, forerunner of the *condottiere*. This was the *signoria*, government by a powerful nobleman with the backing of rich merchants, bankers, and money men. In some cases—Florence being the most noteworthy—government remained in the hands of a strong bourgeois assembly with a limited executive power. The same might be said of Venice despite its oligarchical character. Elsewhere power fell into the hands of strong

9. Garrett Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy*, (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1988), p. 48.

10. Lauro Martines, *Power and Imagination: City-States in Renaissance Italy* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), p. 22.

11. Martines, *Power and Imagination*, p. 40.

individuals. This was especially true in Lombardy where the increased power of the Visconti of Milan eventually led to Milanese domination of the region.

During these centuries, in this context of intense inter-city rivalries, a moral transformation gradually occurred. The city had become the fundamental social fact for Renaissance Italians. It became the principal moral fact as well. Men were proud of *their* cities and regarded themselves especially fortunate to have been born or brought up in one.<sup>12</sup> Loyalty and devotion to one's city was taken for granted as the paramount moral ideal, promoting a *secular* definition of human nature and society. Man's dominant social experience was no longer to be seen in mediaeval terms as contained within the *three orders* and shaped by obedience to the *Church*. Man's existence was not predetermined according to some divinely ordained social hierarchy which was said to be because of sin and necessary for salvation. Instead, the basic fact of urban life was that men lived in a social context that was fostered and maintained by a moral commitment to *public* concerns which derived entirely from the exigencies of *public need*: the need for safety; the need to realise that personal welfare was founded upon the increase and promotion of the public welfare. This sense of public consciousness had no connection to religious salvation and did not stem from some higher obligation to contain sin and evil, but was said to derive entirely from man's innate impulse to gain public recognition and honour for his accomplishments, the satisfaction that comes from the approval of his fellow citizens. It was from this sense of public consciousness, with its belief that the city was the milieu in which human nature was formed and towards which man's efforts should be chiefly directed, that the ethos which has come to be known as *Renaissance humanism* would sprout.

Humanists, like the ancient Sophists, spoke to the men of the new urban societies and offered an educational curriculum that would enable them to shape their ideals as men whose primary concern was public affairs, principally, their administration. Humanism, therefore, was not for the masses, but for ruling elites and men of great abilities. The humanist agenda was directed at whoever was responsible for the business of the *city*—to noblemen, rich bourgeoisie, princes, prelates, oligarchs—to provide instruction for men who ruled, to foster a course of instruction that would produce the best ruler. When they looked to the ancient poets of Greece and Rome, humanists did not do so simply for the sake of literary pleasure or personal moral advice, but to find moral examples to serve as guides for proper public leadership for men of their own day. Their study of history had a strictly utilitarian interest, to teach great men the way of greatness and powerful men how to exercise power. The humanist educational ideal stressed proficiency in language as a tool to be used by men of power. Rhetoric—refined eloquence—was necessary to persuade the citizens to act for the public interest, to guide the *passions* of the people

and inspire them to make sacrifices for the glory of their city. The program of humanism had *politics* as its primary goal.

In a telling comment on the humanists of the period professor Martines writes: "The humanist attitude toward history was emphatically selective, elitist, self-congratulatory, and fixed to a criterion of worldly success." Too often we have been led to believe that the humanism of the Renaissance was merely a disinterested study in all aspects of human experience for the sake of enriching our understanding and expanding our ideas of what it means to be *truly* educated. But the humanists of the period were not pursuing some disinterested study of classical thought simply to open the mind to an insight into things valuable for human experience in general. They meant to find the basis for the new belief in politics as the highest form of human activity and the successful ruler as the ideal type of man. The humanists "saw first and saw deepest into the grounds of praise for the earthly city: praise for politics, for men in civil society, for secular history, riches, worldly accomplishments, and the pursuit of glory."<sup>13</sup> The highest worldly good was to be found in outstanding political activity, which meant that all other *goods* were secondary to and derivative of politics. The programme of humanism was very much an upper class phenomenon, as only prominent men would benefit from a humanist education. The humanists had contempt for any but ruling elites and great men. They despised the crowd and "affected disdain for all 'mercenary' trades, from petty shopkeeping to medicine and even the practice of law."<sup>14</sup>

It would be natural to expect humanists to have a firm interest in redefining the moral basis of human behaviour. They would not be content to hold the mediaeval-Augustinian view which says that man needs government in order to check his impulse toward evil, and would have little use for a concept of social order as merely necessary to prevent men from transgressing against God's established order. The criterion that government was necessary because men were sinful and needed to fear a power that would act with a just retribution against their wicked behaviour was one that Renaissance men for the most part came to despise. Social order and temporal power, rather than being necessary for some other-worldly benefit, were the means for realising legitimate human aspirations for social and civic happiness. Man desires to live the best life possible, and rather than being essentially sinful, he possesses a natural reservoir of *virtue*. Against the background of the city-state wars and internal urban strife, the humanists endeavoured to promote the idea that man could control his passions and channel them into constructive and socially beneficial ends. They found the basis for this optimism in the works of classical authors, particularly those who accepted and taught the Stoic doctrine of the *naturalness* of social and political organisation.

In Stoic thought man was by nature virtuous but

12. *Ibid.*, p. 72.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 198, 206.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 207.



unformed. If he would live in accordance with virtue, he must cultivate his mind, control his passions and act for the good of humanity. At least in the Roman republican period, this doctrine had been used to promote the idea of Rome and of the citizen who sacrifices himself upon the altar of the public welfare. Rome was regarded as the fount of good and its moral customs as superior to others. Its past was a rich lesson in great men who had set aside worldly self-interest so that they might better serve the greater good of Rome.<sup>15</sup> They were examples to be followed. The Stoics believed that the best kind of life was the one lived by virtuous men in a well-ordered and harmonious commonwealth. Stoic doctrine furthered the idea that government, far from being a mere bulwark against evildoers, was an agent for *positive* good.<sup>16</sup> It was not only good in itself but enabled men to *become* good through service to civic well-being.

In like manner, Renaissance thinkers came to believe in the *secular* city as a natural, self-sufficient political organism requiring no justification other than the advantages it provided for its citizens. They accepted no *theological* justification for the idea of the State, because Christian theology contradicted their fundamental belief in the natural virtuousness of men to foster their own happiness, and because it restricted the actions of men to a social arrangement not of their own making. Politics was, for Renaissance men, not simply a given state of affairs descended from heaven to which men were required to subordinate themselves as best they could, but was an on-going process in which shifting imbalances became opportunities for virtuous men to employ their talents and energies in the generating of new policies that would enhance the civic welfare and redound to their own glory and reputation. In this context, there could be no *a priori* rules of behavior, no pre-ordained order. Men must be free to act as they see fit in order to shape a society that accords with their wisdom and foresight. The humanists had great confidence that they could *educate* rulers and other elites in the proper virtues using great examples from the past. Men so taught would always rule in the best interests of the commonwealth.

The transition from the fourteenth to the fifteenth century was a momentous time in Renaissance Italy, which saw a great struggle between the Visconti *tyrants* of Milan and the *republic* of Florence that extended forty years into the century. By the end of the fourteenth century most of the independent cities had been absorbed by one regional

power or another. A policy of aggressive domination had been actively pursued by the Visconti, who ruled in Milan with absolute power. At the same time, the free cities of Tuscany had all been brought under the suzerainty of the city of Florence. Ostensibly a republic, Florence had nevertheless embarked on an expansionist policy of her own to prevent cities such as Pisa, Lucca and Siena from pursuing policies contrary to her interests. Everywhere power consolidated around a strong centre. By the end of the fourteenth century there were five regional powers in Italy: Lombardy, ruled by Milan; Tuscany, under Florentine control; Venice, which was territorially confined mainly to its lagoon; the Romagna, the centuries-old patrimony of St. Peter; and the kingdom of Sicily in the south. Each would like to have had total control in Italy, but none had the means to achieve that goal. Despite limitations, the Visconti pursued an aggressive policy of expansion southward toward Tuscany. Florence, to survive as a free and independent city-state, would have to contend against an enemy who coveted her wealth and hated her institutions.

Florence had been the home of humanist ideas before this time, but the need to arouse the citizenry to patriotic fervour to resist aggression required the evocation of a moral ideal which would move the people to defend their city. They must be brought to see that the issue was not simply one of life and property, but a choice between freedom or slavery, between a life in which full human potential was allowed to realise itself or one in which all human effort was subordinate to the dictates of absolute power, every man's capacity for good subjected to the will of one man. The period saw the efflorescence of *civic humanism*, which viewed the contest between Milan and Florence in stark contrast and sought to promote a vision of a public order, forged in the struggle between light and darkness, that with the guidance of the humanists would give birth to a new society of free men. Florence, *the Athens on the Arno*, would become the home of republicanism and the centre from which would emanate a growing opposition to monarchy, that most mediaeval of institutions.

Florentines saw themselves as waging a campaign not merely against immediate danger but against centuries of ignorance and inhumanity. They sought to raise the issue beyond the need for self-protection to one which included a new vision of man and society, a vision of men who freely and self-consciously shape their society to achieve the best life possible here and now. To find the agenda for building such a society of the future they searched the ancient literary remains of Greece and, especially, Rome, with something of a "militant dedication to antiquity," to discover the ideals of *republicanism* and the notion that men are most virtuous under republican regimes and most full of vice and corruption under one-man rule.<sup>17</sup> The Visconti represented the odious alternative, and were

15. Livy, the famous Roman historian of the first century B.C., wrote in the first book of his monumental *History of Rome*: "The study of history is the best medicine for a sick mind; for in history you have a record of the infinite variety of human experience plainly set out for all to see; and in that record you can find for yourself and your country both examples and warnings . . . for I do honestly believe that no country has ever been greater or purer than ours or richer in good citizens and noble deeds . . ." *The Early History of Rome*, Bks I–V, translated by Aubrey De Selincourt, (Penguin Books, 1986), p. 34.

16. For here and what follows see George Holmes, *The Florentine Enlightenment, 1400–1450*, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 150–167.

17. Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance: Civic Humanism and Republican Liberty in an Age of Classicism and Tyranny* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 4.

made to symbolise all that was evil in monarchy. Florence would become the centre of a type of Renaissance civic humanism which sought not merely to withstand the pressures of tyranny but to foster a new outlook which would make possible the constitution of a society that overcomes man's tendency towards this most virulent of political vices. In anticipation of modern democratic liberalism, the thinkers of Renaissance Florence confidently saw in *state-building* a programme for making men good and their societies happy and contented.

Among the many figures of the time, perhaps none represented the new current of thought more than Leonardo Bruni (1374–1444), whose writings proclaimed the active political life as the highest and most virtuous that men can lead. He had been trained by Coluccio Salutati (1331–1406), a dominant figure of his day in the counsels of government as well as the founder of the Florentine circle of humanist scholars who were to represent the new generation of educated civic leaders. For Bruni, politics was no mere necessity imposed upon men so that their lives and relationships might be less subject to acts of injustice, thus freeing them for *higher* pursuits. Rather, for him, politics *was* the highest activity, the art which made all others possible, the means to overcome the power of *fortuna* in the circumstances of life, to improve and enrich the commonwealth and to change men for the better. In his introduction to Aristotle, Bruni asserted that “among the moral doctrines through which human life is shaped, those which refer to states and their governments occupy the highest position. For it is the purpose of those doctrines to make possible a happy life for all men . . .”<sup>18</sup> But politics meant *republican* politics, politics pursued by men who stand free from every power but the power of moral and intellectual persuasion and have the liberty of *will* to shape their own destiny and to triumph by means of their own virtue and greatness.

When Bruni thought of republican politics he did not think of institutional arrangements so much as he contemplated grand moral visions. He did not think of government ever being an oppressor of its people except in its *monarchical* form. Republican government was, almost by definition, free from the possibility of corruption and from tyrannising over its people, because republican governments are made only by virtuous men. It therefore requires the right kind of men for republics to thrive or survive. How are such men found? Here Bruni drew upon the resources of his humanist education. Such men are not found so much as taught. They are men who have studied how to be virtuous. They are men who have the *knowledge* of virtuous deeds mentally and spiritually before them. Where do such men find such knowledge? The answer came from Petrarch, who believed that it came from the examples of great men in the classical past.

Petrarch has been acclaimed the father of the new *humanitas*, the first to state unequivocally the belief that

the educated man was only made possible through dialogue with the great masters of the ancient past. “These masters alone had understood the full importance of the soul . . .”<sup>19</sup> That is, they understood human nature, what makes it good and what makes it bad. They possessed a remarkable knowledge of what was needed to cure the bad and produce the good. They were not mere teachers of dead abstractions, like the hated scholastics, but had supposedly gained real insight into human experience.

Humanists such as Petrarch turned to antiquity because they wanted to know about man and believed that the scholastic methodology with its logical and grave discourses about God and the intellect could tell them nothing. They disdained any pre-established intellectual order which imposed *authority* on the mind of man and restricted his ability to study human nature as an ongoing *creative* process. This attack on scholasticism also implicated divine revelation, which presented a definitive interpretation of man, explaining man entirely in terms of his relationship to God. This *theological* interpretation of man did not, so they felt, take sufficient account of *real* human experience. Furthermore, it devalued human experience by always seeing it through the prism of sin and salvation. Worst of all, it kept men in subjection to political tyranny and subordination.

Petrarch was the first to look at human achievements past and present primarily as examples of human exertion and experience which were valuable for their own sake apart from any pre-conceived theological mental order. He believed that man's deeds could be explained on a purely human level, as the product of his passions, ambitions, goals, struggles and accomplishments, without reference to anything beyond man himself. By studying the experiences of men of the past one could learn to know oneself and discover the means to overcome the vicissitudes of fortune in the lives of men and societies. Petrarch came to represent a new brand of education, that acquired by the study of human experience and of other men's explanations of that experience. Armed with the moral lessons of this education, the humanists, following Petrarch, believed it possible to achieve the best civilisation for man.

Bruni, and others after Petrarch, expressed a bold confidence in the will of man to accomplish great things on man's behalf. Real *power* was at man's disposal through his *willingness* to take hold of it. Man can change his circumstances; he can elevate virtue over vice and thereby defeat whatever fortune sends his way. In the face of the threat of tyranny great men can triumph. What is more, they can achieve a type of society in which men are free from this scourge. The means was the moral emulation of the ancients, for as Petrarch in the preface to his *De viris illustribus* so assuredly proclaimed: “. . . through the remembrance of virtue we censure vice.”<sup>20</sup>

18. Quoted in Eugenio Garin, *Italian Humanism: Philosophy and Civic Life in the Renaissance*, trans. by Peter Munz (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1965), p. 41.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

20. Quoted in Donald R. Kelley, ed., *Versions of History from Antiquity to the Enlightenment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 227.



It would be possible to complete our discussion of the civic humanism phase of the Italian Renaissance, with its confident belief that virtue would always triumph over vice and so enable man to realise the good society, were it not necessary to take account of the thought of one of the last of the civic humanists—Lorenzo Valla (1407–1457). Valla introduced an important feature of humanism, one that, despite his belief to the contrary, would simply undermine the foundations upon which the humanists of the time had naively taken their stand.

It has been said that Valla merely represented the belief in the value of this life and all that pertains to it. More especially, he stood for the view that nature was normal, and the corollary that the body was a legitimate means of enjoyment which should be accepted and not suppressed. In fact, he went so far as to maintain that pleasure and the senses should be valued as “the goal and prize of action.”<sup>21</sup> Man should seek what is pleasurable for its own sake and should not hold something that is deemed pleasurable to be either abnormal or shameful; nor should the pleasurable be confined to non-bodily (i.e., *spiritual*) things. More importantly, Valla denied that pleasure of any sort should be viewed as the product of good behaviour or the outcome of rightly applied morals, but should be sought after and accepted simply because *it pleases*.

Valla, of course, hated monasticism and the abstention of the *flesh* which undergirded its outlook. To him, there was no distinction or opposition between flesh or spirit in the mediaeval dualistic sense. There was only one nature, and nothing that was *natural* was antithetical to it in any way. Men should not try to live contrary to nature, but in conformity with it. The pleasures of this life in every bodily sense are entirely appropriate and natural. There is no virtue in the denial of the body, neither does any moral code pre-exist to demand that the body be used or enjoyed in accordance with its dictates. Valla believed that men and women could, without any guilt whatever, pursue the goal of pleasure in accordance with only one rule, the rule of *primal nature*.

A programme of such action would not long remain compatible with the triumph of *virtue* over *vice* as the civic humanist so ardently believed. With no moral code but *primal nature*, who is to say what is virtue or vice? More importantly, a real knowledge of human nature, which Augustine better understood from Scripture, clearly shows that the pursuit of pleasure in whatever guise it appears removes any restraint on human behaviour and ultimately destroys every social order. If men are not restrained by any moral code but the wish to satisfy the senses, they will soon come into conflict with one another. Whenever this occurs, social order must be enforced by those strong enough to impose their will upon others. Indeed, by the mid-fifteenth century little remained of the earlier ideal of civic humanism, for powerful men ruled absolutely. A different type of humanism would emerge.

### 3. *The World of Elitist Values and Renaissance Superstitions*

Near the mid-point of the Quattrocento the idea of *humanitas* underwent a considerable transformation, impelled mainly by the defeat of civic humanism and the end of the republican period. The war between Florence and Milan brought to an end the Florentine experiment with republican political institutions, though not by reason of military defeat. Though Florence was hard pressed, especially when nearby cities with their own special interests allied with the Visconti in concerted attack, the Florentine armies frequently showed superiority over the enemy forces. Nevertheless, the need to provide for military force, its maintenance and deployment, was a major cause of stress in the economy, the social structure and the politics of the State, which led to the functioning end of the republican system.

In order successfully to resist Milanese aggression the Florentines found it necessary increasingly to rely on powerful generals who would be willing, for the right material inducement, to lead their armies in the field and, when it was convenient, arrange truces and broker treaties with the enemy. Such military commanders would demand great leeway in making decisions and acting. The independence required for taking initiative in the field was bound to disturb the always fragile nature of republican institutions and practices, especially if the generalissimo proved successful. On such occasions the people would support him even if it meant a diminution of their liberties. By the 1430s one family, the Medici, whose prominence stemmed originally from banking, had begun to play a leading role in the affairs of the city. The Medici were no lovers of popular government or of municipal assemblies of any sort. To the contrary, they admired the strongmen, especially the Visconti (soon to be replaced by the Sforza), and believed firmly in social order ruled by a single powerful individual. But they did not believe in mere power; at least, they did not wish to appear to do so. Instead, they believed that one should rule, or seem to rule, from an *insight* into the total nature of reality and man. Few could possibly hope to achieve such an objective. The people must be made to rely upon superior men and minds. The Medici came to stand for a kind of enlightened despotism as the only solution for social and political disorder.

Florentine merchants, originally enthusiastic about the war, which they hoped would guarantee their monopolies of trade and commerce, grew weary of the struggle and simply wanted it to end. Their interests in the ideals of republicanism and civic virtue waned. The sacrifices and costs were beginning to prove too much to bear; they wished only to be left free to pursue their commercial and industrial activity and were ready to cede power and control to the Medici. Florence, the bastion of civic humanism, suffered moral exhaustion, and fell into the hands of domineering individuals who, to provide an argument for the legitimacy of their rule, supported the cause of a different type of humanism.

It was no accident that as civic humanism lost ground

21. Garin, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

the moral example of great men faded as the principal humanist educational ideal. In the earlier phase of humanism great interest was shown in the poets and writers of ancient Rome whose works provided the lessons of virtue to be imitated. In this programme, little thought initially was given to the Greeks with the exception, of course, of Aristotle. But this would change. From around the beginning of the fifteenth century, Greek literature began to attract the attention of many humanists who were no longer content to study only what was known of the classical past from Latin sources. There was a growing desire to read more in the ancient Greek philosophers, especially Plato. But knowledge of the Greek language was neither thorough nor widespread and instruction in the language was not readily available. That, too, was soon to change. Excellent teachers became available when Greek scholars from Byzantium, fleeing the Turkish peril, landed in Italy. Among the more famous were Manuel Chrysolaras and Cardinal Bessarion. They also brought with them previously unavailable dialogues by Plato, as well as works by Plotinus, Xenophon, and Isocrates. Much that was previously unknown about Greek ideas suddenly emerged to inspire a great revival of interest in ancient Hellenic culture. By mid-century it dominated the humanist educational programme.

Above all, the Greeks meant philosophy. Or, we might say, metaphysics. Earlier, because of their disgust with the rigours of hair-splitting Scholasticism and its association with Aristotle, the promoters of humanism had shown no patience for philosophy or speculative metaphysical questions. They were eager to replace the Augustinian-mediaeval world-view, but had been unable to find the conceptual basis for doing so. To a great extent they had succeeded with a moral redefinition of human nature. However, they became increasingly aware that in order totally to supplant the mediaeval-Christian outlook they would need more than a new moral vision; they needed a new explanation of the existence and nature of reality, one that placed man at the centre of all things and gave him the stature and power he needed to shape that reality to please himself and to advance the goals of the new humanist ideas of order. They would need a philosophy.

As this growing interest in things Greek opened new doors into ancient Greek thought, out stepped Plato, as we indicated, to show the way that humanism should take. Until the end of the Renaissance, his philosophical ideas would control thinking and discussion of all substantive issues. But while Plato was seized upon to give new direction, he would not stand alone: he would be accompanied by the newly discovered esoteric religious source known as *Hermeticism*. It was by means of this combination of Platonism and Hermeticism that Renaissance humanists would at last discover the philosophy that would help man reclaim his potential divinity and enable him thereby to attain to a new consciousness of his exalted place in the scheme to things.

The man who arose to lead this new humanist assault was Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499), the greatest philosopher

to emerge in the Renaissance. Ficino, born near Florence, was the son of a physician who regularly treated the Medici. He was extremely gifted, and his father expected him to study medicine. But in the course of his studies at the University of Florence, Ficino discovered a passion for philosophy which led him down a different path. At age 23 he began the study of Greek and demonstrated an uncanny ability to master the language. His great desire was to use this skill to study the Greek thinkers. He was deeply attracted to the life of *contemplation*, but not as it was understood by monasticism, which saw it as a means to mortify the flesh. Ficino believed in the *mind* and the purification of the soul as the chief means by which to arrive at that stage where the philosopher is enabled to see into the unity and truth of all things. He was especially attracted to Plato, for Plato did not think in terms of logical abstractions and categories as did Aristotle, but in terms of grand metaphysical visions of reality, in which were revealed the links between all aspects of existence, especially that between man and God. Ficino taught a new ideal of knowing, one that involved a total comprehension of all things, which thereby enabled man to have total control of his surroundings.

This sort of thinking had great merit with Renaissance rulers. Cosimo de Medici, in particular, found in the new Platonism a programme for building a humanist society to be run by elites like himself. These types alone would know how to bend reality to their advantage. Consequently, it was necessary for them to be absolutely in charge, for the people as a whole would have neither the time nor inclination to grasp the nature of reality, and would be incapable of doing so in any event. They would need to rely upon others to guide and order their world for them. Renaissance rulers looked to the new philosophy to produce the justification for the sort of *rulership* that Plato himself had taught—*philosopher kings*. The good society could only be produced when select minds, who possessed greater mental resources as well as a better knowledge of the good of the whole community, were put in charge. Ficino wrote under the rising eminence of Medici who wanted their prominence to be based upon the possession of greater knowledge of the mysteries of reality and thus a better understanding of how society should be ruled for its own good. This is the chief reason why Cosimo commissioned Ficino to translate the whole of the Platonic and Neoplatonic corpus. He was not merely interested in advancing the cause of learning; he wanted to be seen as making available the *word of truth* by which superior men live and with which they establish and maintain order.

What made Plato attractive to Ficino was his notion that reality in its essence is intellectual, a product of Reason or Mind. Plato's concept that transcendent Forms underlay all aspects of Nature supposedly insured the unity of all things and determined everything according to a single rational plan. However, Ficino was influenced in his understanding of Plato by the thought of Plotinus who conceived of the cosmos as a Logos or Soul whose true *spiritual-rational* reality lay hidden behind the appearances

of external nature. The Platonic Forms or Ideas, being Divine in nature, act as the “vivifying forces which unite with their opposite, matter, through the mediation of the rational soul.”<sup>22</sup> In this instance, the rational soul meant the philosopher, who has cultivated the highest part of his soul (intellect) in order that he might grasp the reason of things in their eternal truth. To Ficino reality was primarily Rational, but only to a mind that had awakened itself to see the Form of all things. Although truth abides in all of Nature, it can only become truth for men when they *conjure* it from its external appearance. Man can disclose the Reason of the world because he is essentially a participant, by means of his mind, in the Divine Logos. “Humanity is the centre of the cosmos and the mediator between the eternal and temporal worlds . . .”<sup>23</sup> Man is a microcosm of the Macrocosm, and as such is not only capable of knowing the *rational plan* of the world, but of actually taking part in its life-giving creativity. As Ficino stated in *Five Questions Concerning the Mind*: “by means of mind we shall ourselves have the *power* of creating mind . . .”<sup>24</sup> In other words, man not only observes the order of the cosmos, he actually co-operates in creating and perfecting it. Man is a little god who, through human knowledge and action, shares with the big God the power of fashioning and redeeming the world.

Platonic thought was not the only source of inspiration for Ficino in the construction of his Renaissance philosophy of man and the world. In 1462, after Ficino had already commenced translation work on his first Platonic manuscript from Cosimo, he was interrupted by something that would play an even larger role in his thinking. Cosimo, it seems, had come into possession of a Greek text containing the discourses of what would become known as the *Corpus Hermeticum*. It supposedly recorded the thought of one Hermes Trismegistus who was considered at the time to be the most ancient source of pagan divine knowledge. His ideas were said to parallel closely the thought of Moses and later Plato. But his ideas were older, more ancient, than theirs, and since there were parallels between him and both Moses and Plato, then the latter two must have borrowed notions from Hermes. Here was an ancient wisdom more venerable than anything that anyone then possessed, closer to the truth because closer to the beginning of all things. Ficino must stop work on Plato and translate it!

These Hermetic writings aided Ficino in the formulation a radical new conception of humanity, for one of the central thoughts in these documents maintained that before the Fall “[h]umanity possessed godlike creative powers and was closely akin to the Son of God, the Logos who created the visible world.”<sup>25</sup> *Primal man* shared, in other words, in the nature of divinity and had received great creative powers and knowledge of the whole cosmos by

which he was then able to construct a microcosmic social order. “Man was originally a type of terrestrial god capable of creating an earthly paradise.”<sup>26</sup> Mankind, however, experienced a descent from this exalted status and underwent a corruption into matter and lost connection to his divine beginnings. The purpose of these Hermetic materials was to offer instruction for a select few who sought the way of *regeneration*, which meant the regaining of the lost godlike power and knowledge. Through a radical self-transformation man could recover his lost estate and once again become the “Son of God” with power and knowledge to remake reality into a new paradise. In *Corpus Hermeticum XI* Hermes declares: “unless you make yourself equal to God, you cannot understand God . . . by a bound free yourself from the body; raise yourself above time, become Eternity; then you will understand God. Believe that nothing is impossible for you, think yourself immortal and capable of understanding all, all arts, all sciences, the nature of every living being.”<sup>27</sup> Such sentiments deeply influenced the mind of Ficino, and through him and others penetrated to the core of Renaissance ideals.

This vision of man as recovering his lost creative powers would give birth to the notion that there lies embedded in human nature qualities on the order of magic. Man was a *magus* who could penetrate with his knowledge to the *spiritual* core of all reality and there discover the means to make that same reality bend to his indomitable will. Mankind need not live in passive dependence upon the order of the cosmos. Rather, his spiritual nature, which participates in the Spiritual Nature of the world, gives him the advantage of knowing, or of being able to know, the secrets of existence. Armed with such insight he would then be in position to transform Nature to suit his own interests. Indeed, to have this knowledge and not to use it to transform and recreate social utopia would almost be a dereliction of duty. Man must extend his powers and apply his knowledge, otherwise he lives at the mercy of his circumstances and does not control his fate. It would be unworthy of so *divine* a being as man not to be “satisfied until he is complete master of his destiny with no dependency on any other being.”<sup>28</sup>

For Ficino this combination of Platonism and Hermeticism provided the foundation of a new religion, a new faith. He believed passionately that reality is Reason and Reason is reality, and that man’s mind is of a piece with this reality and therefore inclines towards it with a natural affinity. We may be weighed down by matter and body, but the intellect has had placed within it the power

22. Mebane, *op. cit.*, p. 22

23. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

24. Quoted in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, ed. by Ernst Cassirer, et al., (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1948), p. 194 (emphasis mine).

25. Mebane, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

26. McKnight, *Sacralizing the Secular*, pp. 41ff.

27. *Hermetica: The Ancient Greek and Latin Writings Which Contain Religious or Philosophic Teachings Ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus*, Trans. & Ed. Walter Scott (Boston: Shambhala, 1993), p. 221. I, however, have used the translation as provided in Frances Yates, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

28. McKnight, *Sacralizing the Secular*, p. 56, “. . . the perfection of one’s own knowledge brought with it the power, as well as responsibility, to transform the outside world.” Mebane, *Renaissance Magic*, p. 29.



to move towards the infinite as towards a familiar object. Reality is transparent to the searching gaze of the intellect in its striving for the truth and of the will in its striving for the good. Though truth and goodness may appear hidden to the mass of the people burdened with matter and sense, and satisfied with particular transient objects, the mind of the philosopher, because he sees clearly, converses only with the universal and everlasting reason of things. He alone ascends the steep slopes to the realm of God and returns with God's thoughts as his tools for the transformation of the world.

At this juncture the humanist agenda looks quite like some mystical experience. And knowledge appeared to be similar to magic, for it lacked the later scientific and rigorous technological overtones that would give the new humanist *religion* a more rationally mundane character. But a decisive shift had occurred. Ficino had introduced a new vision of man as a new god able to create a world by means of a regenerated intellectual power. The world is no longer merely a given fact, it is now a product of human creative action. "In mathematics, music, and architecture, in exploring the inner workings of nature, and in poetry and oratory we reveal our participation in the God-head."<sup>29</sup> More importantly, man has the ability to imitate the heavenly realm in his creation of civil order and human government. Little wonder that this brand of humanism appealed to rulers and elites. This was no mediaeval view; we are on the doorstep of the modern age.

Next to Ficino stood Pico della Mirandola to give additional support to this new humanist outlook. Pico, too, was fascinated with the notion that man was God-like in nature and capable of learning the total secrets of nature in order to use that knowledge to construct human society. Pico was, perhaps, less interested in the nature of reality than he was in redefining human nature in keeping with the new exalted status that Renaissance philosophers attributed to him. The phrase *the dignity of man* has perhaps come to describe the programme of the Renaissance more than that of any other. While the phrase was first used in the fourteenth century by Giannozzo Manetti, it was Pico who made it famous as an epitaph of the Renaissance by the title of his most famous work, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*. What Pico desired to convey in that book was that, if man was truly God-like, then he is the cause of his own nature and is free to work his own will. Not only does he create the external conditions of his existence, but he creates his own self in the same act. Man is not a given, pre-determined nature; he does not receive his nature from an external source, but he alone produces what he is, and he is free to remake himself without constraint or limitation. In Pico's fictional account of the origin of man we read these oft-repeated words: "Neither a fixed abode nor a form that is thine alone nor any function peculiar to thyself have we given thee, Adam, to the end that according to thy longing and according to

thy judgment thou mayest have and possess what abode, what form, and what functions thou thyself shalt desire . . . Thou, constrained by no limits, in accordance with thine own free will, in whose hand We have placed thee, shalt ordain for thyself the limits of thy nature."<sup>30</sup>

Elsewhere Pico made his view even more clear: "Man alone has no nature which determines him and has no essence to determine his behaviour. Man creates himself by his own deeds and thus he is father of himself. The only condition he is subject to is the condition that there is no condition, i.e., liberty. The compulsion he is subject to is the compulsion to be free and the compulsion to choose his own destiny, to build the altar of his own fame with his own hands or to forge his own chains and convict himself."<sup>31</sup>

Of course, like Ficino, Pico never imagined that just any man was so freely in charge of his own destiny. He, too, believed that only men who have learned the secrets of philosophy, who have cleansed their souls of ignorance and vice, and who have become illuminated by the bright light of reason are then prepared to "ordain" for themselves the limits of their own nature. Those others who remained steeped in darkness and the realm of the senses are fit only to be led by the wisdom of the philosopher. He who has been initiated into the Palladian order of the mind and well taught therein is best equipped to descend to earth, there to build whatever world he would choose for us to live in.

It has been said that Pico, like Renaissance men in general, simply desired the liberation of man from every concept of external compulsion, authority, or limitation. He wanted nothing but a radical freedom for man. He wanted no pre-defined order such as had been prescribed in the Augustinian-mediaeval view. In this respect, he viewed man as *Fallen* only if he failed to live in accordance with his own original calling to ordain his own limitations or choose his own destiny. At the same time, it was possible for man to regain his original divine status by a self-will, by choosing to take the *higher* pathway of philosophy. Philosophy was truth wherever it was to be found—in Plato, in Moses, in Jesus, in Hermes Trismegistus, in the Jewish Cabbala. In the end, it was entirely up to man, but Pico was not in doubt that man would choose to follow *holy philosophy* if and when great minds, like himself, showed the way and promised the rewards.

The Renaissance was clearly a watershed moment in Western culture and civilisation. It represented a new confidence in man and the belief that man was free to determine his place in the universe and that he possessed an incomparable power for self-transformation. Man was no mere creature, but he was God-like; and being God-like he did not go through life passive and resigned to his circumstances. He rose up and confronted them;

30. Pico, *On the Dignity of Man*, quoted in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, ed. by Ernst Cassirer, et. al., pp. 224, 225.

31. *On the Dignity of Man*, quoted in Garin, *Italian Humanism*, p. 105.

29. Mebane, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

he grasped the truths of reality and thereby changed his circumstances to meet with his satisfaction. The goal of man's life was not some higher spiritual plane, some angelic non-bodily existence, but it was to create paradise here and now. Man as a sharer in the Divine Nature could not rise any higher than he already is. While this outlook

remained somewhat fuzzy and mysterious in the time of the early to mid-Renaissance, by the late Renaissance man's increasing fascination with mathematics and science would eventually provide him with the means to cast off what was left of his mediaeval and Augustinian heritage. C&S

# THE QUEST FOR ATONEMENT\*

by *Ruben Alvarado*

MALTHUS recognised the infernal influence set into motion by false charity. Chalmers recognised the falsehood of coercive charity, and the religious root of the social question. Yet neither of these divines penetrated to the core issue, which at bottom explains the anti-capitalist mentality<sup>1</sup> and the drive to expand government at the expense of the private sector. The underlying motivation is religious, and must be understood theologically.

Recall the discussion above, concerning the original human condition as being one of monolithic, mutually antagonistic groups (p. 53). Hayek also refers to this condition, but he does so from his evolutionary perspective, viewing purpose-oriented, group-oriented tribalism as mankind's original condition, with instincts to match, the remains of which linger in modern man as a subliminal consciousness, capable of rising to the surface when triggered or appealed to. His is a useful heuristic approach, even if his evolutionary methodology is not shared.<sup>2</sup>

Monolithic group life is superseded in the transition to a pluralistic order, one based in obedience to rules rather than commands—the civil condition. Such was not accomplished without trouble, as Hayek makes clear: “The rise of the ideal of impersonal justice based on formal rules has been achieved in a continuous struggle against those feelings of personal loyalty which provide the basis of the tribal society but which in the Great Society must not be allowed to influence the use of the coercive powers of government.” The demotion of purpose and

the supersession of the friend-foe relation enabled the establishment of a common life. “The gradual extension of a common order of peace from the small group to ever larger communities has involved constant clashes between the demands of sectional justice based on common visible purposes and the requirements of a universal justice equally applicable to the stranger and to the member of the group.”<sup>3</sup>

The emotivism characteristic of contemporary politics has its roots in this existential condition. The transition from primitivism to civilisation has left an original attachment to the primitive condition, a deep-seated well of emotion, based on a restricted, distributionist conception of justice. “This has caused a constant conflict between emotions deeply ingrained in human nature through millennia of tribal existence and the demands of abstract principles whose significance nobody fully grasped. Human emotions are attached to concrete objects, and the emotions of justice in particular are still very much connected with the visible needs of the group to which each person belongs.” This mentality is incompatible with the universal, common-law order, the superiority, indeed necessity, of which is not readily apparent. “Only a mental reconstruction of the overall order of the Great Society enables us to comprehend that the deliberate aim at concrete common purposes, which to most people still appears as more meritorious and superior to blind obedience to abstract rules, would destroy that larger order in which all human beings count alike.” Peace is only possible when obligatory purpose is relegated to the level of voluntary participation. “It is only by extending the rules of just conduct to the relations with all other men, and at the same time depriving of their obligatory character those rules which cannot be universally applied, that we can approach a universal order of peace which

\* This essay is an excerpt from Ruben Alvarado's new book *Common-Law and Natural Rights: The Question of Conservative Foundations* (Aalten, Netherlands: WordBridge Publishing, 2009), pp. 109–123. For more information see the advertisement on p. 21 below.

1. Ludwig von Mises, *The Anti-Capitalistic Mentality* (Grove City, PA: Libertarian Press, 1972 [1956]).

2. *Law, Legislation, and Liberty*, Vol. 2: *The Mirage of Social Justice*, ch. 11, “The Discipline of Abstract Rules and the Emotions of the Tribal Society.”

3. *Ibid.*, p. 143.



might integrate all mankind into a single society.” General rules, not purposive direction, are what integrate citizens into a common social order.<sup>4</sup>

What, then, is it about the civil condition that inspires so much resistance? For it cannot be denied that such resistance seems to multiply under conditions of obvious prosperity and progress. Is it simply a yearning for all-embracing, all-providing community that underlies this dissatisfaction?

There are various explanations to be given. One of the most convincing is provided by Helmut Schoeck in his important book, *Envy: A Theory of Social Behaviour*.<sup>5</sup> Schoeck traces the influence of envy in human society, from primitive cultures to modern democracies. He finds in envy a universal phenomenon of decisive influence in group behaviour and in politics. It is a major reason that backward economies cannot advance; for individual effort yielding prosperity is viewed as intrinsically unjust and a violation of a preordained order. Conversely, economic progress has been accomplished in no small degree through the conquest of envy. “Most of the achievements which distinguish members of modern, highly developed and diversified societies from members of primitive societies—the development of civilization, in short—are the result of innumerable defeats inflicted on envy . . . and what Marxists have called the opiate of religion, the ability to provide hope and happiness for believers in widely differing material circumstances, is nothing more than the provision of ideas which liberate the envious person from envy, the person envied from his sense of guilt and his fear of the envious.”<sup>6</sup>

What Schoeck has uncovered here is the fundamental importance of the human heart to the social order. Envy is not a mere emotion, but a power capable of breaking the social order, or keeping it from advancing. But what he does not sufficiently appreciate is that the basis of envy is guilt.

Schoeck sees in guilt a *response* of the *envied* person, of the successful and prosperous, to being envied. “The condition of anxiety, the feeling of guilt, the fear of a retributive catastrophe (Polycrates’ ring)—all this is a combination of superstition and empirically verifiable (i.e. realistic) anxiety about another person’s—usually a neighbour’s—envy.”<sup>7</sup> In Western society, Christianity has overcome this penchant. “As long as the Christian (or at least the man still partially imbued with Christian culture) in his attitude to his fellow men still intuitively models his conduct on a supernatural exemplar, the potential innovator’s neighbour, fellow villager or colleague will, in ideal circumstances (reality being often in default), represent less of an inhibition or threat than would have been the case in the pre- or non-Christian world.”<sup>8</sup> And the influence of Christianity in this has lasted even into the age of secularism: “agnostic and atheistic societies, as well as states and regimes, have profited by the opportunity

for individual achievement made possible by Christianity, because they have often developed a system of incentives which rewards the individual extravagantly but is tolerable to him only because he feels in some measure secure against the envy of his companions—thanks to the persistence, albeit in diluted form, of Christian values.”<sup>9</sup>

But guilt is more than just a response to envy. Rather, it can also accompany envy, or rather, envy can accompany guilt; guilt, then, gives rise to envy. The guilty person is also the person who owes something to someone else, and the very fact of being obligated generates the envy which then fastens onto any object of supposedly better fortune.

We have arrived at a very important point in the discussion: the enmity engendered in the civil condition is brought about by the obligation upon which the civil condition is based. Obligation is guilt. Guilt is not the guilt of fault only, but the guilt of debt. It is no coincidence that Germanic languages, such as German and Dutch, use the same word, *schuld*, for guilt and for debt.<sup>10</sup> At bottom, they both refer to something owed, something outstanding which has to be rectified. The civil condition is based on the expansion of this form of obligation. The jural relations of private law revolve around obligation. Obligation is what enables the pluralist, associationalist social order to arise. It is a major reason for communication.

A huge literature has been engendered over the years highlighting the connection between the capitalist order on the one hand and alienation, anomie, all manner of guilt—class guilt, race guilt, Third-World guilt—on the other. The two seem to go together. There never seems to be a reconciliation between the achievements of an advancing society, on the one hand, and its aspirations, on the other. And that not least because the aspirations may be contradictory: for further advance and progress, on the one hand, and for a return to a simpler age, on the other.

The socialist psychologist Erich Fromm is one of the many to have given eloquent expression to these contradictions. His essay, “The Present Human Condition,”<sup>11</sup> provides a succinct example, striking in its ability to hit the mark and yet miss it at the same time. “What kind of man, then, does our society need in order to function smoothly? It needs men who co-operate easily in large groups, who want to consume more and more, and whose tastes are standardized and can be easily influenced and anticipated. It needs men who feel free and independent, not subject to any authority or principle or conscience, yet are willing to be commanded, to do what is expected, to fit into the social machine without friction; men who can be guided without force, led without leaders, be prompted without an aim, except the aim to be on the move, to function, to

9. *Ibid.*

10. Similarly, New Testament Greek uses the same root word for sins, offences, debts, and guilt: *ὀφείλω*; see, e.g., Matthew 6:12.

11. In *The Dogma of Christ and Other Essays on Religion, Psychology and Culture* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963).

4. *Ibid.*, p. 143f.

5. London: Secker and Warburg, 1966.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 126.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 127.

go ahead.” Fromm has accurately captured contemporary democratic man, suffused with the conviction that he is his own man and the master of his own destiny, all the while being led by the nose by powers of which he is not entirely aware. But then comes the obligatory theme of alienation: “This kind of man, modern industrialism has succeeded in producing; he is the automaton, the alienated man. He is alienated, in the sense that his actions and his own forces have become estranged from him; they stand above him and against him, and rule him rather than being ruled by him. His life forces have been transformed into things and institutions; and these things and institutions have become idols. They are experienced not as the result of man’s own efforts but as something apart from him, which he worships and to which he submits.”<sup>12</sup>

Fromm here hits upon the same theme that Hayek does, to wit, that pluralistic, multi-associational, multi-goal-oriented civil society removes an immediate ultimacy from the individual’s activity so that in his activity he may lose touch with a sense of purpose. But this, in Hayek’s view, is not anything to regret, but rather to embrace; for it is the precondition of freedom. “While in the tribal society the condition of internal peace is the devotion of all members to some common visible purposes, and therefore to the will of somebody who can decide what at any moment these purposes are to be and how they are to be achieved, the Open Society of free men becomes possible only when the individuals are constrained only to obey the abstract rules that demarcate the domain of the means that each is allowed to use for his purposes.”<sup>13</sup> As Oakeshott emphasises, an overall purpose is eschewed; there is only agreement to obey rules.<sup>14</sup>

Civil society “requir[es] a predominance of abstract rational principles over those emotions that are evoked by the particular and the concrete, or the predominance of conclusions derived from abstract rules, whose significance was little understood, over the spontaneous response to the perception of concrete effects which touched the lives and conditions of those familiar to us.” Associational life is transformed; its purposiveness is dethroned from

ultimacy to multiplicity, and so, therefore, is its authority. Morality becomes distinct from law. “Since in a society of free men the membership in such special groups will be voluntary, there must also be no power of enforcing the rules of such groups. It is in such a free society that a clear distinction between the moral rules which are not enforced and the rules of law which are enforced becomes so important. If the smaller groups are to be integrated into the more comprehensive order of society at large, it must be through the free movement of individuals between groups into which they may be accepted if they submit to their rules.”<sup>15</sup>

It is, thus, a lack of maturity and an inability fully to accept the prerequisites of civil society that leads to alienation, not any intrinsic shortcoming of civil society itself. “The revolt against the abstractness of the rules we are required to obey in the Great Society [i.e. civil society], and the predilection for the concrete which we feel to be human, are thus merely a sign that intellectually and morally we have not yet fully matured to the needs of the impersonal comprehensive order of mankind.”<sup>16</sup>

In his discussion, Fromm then makes the crucial observation that modern man turns to the State to compensate for the lack of purpose and community he perceives in civil society. “Man’s social feelings are projected into the state. As a citizen he is willing even to give his life for his fellow men; as a *private* individual he is governed by egotistical concern with himself. Because he has made the state the embodiment of his own social feelings, he worships it and its symbols. He projects his sense of power, wisdom, and courage into his leaders, and he worships these leaders as his idols.”<sup>17</sup>

And this transference of religious devotion to the State comes in tandem with a relaxation of the Christianity which helped give birth to the Western order of liberty. “We claim that we pursue the aims of the Judaeo-Christian tradition: the love of God and of our neighbour. We are even told that we are going through a period of a promising religious renaissance. Nothing could be further from the truth. We use symbols belonging to a genuinely religious tradition and transform them into formulas serving the purpose of alienated man. Religion has become an empty shell; it has been transformed into a self-help device for increasing one’s own powers for success. God becomes a partner in business. *The Power of Positive Thinking* is the successor of *How to Win Friends and Influence People*.”<sup>18</sup>

The State, then, is the new idol. It is the vehicle to overcome the inherent lack of community in civil society. But behind this lack of community lurks the ever-present mutual commitment and obligation of which civil society is composed. These come to be seen as obstacles, hindrances, obstructions to true community. Hence, behind the perceived lack of community is the revolt against obligation. And underlying this revolt is man’s existential condition as a sinful creature, guilty before God and alienated from

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 97f.

13. Hayek, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

14. “Thus, *respublica* [i.e. ‘republic’] does not define or even describe a common substantive purpose, interest, or ‘good’. It cannot itself be an object of want, although where it has to be defended against dissolution or destruction it may temporarily and equivocally become an agreed common want, as mere ‘survival’ may become a want but only in circumstances of threatened extinction. It is not a suppositious sum of all approved purposes, a purpose which remains when all competing purposes have cancelled one another, or one which represents a consensus or harmony of purposes from which discordant purposes have been excluded, or one upon which all or a majority of associates are agreed, or any other such imagined, wished-for and sought-after substantive condition of things. Nor is it a ‘policy’ composed of ‘managerial’ decisions and constituting a strategy or a tactic in terms of which a common purpose might be contingently pursued. It is not a schedule of awards of advantage or disadvantage to interests or a scheme for the distribution of the burdens of being associated. On the contrary, it is a manifold of rules and rule-like prescriptions to be subscribed to in all the enterprises and adventures in which the self-chosen satisfactions of agents may be sought.” Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, pp. 147f.

15. Hayek, *op. cit.*, pp. 148f.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 149.

17. Fromm, *The Dogma of Christ*, p. 98.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

19. See Stahl’s discussion of justice and the atonement in §§56–59,

him, and thus in eternal debt to him. This ultimate, cosmic alienation and guilt is what all other obligation points to, and reminds of. Obligation is the human condition; it is the result of the primordial revolt; and it is a standing affront to rebellious man.

This existential condition of man was dealt with conclusively by Western Christianity. What sets Western Christianity apart—and which, in fact, enabled the growth of the common-law social orders of Western civilisation—is judicial theology. Such a theology, already anticipated by Augustine, was given explicit, albeit provisional, shape by Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury.<sup>19</sup> In his dialogue *Cur Deus Homo*, “Why God Became Man,” Anselm laid out the structure of justice in such a way as to explain the necessity of obligation and the achievement of its ultimate extinguishment.

In Christ, God became man. He did so in order to satisfy, through his atoning work on the cross, the claim of justice, by paying for man’s sins; and so he restored community, by extending that payment to man so as to redeem him to relationship with the Father.

This atonement therefore is crucial not simply to the salvation of one’s soul, but to the very existence of civil society. It is what enabled the transition to a full-fledged civil society. This atonement separates guilt and debt by separating atonement from the administration of justice. Atonement is achieved once and for all through the work of Christ on the cross; the Church administers the sacrament of Holy Supper as the celebration of that work. Thus atonement is removed from the repertoire of the organised political society, leaving the administration of justice and the capacity to enforce the regime of private law in the hands of the State. And this liberation, brought about by the Augustinian separation of Church and State, allowed the civilisation of capitalism to be engendered.

The “guilt” that capitalism engenders, debt, fuels the drive for atonement which underlies the religious fanaticism all civilisations have exemplified. For consider that it was the most capitalistic societies of the ancient world, the Phoenician and Carthaginian, which also exhibited the most blatant and revolting forms of the quest for atonement: child sacrifice. The capacity to sustain capitalism can only be found in the ability to separate atonement from justice, guilt from debt. That is why capitalism is the product of the Augustinian West. And that is why it cannot be sustained if that civilisation is allowed to be destroyed by multiculturalism, relativism, and a false doctrine of the neutrality of the State. For the “neutral” State, by abandoning the Augustinian distinctive, dismantles the separation of atonement and justice, and opens the door to the return of the politics of envy.

Atonement, then, made possible the administration of justice by the State, whereby the State restricts its

activity primarily to the administration of justice. The Church enabled it to do so, for by establishing its ministry of the restoration of community in the midst of the social order, the Church called upon the State to leave off the task of coerced community to assume its proper task as “the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil” (Rom. 13:4).

To some this may seem a grave overstatement. Surely the state can be called upon to administer justice in this manner without any appeal to the atoning work of Christ—is this not the conviction of all who call for the “wall of separation” between church and state, who place their hope in the promise of the *neutral State*?

But this is precisely what is wrong with such neutral theories of the State, and the role of religion in society. *Justice cannot be achieved until atonement is achieved*: ancient societies perceived this, and made sacrifice—plant, animal, even human—an integral part of their public life. Modern man thinks he has escaped this necessity, relegating religion to the private sphere, secularising the public square. This is pure self-deception.

Ancient societies instituted the most grotesque rituals—fertility rites, bloodstained child immolations, etc.—so as to lay the basis for common human life.<sup>20</sup> But Christianity realised the substance of what other human societies perversely pursued. For Christ died on the cross, in a *public* execution, “that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not” as the high priest Caiaphas unwittingly prophesied (Jn 11:51), providing a full, common, public atonement (the crucifixion a “public display” of Christ’s triumph: Col. 2:15). In this, the quest for perfect justice is exposed as another manifestation of the attempt to “immanentise the eschaton,” to use Voegelin’s phrase, to realise the Day of Judgement here on earth by human hands. For Christ, “Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things” (Acts 3:21), has removed that necessity, placing it in heaven where it belongs, until that time.

The atonement realised through Christ on the cross is *satisfactio*, the perfect payment for the sins committed by man. Yet even more than this, it is the payment, beyond sins, of sin. Sin is the mysterious power which has man in its grip and which makes it impossible for him to please God. Sins had to be paid for, but the power of sin had also to be broken. This is the full meaning of atonement. Such a cosmic, trans-historical deed transcends every effort to punish sin and eradicate guilt in this world. It also obviates the need to do so. Henceforth, the State need no basis in an atonement of its own making; it can rest upon the atonement attained outside of it. This is what frees the State to pursue justice, while also restricting it to this pursuit.

book *Der Erschaffung der Götter: Das Opfer als Ursprung der Religion* [The Creation of the Gods: Sacrifice as the Origin of Religion] (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1997). Although his conclusions are to this author unacceptable, his argument, that sacrifice laid the foundations for civilisation, is well-taken.

Volume II, Book I of his *Philosophy of Law*, a translation of which is scheduled for publication in 2010. Stahl takes Anselm’s discussion of the atonement forward; the following discussion is based on his seminal statement.

20. Heinsohn has brought this reality to light in his enlightening

Universal atonement is administered to the world through the Church's ministry of mercy, exercised firstly through the ministry of Word and Sacrament. Through this ministry the Church makes felt its jurisdiction; and in so doing it makes room for the jurisdiction of the State, and for the jurisdictions of a pluralistic social order. "And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Micah 4:2). So the common law is rooted in common atonement, resulting in the positive legal orders of the community of free nations.

Where this atonement is not acknowledged, justice itself merges into atonement and cannot be distinguished from it. That is when atonement is *sought* through the administration of justice, rather than being received. Justice rests on atonement and cannot exist apart from it. Justice receives its full depth and breadth in human life when it flows from mercy as expressed in the atonement, not when it is severed therefrom, for then commences the ultimate confusion of justice and mercy, of law and grace, wherein the one consumes the other. It matters not which consumes which, the end result is the same.

The modern political apostasy began with the French Revolution—"Ni Dieu ni maître"<sup>†</sup>—which, interestingly enough, chronologically accompanied the rise of the modern Welfare State. Both were the fruit of the new philosophy of man whereby the individual becomes the

source of law, the institutions of civil society the adventurous outworking, a shell to be shucked off at will. The result is the entitlement mentality, against which Thomas Chalmers expostulated with true righteous anger. It is also the warped mentality which has given us political correctness—the religious zeal to silence all conflicting opinions in the name of freedom of expression. The zeal of the Left can only be seen against the background of the loss of religion in public life; for its zeal is the zeal of the religious fanatic, aiming through the vehicle of the State and politics to achieve perfect justice and full atonement.

How else is one to explain the consuming desire to silence opposition and in fact eliminate it, which has characterised all collectivist movements? The National Socialists under Adolph Hitler certainly were not the only ones to practice this; in fact, in Germany they managed to triumph over socialists and communists pursuing equally vile ends through equally vile practices; it was merely a form of survival of the collectivist fittest. Josef Stalin, Mao Tse Tung, Fidel Castro, Saddam Hussein—all pursuing total power by root-and-branch elimination of the opposition, all equally feted by the Left. For it is power they are after, power which is required by their religion, a religion which requires total sacrifice, through which alone the coveted atonement can be attained.

This power, and this elimination of obligation, can only be achieved by eliminating the pluralist order of mutual obligation as contained in the jural relations of private law. All must be subsumed into a single, all-embracing community, eliminating all vestiges of obligation, debt, guilt—where all is one and one is all. And freedom will be dead. C&S

<sup>†</sup>Ed.—"No God, no master."

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

By Robin Phillips

81 pages, Paperback • ISBN: 978-1-4357-4493-6

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Available through [www.lulu.com/en/buy/](http://www.lulu.com/en/buy/)

Starting at the time of the Enlightenment and working through to the present day, the author of *The Decent Drapery of Life* 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.



# *Common Law & Natural Rights*

## *The Question of Conservative Foundations*

BY RUBEN ALVARADO

Aalten, Netherlands: WordBridge Publishing, 160 pages including bibliography

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The natural rights philosophy currently holds pride of place as the basis for conservatism. This book argues for an alternative—common law—and does so by exposing the predicament into which the natural-rights philosophy has put us. America's constitutional foundations are examined in terms of the natural rights philosophy in which they were framed, and the inability to restrain government is discovered to be the result. The separation of powers was the fruit of natural-rights philosophy, and has been found wanting. What is needed is a restoration of a truly independent legal order and judiciary, rooted in the common law. The separation of powers has given us a nominal, not a real, independent judiciary.

Some of the issues addressed in *Common Law & Natural Rights*:

- \* Russell Kirk's vision of conservatism and how it differs from that of many modern conservatives
- \* Mark Levin's book, *Liberty and Tyranny*, and how it exemplifies some of conservatism's shortcomings
- \* Friedrich Hayek's neglected, masterful critique of contemporary constitutionalism, including the US Constitution
- \* Friedrich Julius Stahl's anticipation of Hayek's argument
- \* Charles Howard McIlwain's thematic distinction between *gubernaculum* and *jurisdictio* brought to bear
- \* Gottfried Dietze's forgotten critique of overbearing democracy
- \* Michael Oakshott's analysis of the civil condition
- \* Herman Dooyeweerd's idea of common law as the product of Rome
- \* the parallel between Roman and English law
- \* Alan Macfarlane's origins of English individualism in context
- \* adjudication versus legislation as the source of law
- \* the value and failure of American judicial review
- \* credit and debt as the primary factors in law and economics
- \* the credit crisis as the latest example of egregious government intervention
- \* the religious root of the welfare state
- \* the religious root of the anti-capitalist mentality
- \* the role of atonement as the basis of the state and capitalism
- \* Thomas Chalmers on the entitlement mentality
- \* Edmund Burke on natural rights

*Common Law & Natural Rights* takes us beyond a simple affirmation of the virtues of self-reliance and the limited state, to the philosophical foundations upon which they must be grounded, so as to make them possible and defensible. It grounds conservatism in the historical reality of received institutions, where conservatism belongs, while maintaining a strong connection to higher law, to which conservatism must always point. Well-intentioned defenders of natural rights owe it to themselves to apprise themselves of this argument.



# PIERRE VIRET AND A REASONABLE ECONOMY<sup>1</sup>

by Jean-Marc Berthoud

## INTRODUCTION

It is my pleasure to dedicate this brief evocation of the French Swiss Reformer, Pierre Viret, (Orbe/Vaud 1511–Nérac/Navarre 1571) to the eminent French Protestant historian, well known to the city of Séville, Pierre Chaunu, who with his wife Huguette, spent many years in your city engaged in pioneering research for his massive doctoral thesis, *Séville and the Atlantic, 1504–1650*.<sup>2</sup> Not only did he bring the techniques of the school of the *Annales* to the history of Spain's American Empire, but he did more. His research constituted a decisive step in the breaking down of the notorious "Black Legend" which has done so much to render Spanish culture and history incomprehensible to the Reformed civilisation of Northern Europe and North America.<sup>3</sup>

Nowhere has this cultural disinformation been so marked as in the history of the Spanish Reformation. Not only did the Inquisition do its utmost to wipe out the faintest traces of the great movement of a return to the Bible which marked so strongly the Renaissance of ancient learning in the Spain of the first half of the Sixteenth Century, but it effaced from the historical memory of our European Reformed Tradition most traces of this great movement of the Spirit of God in your country.

Who, today, knows Pierre Viret? Even in Lausanne, in his own country and where he exercised a very fruitful ministry for over twenty years, he is largely forgotten.

### 1. *Brief life of Pierre Viret*

Pierre Viret was born in 1511 in the ancient Roman and Burgundian town of Orbe at the foot of the Jura

1. Conference given for I Congreso Internacional. *Reforma Protestante y Libertades en Europa*, Facultad de Comunicación, Universidad de Sevilla on the 31st March 2009, day of the opening of the G20 Conference in London on the World Financial and Economic Crisis.

2. Pierre et Huguette Chaunu, *Séville et l'Atlantique 1504–1650*, Armand Colin-Sevren, Paris, 1955–1959, 8 volumes.

3. See Philip Wayne Powell, *Tree of Hate: Propaganda and Prejudices Affecting United States Relations with the Hispanic World* (Ross House Books, Vallecito, 1985).

mountains in what is today the canton of Vaud in French-speaking Switzerland. His parents were pious Roman Catholics and after attending the parochial school of his home town, they sent him to Paris in 1527, at the age of sixteen, to further his higher education with a view to his entering the priesthood. There he followed the strenuous academic discipline of Montaigu College, famous for such students as John Calvin and Ignatius of Loyola.

It was in this context of arduous study, lit up by the bonfires in which the first French martyrs of the Reformation were burnt at the stake, that Viret came to see the deadly errors of that Roman religion in which he had been brought up and his need for a personal Saviour to deliver him from that curse a holy God laid justly on his sins.

Persecution led Viret, seeking refuge, back to his native Orbe. And it was here that he was confronted by his vocation. For in the spring of 1531 Guillaume Farel, that intrepid preacher of the Gospel and political agent of the newly reformed authorities of the Berne Republic, called Viret (as he was to do with Calvin a few years later) out of the tranquility of his studies into the battlefield of the reformation of the Church and the implantation in his country of God's mighty Kingdom. At the age of twenty Viret thus became the pastor of the small evangelical congregation of Orbe where he had the privilege of seeing his parents' conversion under his preaching of the Word of God. The following years saw him engaged in a growing itinerant ministry all over French-speaking Switzerland. In 1534, two years before Calvin's dramatic call, we find Viret at Farel's side breaking the ground for the free entrance of the Gospel in the city of Geneva. In 1536 the canton of Vaud was overrun by the Bernese army, ostensibly at war to defend Geneva from the threats of the Counts of Savoy, but effectively working for the aggrandisement of Bernese power. But these temporal ambitions, in God's merciful hand, opened up the whole region to the preaching of the Gospel. After the famous *Dispute de Lausanne* in October of the same year, a public disputation where Viret bore the brunt of the debate, the young pastor, now aged 25, became the minister of the Cathedral Church. Apart from a brief period (1541–1542)

where he assisted Calvin on his return to Geneva after his exile in Strasbourg, the twenty-three years between 1536 and 1559 saw Viret as the principal minister of the Reformed Church of the Vaud canton where he exercised the ministry of God's Word under the heavy hand of the Bernese political and ecclesiastical power.

Between 1559 and 1561 Viret exercised a much appreciated ministry in Geneva at the side of his great friend Calvin, but his failing health forced him to seek a milder climate in the south of France. His health partly restored he was instrumental in bringing about a remarkable revival, first in Montpellier and Nîmes, then in the second city of the realm, Lyon. There he exercised a highly blessed ministry during the early years of the civil wars, ending a very fruitful and eventful life as Chief Pastor and Academic Superintendent of the Reformed Church of the Kingdom of Navarre, where he died at the end of March or the beginning of April 1571 at the age of sixty and was buried in Nérac. The Queen of Navarre, Jeanne d'Albret, wrote of his death: "Amongst the great losses I have suffered during and since the last wars, I count the most grievous to be that of Monsieur Pierre Viret, whom God has now taken to Himself."

## 2. *Pierre Viret's place in the Reformation*

Now Pierre Viret, Calvin's most intimate friend known under the name of *the angel of the reformation*, was by no means the minor or insignificant figure which most Reformed histories of the Reformation lead us to imagine. He had, in 1537, founded in Lausanne the first Reformed Academy. He gave much of his time to the teaching of theology to students who flocked there from every corner of Europe. This Lausanne Academy (and not the Genevan, as is too often thought) became the model of all future Reformed Academies. By the time of the expulsion of Viret in 1559 the Academy had up to a thousand theological students on its roll.

But this mild and gentle Christian, a man of the highest spiritual mettle, was also one of the great preachers of the Reformation. Of Calvin, Bèze wrote, "none have taught with greater authority"; of Farel, "none thundered more mightily"; but of Viret he said, "none has a more winsome charm when he speaks."<sup>4</sup>

But in addition to exercising such great gifts Viret was in his own right a prolific writer, author of over forty books, some up to a thousand pages in length. The immense majority of his books were written in French, in a familiar style and in the popular form of dialogues between clearly differentiated and attractive personages designed to reach a public privileged with little formal instruction. But if the style is pleasant, the matter is profound, the knowledge of the Bible impeccable and the scholarship immense. The pattern of his dialogues: affirmations, objections, refutations, and finally the clear, authoritative and balanced doctrinal synthesis, harks clearly back, in

a popular form but without the philosophical jargon, to the scholastic method of formal discussion.

Pierre Viret was undoubtedly (with Martin Luther) one of the finest popularisers of the Christian faith in the sixteenth century. But his deep concern for the spiritual needs of the common people never led him (as is all too common today) to debase the content of his theological teaching. If his good friend, John Calvin, was the consummate dogmatician and the prince of exegetes, Pierre Viret must be considered as the finest ethicist and the most acute apologist of the sixteenth century. His monumental *Instruction chrétienne en la doctrine de la Loy et de l'Évangile*, "Christian Instruction in the Doctrine of the Law and the Gospel and in true Christian Philosophy and Theology, both Natural and Supernatural" is without doubt his major theological work and can well bear comparison, in its own domain, with Calvin's *Institutes*.

## 3. *Viret, the economic thinker*

In this all too brief appreciation of one of the great figures in the history of the Church (often totally unknown to those who rightly consider themselves the heirs of the Reformation) I would now like to show how Pierre Viret's great respect for God's Law endowed him with an extraordinary lucidity and discernment in the field of economic analysis. In a book devoted to studying the writing of history in the latter part of the sixteenth century the French literary historian, Claude-Gilbert Dubois, pays close attention to Viret's Biblical vision of the historical process. In so doing he brings to light the remarkable economic discernment of our Swiss Reformer.<sup>5</sup> Dubois' analysis is concentrated on the study of a masterpiece in Viretian apologetics, *Le monde à l'empire et le monde démoniaque*.<sup>6</sup> This book, says Dubois, could well be considered a modern treatise in economics written some two hundred years in advance of its time. Though in total disagreement with Viret's theocentric conservatism the marxist atheist Dubois is nonetheless outspoken in his admiration of our author's perception of contemporary economic currents.

For Viret saw in the anarchical monopolistic capitalism developing before his indignant gaze a growing practical opposition to God's Law and the rise of a thoroughly anti-Christian society. Viret saw in the progressive attachment of many of his contemporaries to material wealth, (a fascination severed from all sense of stewardship and of accountability to God for the use of one's riches), a particularly vile form of idolatry where the rapidity of growth in opulence—an extreme form of unfettered liberalism—was in direct proportion to the loss of religion and morality, and all sense of social responsibility. This is how Dubois expresses Viret's preoccupations: "Behind the

5. Claude-Gilbert Dubois, *La conception de l'histoire en France au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle (1560–1610)* (Paris, 1977, 668 pages).

6. *Le monde à l'empire et le monde démoniaque fait par dialogues* (Genève, 1561, 373 pages).

4. Henry Vuilleumier, *Notre Pierre Viret*, p. 142.

official public laws which are supposed to govern society one can discern the existence of those hidden perverse principles of our fallen nature that have now come to be officially accepted by a society which imposes as the norm of its new morality the perverted rules of a chaotic nature.<sup>7</sup>

Viret's polemic is not only directed at the unproductive accumulation of wealth by the Catholic Church but against those inconsistent *evangelicals* (i.e. Calvinists) of his time who saw in the process of the Reformation a liberation from the historical (moral and legal) constraints of a partly Christianised society and thus refused all submission to the social and economic disciplines implied by the Law of God. It was this Godless antinomianism, often to be seen in what he called *deformed* (rather than *reformed*) Christians, that Viret attacked with biting irony. He saw an expression of this anti-social behaviour in the *nouveaux riches* who had been quick to forget their modest origins and who now arrogantly gloried in their recent prosperity, wealth often acquired at the expense of the poorer classes who had been impoverished by the new economic order founded largely on monopolistic speculation. Dubois writes:

Viret's indignation has a theological base—these Christians have betrayed that spirit of poverty which characterised the apostles ; but it also bears a social character—this sterile and unproductive wealth provokes the economic enslavement of the poor to the newly enriched ruling class. What this sixteenth century economist reproaches the Roman Church for is that its accumulation of riches had the effect of freezing its wealth in unproductive activities rather than letting it circulate freely in the money market where eventually it would also have come to benefit the poorer classes.

and he asks,

What is the true character of the social degradation Viret perceives in the history of his time? Its origin is theological in nature, linked as it is to human sin. It manifests itself immorally by the perversion of the created order. But it takes on the modern form of a specifically economic scandal: a perverted economic system, an unethical distribution of riches, provoked by the circulation of wealth in one direction only, its accumulation in the hands of a few. Such are the signs of the corruption that reigns in the world today.<sup>8</sup>

Viret writes:

The greatest evil that can be imagined is when the public purse is impoverished and individual men are wealthy. This is an evident sign that the commonwealth is in an unhealthy condition, that public policy is in weak and incapable hands and that the state is under the domination of thieves and bandits who make of it their prey.<sup>9</sup>

7. Claude-Gilbert Dubois, *La conception de l'histoire en France au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle (1560–1610)* [The Conception of History in XVIth Century France], p. 442.

8. Claude-Gilbert Dubois, *La conception de l'histoire en France au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle (1560–1610)*, p. 453.

9. *Le monde à l'empire et le monde démoniaque fait par dialogues*, p. 156. What an astonishingly perceptive understanding of what is at present

For the economic mechanisms which lead to such an unfruitful concentration of wealth in the hands of an unaccountable financial oligarchy prepare the way for those social and political catastrophes which will inevitably destroy such an amoral and irresponsible ruling class. For, in the eyes of Viret, this infernal cycle of economic injustice must of necessity breed revolution. Economic oppression has as its direct origin an inordinate desire for the accumulation of wealth but, in the long run, it must produce social unrest. And such a feeling of social frustration, when it becomes conscious, ends in revolt. Viret saw very clearly that this new oligarchy made abundant use of its monopolistic domination of the apparatus of the State to draw to itself the riches of the whole nation by disrupting the natural circulation of wealth in the usual channels of production and exchange. For Viret, this stifling of the economic blood flow of industrial production and commercial exchange by a parasitical oligarchy must be broken if an equitable distribution of wealth by the proper functioning of the market is to be re-established and the economic health of the society restored.<sup>10</sup> If Viret sees all too well, in the outworking of the principles of evil the judgements of God towards a rebellious and ungrateful world, he on the other hand, shows us all the more clearly the blessings which flow from faithful obedience to God's commandments.

I would now like to examine with you two aspects of Viret's economic analysis which have an extraordinary bearing on our contemporary issues and problems : (a) The fabrication by the State of virtual money *ex nihilo*, out of nothing. (b) The invention of the State's universal tax on every kind of sold object, the Value Added Tax (VAT).

#### 4. *The fabrication by the State of virtual money ex nihilo, out of nothing*

Viret's great friendship for John Calvin (his elder by only two years) in no way prevented him from, on occasion, expressing divergent theological views whilst, of course, sharing on all fundamental points of doctrine the same Reformed convictions. The Reformation thus gives us a striking example of the way basic doctrinal unity is in no way exclusive of a certain theological diversity. It is

(September 2008) happening to the Government of the United States of America in its mismanagement in favour of what Viret so justly calls "thieves and bandits" of the unprecedented present financial crisis. See : E. L. Hebden Taylor, *Economics, Money and Banking : Christian Principles*, The Craig Press, Nutley, 1978. For an analysis of the development of the phenomenon Viret analyses over the past four centuries see: George Knapfer, *The Struggle for World Power*, London, 1971. For an up to date account of the financial control of American politics see : G. Edward Griffin, *The Creature from Jekyll Island*, American Opinion, Appleton, 1994.

10. Viret was no adversary of the economic function of the market and would have been strongly opposed to socialistic State planning and redistribution of wealth ; but he would have demanded that the market itself be legally and judicially subject to the financial and economic demands of God's Law and that our present financial "thieves and bandits" be arraigned before the courts.



the mechanical conformism of an effeminate age which cannot stomach disagreements on secondary matters in the Church. Thus, on the question of the extent of the application of the detail of the Mosaic Law to our present situation, Viret held a significantly different position from that of Calvin. This is how Linder defines this difference: “Viret, unlike Calvin, was ready to extend openly the authority of the Bible over the State.”<sup>11</sup>

It is enlightening here to compare Viret’s and Calvin’s exegesis of specific texts. In his *Sermons on Deuteronomy*<sup>12</sup> for example, we often find that Calvin, while not ignoring the detailed practical implications of the Mosaic Law, nonetheless pays much less attention than Viret to their immediate meaning and to their application to the political, economic and social problems of his time. Let us briefly contrast these two different attitudes by showing how they apply to a specific biblical text.

Thou shalt not have in thy bag divers weights, a great and a small.

Thou shalt not have in thy house divers measures, a great and a small.

But thou shalt have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure shalt thou have, that thy days may be lengthened in the land which the Lord thy God hath given thee.

For all that do such things, and all that do unrighteously, are an abomination unto the Lord thy God.

Deuteronomy 25: 13–16

Let us first look at Calvin’s comments on this text in his *Sermons on Deuteronomy*.

There are two things by which above all we offend our neighbour. For some abandon themselves to fraud and evil practises, whilst others proceed by aggressions and insults. However, with regard to hidden malice the worst means of all is that by which weights and measures are falsified. For just weights and just measures enable men to commerce with one another without dispute or harm. Without money with which to buy and to sell what confusion would ensue. Now goods are also often distributed by weight and measure. Thus when the falsification of money, weights or measurements occur it is the social bond itself between men which is broken. Men are then reduced to the state of cats and dogs whom it is impossible to approach without fear. We must thus not be surprised if our Lord manifests such detestation for the practise of falsifying weights and measures for he shows thereby that we deal here with the worst and the most detestable kind of robbery imaginable. For when a thief proposes to carry out some thieving knavery he only attacks one man. True he will go from one victim to another. But we know that a thief cannot multiply himself to such a degree as to enable him to rob the whole world at one go. But whoever establishes false weights and false measures is not particular as to whom he will rob. He indeed robs all and sundry alike. Thus he so perverts the common order of society that the bond of humanity is broken. When no integrity or loyalty remains in those things which should normally help men to maintain

themselves in their condition, what then will become of law and justice?<sup>13</sup>

Calvin then goes on to apply this particular law to what he calls *general doctrine*. By this he means the application of the principle of integrity which stands behind this specific law to divers aspects of the Christian life. He speaks of loyalty in business dealings; of just prices in commerce; of compassion for the poor; of the hypocrisy of pretending to be a Christian and neglecting these practical duties towards one’s neighbour; of man’s innate corruption; and of the necessity for loyalty and integrity in human relationships. He concludes on the following note:

Let us all fear what has here been shown and may each of us walk in loyalty and integrity with regard to his neighbour. Let those engaged in commerce see that their balances and their measures be correct, that their merchandise be genuine, that they should falsify nothing and that all should use of such loyalty one to another that everyone recognise that there indeed exists a law which exercises its effective rule over our hearts.<sup>14</sup>

Pierre Viret proceeds in a very different manner. He devotes no less than fifty-five large folio pages of small print to a detailed exposition of the eighth commandment.<sup>15</sup> On our particular text his comments cover six pages from page 581 to page 586. Instead of drawing general moral lessons from the particular statute as Calvin does, Viret takes great pains to study the various specific applications of this precise statute in a variety of aspects of commercial dealings. That is, he develops the case law of this particular biblical statute. He does this in such a way that, though his remarks are carefully adapted to the conditions of his time and culture, they nevertheless remain applicable today. His comments constitute in no way a distortion of the Mosaic significance of the particular law under consideration. Let us first look at the subdivisions into which he orders his material, divisions marked by the following headings:

—Theft committed by the falsification of quantity and of weights and measures of things sold and distributed and how such theft is detestable in the sight of Holy Scripture.

—Of the invention and usage of money, of counterfeiters and of the magnitude of the crime committed by the counterfeiting of money.

—Of thieves and counterfeiters of the Word of God and of the thefts both of men’s souls and of their goods committed by such means.

—Of those who clip coins and of those who consciously use false money and particularly of those responsible for the public treasury.

13. Jean Calvin, Sermon CXLIV du vendredi 14 février 1556, Deutéronome 25, 13–19, *Opera Omnia*, Vol. XXVIII, p. 236. My translation.

14. Jean Calvin, Sermon CXLIV du vendredi 14 février 1556, Deutéronome 25, 13–19, *Opera Omnia*, Vol. XXVIII, p. 237.

15. Pierre Viret, *Instruction Chrétienne en la Doctrine de la Loi et de l’Évangile*, Vol. I, p. 586–611.

11. Robert T. Linder, *The Political Ideas of Pierre Viret*, Droz, Geneva, p. 63.

12. Reprinted by the Banner of Truth in Edinburgh.



—Of corruption by bribes and of merchants who sell and buy justice and of the effect of this on the poor.

—Of thefts committed in the sale of foodstuffs by their falsification and the dangers which such corruptions produce.

—Of the attention magistrates should give to the quality of foodstuffs.

—Of the danger of falsification of medicines by doctors and druggists.

—Of the importance of the law given by God on weights and measures and of his threats against those who falsify them.

Speaking of the falsification of weights and measures Viret writes:

Such theft is frequent and very common for it is easier to rob men by this means than by the modification of the substance of the goods sold, such material falsifications being easier to notice. For in buying and selling we must for the most part trust the weights and measures of those with whom we have to do. For we cannot always have such measures with us. The iniquity is all the greater in that those who falsify weights and measures wickedly deceive those who put their trust in them. They are thus nothing else but public thieves and bandits.<sup>16</sup>

Viret aptly applies this statute to counterfeiters as in ancient times the inequality of the weight of coins made it necessary to weigh them in order to measure their exact worth.

Firstly counterfeiters are highly dangerous and very detrimental to society. For the invention of money and the technique for transforming gold, silver and other metals into coinage was discovered by men in order to assist them in their commerce and to facilitate their mutual exchange of various goods. For commerce is nothing else but an exchange of goods between men, exchange through which they take one thing in payment for another in proportion to the value of the goods exchanged. As the distant transportation of goods which could serve as means of exchange is cumbersome, sums of money are substituted for the goods in proportion to the value of the goods exchanged. For money is of easier transportation and is better adapted to commercial exchange than is the case for any other good. As God has given men such a means to facilitate mutual relations between men, those who pervert and confound this order provoke a great wound in the body politic and in the whole of human society. They are thus worthy of the most severe punishment particularly producing as they do the greatest possible confusion in society, for men cannot live without commerce. Thus whoever destroys the means of exchange resembles a public bandit, a cut-throat slitting the gizzard of the whole community. For through his fraud he destroys every kind of good faith and loyalty and without these human society can neither be maintained nor develop. For faith and loyalty being removed nothing certain remains. By this means men are greatly troubled and fall into an incomparable disorder.<sup>17</sup>

Today the counterfeiting of money has become the common practice of the banking system with what is called “fractional reserve banking” and, more particu-

larly, that of our Central Banks who outrageously rob the community by their creation of *fiat* (“virtual”) money out of thin air, for such unbacked creation of means of exchange will inevitably lead to inflation.<sup>18</sup> The result of such monetary creation is of course the uncontrolled expansion of every kind of public and private debt, the destruction of the productivity of society by the concentration of such capital in speculative transactions and the development of our modern boom/bust cycle of inflation and monetary restriction and the widespread expansion of totally unproductive speculation. Viret would have had much to say from a biblical perspective on our present monetary set up.<sup>19</sup> He was fully aware of these problems as they manifested themselves in his own time. He goes on to write acidly of the sin of the State counterfeiting the means of exchange in the following sparkling dialogue:

*Timothy*: It would seem that one could quite justifiably add to the company of counterfeiters all those who clip coins and thus reduce their weight and who then make fully conscious use of such clipped coins (and not by ignorance as often happens) knowing that they are fraudulent and of incorrect weight. For though they act in a different manner to those whom we normally call counterfeiters their deeds tend to much the same end.

*Daniel*: You here touch a matter in which those who have the management of public funds are often deeply implicated. For when they receive money from the public they take great pains to count it correctly and to refuse outright all illegitimate or unacceptable coinage. But when it comes to opening the public purse and to paying those who have served either the Church or the public good, or to distribute something to the poor, God only then knows with what kind of loyalty and faithfulness they fulfill their obligations!

*Timothy*: I have known some who would take the greatest care never to make any payment to those who had to do with them, particularly to the poor, without robbing them outright of a part, either of the payment due to them or of the alms they were under the obligation to distribute; and to do this they used either counterfeit money, or coinage of incorrect weight and faulty appearance. And the poor who are the objects of such treatment are not even permitted to bemoan their wretched fate though they have plainly been robbed and pillaged.

*Daniel*: Such administrators are not only robbers and coun-

18. On this whole question see the books cited above by Maurice Allais and E. L. Hebden Taylor.

19. For an economic and ethical analysis of our present financial situation, which in many ways resembles Viret’s analysis of the similar woes of his time, see the premonitory work by Maurice Allais (Nobel Prize in economic science, and more particularly his: *La crise mondiale d’aujourd’hui. Pour de profondes réformes des institutions financières et monétaires*, (Clément Juglar, Paris, 1999). In many ways Viret’s thinking on social and political matters resembles that of Alexander Solzhenitsyn. See also by Marcel De Corte, *Économie et Morale* and *Principes d’un Humanisme Économique* (Université de Liège, 1958 and 1965). In a similar perspective see: Rousas John Rushdoony’s commentary on the Eighth Commandment in his *Institutes of Biblical Law*, (Presbyterian and Reformed, Nutley, 1973, pp. 448–541), Gary North’s comments on Leviticus 19 : 35–36 in his *Commentary on Leviticus* (ICE, Tyler, 1994), and G. Edward Griffin’s study of these questions *The Creature from Jekyll Island. A Second Look at the Federal Reserve* (American Opinion, P. O. Box 8040, Appleton WI 54913–8040, U.S.A., 1995, 608 pages) and Eustace Mullins, *Secrets of the Federal Reserve: The London Connection*, Bankers Research Institute, P. O. Box 1105, Staunton, VA 24401, 1993.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 581.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 581–582.

terfeiters but thieves and public bandits far worse than those highwaymen who lay in wait on lonely travellers in the woods. For what more could they do to them if they robbed the poor of their very lives?

*Timothy*: Nevertheless when they collect what is their due they take the greatest pains to count, weigh and test whatever coins they receive in payment. But they act in a very different manner with those whom they have on their payroll and who have neither the means nor the boldness to resist their tyranny and rapacity.

*Daniel*: You can be sure of that.

5. *The invention of the State's universal tax on the sale of every kind of good produced by men's activity: the Value Added Tax (VAT)*

We shall now consider Viret's reflexions on the predatory character of the modern State, and in particular on its desire to draw from every human industrial and commercial activity a source of its irresponsible wealth. His analysis, which combines a strict biblical framework (this is his "presuppositionalism") with a profound understanding of the workings of the society of his time and of the historical processes which had brought the nations of Europe to their present condition (this is his "evidentialist" apologetic), is underpinned by two fundamental premisses constantly present in his thought. (1) All reality must be understood in the light of a thoroughly biblical perspective. (2) All reality is inherently structured, as God's creation and the manifestation of his providential purposes, by the same theological and philosophical principles which we find in the Bible.

It is this basically theonomic *and* naturalist (i.e. creational) position that enabled him to analyse the economic structures and the sociological dynamics of society so skilfully and so successfully. He thus combines theological, moral, philosophical, sociological, economic, literary and historical analysis in an astonishingly unified and differentiated system of thought. He thus refuses all gnostic dualism, every kind of that binary opposition, so common today in Christian and secular thinking, between creation and redemption, between theology and culture, between morality and economics, between society and God, between grace and law, and so forth. Where we often think exclusively in binary terms, his thought functions both in an antithetical (good versus evil, truth against error) and in a complementary manner (all aspects of created reality are related, are interconnected). It is this balance between unity and diversity in his thinking which makes his writings, after more than four hundred years, so refreshingly actual.

Viret puts his finger on a major means by which the State extorts its citizens: the universal application to all goods of the gabelle tax on the sale of salt, tax first instituted in 1341 by the French King, Philippe VI de Valois (1328–1350). Viret, in a brilliant historical analysis, shows that this tax on the sale of salt was extended to almost every good sold on the market in the Kingdom of France and can thus be considered the ancestor of what we today

call the VAT, the Value Added Tax, an elastic and very effective instrument in the hands of the modern almighty and tyrannical State the better to fleece its citizens.

By "tyranny" Viret means the trend of the monarchies of Western Europe, first the Holy Roman Empire of the Hohenstaufen's, then those of France, England and Spain, (all imitating the absolute bureaucratic centralisation of the ancient Roman Empire, a model restored by the Imperial Roman Papacy from Gregory VII to Boniface VIII), towards absolutism. This trend would lead to the revolutionary nation State and to our present totalitarian and democratic, statist and oligarchic tyrannies. But, in his criticism of the fiscal abuses of tyrannical government, Viret at no time questions the divine ordinance of Government, a government limited by divine and human laws, both the overarching divine biblical Law and existing terrestrial legislation and jurisprudence. Nor does he deny the State its right to levy legitimate taxes. Under the title, "Taxes due to Princes and the necessary moderation in their application" he has Jérôme, the historian, sociologist, economist and theologian in his Dialogues, say:

With good reason Kings and Princes levy taxes and revenues so as appropriately to provide themselves with the means for the government of their people and for the administration of justice to all their subjects. For such has been ordained by God.<sup>20</sup>

But this, in Viret's opinion, in no way provides legitimation for the ruler's right to levy arbitrary taxes at will on his subjects. Earlier, the same Jérôme had affirmed, in response to a question he had himself addressed to Tobie (who represents the common sense position of the ordinary Roman Catholic layman of Viret's time very much interested by the gospel), "Have you any idea where lies the chief cause for the tyranny and the extortions of Princes with regard to their subjects?" To which Tobie answers: "No doubt in the sins, both of the rulers and of the ruled." To which Jérôme gives the following differentiated answer:

If we look to God, we cannot doubt that man's sin is the true, the first and the principal cause of tyranny. But if we look to men, the cause is to be found in the flatterers and thieves who, at court, gather around Princes. Such flatterers and thieves teach Princes to consider that their every wish is legitimate and thus that the bodies and the goods of their subjects are freely at their disposition and pleasure, as so much cattle. They speak as if Princes had no obligations towards their subjects; as if they had never taken the oath to govern them for their good, or to deal with them justly as good princes and faithful shepherds should do.<sup>21</sup>

Jérôme's eloquent description of such perverse flattery of Princes by fawning and cynical courtisans elicits the following vigorous reponse from Tobie, a section which bears the following title: "Does the mere good pleasure of Princes legitimate their every action, in particular the

20. Pierre Viret, *Le Monde à l'Empire*, 1580 [1561], p. 283.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 277.

daily increase of ‘tailles’ and ‘gabelles’?” [that is taxes on the sale of every commodity]. Let us follow Tobie’s reasonable response:

What we must first discuss is the following question: Are such increases in gabelles and tailles [that is in “value added taxes”] in the first place legitimate? This question I raise not only from the perspective of God’s Law, but from that of ordinary civil legislation. For no human law worthy of the name can free Princes from themselves submitting to the rule of law and justify their enacting whatever law they please, thus laying on the backs of their subjects whatever burden they wish. For even if their subjects were nothing more than chattel-slaves, some kind of equity must even then regulate the relation between such serfs and their lord.

This leads Viret to a careful economic and historical analysis of the “gabelle” and “taille” taxes imposed by the French Monarchy on the sale of every kind of good. Tobie here clearly expresses Viret’s own indignation:

Since the beginning, this tyrannical system of universal taxation has never decreased but has rather constantly grown. For princes and nobility alike never consider the ordinary revenues and taxes at their disposal as a necessary limitation to their style of life, to their projects and to their ambitions. Rather they only consider the fulfillment of the ambition they cherish, not examining whether their actual revenues are able to sustain such utopian dreams . . . To satisfy their excessive ambitions they then look to ways of increasing their taxes and revenues.<sup>22</sup>

Here Jérôme comments:

In this, their action is the exact opposite of what they should in fact be doing. For, instead of limiting their style of life and their ambitious projects to their normal revenues and taxes they, on the contrary, seek to increase such revenues and taxes in order adapt them to the style of life and the ambitions they have in mind. Placing themselves in this dilemma they often undertake many ambitious and difficult projects for which they do not have the means: that is their ordinary revenues and taxes. Their revenues not being able to cover the cost of their projected ambitions they are forced to seek ways of raising them to the level of their inflated needs. But their subjects soon come to understand who is to pay for such extravagant ambitions.<sup>23</sup>

There follows a minute and hilarious enumeration by Tobie of all the objects subjected to the value added tax imposed by the King’s administration on every kind of economic activity, this in favour of the growth of the omnipotent State and its visible and invisible ruler-leeches. But time forbids my sharing with you this brilliant *tour de force* in social and economic satire.

#### CONCLUSION

*Reasonable economics, because both biblical and creational*

Viret perceives very clearly the consequences of such unrealistic personal, economic and political ambitions on

the part of the French Monarchy: social unrest, persistent hatred of the ruling classes by an impoverished populace and, finally, revolution. He, of course, disapproves of such violent reactions, but clearly perceives their inevitable nature. Evil will out and God’s just judgements will not be halted. Overweening ambition will necessarily know, in due time, its fall, but in the process the nation will be drastically, perhaps irretrievably, damaged. In Viret’s view, a view expounded by his theological spokesman, Théophraste,

Such rulers are little better than mere tax collectors . . . They have no care for their own people, nor any concern for the common and public good. They have no respect for the laws of the kingdom, for the correct policing of the society given to their charge, for justice or even for the safety of their kingdom. Their only preoccupation is that of drawing to themselves the wealth of the nation, this for the satisfaction of their good pleasure and for the enjoyment of sensual delights.

The means to this end: constantly and continuously increasing the universal taxation levied by the State on the sale of every good. Tobie’s good sense expresses the common complaint of a people overburdened by the fiscal extortions of its rulers. He finds his consolation in the conviction that a God who is just will in time inevitably exercise terrible and grievous vengeance on such egotistical and iniquitous rulers.

. . . they should consider that their subjects are men like themselves, that all stand under the rule of the same God whose will is by no means that the big should eat the small, and that Kings and Princes be among their subjects like lions and wolves among sheep, or like a great fish who, in the sea, devours the small about him.<sup>24</sup>

How are we to conclude this brief evocation of Viret’s economic thought? How may we characterise his economic and political good sense? How was it possible for him to develop so precise and comprehensive an analysis of the economic and political problems of his time, an analysis that is so exact that his writings can today still speak with great perspicuity to the difficulties which bedevil our own times? I will put forward, as a provisional answer, the following suggestions:

(1) He constantly looked at every aspect of reality from the point of view of God.

(2) This theonomic and presuppositionalist attitude came from his fully biblical perspective, a perspective which witnessed to his truly catholic spirit: he took into account every aspect of God’s revealed Word.

(3) In this, his theological thinking was very different from that which informs much of that modern gnostic dualism which marks the thinking of the Christian Church today: biblical theology for the Church, scientific autonomous thinking for created reality.

(4) He thus understood that the order manifested

22. *Ibid.*, p. 280.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 280–281.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 275.



by the written Word of God was the same order as that we find in the created cosmos and in God's providential covenantal direction of history.

(5) He thus did not oppose (but rather distinguished) nature and grace, general and special revelation, for, in Viret's thinking, both Creation and redemption have issued forth from the same One God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Such a theology led him to consider every aspect of reality, however deformed today, however sinful, as a fallen witness to the goodness of the created order and capable of being illuminated by God's supernatural revelation and restored in Jesus Christ by his sovereign, almighty and benevolent grace.

(6) Thus, to speak of God and his just and merciful decrees to his contemporaries, Viret did not limit himself simply to a faithful exposition of the Scriptures (for him these divine writings were absolutely normative) but made use in his preaching and writing of every aspect of created and providential reality. Thus he rightly felt that the whole of man's cultural activity was available to him as a spring-board from which the preaching of the gospel would touch the minds and hearts of his audience, this from popular proverbs to philosophy; from poetry to historical annals; from economic analysis to the description of the details of human and animal anatomy. He lived before the time when modern science had come to eliminate the final and formal causes from the very method of the new sciences. As all things had their end and meaning in God and were ordered and sustained by him (even in their present fallen state!) all things likewise could be brought to speak of God, if seen in the light of God's inspired and infallible Word. Thus his fundamental presuppositionalism was the foundation on which rested his evidentialist use of every fact in Creation to speak of God and of God's immutable ordering of his Creation.

(7) Thus, to use a vocabulary unknown to him, Viret was at the same time fully presuppositionalist and fully evidentialist in his apologetic thinking and in his preaching of the gospel, thus bringing all the disordered

and distorted thoughts of men captive to the obedience of Jesus Christ. Such a catholicity—the totality of Scripture illuminating the totality of created and providential reality—was certainly the source of the immense success of his preaching. He could thus reach out to all the preoccupations of his contemporaries in a language they could readily understand.

(8) His economic thinking was thus both theological and moral, both historical and sociological, both structural and human. He could in this way perceive and express the mechanics of economic realities and, at the same time, relate such structural realities to the immediate and long term responsibilities (both for good and for evil) of human agents. These human agents in the economic process could thus be the morally responsible instruments for producing good fruit or corruption into the ongoing development (or disintegration) of the social order. For Viret would have considered both Adam Smith's "unseen hand" or Karl Marx's "iron laws of economic science" imaginary realities, for they ignored the economic impact of the responsible moral (or immoral) actions of human agents created in the image of God.

(9) Finally, this fully catholic, theologically inspired reflexion, developed by Pierre Viret in so many fields of human thought and endeavour, comes from his being not only utterly biblical, but also fully open to all the realities of God's created and providential order. In this, his thinking was in utter opposition to the dualism of that binary thinking which, since the birth of modern science at the start of the seventeenth Century, has been the bane, or better still the doom, the destruction, both of the created order and of a fully catholic Christian theology, in what we, with irony, might perhaps still call modern civilisation.

It is, in my modest view, high time that the Church (and through her teaching all our nations) come once more to listen to what Viret has to say of God's immutable purposes for men and of our present most distressing condition. *C&S*

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# INCOMPATIBLE VIEWS OF THE CHURCH: HIGH, LOW AND EMERGENT<sup>1</sup>

by Andrew Sandlin

IN the late 1970's, at the apex of the evangelicals' acrimonious "Battle for the Bible," Stanley Gundry offered the following prediction in his presidential address to the Evangelical Theological Society:

. . . I submit to you that the area most in need of serious theological discussion in the near future will be ecclesiology. This in turn can be divided into two large subject areas: the nature of the Church (what we might call ecclesiology proper) and the mission of the Church (an aspect of missiology). The theologian and Biblical scholar who does not tune his/her ear to the discussion of these related issues simply will not be where the action is; and, worse yet, the Church of Jesus Christ worldwide will be the poorer for that failure.<sup>2</sup>

Moving from descriptive to prescriptive, Gundry chided North American evangelicals for their "little sense of history" and lack of "connection with the Christian past." "Independence has been . . . idealized," he charged. "Faith and worship," he continued, "have been so highly individualized that the corporate aspects of these seem all but lost in many instances." There is "a very real [ecclesiological] deficiency in North American evangelical Christianity."<sup>3</sup>

Gundry's observations were nothing if not prescient, and perhaps even prophetic, though even at that time he took notice of the migration of many evangelicals to Episcopacy.

Almost exactly thirty years later, however, one of Gundry's ETS successors, Francis Beckwith, was obliged to resign his presidential term as a consequence of his conversion (or, more accurately, reversion), not to Episcopacy, but to Roman Catholicism.<sup>4</sup>

Beckwith is only one of the latest and more prominent examples of such ecclesial migration. In reaction to what has been perceived as the impoverished ecclesiology of much of twentieth century evangelicalism, a burgeoning segment of today's alleged evangelicals embraces various high-church ecclesiologies, including not only Roman Catholicism, but also Eastern Orthodoxy and Anglo-Catholicism. Among the Protestants, traditional Lutheranism<sup>5</sup> and certain sacramentarian expressions of Calvinism<sup>6</sup> have espoused components of high-church ecclesiology.<sup>7</sup> While these ecclesiologies stand, objectively

4. Francis Beckwith, *Return to Rome* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009). The book carries two subtitles: *Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic* and *Why the President of the Evangelical Theological Society Left His Post and Returned to the Catholic Church*.

5. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1953), Vol. 3, p. 415f. The designation of Lutheranism as high church must be qualified. See n. 24.

6. John Williamson Nevin, *The Mystical Presence* (Philadelphia: S. R. Fisher, 1867).

7. Ernst Troeltsch contends that the Magisterial Reformation did not break with the medieval Roman form of (what is here termed) the high-church paradigm, only with its substance. As the principal means of grace to which all must submit to obtain salvation, the Reformation substituted the Word for the sacraments (which it did not devalue but did redefine). The believer's incorporation into the biblicised (as opposed to the sacramental) community confers salvation. See his *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (New York: Harper, 1931, 1960), Vol. 2, pp. 478–479. This over-simplistic thesis overlooks the emphasis the Reformers placed on individual faith as the exclusive instrumental cause of justification by which alone man is incorporated into Christ. See Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei* (Cambridge, England: University Press,

1. A version of this paper was delivered at the Spring 2009 Far West Regional meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society at San Diego Christian College.

2. Stanley N. Gundry, "Evangelical Theology: Where Should We Be Going?" in ed., Ronald Youngblood, *Evangelicals and Inerrancy* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984), p. 245.

3. Stanley N. Gundry, "Evangelical Theology," p. 245f.

considered, within Christendom, they do not reflect an authentically evangelical conception of the Church. And if thirty years ago anxiety over impoverished ecclesiologies may have been warranted, today, amid the inevitable theological pendulum swing, we might justifiably suffer consternation over inflated ecclesiologies that threaten to subvert authentic evangelical faith.

An evangelical ecclesiology must be fundamentally a biblical ecclesiology, wedded, as evangelicalism must ever be, to Scripture (and nothing else) as the ground of religious authority.<sup>8</sup> The precise role of Scripture in framing the theological architecture, and especially ecclesiology, is pivotal. If, for instance, we perceive Scripture as the sole authority for our ecclesiology, we will likely arrive at a different conclusion than if we understand the Bible as providing the trajectory of sub-apostolic historical development from which we derive an ecclesiology. There can be no dispute that comparatively soon after the apostolic era Christianity evolved ecclesiological tenets and practices hospitable to what today is a distinctively high ecclesiology.<sup>9</sup> This development provides cogent support to high-church ecclesiologies that perceive in the apostolic era itself latent tendencies toward their viewpoint. It offers no refutation, however, to an ecclesiology that wishes to rest its case exclusively in biblical teaching and resultant practice. This is not to argue that high-church ecclesiologies cannot be derived from a formal commitment to *sola scriptura*.<sup>10</sup> It is merely to suggest that high-church ecclesiologies have historically been more likely to emerge from theological enterprises that have refused to limit their source of theology to the Bible — that is, have refused to be evangelical.

The goal of this paper is not to offer such definitive biblical support for a distinctively evangelical ecclesiology. Rather, it is to sketch out the two primary, paradigmatic, and competing ecclesiologies of Christendom (“high church” versus “low church”); to advocate low-church ecclesiology; and, in any case, to suggest why these two ecclesiologies are mutually exclusive and fundamentally irreconcilable, while along the way touching on the strange case of the recent Emergent Movement and its relation to this ecclesiological bipolarity.

Since “anyone who has sought an agreed [upon] definition of these terms [“high church” and “low church”]

. . . will have learned how elastic they are,”<sup>11</sup> I propose only a recognition of the distinctives of the two divergent ecclesiologies, not for the validity of these expressions.

First, a high-church ecclesiology locates the appropriation of salvation (“the application of redemption”) in the sacramental structure of the Church; alternatively, a low-church ecclesiology situates the appropriation of salvation in a relationship with God by exclusive means of faith in Jesus Christ as man’s Redeemer and King.

Second, a high-church ecclesiology routinely (and necessarily) overemphasises the ecclesial *one* (the community) and underemphasises the *many* (the individual); conversely, a low-church ecclesiology, at its best, tends to preserve a biblical balance between the community (*one*) and the individual (*many*).

Third, the Emergent Movement, often lacking both historical perspective and rigorous theological reflection, creates an odd amalgam between these two ultimately irreconcilable conceptions of the Church.

By “Church,” I employ a theological rather than exegetical definition<sup>12</sup> on which partisans of both principal ecclesiologies can agree: the community of saints (whether local or trans-local, whether including or excluding the children of members) bound to one another by faith in Jesus Christ and fundamental doctrinal affirmations and under the care and oversight of duly ordained leaders. The Church, whether “high” or “low,” is the formal, duly constituted community of Christ. As Barth asserts, the scandal of our differences is not that the two groups are talking about a different reality when they use the term *church* but that they are talking about the *same* reality very differently. It is this same ecclesial reality, *differently understood*, that this paper pointedly addresses.<sup>13</sup>

#### CHURCH AS AN EXTENSION OF THE INCARNATION OF JESUS VERSUS CHURCH AS THE TESTIMONY AND CONDUIT OF THE GOSPEL

##### *Church as an Extension of the Incarnation of Jesus*

High-church ecclesiology holds, in summary, that the Church as “a visible corporation here on earth” is “the fountain of spiritual life.”<sup>14</sup> Harvey fleshes out this distinction as it finds expression in the three main branches of Christendom:

[T]here are certain fundamental conflicts concerning the nature of the C[hurch] that cannot be attributed to misunderstandings

1986), Vol. 2, pp. 37ff. But on how Calvin’s sacramentology clouded his view of justification, see Bruce L. McCormack, “What’s At Stake in Current Debates Over Justification: The Crisis of Protestantism in the West,” in ed., Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier, *What’s At Stake in Current Debates—Justification* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 2004), p. 104.

8. Edward John Carnell, *The Case for Orthodox Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959), p. 13.

9. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago, 1971), pp. 155–171.

10. Peter J. Leithart is a refreshing example: “Trinitarian Anthropology: Toward a Trinitarian Re-casting of Reformed Theology,” in ed., E. Calvin Beisner, *The Auburn Avenue Theology: Pros and Cons* (Fort Lauderdale, Florida: Knox Theological Seminary, 2004), pp. 68–71.

11. Paul S. Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), p. 259.

12. For an exegetical definition, see L. Coenen, “Church, Synagogue,” in ed., Colin Brown, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975, 1986), Vol. 1, p. 291f.

13. Karl Barth, “The Concept of the Church,” in eds., Daniel J. Callahan, Heiko A. Oberman and Daniel J. O’Hanlon, *Christianity Divided* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1961), p. 155.

14. John McClintock and James Strong, “Church,” *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1867–1887, 1981), Vol. 2, p. 326.

or cultural differences. Perhaps the most fundamental of these exists between the R. C. [Roman Catholic] and E.O. [Eastern Orthodox] churches, on the one hand, and the churches stemming from the Reformation on the other. The former regard the C[hurch] fundamentally as a supernatural sphere, not simply in the sense that the C[hurch] possesses the divinely ordained means of salvation, but in the sense that this salvation consists in a supernatural participation in the divine life, a participation made possible by the sacramental system. The sacraments literally are the “medicine of immortality.” Consequently, the whole understanding of salvation and the entire structure of these churches and their doctrines are ordered around this sacramental understanding.<sup>15</sup>

Unduly sweeping though Harvey’s antithesis may be, it does point to an authentic distinction: high-church ecclesiologies depict the Church as a living corporation, formal (notably sacramental) union with which constitutes union with divine life—and, therefore, salvation.

This description of a (likely *the*) chief distinctive of high-church ecclesiology is readily and widely verifiable. To take but one example, Joseph Ratzinger, presently Pope Benedict XVI, wrote in a work originally published in 1984:

... [T]he Incarnation of the Son creates communion between God and man and thus opens up the possibility of a new communion of men with one another. The communion between God and man that is realized in the person of Jesus Christ for its own part becomes communicable to others in the Paschal Mystery, that is, in the death and Resurrection of the Lord. The Eucharist effects our participation in the Paschal Mystery and thus constitutes the Church, the body of Christ. Hence the necessity of the Eucharist for salvation. The Eucharist is necessary in the sense that the Church is necessary, and vice versa.<sup>16</sup>

Thomas Baima, prominent Roman Catholic academic, likewise writes in defense of Roman eucharistic theology, while introducing the principle of analogy:

Th[e] notion of communion flowing from the Trinity itself and passing through the incarnate Word of God, Jesus Christ, sets the stage for the wider unity of God with all nations. If the communion of persons is how it is with God and how it is with Christ, by extension union with persons must be how it is with the church. Now, the church is not God. It is a creature—something made by God. However, *the church participates in the same communion of the Trinity and Christ because something analogous to the incarnation is happening in her.* Christ, the head of the church, is united with the human members who make up the church, which Scripture calls “the body of Christ” . . . God and humanity are united by means of the actions of the Holy Spirit, which we call the sacraments . . .<sup>17</sup>

15. Van A. Harvey, “Church,” *A Handbook of Theological Terms* (New York: Touchstone, 1964), p. 52.

16. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, “Eucharist—Fellowship—Mission,” *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2002), p. 82f.

17. Thomas A. Baima, “Christ’s True, Real and Substantial Presence,” in ed. John H. Armstrong, *Understanding Four Views on the Lord’s Supper* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), p. 122, emphasis supplied. The description of the Church as an extension of Jesus’ incarnation is found also in Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), pp. 69, 73, 81.

In other words, just as the Trinity constitutes the communion between Father, Son and Spirit, so Jesus’ incarnation *creates* a communion between God and man, the visible community of the saints in the Roman Catholic Church constituting, by analogy, the earthly extension of the Jesusian incarnation. By formal (specifically eucharistic) participation with this church, man participates in Jesus Christ, and in this way both attains and maintains salvation. The sacraments *structure* the Church.<sup>18</sup> In fact, the Church itself is the sacrament of salvation, precisely what the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* asserts.<sup>19</sup>

Biblical (as distinct from traditionary) support for this dogma is buttressed by texts like John 6:50 (Christ is the living bread that we must consume to gain eternal life); John 15:4–5 (Jesus is the spiritual life that flows to the Church, just as the vine supplies life to the branches); Romans 6:4–5 (by [water] baptism we are born anew and become members of the very body of Christ); 1 Corinthians 12:13 (by [water] baptism we enter the Church, the body of Christ); Galatians 4:19 (gradually, Christ is formed in us as we co-operate with the Church as his means of grace); and Ephesians 5:25–29 (believers are mystically and sacramentally united to Christ, just as the man is mystically and sacramentally united to his wife).

High-church ecclesiologies perceive the Church, institutionally conceived, as the very life of God in Jesus. It is with this understanding that Beckwith writes: “Justification is about our being part of a communion of saints, the body of Christ, with whom we can receive and share the unearned and totally gratuitous wonders of God’s grace, through baptism, the Eucharist, confession and all the [other] sacraments.”<sup>20</sup>

Employing terms from the traditional (!) theological *loci*, Roman Catholicism (and, I would assert, virtually all other forms of high-church ecclesiology<sup>21</sup>) in effect collapses soteriology into ecclesiology. Or, rather, it espouses a soteric ecclesiology and an ecclesial soteriology. The Church is not merely the conduit of salvation; its very institutional structure, its “incorporation,” contains and communicates the life of God to its members.

### *The Ecclesial One*

A useful pedagogical device for grasping this paradigm

18. I am indebted to Fr. Thomas Baima for this language, used in private conversation. Baima observed that while the Church is analogous to the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the elements of the Eucharist are not analogous to the body and blood of Christ but are in fact that body and blood. I infer from this distinction that it is not by participation in the church as such that believers unite with Christ’s actual being but rather by consumption of the Eucharist. This seems to mean that by contact with the sacraments, which structure the Church, one participates in the actual, and not merely analogical, body of Christ.

19. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Washington, D. C.: United States Catholic Conference [*Libreria Editrice Vaticana*], 1994, second edition), pp. 205–213.

20. Francis Beckwith, *Return to Rome*, p. 113.

21. On Eastern Orthodoxy, see John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology* (New York: Fordham University, 1974, 1979), pp. 163, 176, 193.



is the age-old philosophical problem of the one and the many.

The ecclesial *one* might be termed *extreme communalism*, at the heart of the high-church paradigm. The body of Christ is depicted not just as a potent metaphor, but, as noted above, a living reality. The visible Church is an extension of Jesus' incarnation. The Church is not just a collection of individuals but a living, breathing organism. It is God's presence in the world in the form of Jesus' mystical, but real, body. One joins Christ by joining the Church. He gets baptised, submits to the Church, affirms her doctrines, and thus becomes a Christian. If one stands outside the Church, he cannot be an acceptable Christian, because being an acceptable Christian means being a Church member, a member of the (institutional) body of Christ—we relate to Jesus only by relating *first* to the Church. The sacramental system of the Church as the body of Christ is the mediator of salvation. It is his living presence in the earth.

*Objectivity* is vital in this perspective. This concern goes back to the Donatist controversy in the patristic Church:<sup>22</sup> the validity of baptism does not depend on the spiritual condition of the one administering it. It is valid because the institution of (Trinitarian) baptism is valid, and because the Church that baptises is valid. To the patristic Church, there is objectivity in the *institution* of the Church.

The sacraments become vitally important because they are the visible means of connecting one to that body, and keeping him connected to it. At baptism, God regenerates and implants the seed of justification (that is, righteousness before God).<sup>23</sup> One establishes contact with the body of Christ at this baptism, and that is where he gains, or at least begins, eternal life.<sup>24</sup> That life, that justification, grows in intensity as one perseveres in the Church.<sup>25</sup> Communion is crucial, because it is there that one continually derives the sustaining, energising body and blood of Christ. The Church is the body of Christ, and communion is the sustenance of that body to its members. It is the lifeblood and nourishment running through the veins of the body of Christ, which is identified analogously as the incarnation of Jesus on the earth.

It is not hard to grasp that the individual as such is not of great significance in this scheme. An individual gains spiritual identity in being a part of something much bigger than himself: this massive, universal, trans-historical,

22. Harold O. J. Brown, *Heresies* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1984), p. 198ff.

23. Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* (Rockford, Illinois: Tan Books, 1955, 1960), p. 354.

24. Hans Küng, *The Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967), pp. 330–341.

25. The high-church paradigm generally sees justification as a process, since salvation depends on the individual's perseverance within the sacramental system of the Church. On the mediaeval development of this view, see Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei* (Cambridge, England: University Press, 1986), Vol. 1, p. 91–100. The exception may be Lutheranism, which unites a heavy sacramentalism with a punctilinear justification. As with Rome, however, one can forfeit his justification by failure to persevere. Justification, while not a process, can be obtained and lost.

(largely) visible, living body of Christ that is much greater than the sum of its members. What the individual desires does not matter much. For example, one's personal interpretation of the Bible is not of great import. The Bible is interpreted in the community. The Holy Spirit does not lead individuals in definitive interpretation; he leads the Church communally (and specifically its representatives in the magisterium) as the body of Christ to interpret the Bible, and the individual should feel secure in this nourishing, interpretive community.<sup>26</sup>

One stays in the Church; he partakes of its life-giving sacraments; he continues in the faith and is progressively justified; if he leaves the Church or sins grievously, he may lose his justified status, but if he gets back into the good graces of the Church, he can recover his justification. One's justification waxes and wanes in his lifetime, but if he dies in the bosom of the Church, he dies in God's good graces and will be blessed with eternal life. Salvation is all of grace, but it is a *co-operative* venture. God provides the Church as the means, and the individual cooperates to assure that he will be saved in the end.

Yet individual salvation is not the central issue. *Community* is more important to this perspective. The individual is not what is important; the institution is important. The individual is de-emphasised and the community is exalted. The individual dies, but the community persists. The individual defects and apostatises, but the community remains faithful throughout history. One must at all costs remain in the bosom of the community, the Church, for it keeps him in contact with Jesus and eternal life.

Such is a summary of the ecclesial *one*, which is a reflection of the high-church paradigm.

#### *Church as the Testimony and Conduit of the Gospel*

Low-church ecclesiologies do not deny the often intimate association between salvation and the Church; their contrast with high-church ecclesiologies consists in holding that the Church may and should *testify to* and *convey* that salvation without constituting it.

How, one immediately might ask, in low-church ecclesiologies do individuals gain union with Jesus Christ, without which there is no salvation (1 Jn. 5:12). If not by incorporation into the Church, then how? For low-church ecclesiologies, salvific union with God is appropriated by faith in Jesus Christ, which is logically, though not always chronologically, prior to (sacramental) incorporation into the Church.

Critical to low-church ecclesiologies is the interpretation of God's salvific work in the human heart as predominantly immediate, not mediate<sup>27</sup>—that is, God deals with sinners chiefly in direct and only subordinately in indirect

26. Francis Martin, "Reading Scripture in the Catholic Tradition," in eds., Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus, *Your Word Is Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), pp. 147–168.

27. Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931), p. 47.



ways, though he employs both. For instance, though God's salvific grace employs instruments to convey the gospel (Rom. 10:13–15; 1 Pet. 1:23), that grace is a result of God's immediate regeneration of the individual human heart, an internal spiritual resurrection (Jn. 3:1–8; Rom. 6:13; Eph. 2:5; Col. 2:13), apart from human interposition.<sup>28</sup> This conviction about the immediacy of God's salvific work, in according grace a higher priority than faith, regeneration a higher priority than preaching, and the gospel a higher priority than the Church, by no means implies diffidence toward "ordinary means of grace," preaching the gospel, reading the Bible, praying to the Father, taking the sacraments or ordinances, and exercising charity toward other believers. It merely suggests that *justifying* grace is the monergistic work of the Holy Spirit, which is not at the routine disposal of the Church.<sup>29</sup> While, therefore, low-church supporters may believe (as I do) that preaching, prayer, charity, the sacraments, and cultural reclamation may transmit grace, they do not transmit justifying grace.<sup>30</sup> This opinion is a correlate of a strong Creator-creature distinction.<sup>31</sup> God alone, directly and immediately, apart from human interposition, transmits salvific grace.

This fact of immediacy shapes how one sees the relationship between Jesus and the Church as it pertains to man's relation to each. The great ecclesial (and soteric) difference between Rome (plus the East) and Protestants is that in the former we relate to Jesus by means of the Church, while in the latter we relate to the Church by means of Jesus.<sup>32</sup> The high-church view understands the Church via the sacraments as mediating salvation to the individual.<sup>33</sup> Low-church defenders usually aver that man joins the Church in response to the unmediated grace of God. *This distinction is likely the root difference between high- and low-church ecclesiologies.* Preservation of the Creator-creature distinction demands that the mediate follows and is anchored in the immediate. The work of Jesus Christ in the human heart is logically (though, as noted above, not always chronologically) prior to the work of the Church in the individual's life.<sup>34</sup>

God often employs the Church and its ministries instrumentally in saving man; but the work of salvation

is fundamentally immediate. "[E]vangelical religion," Warfield notes, "reaches stability only when the sinful soul rests in humble, self-emptying trust purely on the God of grace as the immediate and sole source of all the efficiency which enters into its salvation."<sup>35</sup> This does not imply that in salvation there is no mediation at all. God does not save man without a mediator. Jesus himself is the exclusive mediator and in his redemptive work secured the salvation of his people (1 Tim. 2:5), to whom the Holy Spirit applies the benefits of redemption, ordinarily under the influence of the declaration of the gospel (Rom. 10:14). The Spirit operates directly on the sinner's heart, which God opens so that sinners will believe the gospel and follow Jesus Christ (Jn. 3:1–8).

The chief difference between high- and low-church ecclesiologies, therefore, is the *locus* of the application of redemption. Both sides agree that Jesus is the mediator of man's redemption, but low-Church ecclesiologies posit this work as applied by the Holy Spirit to the human heart irrespective of human intermediaries.

High-church ecclesiologies, conversely, hold (as we have seen) that this redemption is applied by the church through baptism, in which the sinner is regenerated and where the process of his justification is begun, and at the Eucharist, which communicates the benefits of atonement continually in the Church. Justification is a process that begins at baptism and continues as one obeys God and participates in the Church's sacramental system; in low-church ecclesiologies (by contrast) justification is an event in history at which God declares sinners righteous on the ground of Jesus' death and resurrection, though the effects of that justification persist in this life until one receives the final verdict of justification at the Last Day.<sup>36</sup>

Low-church ecclesiologies, therefore, do not interpret texts like John 15:1–8 and Ephesians 5:24–33 to refer to a mystical union, certainly not a union initiated and secured by the sacraments. Rather, these texts contain powerful metaphors depicting the intimacy between Jesus Christ and both Christians (individually) and the Church (communally).<sup>37</sup>

In the low-church narrative of primitive Christianity, Jesus Christ, drawing from the faithful remnant of believing Israel, called and commissioned a community as his ambassadors in the world (Mt. 28:18–20; 2 Cor. 5:17–21). This community is redemptive-historical in that it declares his gospel and lives (both individually and corporately) in terms of the apostolic testimony now enshrined in the

28. This is a leading point in Robert Lewis Dabney's rigorously reasoned but excessively polemical "Prelacy a Blunder," *Discussions: Evangelical and Theological* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1891, 1982), pp. 218–260.

29. Donald G. Bloesch, *The Church* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 2002), pp. 58–62.

30. G. C. Berkhofer, *The Sacraments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), ch. 4.

31. This distinction is a hallmark of Reformed theology. See Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1955 edition), p. 31.

32. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1928, 1976), p. 103.

33. Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, p. 295f. For a Protestant variation, see Douglas Wilson, "Union With Christ: An Overview of the Federal Vision," in ed., E. Calvin Beisner, *The Auburn Avenue Theology, Pros and Cons: Debating the Federal Vision* (Fort Lauderdale, Florida: Knox Theological Seminary, 2004), p. 5.

34. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), Vol. 3, p. 1046ff.

35. Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, "Calvinism," *Calvin and Augustine* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1956), p. 289.

36. The low-church paradigm tends to depict justification as a punctilinear event, since it is activated by the individual's decisive response of faith to the gospel. On the relation between justification within history and justification at the Final Day, see Norman Shepherd, *The Way of Righteousness* (Mt. Hermon, California: Kerygma, 2009), pp. 87–93.

37. John Murray, "The Nature and Unity of the Church," *Collected Writings of John Murray* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Banner of Truth, 1977), Vol. 2, p. 329.

New Testament,<sup>38</sup> which assumes the abiding authority of the Old Testament.<sup>39</sup> This community, knit together in belief and in love for one another and for the world, declares and demonstrates the gospel as the apex of the exercise of Christ's Lordship in the earth.<sup>40</sup> The church is the *gospel* community—"gospel" in that this is the core message that it declares and in terms of which it lives (Phil. 1:5). It exists to press the claims of Christ's Lordship, primarily by preaching and by nourishing its members in the gospel and putting the world into contact with that transformational message. The church is essential for the believer, not because it sacramentally mediates salvation, but because it is God's new covenant community that consistently keeps believers in contact with the gospel message and gospel living without which there is no salvation (Col. 1:19–23; Heb. 5:9).

To simplify, in low-church ecclesiology *personal faith* occupies the role assumed by the *sacramental system* in high-church ecclesiology. This is not to say that low-church ecclesiology denies sacramental efficacy or that high-church ecclesiology denies fiduciary efficacy. It is to say that, in the high-church view, one appropriates the benefits of Jesus' redemption by participation in the sacramental system of the Church, while in the low-church paradigm, one appropriates those benefits by personal faith in Jesus Christ, a faith that the Church exists to invite and nourish.

What then is the role of the Church in relation to salvation in low-church ecclesiologies? It is to testify to and convey that salvation. Bloesch observes:

The church can be thought of as a redemptive community but not in the sense of being in itself a redeeming force in the world. It is the community of the redeemed but not the source of redemption. It plays an important role in directing sinners to Christ, but its ministrations and rituals do not effect redemption. The church's actions take on redemptive significance because they are used by the Spirit to heal and transform lives . . . The church is not a co-mediator with Christ but instead a receiver and reflector of his saving grace . . . The church does not dispense grace but proclaims grace. In this role it may on occasion become the means through which people come to experience God's grace.<sup>41</sup>

Likewise, Barth captures the relative and provisional character of the Church in all low-church ecclesiologies: the Church is consistently looking beyond itself for authentication, truth, vitality, and efficacy. It carries no resources within itself.<sup>42</sup>

The church is (ordinarily) essential to the appropriation of redemption but is not itself that appropriation. One gets living contact with the church by faith-induced contact with the living Lord, not vice versa.

### *The Ecclesial One and Many*

While the high-church paradigm stresses the ecclesial one, the low-church view tries to balance the one *and* the many, avoiding the temptation (when at its best) to tip toward the many and away from the one. We might call this latter error *extreme individualism*. We detect it in parts of the Reformation and aspects of modern evangelicalism.<sup>43</sup> The Church is often identified first as an invisible body seen only to God—all those whom God has chosen to salvation, or at least all those who have trusted in Jesus. The Church as a visible organisation in time and history is there to serve the individual in his personal walk with the Lord, if it is necessary at all. Salvation is not in the church, but in Jesus. Individuals hear the gospel, the Holy Spirit regenerates them, and they believe. They are placed in Jesus' mystical body, the invisible Church, the universal body of all the redeemed who have ever lived, unseen to human eyes but seen by God.

They may (and perhaps should) join a local Church on earth, in this perspective. But this Church is not the body of Christ; it is not the incarnation, even by analogy. It does not put us into vital contact with Jesus. Instead, the Church furnishes fellowship for disparate individual believers. It is where we hear the word preached, and that word blesses and sanctifies our souls as individuals. Water baptism does not unite us to the body of Christ; rather, it identifies us as (individual) followers of Jesus. The Lord's Supper does not unite us to the actual body and blood of Jesus, but it is a memorial by which we relish what he has done for us on the Cross.

In this perspective, the gospel of Jesus for individual salvation is crucially important. We gain eternal life not by joining or being baptised into the Church, but by trusting in and submitting to Jesus. In the individualist perspective, Jesus takes precedence over the Church.<sup>44</sup>

Despite aspects of truth in the extreme individualist perspective, it is not entirely clear in this view why the (earthly, visible) Church is actually necessary. After all, this Church is not necessary to get saved, and strictly speaking, it may not be necessary to grow in the Christian life (sanctification). In the final analysis, perhaps we need only our personal prayer and our private Bible reading

38. Herman N. Ridderbos, "The Redemptive-Historical Character of Paul's Preaching" in *When the Time Had Fully Come* (Jordan Station, Ontario, Canada, 1957, 1982), pp. 44–60.

39. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward Rediscovering the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987).

40. Oscar Cullmann, "The Kingship of Christ and the Church in the New Testament" in *The Early Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1956), pp. 105–137.

41. Donald G. Bloesch, *The Church*, 58–59.

42. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics, The Doctrine of Reconciliation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956, 1988), IV:I, pp. 645f., 690, 697.

43. Even sectarians within the high-church tradition have stressed the many to the neglect of the one ("Our catholic denomination or group of Churches is the only true Church"), just as monopolists within the low-church tradition have stressed the one to the neglect of the many ("Our local Church is the only true [brand of] Church"). The high-church tradition can deny the unity of all believers under the guise of fidelity to the national (or geographic) denomination, and the low-church tradition can deny diversity within the faith under guise of fidelity to the local Church.

44. Charles C. Ryrie seems to operate in this individualistic ambit in *Basic Theology* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1986), pp. 393–436.

and our individual evangelism and perhaps at best some faithful Christian friends.

Conversely, the low-church paradigm wishes to strike a balance between the community and the individual, between the one and the many. This paradigm does not deny the formal distinctives of the ecclesial many, objectivity and community, but it wishes to circumscribe them by *subjectivity* and *individuality*.

First there is *subjectivity*. In the application of redemption the important thing is not human institutions, even vital ones like the Church, but rather what happens in the human heart. This work starts with the gospel and regeneration. God does not save groups of people; he saves them one by one, usually by the preaching of the Church. He regenerates individuals, and he sanctifies individuals. The goal is to live in obedience to the Lord and love him and stay close to him. The Church nourishes this gospel living, and we may never abandon the Church, which is God's ordained means of preserving and perpetuating truth (1 Tim. 3:15).

Then there is the principle of *individualism*. The plan of salvation for man and the world starts (but never ends) with the individual. No one else can do his religion for him. One cannot be saved by getting baptised and getting his name on the Church roll. He is saved only by trusting in Jesus. Nobody can trust Jesus on another's behalf. No one is saved by birth into a Christian family, valuable though a Christian heritage is.<sup>45</sup> One is not saved by enrolling in the Church or preserved in salvation by taking communion. He is saved only by direct, immediate contact with Jesus by means of the Holy Spirit in the preaching of the gospel. The individual and his salvation are important, and the Church is important insofar as it unites these individuals into one body as a loving, obeying, worshipping community (Ac. 2:42; 1 Cor. 10:17).

God saves individuals as individuals—they are “born again,” or born anew (Jn. 3:3). Individuals are called to repent and believe and get baptised and follow Jesus (Ac. 2). We do not get the impression reading the Bible that people are eternally redeemed by joining the Church; they join the Church because are eternally redeemed (Ac. 2:41).<sup>46</sup>

The low-church perspective may tip toward the many, and if it tips too far, it can foster extreme individualism, which undercuts the very rationale for the Church. At its best, the low-church paradigm avoids this imbalance. Alternatively, by its very nature, the high-church perspective tends to obscure the many. In short, to the extent that it is successful, the low-church perspective preserves a balance between the one and the many; to the extent

that it is successful, the high-church perspective tends to eclipse the many in favour of the one.

“We must resist the ideology of individualism,” writes Bloesch, “but we must also be wary of the ideology of collectivism.”<sup>47</sup> The Church is a body (one), and the Church is individuals (many). Like Paul in his epistles (1 Cor. 11–12), low-church supporters seek to preserve the importance of individuals within the context of the community and not allow the latter to absorb the former.

#### MODEST ECCLESIOLOGY

Consequently, low-church ecclesiologies subordinate ecclesiology to Christology, soteriology, and other specific features of the faith.<sup>48</sup> The low-church perspective sees the Church as important, but not ranking with (for example) the Lordship of Christ, his atoning death and victorious resurrection, the Gospel, salvation by grace, and so on. The Church subsists, partly, to put us into contact with these realities, but it is not on par with these realities. In other words, there are dimensions of the Christian faith more important than the Church.

This is by no means to suggest that low church equates to a low *opinion* of the Church as the people of God. In fact, it is precisely because of an exalted opinion of the people of God that a low-church ecclesiology comes about.<sup>49</sup> While among high-church supporters, heavy accent on the clergy, denomination, organisation, structure, liturgy, and formality of the Church sometimes tends to relegate the people of God as such (both corporately and individually) to the background, low-church advocates stress individual members of the local body, variously gifted, as Jesus' kingdom of priests (Rev.1:5), without in any way denying the validity of servant-authority by the leaders in the Church (1 Pet. 5:1–2).

It is in the interest of the Church more as the priestly people of God as individuals and less as a collective under the oversight of an exalted clergy that low-church devotees maintain their position. Low-church devotees detect a note of holy equality among the people of God as the Church is depicted in the Bible. For this reason, they

47. Donald G. Bloesch, *The Church*, p. 13.

48. Paul F. M. Zahl, “Low-Church and Proud,” in ed., John G. Stackhouse, Jr., *Evangelical Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), p. 215.

49. “Against the papal form, and also against the episcopal and presbyterian synodical forms of constitution, there is this basic objection, that they not only do not serve the readiness, openness, and freedom of the congregation for the Word of God and therefore for the Reformation of the Church; they actually hinder it. They all rest on the remarkable contradiction that they entrust *too little* to men—namely, to the men gathered as Christians to be the living congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ—yet, on the other hand, they entrust too much to men—namely, to those particular office bearers and representatives chosen and ordained by men . . . These . . . polities are all open to the charge that they smell a bit of unbelief,” Karl Barth, “The Church: The Living Congregation of the Living Lord Jesus Christ,” *God Here and Now* (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 83, emphasis in original.

45. But the low-church paradigm is not incompatible with infant baptism. See John Murray, *Christian Baptism* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980).

46. For a balanced view, see I. Howard Marshall, *Aspects of the Atonement* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Paternoster, 2007), p. 148. More expansively, see John M. Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 2006, 1980), pp. 233–286.



recognise Church leaders (elders, for instance) in terms of both gifts and office, but do not perceive the leaders as a special sort of caste—they simply exercise different gifts from the rest of the congregation (Eph. 4:1–16; 1 Pet. 5:3). Pastors and other elders enjoy divinely bestowed gifts but are not deemed a different *class* within the Church.<sup>50</sup>

For this reason, low-church advocates are not inclined to invite preachers to wear vestments. Vestments are by no means anti-biblical, but they imply that the minister speaks as a representative of Christ,<sup>51</sup> *in distinction from* the rest of Jesus' priests; but in the minister's capacity in the Church, low-church supporters wish to emphasise not his difference from, but rather his identity with, the people of God.<sup>52</sup> He is no more—or less—Christ's representative than they are. And it is the people of God, less the structure and accoutrements<sup>53</sup> of the church apparatus, which the low-church paradigm wishes to highlight.

### *The Emergent Movement as Irreconcilable Amalgam of the Ecclesial One and the Many*

Into this comparatively well-defined ecclesial bipolarity has emerged the Emergents, that dynamic coalition of (overwhelmingly) young evangelicals<sup>54</sup> consciously committed to postmodernity.<sup>55</sup> The nearly chaotic di-

versity of this movement forbids easy characterisations, and, constantly on the move, it is hard even to define. To speak of *the* Emergent ecclesiology, therefore, is to imply a homogeneity that does not exist. Even, therefore, were certain ecclesial viewpoints common to many of the leading Emergents to allow cautious generalisations, it may be safest to select for review the ecclesiology of a single, prominent Emergent. Phyllis Tickle, who perhaps as much as any other Emergent has addressed ecclesiology proper, is a suitable exemplar.

Tickle postulates that once “every 500 years the empowered structures of institutionalized Christianity, whatever they may be at that time, become an intolerable carapace, or hard shell, that must be shattered in order that renewal and new growth may occur.”<sup>56</sup> This shattering engenders three results:

First, a new, more vital form of Christianity does indeed emerge. Second, the organized expression of Christianity that up until then had been the dominant one is reconstituted into a more pure [*sic*] and less ossified expression of its former self. As a result of this usually energetic but rarely benign process, the church actually ends up with two new creatures where once there had been only one. That is, in the course of birthing a brand-new expression of its faith and praxis, the church also gains a grand refurbishment of the older one.

The third result is of equal, if not greater, significance. Every time the incrustations of an overly established Christianity have been broken open, the faith has spread—and been spread—dramatically into new geographic and demographic areas, thereby increasing exponentially the range and depth of Christianity's reach as a result of its time of unease and distress.<sup>57</sup>

Enlisting the Protestant Reformation as one example of this beneficial shattering, Tickle identifies every such epochal event with the advent of new, innovative social currents to which the Church adapts itself (in the case of the Reformation, that innovation was representative democracy according to which the Church began to pattern itself).

Tickle argues that we today confront just such a shattering, spearheaded by “network theory,” in harmony with which we must define the “church [as] a self-organizing system of relations, symmetrical or otherwise, between innumerable member-parts that themselves form subsets of relations within their smaller networks, in interlacing levels of complexity.”<sup>58</sup>

The end result of this understanding of dynamic structure is the realization that no one of the member parts or connecting networks has the whole or entire “truth” of anything, either as such and/or when independent of the others. Each is only a single working piece of what is evolving and is sustainable so long as the interconnectivity

50. “At their best, free churches [the low-church tradition—AS] have never exalted the individual above the community; they have simply exalted the community—composed of persons in relationship with God—above the hierarchical powers of state and bishop,” Roger E. Olson, “Free Church Ecclesiology and Evangelical Spirituality,” in ed., John G. Stackhouse, Jr., *Evangelical Ecclesiology*, p. 171. Unfortunately, in some Churches, the class system separates not just clergy from laity, but also clergy from clergy. Years ago I preached on a Sunday morning in a highly conservative denominational church. I met with the elders beforehand to pray and to review the liturgy. I asked if I could simply preach and be excused from doing the “salutation” (this is a sort of glorified greeting at the service's beginning). They replied that I *had* to do it, because they were merely “ruling” elders, not “teaching” elders as I was, and therefore were forbidden by the denomination from doing the “salutation.” I am confident that had I inquired of them the rationale for this prohibition, they would have responded that their denomination wishes to exalt the “minister of the word,” who alone is permitted to lead certain parts of the service. However, I am convinced that this denomination has not so much exalted the minister as *devalued the (non-ministerial) saints*. The minister does not stand in some different, super-exalted class; and the Bible nowhere prohibits the other saints (including women and children [1 Cor. 11:4–5; 14:26]) from ministering in the Church meeting, and they often minister to us in music and prayer, if nothing else.

51. Jeffrey J. Meyers, *The Lord's Service* (Moscow, Idaho: Canon Press, 2003), ch. 19.

52. Gordon D. Fee, “*Laos and Leadership Under the New Covenant*,” *Listening to the Spirit in the Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), ch. 10.

53. Defending a Christocentric and apostolic view of the liturgy is Puritan Congregationalist John Owen, “A Discourse Concerning Liturgies and Their Imposition,” *Church, Purity & Unity*, in *The Works of John Owen* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Banner of Truth, 1965), Vol. 15, pp. 3–55.

54. Robert Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002).

55. The literature is voluminous. Start with ed., Leonard Sweet, *The Church in Emerging Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003) and ed., Robert Webber, *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007).

56. Phyllis Tickle, “The Great Emergence,” *Sojourners*, August 2008, p. 30. The book from which this article is adapted is *The Great Emergence* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008).

57. Phyllis Tickle, “The Great Emergence,” p. 30.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 33. One wonders what Paul the apostle would have thought of such a characterisation.



of the whole remains intact. No one of the member parts or their hubs has the whole truth as a possession or as its domain. This conceptualization is not just theory. Rather, it has a name: crowd-sourcing, and crowd-sourcing differs from democracy far more substantially than one might at first suspect. It differs in that it employs total egalitarianism, a respect for the worth of the *hoi polloi* that even pure democracy never had, and a complete indifference to capitalism as a virtue or to individualism as a godly circumstance.<sup>59</sup>

What is the normative authority for fashioning this ecclesiology and for its adherents? The answer is (a) Scripture and (b) “the community,” by which Tickle seems to denote contemporary Christians worldwide (“the network”).<sup>60</sup> This authority, historically conditioned (“trapped in space-time”) constitutes the ecclesiology itself. How can this be? In the delicate but continuous interplay between Scripture and the community, no single viewpoint is authoritative, and no single individual or group secures or guarantees it—it is constantly in flux: this human network “is how the message runs back and forth, over and about the hubs of the network that . . . is tried and amended and tempered into wisdom and right action for effecting God’s will.”<sup>61</sup> The Church equals the *locus* of this interplay, defined as a “conversation.”<sup>62</sup>

While likely no informed Christian early in the twenty-first century would deny the historically conditioned character of theology,<sup>63</sup> we might inquire why Tickle would simply bandwagon with postmodernity<sup>64</sup> and thereby posit a normative ecclesiology by appeal to a descriptive historiography. In willingly acknowledging and relishing the adaptation of the Church to hypermodernity (“network theory”), is she simply offering the latest iteration of the Babylonian captivity of the Church—Church enslaved to culture? For example, when she predicts that the “Great Emergence” will eventually legitimate homosexuality in the Church and in so doing deliver the *coup de grace* to an already flailing *sola scriptura*,<sup>65</sup> is she not applauding a surrender to cultural relativism that she requests the Church retroactively validate? And if “[t]he singl[e] cause of the pitiful theological anarchy of our time is the loss of biblical authority,”<sup>66</sup> does not Tickle contribute to that anarchy?

In terms of the ecclesial one and many, Tickle gets the worst of both worlds. Her “total egalitarianism [in the church]”<sup>67</sup> (extreme individualism) prevents the guarantee and transmission of a definitive faith “once for all delivered” (Jude 3), a visible community that perceives the faith as a sacred trust.<sup>68</sup> Her global “network” offers

no unity apart from the cohesion of the network itself. It is not the faith grounded in Scripture to which all must submit that is normative, but rather the constantly mutating consensus of the individuals comprising the network. Meanwhile, Tickle’s “respect for the worth of the *hoi polloi* [i.e., the many] that even pure democracy never had” forbids the encroachment of the transcendent Word as the message of judgment and reformation in the Church. Since the authority in the Church is a conflation of Bible and “community,” change is generated by intramural, never extramural, interaction (extreme communalism). The community is always in dialogue with itself.<sup>69</sup> Operationally, man as communal being vests himself with sovereignty.

Tickle’s ecclesiology is not strictly high church, since it posits “total egalitarianism” and resists any authoritative hierarchy that secures and preserves an orthodox faith. Nor is it low church, because it perceives spiritual realities as deriving from “the network” and not in a prior relationship with Jesus Christ.<sup>70</sup> Neither fish nor fowl, her ecclesiology is a weird amalgam suited to, and likely impossible apart from, postmodernity. Indeed, one might postulate that it is a coalition of individuals all committed to autonomy—a “radically communalised radical individualism,” we might say.

Her ecclesiology is not evangelical, because it denies the exclusive, normative role of Scripture. To the degree that the Emergent Church adopts Tickle’s ecclesiology,<sup>71</sup> it departs from evangelical and biblical faith.

## CONCLUSION

The low-church paradigm, which resists the high-church as well as the Emergent paradigms, is not without its dangers. If one-sided and unreflective, it can undermine the cohesion and even calling of the community, dissolve the objective dimensions of the faith, and exalt the individual to the exclusion of the body. In contrast to the high-church paradigm, though, it takes seriously the people of God both as a collective priesthood and as individual priests. At its best it over-exalts neither the believer nor the community, but properly exalts Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and never permits man or his institutions to arrogate to themselves God’s sovereignty.

The chief compelling characteristic of a low-church ecclesiology, in fact, is its unremitting stress on the Creator-creature distinction: it refuses to enmesh Jesus into his Church in such a way as to imply that to join the Church

59. *Ibid.*, p. 33–34.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

63. Gerhard Ebeling, *The Problem of Historicity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967). For an explicitly biblical warrant for recognition of theology as a historically conditioned activity, see Vern S. Poythress, *Symphonic Theology* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey, P. and R. Publishing, 1987, 2001).

64. Phyllis Tickle, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

65. *Ibid.*, pp. 98–101, 162f.

66. Clark H. Pinnock, *A New Reformation* (Tigerville, South Carolina: Jewel Books, 1968), p. 6.

67. Phyllis Tickle, “The Great Emergence,” p. 34.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 104.

68. Thomas Oden, *Agenda for Theology* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), ch. 5.

69. Note the criticism of Rome in Karl Barth that applies to the Emergents as well, in *Church Dogmatics, The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1936, 1963), I:I, p. 119.

70. She argues that it is possible to be a member of the Church apart from any distinct Christian identity: Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence*, p. 159.

71. The dust jacket of Tickle’s book carries endorsements by Emergent leaders Tony Jones, Scot McKnight, and Brian McLaren.

in its sacramental system is to join Christ or to become a member of the Church is to become a Christian. A low-church ecclesiology tends to preserve the church from idolising itself; its intrinsic tendency is to keep Jesus Christ front and centre, exalted above the Church, which in fact exists to exalt him, and does not exist to domesticate our Lord to the Church itself.

This the high-church paradigm, with its identification of the Church as the extension of Jesus' incarnation, its definition of the sacraments as the medicine of salvation, and its positioning of the bishops and priests and pope as God's chosen dispensers of eternal life, is much less capable of doing.

For that reason, if for no other, low-church ecclesiology is preferable to high-church ecclesiology.

The creditable ecumenical spirit of our times should be tempered by an understanding of the unbridgeable chasm separating these two ecclesiologies—and not merely two different ecclesiologies but also two different kinds of Churches; two different modalities of salvation; and, indeed, two versions of Christianity. The unbridgeable chasm is not papal supremacy, not the interpretive authority of the magisterium, not Marian dogma, not even soteriology, abstractly considered. In the high-church conception, all of these distinctives are what they are because they occupy a unique role in an ecclesiology.

The paradigm that the benefits of our Lord's atonement and resurrection accrue to sinners only as they relate to the Church as a mystical but actual, living extension of the incarnation creates a communal version of Christianity in which God relates to man in a way that is antithetically conceived in the paradigm that the redemptive benefits are conveyed to sinners by the individual exercise of faith, no matter how prominent the role of the Church in proclaiming and fostering that faith.

In this distinctive, low-church ecclesiology reflects evangelical identity,<sup>72</sup> and Donald Carson is accurate to

72. Alister McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1995), pp. 19, 73.

declare that “[A]gainst high churchmanship, evangelicalism stressed the sufficiency and finality of Scripture (over against a too ready appeal to the voice of tradition), the finality of Christ's atoning death (over against any view that posits a[n] overly sacramentarian theology), and the priesthood of all believers (over against a sacerdotal view of Christian ministry).”<sup>73</sup>

If, likewise, we agree with Packer in defining evangelicalism “as that version of Christianity which affirms the salvation of sinners by grace alone in Christ alone through faith alone, as against any thought of salvation by effort and merit on the one hand or by the working of ecclesiastical mechanisms, institutional and sacramental, on the other,”<sup>74</sup> we cannot escape the conclusion that the concept and moniker “high-church evangelicals” (when “high church” denotes the ecclesiology I have described) is a contradiction of terms. There simply are no high-church evangelicals.

As much as we love our high-church sisters and brothers in the Lord, as much as we are motivated by a desire for unity and catholicity and/or tempted by the syncretism and pluralism of our time to broaden the definition of evangelicalism, we cannot pretend as though these ecclesiologies can be reconciled. Perhaps the most naive tack of all is the supposition that these two viewpoints can be combined, or that they are variations on a single theme, or that with arduous dialogue they can be overcome.

We can be evangelical churchmen, or we can be high churchmen. We cannot be both.<sup>75</sup> *C&S*

73. Donald A. Carson, “Evangelicals, Ecumenism, and the Church,” in eds., Kenneth S. Kantzer and Carl F. H. Henry, *Evangelical Affirmations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), p. 350.

74. J. I. Packer, *Beyond the Battle for the Bible* (Westchester, Illinois: Cornerstone, 1980), p. 37.

75. Many thanks to the following for their critical interaction with earlier drafts of this paper: Thomas Baima, Jason Escalante, John M. Frame, Don Garlington, Peter Leithart, Patrick Reardon, and Richard A. Sandlin. I alone am responsible for its content.

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

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# FAITH IN THE PRESIDENT: WHAT DOES OBAMA *really* BELIEVE?

by *Esmond Birnie*

## INTRODUCTION

THIS subject is important for a number of reasons not least because previously the leadership level of the Democratic Party has divorced itself from most religious groups in the US<sup>1</sup> even to the extent of being reluctant to use language which would be comfortable to Christians. Some observers would go further and say that for much of the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s the Democratic Party was in league with a militantly secularist agenda.<sup>2</sup> As he rose through the primaries and then the 2008 election Obama certainly *seemed* to change all this; “We worship an awesome God in the Blue States.”<sup>3</sup>

Whilst a detailed analysis has yet to be done of the November 2008 voting figures I suspect some combination of Obama perceived attractiveness plus a disillusionment with G. W. Bush’s previous performance<sup>4</sup> as a “born again” president gave Obama a *relatively* high share (for a Democrat) of the “evangelical vote.”<sup>5</sup>

1. Barack Obama himself concedes this point in this book (2007) *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming The American Dream* [hereafter *Audacity*], Canongate, Edinburgh, p. 214.

2. Taking a longer historical view this represents a striking reversal. In the nineteenth century the Democratic Party was often associated with conservative evangelicalism (A. Sullivan (12 July 2007), “The origins of the God gap”, *Time*, <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,85999,1642651,00.html>). As recently as 1976 Pat Robertson endorsed a Democrat (Jimmy Carter) for the presidency.

3. Obama to the 2004 Democratic Convention, quoted in S. Mansfield (2008), *The Faith of Barack Obama*, Thomas Nelson, Nashville, p. xv. Those of us from this side of the Atlantic need to remind ourselves that traditionally in the US blue is associated with the Democrats (now, the *relatively* more left wing Party!)

4. See my (2008), “Christian Politics: The State we’re in” *Christianity and Society*, Vol. 18, No. 2, Winter, pp. 32–40.

5. Opinion polling by Barna in August 2008 suggested McCain and Obama were close to neck and neck amongst self-identified evangelicals (39% and 37% respectively). However, when a stricter definition (using doctrinal categories) is used the gap widened to 61% compared to only 17% (see J. W. Kennedy (2008), “Preach and Teach,” in *Christianity Today*, Vol. 52, No. 10.

## Sources

In an effort to try to be fair to the President I will draw on the two substantial books he has written which represent his (political) autobiography. It is notable how much “faith” figures in both these books. The first, written in 1995 (*Dreams from My Father*,<sup>6</sup> hereafter *Dreams*) came after Obama had become the first African American President of the Harvard Law Review (and in 1996 he was elected to the Illinois State Senate). In 2004 Obama made a keynote speech to the Democratic National Convention and was elected to the Senate. He then published a second book: *Audacity*.

What sort of man emerges from his writings? The two books are well written.<sup>7</sup> There is no doubt Obama is articulate and intelligent. If anything the earlier and more autobiographical *Audacity* may be too novelistic; did things really happen quite as he described them?<sup>8</sup> Certainly a line such as that on page 133 of *Audacity* “In 1983 I decided to become a community organiser” takes added force when read with hindsight. At the same time, to his credit Obama shows some honest self-criticism (*Audacity* describes his envy during the late 1990s-early 2000s as he saw younger politicians outpace him and tells how he felt shamed into softening his previously very combative web

6. (2007), Canongate, Edinburgh.

7. As an example of Obama’s turn of phrase, he told the journalist Cathleen Falsani in 2004, “... the biggest challenge is always maintaining your moral compass.” One wonders if British Prime Minister Gordon Brown who used the same phrase a few years later had been reading Obama! (The interview with Falsani is probably the longest in-depth interview with Obama about his faith; <http://falsani.blogspot.com/2008/04/barack-obama-2004-god-facctor-interview.html>).

8. Obama’s *Dreams* may be a better literary work than his rival John McCain’s (2000), *Faith of my Fathers*, Harper Collins, New York (note the irony that both Presidential candidates wrote about their forefathers, and also McCain’s possibly cunningly ambiguous religious reference) but I found the latter much easier to understand and follow!

9. *The Times* (21 January 2009), p. 7.

10. “I am a Christian but my father came from a Kenyan family

description of anti-abortion campaigners [p. 3 and 196]). *The Times* described *Audacity* as “candid.”<sup>9</sup> On occasions he has also tackled contentious issues with some courage (e.g. that the quality of teachers must be improved, or the need to take moral responsibility for the disintegration of the African American family, *Audacity* p. 162 and 256).

#### *Religious inheritance*

Commentators have usually focused on Obama’s mixed ethnic inheritance (White and African American) and mixed nationality background (US, Kenyan and Indonesian). However, religiously speaking, his background is also rather varied. His maternal grandmother was a “strait backed Methodist” who valued reason over passion and temperance over both (*Dreams*, p. 14) whilst his maternal grandfather started as a “strict Baptist” before turning for a time to be a Unitarian Universalist (*Dreams*, p. 14 and 17). Both Barack’s Kenyan father and Indonesian step fathers had Islamic backgrounds (the latter also seems to have been fairly syncretistic, *Dreams*, p. 37, whilst the former, according to Barack was probably an agnostic).<sup>10</sup> Obama’s mother possessed no particular faith but her son writes of her respectful and eclectic borrowing of elements from many faiths and cultures (*Audacity*, pp. 204–5).

#### *Conversion*

As one reads *Dreams* (e.g. p. 153) one gets the definite impression that the young Obama admired the religious convictions of many of his fellow community activists but that this was an admiration of the outsider. *Dreams* (p. 281) gives the credit in human terms for his conversion to the Rev. Jeremiah Wright of Chicago.<sup>11</sup> It appears that Obama’s conversion can be dated to Wright’s sermon on (a significant title!) “The Audacity of Hope”. Frustratingly in Obama’s account we are not told very much as to precisely what Wright said at that time but the text was on Hannah (1 Samuel 1) and Obama was moved by Wright’s appeal to move to the “. . . equal ground at the foot of this Cross” (*Dreams*, p. 292). However, in Mansfield’s book on Obama there is the following: “Somehow, beginning with the slender hopes of Hannah, the mother of Samuel, the Rev. Wright managed to reflect on the injustice of Sharpsville and Hiroshima, the follies of State and federal government in America, the callousness of

the middle class. Despite the broad range of references, or perhaps because of them, a laser of hope penetrated Barack’s soul.”<sup>12</sup>

#### *Theological distinctives*

But what precisely is the content of the President’s faith? There do appear to be a number of (sometimes conflicting) layers. First, as we have seen, a multi-faith or even syncretistic background. As a young man he read widely (including Augustine and Reinhold Niebuhr) and then in Chicago he finally joined a Church community strongly influenced by the Black Liberationist approach. In all of this (as in other things) he may be rather post-modern.<sup>13</sup> His own testimony is that he prays but he does not seem to believe in Christianity as the exclusive truth. In *Audacity* (p. 208) he says that as he was baptised into membership at Trinity United Church Chicago “I submitted myself to His will and dedicated myself to discovering his will.” And yet he also writes that the American Founding Fathers (*Audacity*, p. 93) rejected the idea of absolute truth. This may well be true of many of those who signed the Declaration of Independence (though surely not of all of them) but it is a statement which is probably revealing about Obama himself.

Elsewhere in *Audacity* as he tries with whatever degree of success to open a line to evangelicals he says that the latter must recognise the separation of Church and State (p. 217), and that they must only use arguments in public debates which are accessible to all (i.e. use reason and not revelation), he implies the debate about homosexuality is largely a cultural matter (p. 221) and he then says Christians should not base their position on “obscure lines in Romans” (p. 222). Critically, the would be president wrote that he regarded the Bible “not [as] as static text” “but the living Word and that I must be continually open to new revelations” (*Audacity*, p. 224). In another place Obama has written, “. . . I’ve said this before and I know this raises questions in the minds of some evangelicals. I do not believe that my mother, who never formally embraced Christianity as far as I know . . . I do not believe she went to hell.”<sup>14</sup>

#### *By their fruits*

However, it is one thing to read what Obama said *before* 2008 but what has he actually done since being elected? (Albeit, being mindful that it is still early days for his administration.) One political rival of Obama, Ambassador Alan Keyes, during his unsuccessful contest with Obama

that includes generations of Muslims. As a boy I spent several years in Indonesia and heard the call of the *azaan* at the break of dawn and the fall of dusk. As a young man I worked in Chicago communities where many found dignity and peace in their Muslim faith”; Obama’s Cairo speech, *The Times* (5 June 2009), “That is the peaceful world we seek, but we can only achieve it together”, pp. 36–37. For Obama’s view that his father was probably an agnostic see Falsani, *op. cit.*

11. *Dreams* was written over a decade before the 2008 presidential campaign and by that stage Obama had distanced himself from aspects of Wright’s controversial preaching. Obama denounced the preacher for “divisive and destructive” comments about 9/11.

12. Quoted at <http://seanslaglebookmarkcafe.blogspot.com/2008/09/faith-of-barack-obama-by-stephen.html>

13. “I’m rooted in the Christian tradition. I believe that there are many paths to the same place, and that is a belief there is a higher power . . .” Falsani, *op. cit.*

14. Quoted in *Newsweek* (2008). <http://www.Newsweek.com/id/145971/page.4>. Interestingly, in the 2004 interview with Falsani (Falsani, *op. cit.*) Obama says his mother was a Christian.

15. The Republican Keyes’ opposition to his fellow African American has not abated. At the time of writing (summer 2009) he was



for an Illinois US Senate seat in 2004 said, “Christ would not vote for Barack Obama because Barack Obama has voted to behave in a way that is inconceivable for Christ to have behaved.”<sup>15</sup> Well, from the start Obama indicated some departure from the line held under Bush. For example, Federal funds are to be provided for embryonic stem cell research and also to international aid organisations which promote abortion.

In *Audacity* (p. 82) Obama said appointees to the Supreme Court should be “moderate.” Questions have been asked about Obama’s first appointment to that Court, Sonia Sotomayor. She is the first Justice from a Hispanic background and also one who has been quoted as supporting a very activist role for the Courts in policy formation, particularly with respect to positive discrimination on ground of ethnic background. And time will tell what he might do with any further opportunities to reconstruct the Supreme Court.

Obama has long combined an attempt to outreach to parts of the evangelical constituency with a scathing view of the ambitions of the Religious Right: “[they are not wrong to believe] . . . that Christianity is America’s dominant faith but [they are wrong to assert] that a particular fundamentalist brand of that faith should drive public policy overriding any alternative source of understanding, whether the writings of liberal theology, the findings of the National Academy of Sciences, or the words of Thomas Jefferson . . .” (*Audacity*, p. 37). It is worth noting who his authorities are!

### *Like Lincoln?*

During the 2008–09 transition to the new administration comparisons were frequently drawn between Obama and a president whose base was in Illinois; Lincoln.<sup>16</sup> Obama himself contributed to this. In *Audacity* (pp. 122–3) he admits it was unfortunate that he had previously written (in *Time* in 2005), “In Lincoln’s rise from poverty, his ultimate mastery of language and law, his capacity to overcome personal loss and remain determined in the face of repeated defeat—in all this, he reminded me not just of my own struggles.”<sup>17</sup> For our purposes, the comparisons

involved in a legal challenge as to whether Obama had been properly registered at birth as a US citizen. Persons born outside of the USA cannot assume the office of president.

16. G. Pilcher (16 January 2009), “Like Lincoln, Obama’s faith is uncertain,” *Daily Telegraph*.

17. Obama was chided by Peggy Noonan, formerly a speech writer to Reagan, for this immodesty. Both Obama and Lincoln came to the presidency with very limited experience of politics at the Federal or international level. I do not think Obama has experienced “personal loss . . . and . . . defeat” on a scale comparable to the pre-1860 Lincoln nor (thankfully) has he inherited a developing civil war although the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq continue. However, Obama had appointed his main rival (indeed the former favourite for the presidential nomination) Hillary Clinton to be his Secretary of State just as Lincoln improbably (but, ultimately, successfully) placed William Seward as his Secretary of State. Time will tell how great Obama’s “team of rivals” proves to be (see the book of that title about Lincoln’s very impressive cabinet by D. K. Goodwin (2005), *Team of Rivals*, Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, New York).

with Lincoln have a particular interest: there remains great ambiguity as to what, if any, were the distinctively Christian religious beliefs of that president.

As Lincoln was raised to almost secular sainthood post-1865 the debate as to whether he was a real Christian has raged and it is doubtful it will be resolved this side of eternity. It seems clear as a young man he was something of a free thinker albeit later in life he managed to show impressive regard for Christian ethics (if not necessarily for doctrine). His wife, after all, did say he was “not a technical Christian.”<sup>18</sup> However, a case can be made for saying that something happened to his beliefs, especially an intensification of his trust in providence, whilst he was in the White House (possibly about 1862) probably in response to personal (the death of one son) and national tragedy (the rising death toll on the battlefields). Is Obama consciously modelling himself on Lincoln in terms of being religious whilst “doctrine-lite”? Possibly. Certainly, one aspect of Lincoln that the present president has quoted with approval is the former’s very nuanced approach to providence in politics: “. . . [we] . . . can never act with the certainty that God is on our side; and yet at times we must act nonetheless, as if we are certain, protected from error only by providence” (*Audacity*, p. 98)

### CONCLUSIONS

In the first half year since inauguration Obama cited Jesus more frequently than G. W. Bush did.<sup>19</sup> Whilst some within the US evangelical community (broadly defined) have been prepared to give Obama a fair wind (to varying extents Rick Warren, T. D. Jakes, Jim Wallis and Tony Campolo), the nature of Obama’s faith remains in dispute. James Dobson has said that he “deliberately distorts the traditional understanding of the Bible to fit his own worldview.”<sup>20</sup> At this stage I would say that the president does appear to have a personal faith albeit one which has added to it very large components which fall outside orthodox Christianity. This may or may not be “distortion” but Obama does not seem to have disguised what he actually believes. As we have seen the evidence is presented in his own books, interviews and speeches. Perhaps his dominant trait in this area is not “distortion” or “disception” but naivety, a belief that he will indeed find it possible to find substantial common ground with US evangelicals or, indeed, Catholics. In his May 2009 speech at Notre Dame he appealed that we, “. . . open our hearts and minds to those who may not think like we do or believe what we do . . .” in search for, “. . . common ground.”<sup>21</sup> Although, in the longer term such

18. W. L. Miller (2007), *Lincoln’s Virtues: An Ethical Biography*, Knopf, New York, p. 87.

19. *Politico* cited in *The Economist* (2009, July 19), “Lexington Glad to be godless,” p. 50.

20. *Newsweek* (2008). <http://www.newsweek.com/id/145971/page4>.

21. *Daily Telegraph* (18 May 2009), “Anti-abortion protestors target US president.” For the full text see the Huffington Post on the web. Such naivety, which is reminiscent of aspects of President Clinton

naivety might prove to be politically astute if it emerges that American evangelicalism no longer has sufficient

doctrinal content to make much by way of discerning political judgements.<sup>22</sup> *C&S*

and Prime Minister Tony Blair, may be just a part of a larger over-optimism that hopes it will often be possible to split the difference on contentious policy issues (be they abortion, health care reform, or the deficit) and find some hitherto elusive “common values” (Audacity, p. 9, 34, 58).

22. D. F. Wells (2008), *The Courage to be Protestant*, IVP, Leicester, certainly points out much evidence of vagueness and imprecision in

the beliefs of many (self-identified) “born again” American Christians. One critic reminded me that in the past many Americans with very clear evangelical and Reformed doctrinal beliefs had felt able to endorse first slavery and then racial discrimination. Whilst doctrinal soundness may not be a sufficient condition for political wisdom in all cases (and given God’s common grace may not always be a necessary condition) I still think the one thing tends to lead to the other.

# WHICH WILBERFORCE?

## CONTRASTING EVANGELICAL RECONSTRUCTIONS

by *Esmond Birnie*

THE recent bicentenary of the 1807 Westminster legislation which outlawed slave trading within the British Empire has implied that the life and work of William Wilberforce have received a lot of attention. 2007 saw the publication of two excellent biographies, by John Pollock and William Hague, as well as a Hollywood bio-pic.<sup>1</sup> I want to write about how Wilberforce has been used (“reconstructed”) by two contrasting camps within evangelical Christianity—by the relatively more fundamentalist or conservative and also by the relatively more liberal or progressive.<sup>2</sup> Arguably, neither camp has been entirely fair to Wilberforce’s life, work, aspirations and methods.

as the Wesleys and Whitefield, the later decades of the eighteenth century were a time of great and obvious public immorality.<sup>4</sup> Wilberforce went on to become a leading light in a major revival of evangelical faith. He was, for example, a crucial part of the so-called “Clapham Sect.”<sup>5</sup>

### *Wilberforce in the image of fundamentalism*

Wilberforce certainly underwent a clear conversion to faith in Christ in the mid 1780s (when he was in his mid twenties). This meant he left behind the nominalism of most of his own family<sup>3</sup> and indeed the very superficial adherence which passed for religion amongst the English ruling classes. Notwithstanding the efforts of men such

In July 2008 in Northern Ireland there was some controversy as to how far government should seek to apply the “Laws of God,” particularly on issues of human sexuality (notably homosexuality) and how far politicians could legitimately bring to bear their Christian convictions whilst working and, indeed, legislating in the public arena. At that time Wilberforce was quoted as a positive example of Christian politics.<sup>6</sup> It was quite legitimate to point to Wilberforce as an example but I wonder how far those who claimed Wilberforce as one of their own had studied how he actually operated as a politician?

Wilberforce never held government office. The number of MPs who shared his intense religious convictions was probably always quite small. He therefore relied on a process of persuasion, over the course of two decades after 1787, to create a majority in the House of Commons to vote against the slave trade. As part of this process he was quite willing to work with other politicians who did not share his faith (Pitt the Younger) or even with those

1. J. Pollock, *Wilberforce* (London: Kingsway Publications, 2007), and W. Hague, *William Wilberforce* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2007). Also very useful is the biography by F. Furneaux, *William Wilberforce* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1974). The 2007 film was *Amazing Grace* (Michael Apted, Momentum Pictures).

2. For these purposes “evangelical” is being defined very broadly; an evangelical is anyone who self-describes himself/herself as such. For the problems around the contemporary use of the word “evangelical” see C. Watkin, “By any other name? ‘Fundamentalist’ and ‘evangelical’ as terms of public discourse,” *Cambridge Papers*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (2008) (it is increasingly used as a term of abuse like “communist” and “fascist”) or D. F. Wells, *The Courage to be Protestant* (Leicester: IVP, 2008) (theological downgrade implies that the name means very little any more).

3. Hague, *op cit.*, p. 8.

4. It was estimated that one-quarter of the unmarried women living in London were prostitutes (Furneaux, *op cit.*, p. 56).

5. Interestingly, some of this impact did not last. None of Wilberforce’s children continued in his evangelical religion (Pollock, *op cit.*, p. 371). However, there was to be quite a number of prominent “second generation, Victorian, ex-evangelicals” including Gladstone, Stephens, Macaulay, and Newman (Furneaux, *op.cit.*, pp. 43–44).

6. This debate was initiated by remarks by Iris Robinson MLA MP. See, D. Boucher, “Faith has a long legacy of public benefit,” *News Letter* (18 July 2008), p. 7.

whose lifestyle was far removed from Christian morality (Charles Fox).

With a very few exceptions, Wilberforce's long career was devoid of any hint of nastiness or deceit in his tactics: "His readiness to consider all points of view, assume the best of human nature in his opponents and change opinions if necessary, were all opinions that should be rated highly in a politician."<sup>7</sup> Whereas it was said of the seventeenth century Roundheads and Puritans that they were "right but repulsive" a critical part of Wilberforce's success was his attractive personality. He had, for example, a sense of humour; one of his many jokes was "why is the House of Commons like Noah's Ark, because it has many beasts but few humans!"<sup>8</sup> In a more general sense Wilberforce and the Claphamites helped to influence public opinion because whilst faithfully Christian they worked with the grain of modernity and enlightenment values.<sup>9</sup>

#### *Wilberforce in the image of liberal or progressive evangelicalism*

There has been a tendency for some Christians, especially evangelical ones, who favour social activism to quote Wilberforce (alongside, say, Lord Shaftesbury) almost *ad nauseum* as an antidote to that long period (roughly the 1920s–60s) when many Christians eschewed such involvement.<sup>10</sup> However, I think something more than this is now going on.

It is sometimes claimed that in contemporary culture people need to see that we care before they will even consider what we believe. As already noted, Wilberforce was a very winsome character. He therefore seems attractive to those Christians who fear our reputation itself has become a barrier to spreading the gospel; that the very name "evangelical" is a bit of a stench in the nostrils of the modern world.

So far so good, but I wonder if Wilberforce would have approved of the associated tendency amongst some evangelicals to downgrade some of the points of sharp contention with modern culture (notably regarding sexuality)<sup>11</sup> in the hope that we will get a hearing on

everything else or so that we can focus on commonly accepted "good causes" such as international development? Somehow I doubt it. In any case I doubt if this strategy will even work at some pragmatic level and it is certainly not right. I do not believe we have liberty to soft sell the parts of the Christian message which are most dissonant to modern culture. I do not think we have to choose between condemning homosexuality, abortion, global hunger and racism—they are all wrong! There is little evidence that we will win much respect from the media or the secular political establishment by policies of tactical withdrawals.

It is notable that the 2007 evangelical celebration of Wilberforce's achievement regarding slavery did *not* focus on two other causes about which he also felt strongly; the abolition of the nineteenth century's equivalent to the national lottery and the conversion of India to Christianity.<sup>12</sup> I fear that the 2007 version of Wilberforce was sometimes a domesticated one.

#### CONCLUSION

The *Amazing Grace* film reproduces Wilberforce's famous statement of 1787 that he had two God-given tasks; "the suppression of slavery" and "the reformation of manners".<sup>13</sup> Except, in the film the latter is translated into modern speech as "the reformation of society" and the latter is implied to look like the modern Welfare State. Yes, it is entirely right to be awed by the width of Wilberforce's compassionate concerns<sup>14</sup> but I fear the modern reproduction of him is "spinning" him into something he was not and thus loses his very strong sense that the foundation of all lasting social reform is a society where individuals fortified by Christian convictions take personal moral responsibility for their actions. So to summarise, the life and work of Wilberforce continues to repay study. Some excellent, up-to-date source materials are available. The "right wing" of evangelicalism could learn from his sweetness and gentleness in method but the "left wing" could learn from his unshakeable Christian distinctiveness. *C&S*

7. Hague, *op cit.*, p. 507. And Hague, as a former leader of the Conservative Party, is well placed to comment on the characteristics of Wilberforce as a parliamentarian (Hague went on to note that Wilberforce's virtues might have implied that he would not have been a very effective government minister!).

8. Pollock, *op cit.*, p. 157.

9. So Wilberforce argued that slavery was not only immoral but an affront to the empirical evidence (and the views of the then emerging theories of market economics) that Britain, Africa and America would prosper best through free trade between free nations. J. Coffey, "The abolition of the slave trade: Christian conscience and political action," *Cambridge Papers*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (2006).

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

11. For examples of what I fear is an over-accommodating approach

to secularism in the public arena (which is being sold as an attempt to emphasise loving engagement rather than harsh confrontation) see "Towards a fairer society," *Agenda* (Evangelical Alliance, July/August, 2008), p. 5; P. Yancey, *What's So Amazing about Grace* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), p. 236 and J. Edwards, *An Agenda for Change* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007).

12. See Hague, *op cit.*, p. 354 and Furneaux, *op cit.*, p. 322, 327. Wilberforce went so far as to describe the eastern religions as "... one grand abomination."

13. Hague, *op cit.*, p. 141 and Pollock, *op cit.*, p. 14.

14. For example, animal welfare, mental health, prison and criminal justice reform.

# THE LEGACY OF THOMAS CHALMERS

by *Robin Phillips*

THOMAS CHALMERS was born on 17 March 1780, the sixth child of John and Elizabeth Chalmers, in a small fishing and trading village on the south-east coast of Fife, Scotland. The Chalmers family owned a dye and thread works as well as a general merchant's business. The money provided by these businesses made it possible for John to give his children a good academic education. As important as a good education was, however, John's primary desire was that his children would excel in what he termed, "practical Christianity."

The family home was a happy hub of activity as Thomas, along with his eight brothers and five sisters, were encouraged to read widely and to discuss the latest scientific advances with their parents. From an early age it was evident that Thomas was an extremely gifted child. At the age of three he outstripped his parents' resources and was enrolled in the local school. When he was only ten he was ready to enter St. Andrew's University but was too young and had to wait until he was twelve to begin.

When he entered the university in 1792, Thomas quickly outpaced the curriculum, showing particular aptitude at mathematics. While still a student he became one of the greatest theoretical mathematicians in the world.

Thomas hoped to become a professor at the university when he was old enough. However, at the age of fifteen he began to sense a call to the ministry. Thus, in 1795 Thomas entered the divinity school in order to prepare for ministry. Three years later he finished the course but because he was too young to become an ordained minister he took a post as a private tutor.

In 1799, Thomas Chalmers was ordained, but there was still no opening for him to serve. Thus he continued to take courses at university, eventually becoming an assistant professor. It was evident to the entire university that he was a man of exceptional intellectual gifting. Although he began teaching graduate courses to students older than himself, being an expert in everything from chemistry to moral philosophy to history to political economy to theoretical mathematics, he was still too young to be offered a permanent position.

On the side, Chalmers taught himself German (he

had already taught himself French to read French math books). He also began to dabble in the Nordic languages, ultimately inventing his own Nordic language in which to record his journal entries.

## *A Rising Star*

In the year of 1803 two opportunities simultaneously presented themselves. He was simultaneously offered the rural parish of Kilmany and a position as a permanent faculty member at the university teaching mathematics. Since Kilmany was not far from St. Andrews, he accepted both posts.

An energetic orator, Chalmers quickly became the most popular preacher in the entire region and the most sought after professor at the university. Transfixed by his magnificent intellect, students described the experience of being spell-bound as they listened to him. Likewise in his Church at Kilmany, his parishioners were transformed as they listened to his elegant sermons.

Thomas Chalmers was clearly a rising star and his fame began to spread far and wide. People began coming from all over England and Scotland to meet this incredibly accomplished young man.

## *From Self-Sufficiency to Christ-Sufficiency*

When he was 29, Chalmers was struck by a series of bereavements. His old brother and sister were stricken with tuberculosis. During the long period of suffering prior to their deaths, Chalmers nursed them at their bedside. The strength of their faith and their love for God utterly undid Chalmers. Chalmers was completely transformed by his dying brothers' understanding of God's grace, and the peace in his eyes as he was ushered into the arms of Jesus. Likewise with his sister, who asked her younger brother to sing the entire Psalter to her eight times as she withered away.

When Chalmers returned to the parish at Kilmany, he was a completely changed man. He now realised that his abilities were his greatest liability. From then on,



instead of drawing strength from his gifting, Chalmers' ministry was marked by humility and utter dependence on Christ. Reflecting on this transformation, he would later write, "In the death of my beloved I have discovered the one thing I never discovered at university, that I am at heart a fool. I have always been heralded as wise and I have now discovered the gospel truth of my dire need of Christ Jesus and of the gospel. I have discovered the fleeting nature of time. Should I ever resort to my pride and my strength again, O God, prune me quick. Prune me quick."

Prior to this transformation, Chalmers had been deserting his parish during the week to teach at university. But now Chalmers devoted himself full-time to the people of his Church, even committing to visit every home in the parish on three successive days each week. In 1812 he married Grace Pratt. It was a happy marriage and their six daughters helped create a lively and hospitable atmosphere in the home.

It was in Kilmany that Chalmers developed his model of parish life.

#### *Time in Glasgow*

The Lord blessed Chalmers' ministry amazingly, attracting the attention of the Church leaders in Glasgow, who asked Chalmers to apply his gifts there. While loath to leave his beloved Kilmany, in 1815 Chalmers was persuaded to visit Glasgow to see if the biblical principles that he had applied in the country would work in the city.

The Industrial Revolution had radically altered the landscape of the cities, turning them into cruel wildernesses where swarms of human beings lived lives of isolation and poverty. Nowhere was this more true than in Glasgow.

Immediately upon arriving in the city, Chalmers applied himself to the needs of the 12,000 families he was responsible for. Believing that it was the job of the Church, not the State, to help the poor and make the world a better place, he entered into an organisational frenzy in order to radically transform the region. The Lord blessed his work so amazingly that government social services spending in Glasgow was reduced by eighty percent in three years (this included all services from cleaning of streets, policing, helping poor, hauling away of rubbish, sewage management, etc.)

When Chalmers had begun work in Glasgow, virtually the only people who went to school were children whose parents could afford to send them to expensive private academies. Eight years later virtually everyone in his parish could go to a parish school.

#### *Bestselling Author*

Chalmers was brought to the public eye again when he began giving Thursday afternoon lectures in Astronomy as part of a "businessman's lunch" series at the church. By the second lecture the church where he was lecturing was packed with 2,100 people. At a time when there was

increasing polarisation between science and religion, Chalmers proclaimed that astronomy, like all of science, declares the providence of God. He drew attention to the fact that astronomy's purpose is to capture that which is Christ's own and show it as his own. Because Chalmers' lectures, like his sermons, were always written down, they were easily collected by one of Glasgow's small religious publishing houses and put into a book. Within twenty minutes of being published the entire inventory sold. They printed more, only to have them outsell Sir Walter Scott's popular Waverly novels that were published on the same day. Nine printings in the first year still could not meet the demand. Chalmers quickly became the bestselling author in the entire world.

#### *The St John's Experiment*

In 1819, Chalmers transferred to the parish of St. John's, an even more difficult part of Glasgow. The parish contained 21,000 people, which included some of the roughest and poorest people in the entire town.

Chalmers was able to expand his effectiveness by delegating work to his deacons. Determined to keep poor-relief within the funds available from Church offerings, he believed it was crucial that the poor learn how to responsibly manage their affairs with the little they had. Thus, Chalmers and his deacons systematically visited every home in the parish, interviewing the families to find out how they might be more effective in their use of money. Chalmers made sure that poor relief was kept at a personal level, as every situation and circumstance was individually investigated. Chalmers also set up local Sunday Schools for adults.

Unlike those who have been involved in the contemporary, "War on poverty," Chalmers did not believe that the solution to poverty was found in the liberality of the rich. Rather, he taught that the solution to poverty lay in the hearts and habits of the poor. To address that, the poor needed the gospel.

At the same time as seeking to meet the needs of the poor, Chalmers taught the poor to think beyond themselves and their immediate needs. He established missionary societies so that the poor could support the work of foreign missions.

#### *Parish Life*

Chalmers believed that his model for parish life, because it was biblical, could be successfully copied in all of the cities. This plan sought to rehumanise the poor with the gospel at a time when the theories of Sir Francis Galton and Thomas Malthus were treating them as mere objects.

His plan for parish life sought to restore dignity to the vast population of paupers who had been victims of the Industrial Revolution. Central to this plan was the establishment of evening Sabbath schools so that the poor might learn to read. He started parental uplift pro-

grammes to teach mothers lessons in basic skills so that they might better train and teach their own children. He designated a spiritual mother for each community to give housecraft schools once a week, so that the poor might learn to beautify their homes instead of simply surviving. He started day schools for the cities' children, which taught trades as well as academics. He organised small groups and Bible studies for the poor. He instituted a system of systematic visitation of every house in the parish, where families were given instruction in financial planning and household management. He emphasised the priority of family worship and encouraged orphans to join in the family worship at the houses of neighbours. He started wash houses, where the poor could wash themselves, clean their teeth and their clothes.

All of these projects were based on Chalmers' belief that the gospel needed to transform society by being woven into the fabric of everyday life. He believed this was best achieved in communities of small manageable sizes. Thus, within each of the large parishes he established smaller parishes. This enabled all the houses within a parish to be within walking distance, not only to allow the deacons to visit their flock but to allow a sense of the village to those who lives had previously been isolated in the smothering uniformity of the metropolis. As he put it, "It is ever afterwards in this charm of Localism that we ought to win back the outcast population of large towns to humanity, decency, intelligence and Christendom and to the still higher influences of the eternal realms. Let next door neighbours be supplied with one common object of reverence and regard in the clergymen who treats them alike as members of the same parochial family. Let his church be the place of common repair upon the Sabbaths. Let his sermon, which told the same things to all, suggest the common topics on which the similarly impressed might enter into conversations which began and strengthen more and more the friendship ties between them. Let the intimacies of the parish children be formed and ripened together at the same school. These all help as cementing influences, for this is the covenant is it not? By which this cementing we will bind this aggregate of human beings into one community distinct from all others and with a speed and certainty now by many inconceivable to set up a village or domestic economy even in the heart of this crowded metropolis."

#### *St Andrew's*

In 1823 an exhausted Chalmers was persuaded to go to St. Andrew's to teach moral philosophy. One of his purposes was to use his position as a teacher to make more people like him. One of the main criticisms made against him is that his plans were unrealistic and required Chalmers' magnetic personality in order to make it work. By teaching the principles of his work to others, Chalmers hoped to train a new generation of Christians to continue the work he had started.

Chalmers instantly became a phenomenon at the

university again, as people flocked to listen to him. Five years later he went to the University of Edinburgh to take the divinity chair.

#### *Views of Civil Government*

Chalmers believed that society could only function properly if the Church was central to the life of the State. He stood against the Enlightenment idea of secularism, whereby the State was seen as autonomous. He argued on the contrary, calling all rulers and authorities to bow the knee to Jesus Christ.

Articulating views of sphere sovereignty that would later find fuller expression in the work of Abraham Kuyper, Chalmers taught the financial and administrative independence of the Church and State. Although the government must recognise and establish the Church as the centrepiece to the community, the vocation of the government and the Church are not the same. It was the job of the Church, and not the government, to transform society with the gospel and to reach the poor. At the same time, he expected the State to co-operate with the Church's goals, giving preferential treatment to the Church's causes, removing legal obstructions to the Church's work. Chalmers believed that society would be doomed without the work of the gospel as a hedge on the growing power of the State. As he said, "It is only the gospel of Jesus Christ which has the power to deter the effects of this looming disaster and all of the ministrations of the state will only portend to the undoing of the family, the rescinding of initiative and the recoiling from human dignity . . ."

In a book titled *The Christian and Civic Economy of Large Towns*, Chalmers articulated the problems that would persist in large metropolitan cities if the Church were not central to the life of the growing cities. He argued that the vision of bringing hope and prosperity to cities was the job of the Church not the government. If the Church is not central to the economy of a town, he argued, cities will be sucked into the "servile status of the grand, glorious smothering state."

#### *Legacy*

Chalmers left a remarkable legacy in his wake that included numerous missionary and Bible societies, organisations for supplying the Bibles to soldiers, sixty schools, hundreds of organisations for helping the poor, forty libraries, fourteen publishing houses and three art galleries. He funded a new edition of the Psalter, encouraged hymnists, composers and artists to trumpet the claims of Christ in the arts.

Despite his titanic accomplishments, Chalmers is practically unheard of today. This is partly because Chalmers self-consciously rejected the spotlight for himself. Though he was the most influential man in Christendom, Chalmers chose to spend his time among the poor, ministering to their most basic needs.

Thomas Chalmers once said, "Regardless of how

large, your vision is too small.” Chalmers lived by these words, always seeking ways to expand his vision. Like other social reformers, his vision went beyond his own country but was international in its scope. He was concerned,

not just with Scotland, but with Christendom. His vision for God’s kingdom was a vision for the whole world, but it always started with the needs that lay closest to home.  
C&S

# Book Reviews

THE PASSING OF AN ILLUSION:  
THE IDEA OF COMMUNISM IN THE  
TWENTIETH CENTURY<sup>1</sup>  
BY FRANCOIS FURET

Chicago: The University of Chicago Press,  
trans. by Deborah Furet, 1999

REVIEWED BY MICHAEL KELLEY

It was Hegel, I believe, who said that the Owl of Minerva only takes flight at mid-night. In other words, it is only when the day’s events have ended that one can reflect back on their meaning. He meant this as a metaphor for the work of the historian, whose job is to examine and evaluate the events of the past, and who can only do so once the actions and events of time have been completed and now belong to the past. It is with that thought in mind that I should like to comment on an outstanding work by the foremost French historian of Communism, Francois Furet.

Furet has produced a brilliant work on the phenomenon of communism, especially once it had passed from theory to reality in the twentieth century. Even so, the book is not specifically a history of communism as a movement, nor is it an examination of communist States, even though it is necessary to discuss the topic in the light of the October Revolution of 1917 and the formation and impact of its most formidable political entity in this century—the Soviet Union. The book, in fact, is a masterful assessment of the *idea* of communism and the massive influence it has had—and still has—upon post-enlightenment man. Furet has produced a lengthy expose of the *spiritual* effect of communism, which has become the primary substitute for religion in the place of Christianity in the modern era. He examines the roots of that spiritual transformation and shows why it has been

so phenomenally successful at attracting both the masses and, most especially, the elites in the twentieth century. Communism has been the most potent idea to attract a following since the beginning of the nineteenth century, and has, even after the collapse of the Soviet Union, by no means lost its broadly popular appeal. It is a complex story, but Furet shows that it is far from being of mere academic interest, for the spirit that produced and drove the communist agenda may seem to be dormant, but it is not dead.

Ironically, this is particularly true where the ideal of communism has been widespread and adored the most, as compared to where it became a reality, namely, in the West. Where people experienced communism first-hand as an inescapable political force, there its glamorous appeal, except among those who benefited from being its privileged elites, was considerably decreased. Reality always has a way of throwing cold water in one’s face. But a belief system, as communism was and is above all else, simply cannot be disturbed in the minds of those who have never experienced its brutal reality. The *leftist* vision of communism is simply the only option available to those who cannot imagine any alternative other than the one that would permit man to create the perfect society by the instrument of unfettered political Will.

Communism, as Furet notes, was undoubtedly a product of the West, and still maintains, in modified form, a large following in the West, especially among academics, the media, and the politically ambitious. Its programme for man and society, which sought political form in the Soviet Union and other communist regimes, is still the predominant, though highly softened, outlook and instinct of those who seek political power and control in all Western governments.

In the broadest sense, communism is a product of the Enlightenment with its emphasis upon a solely man-constructed and perfectly rational social order. When men spoke of the need for communism, they spoke of it as a need for revolution and the overthrow of the existing form of society. This is largely because the Enlightenment was a revolutionary movement in its own right. It stood for the

1. The original French title is *Le passé d’une illusion: essai sur l’idée communiste au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Editions Robert Laffont, S.A., Paris, 1995).

rejection of the *ancien regime*. The power and stability of that long-established mediaeval social order rested on the unity of *throne and altar*. What is more, it was a society that was supposedly a divinely ordered hierarchy with those who rule at the top, followed closely by those who pray, then, lastly, came those who serve and do the necessary menial work. Because this was the divine order for man, every good Christian was duty-bound to acknowledge and submit to its requirement. Generally, in this social system everyone belonged to a recognisable class from which he was not allowed to escape. This centuries-long static arrangement of the society of men came to be deeply resented. This was particularly true from the time of the Reformation onwards. Suddenly the whole alleged divine order was called into question. But it was the Enlightenment, with its systematic elevation of the autonomous reason of man, that led the attack on the entire notion of a divinely ordered system of society. Furet, and others, have come to see that far from being the unique invention in the mind of one Karl Marx, communism, as an idea, in fact, preceded Marx, that it was an accompaniment of the spirit of Enlightenment rationalism in general, and therefore as long as the Enlightenment explanation of man, society and the world controlled the thinking of modern man, communism would always seek to offer itself as the very essence of what it means to be progressive, liberated and truly human.

Thus, although communism only became a political reality in October, 1917, those who made the communist revolution saw themselves as completing the work of a revolution that had actually first begun in 1789. That is, the communist revolution was the crowning achievement of the French Revolution. Here was the Enlightenment's first true social and political accomplishment. The French Revolution overthrew the *ancien regime* in France, but longed to do so in the whole of Europe. In the place of divine order and divine rights it substituted *the rights of man and of the citizen*. Man did not need God to establish the social order for him; he possessed all capabilities within himself to fashion his own order. He was the source of his own rationality and the centre of his own moral universe. He intended to establish an order in which perfect *equality, fraternity, and liberty* were the possession of all, and all men would live in harmony, peace and prosperity in accordance with these ideals. The *ancien regime* stood for the tyranny of man; the Enlightenment stood for his liberation from such tyranny. Communism, which issues from the Enlightenment, will offer itself as the true fulfillment of this ideal of a free humanity.

In fact, however, what the Enlightenment first produced was the liberal bourgeois order, and this is where Furet picks up the beginnings of communism. Bourgeois is "a synonym for modern society." (p. 4) The bourgeoisie thought of themselves as the true bearers of the new universal order of reason proclaimed by the Enlightenment. "Members of the bourgeoisie . . . conceive themselves as liberated from religious or political traditions and as undefined as are all men who are free and have

the same rights as all others" (p. 5). But the bourgeoisie, having overthrown all tradition, having emancipated themselves from the past with all of its irrationality and superstition, having set its course by the autonomy of the individual, suddenly found itself faced with the problem of community. In this new condition, men discovered themselves to be not only independent from the past but from one another. The only reason for living, after all, is to achieve an immediate happiness in this world, and in the bourgeois mental universe, happiness is the product of the free exercise of private activity and the enjoyment of things one has acquired by such activity. Society is important only in a minimal sense, only to the extent that it guarantees each individual the freedom to pursue his own interests and to enjoy the fruits of his own endeavors without the interference of others in pursuit of theirs. Suddenly everything is up to each particular member: each is free to make his own decisions, to follow his own desires and ambitions, to decide for himself what he believes or does not believe, what he judges right or wrong, what he deems good or bad. Life in the bourgeois world is about the burden of needing constantly to make choices without the benefit of pre-established or pre-arranged moral conditions. Nothing is predetermined. Nothing is planned for man in advance of purely personal preferences. Man is face-to-face with and alone in the world, and it is only his immediate will that can guide him in his private activity. He is responsible only for himself. His success or failure in life is due entirely to his own abilities. Life has no order or purpose except that which one gives oneself. One's fellow citizen or something called a common good or public interest holds only negative importance in his thinking. It exists to secure to him his private wellbeing, and nothing besides.

The promise of the Enlightenment, certainly as proclaimed in the French Revolution was fraternity, equality, as well as liberty. But the private pursuits of the bourgeoisie seemed constantly to negate the ideals of, especially, fraternity and equality, because it inevitably produced an inequality of property and wealth (p. 6). And, in time, the loss of these ideals would lead to the curtailment of liberty as well. Private pursuits inevitably lead to private distinctions, and such distinctions also produce a "contradiction with the way individuals view themselves" (p. 6). Having demolished the *ancien regime* with its hierarchies and classes, suddenly the bourgeoisie, who represented themselves as the negation of all established ruling classes, began to appear as just another form of ruling class, for the bourgeois found that with the increase of wealth there came an increase in social power. In other words, money talks! The bourgeoisie had replaced the *ancien regime*, but produced a society in which the avid pursuit of personal and material happiness was all that mattered. The communist world-view sprang from a deep-seated resentment not only of the ancient system, but even more of the budding liberal, bourgeois view of man and society.

Initially, communism lacked political embodiment. It



existed more as a hostile ethical negation of the bourgeois agenda by those who viewed life more from the standpoint of aesthetics than material possessions. As Furet comments: “In the nineteenth century, the bourgeois began their great career as the antithesis of the artists: they were seen as petty, ugly, miserly, laborious, and stick-in-the-muds, while artists were characterized as great, beautiful, generous, brilliant, and bohemian. Money twisted and lowered the soul, whereas contempt for money elevated the soul to the great things of life . . .” (p. 12f.). But, throughout this century, this hatred was to grow and acquire intellectual and revolutionary sophistication.

There were many denouncers of the bourgeois lifestyle, but it was, of course, Karl Marx who gave the alienated aesthetic-minded communist soul the philosophical foundation that was needed to turn communism from something negative into something positive. First, Marx proclaimed communism as the redemptive social order towards which history was inevitably leading mankind. In place of divine providence, Marx substituted the providence of history. This gave the communist, who had rejected all traditional religion, a reason to hope in the future, for history was working all things for the good of those who hate the bourgeois world. Man needs to believe that the world exists for a reason and that something greater than mere individual appetite and inclination is working to deliver man from the misery and alienation of the present moment. Communists proclaimed the communist society the wave of the future because the present bourgeois society was too hard to bear. Second, capitalism, which was the actual economic system of bourgeois man, was unavoidably creating its own demise by the fact that it inevitably produced a totally dispossessed order of mankind, whom Marx called the proletariat, that would eventually rise in its turn to dispossess the dispossessors. Thus, Marx offered to the communist soul a foundation in reason and science. Communism need no longer wander in a feeling of abject alienation, but now had the intellectual tools to assert that all things were working for the good of a new humanity. The spiritual transformation of modern Western man was nearly complete. One ingredient remained to be included.

Besides the so-called scientific explanation of the march of history towards its destiny in communism, what turned Marxism/communism into a potent political force, and a genuine revolutionary movement, was the addition of Leninist Bolshevism to its intellectual stock. Leninism was the idea that while history was on the side of communism, it would also require the forging of an unshakable political Will by means of a programme of revolutionary violence to act as the agent of history in the overthrow of all existing capitalist societies. In other words, the proletariat alone could not accomplish its historical calling unless it was organised and led by a vanguard of committed revolutionary professionals who would have the necessary foresight and wisdom to see and direct the forces making for communism against all resistance and opposition. This combination of Marxism

and Leninism often caused intense divisions among the coterie of revolutionaries bent upon destroying the existing system and replacing it with the *new man* of communism. Whereas some felt that history could only advance by means of inviolable law and that any attempt to nudge history prematurely in the direction of the inevitable communist Utopia would only prove to be fruitless, others were impatient and believed that unless those with obviously superior knowledge of the world and what is needed to guarantee the final outcome of the communist revolution took charge, then history just might not get where it's supposed to after all. However, both outlooks became integral to the communist idea. Nevertheless, with the success of October 1917, the belief in revolutionary Will came to occupy greater space in the firmament of communist orthodoxy. Much of this has to do with the fact that Romantic anti-enlightenment sentiment played a strong role in the aesthetic longings of nineteenth century man, who yearned for the *free* soul's deliverance from the fetters of material necessity that seemed to imprison the bourgeois mind-set. Communism offered a project for acting in the world and for the achievement of Utopia for man who was otherwise constricted in an alienating bourgeois existence. In history and reality the success of this belief first found expression in the formation of the Soviet Union. There the communist idea became communist fact. And it is the fact that stands at the heart of the *illusion* of Furet's title.

Nothing fired the communist imagination and gave heart to its hopes and desires as much as the success of the October revolution in Russia in 1917. Out of the maelstrom of World War One, the Bolsheviks managed to seize control of the Russian Imperial State, and began the process of transforming a backwards *ancien regime*, but one that had also shown the early stages of a bourgeois-capitalist order, into the first real communist political State in history. The communists, therefore, had killed two birds with one stone. The impact world-wide on vast numbers of people was infectious and inspiring. Other revolutions followed in time in other corners of the globe. Nevertheless, it was the Soviet Union, as the new Marxist State referred to itself, which served as the lodestar of communist revolution. Not the least of the reasons for this was also because the communist party of Russia claimed all authority to direct the policies of communist parties everywhere, including those that developed in the West. In the 1920s and 30s much anticipation was felt for a world-wide revolution. But apart from this, the Soviet Union was looked upon as if it were a veritable humanitarian paradise. Even though rumors began to filter out of vast disruptions of human life and the destruction of large numbers of people, yet outside the country many saw the Soviet Union as the grand Marxian culmination of history. The communists were engaged in imposing an absolute or total political control on all aspects of life in the Soviet Union, including thought-life. The communist rulers viewed themselves in God-like fashion as the creators of a new world and new humanity, and all those who did not or could not conform

to this obviously glorious goal ought to be physically exterminated. Thus, how events were viewed inside the Soviet Union was one thing, but outside it was another, and it was from the perspective of those outside that the *illusion* grew and spread of a marvellous new society of man.

In a quote that probably captures the essences of the appeal of the success of October, 1917, Furet puts his finger squarely on the reason why the communist idea achieved such a widespread attraction, especially among Western elites. Furet writes: “What was so spellbinding about the October Revolution was the affirmation of the role of volition in history and of man’s invention of himself—the quintessential image of the autonomy of the democratic individual. After centuries of dependence, the late eighteenth-century French had been the heroes of that reappropriation of the self; the Bolsheviks picked up from where the French had left off” (p. 63).

It is this very notion of *volition in history and man’s invention of himself* that drew so many to the communist idea, and in the success of 1917 and the creation of the Soviet Union faith in this notion seemed to have been vindicated. The world could be re-made according to the communist vision of man and social order by the mere application of unhindered political Will. This was the great illusion, but it captured the hearts of millions (and in milder form still does). Utopia was no longer a mere wish or hope; it could be ushered in by sheer revolutionary resolve. Man could become whatever he wanted to become; he would make his world into whatever he fancied it should be. He could eliminate all problems, he could overcome all disparities between men; he would create the perfect humanity and the perfect society of men. There were no obstacles but man’s own failure to act. However, there were many, no doubt, who had been too deeply morally tainted by the false consciousness of bourgeois man. If such persons could not be converted to the communist faith—and apparently many could not—then all that remained was to liquidate them. The communist faith tolerated no dissent.

As we all now know, the creation of a communist society in the Soviet Union produced a totalitarian dictatorship that showed very little concern for the brutal suffering of those upon whom it sought to impose its will. Man, after all, was not so readily transformed into communist man. But this did not upset the utopian illusion of those who either possessed the power of the State in the Soviet Union (or other communist countries) or hoped for the same revolution to spread elsewhere in the West. The Soviet Union was the future, and everything would only be glorious once the communist revolution had been completed in the whole world.

The Soviet Union became a mass totalitarian state and the hope of a totalitarianised world. But in the mid-twentieth century this reality was confronted by another totalitarianism. This was the totalitarianism of Nazism, or what, from the communist standpoint, would simply be referred to as fascism. The totalitarianism of the communist idea was universalistic, a one-world communist

order. The totalitarianism of fascism was particularistic, a world dominated by a particular nation who possessed a superiority above all other nations. It was nineteenth century nationalism elevated into a racist idea. Each type of totalitarianism regarded the other as its deadly enemy, and, yet, they were fundamentally similar in nature. Both were brutal and dictatorial; both were socialistic; both demanded absolute political control of all aspects of man’s life, including his thought-life; both were intent upon complete world domination. Furet writes: “Fascism was born not merely to vanquish Bolshevism but to break the divisiveness of the bourgeois world. The same ambition and the same ill-being supported both promises and both movements. The Fascists and the Bolsheviks relied on different and even contradictory supports—the one on class, the other on nation—but both sought to dispel the same curse by the same means” (p. 175). Both were revolutionary movements with but one purpose in mind, to rid the world of the bourgeois bacillus.

Of course, we know that World War Two found these two revolutionary and totalitarian systems fighting each other, and to the death. Neither could tolerate the existence of a rival. Here is where matters become interesting; for in the struggle against fascism, the communists, along with their leftist fellow travellers in the West, cleverly painted fascism as actually a form—the highest form—of capitalism. That way they could portray fascism as a type of capitalism against which they were fighting a war for democratic freedom and liberation from tyranny. It was a propaganda coup, and has remained one to this day. For in so many ways, gullible people in Western societies have been more than willing to see Nazi Germany as the greatest evil that history has ever known, but have rarely considered Soviet communism with the same repugnance, even though as social and political orders, they were mirror images of one another. What is more, the idea that fascism and capitalism are the same has proved to be a successful ploy in concealing the truth about communist and capitalist realities alike. And in the post-war period, the period of the Cold War, communists everywhere, deeply deceived about the communist east and the so-called fascist West, were able to trade on the notion that it was the Soviet Union that was peace loving and progressive, whereas it was the capitalist West, especially the USA, that was a paranoid, war-mongering and retrogressive society. Those living behind the iron curtain were, of course, undecieved by this propaganda line, but alienated western intellectuals and romantics of all stripes were (and still are) willing believers.

It was not until the collapse of the Soviet Union that the communist idea of which it was the realised manifestation finally appeared as the *illusion* that it was. But, even earlier, when dissident voices were starting to be heard in the West, did it begin to occur to the leftist believers that something was radically amiss in the land of communism, and that it was not due simply to some fatuous notion of an ideal derailed by, say, the dictatorship of Stalin. Dictatorship and tyranny were and are the very essence of communism.

Communism knows of no other social order than one that is absolutely and inescapably politically coerced. It was the great and gullible lie that proclaimed it to be the road to freedom and happiness. However, the remarkable thing is that, while the monstrous Soviet system reached a point of unsustainability, and finally was condemned by the only tribunal the communist mind has ever accepted, namely, the tribunal of history, there are still vast numbers of people, especially in the West, who cannot imagine that man and society should not be the product of anything but human volition as the act of unfettered political Will and coercion. As Furet, rather ominously, commented in the epilogue: “But the end of the Soviet world in no way alters the democratic call for another society, and for that very reason we have every reason to believe that the massive failure of Communism will continue to enjoy attenuating circumstances in world opinion, and perhaps even renewed admiration” (p. 502).

The *Passing of an Illusion* is not always an easy book to read, but it is certainly a worthwhile one. The late Francois Furet, like Paul Hazzard, another great French historian of a slightly earlier generation, was a brilliant analyst of man and the modern world. His portrayal of twentieth-century man lost in the illusion of a communist Utopia is simply without comparison. And the lessons his book contains are ones that need to be learned now more than ever lest, as he warns, the recent past emerges once again as the hope of mankind. More than this, we need to see how Western man today still thinks more or less in communist terms in matters of politics and society. The belief that the good, if not perfect, society can be manufactured by politics; that some men ought to coerce society as a whole for seemingly utopian-like ends (one only has to think of the new environmentalist totalitarians) remains an unshakeable faith in the modern world. *C&S*

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MEET THE PURITANS  
BY JOEL R. BEKE & RANDELL J. PEDERSON

Reformation Heritage Books, 2006, 896 plus xxxvi pages (including indices), \$25.00

REVIEWED BY STEPHEN HAYHOW

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THIS huge volume is a big, fat introduction to the Puritans, written by men who have read deeply and widely in the theology of the seventeenth century. It is crammed full of nearly 900 pages of short cameos of all of the Puritan authors that have been re-published since the revival of Reformed re-printing started with the *Banner of Truth* in the 1950s. They are all here: John Owen, Richard Sibbes, Thomas Goodwin, John Flavel; all the old favourites. But also Richard Baxter, William Bates, Robert Bolton, William Bridge, John Bunyan, Thomas Cartwright, and so the list goes on and on.

They are also accompanied by the legion of other, lesser-known Puritan preachers and teachers, and then a section covering the Scottish Puritans: Thomas Boston, Samuel Rutherford and Henry Scougal, to name but a few. Finally, there is an appendix that includes the Dutch men: Witsius, and Voetius being the names one might recognise.

This is a huge compendium of resources, a full reference and resource that will thrill lovers of the Puritan. The book begins with a short essay, surveying who the Puritans were, but the rest of the book is a string of “lives.”

Each “life” is just a few pages long, although they vary in length. The first half gives a brief biographical sketch, whilst the second describes the main written works of the subject that have been republished.

One is impressed by the fact that the Puritan movement was not just a handful of attractive and compelling teachers and preachers, but a whole army of capable, well-educated men who preached, taught and wrote on a vast scale. We can be thankful that we live in a time when so many of these riches have been made

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THE PRESBYTERIAN DOCTRINE  
OF THE CHILDREN IN THE COVENANT:  
AN HISTORICAL STUDY OF THE  
SIGNIFICANCE OF INFANT BAPTISM  
IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
BY LEWIS BEVENS SCHENCK

Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 188 pages,  
\$15.99, ISBN—10: 0875525237

REVIEWED BY ROBIN PHILLIPS

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ONE of the earliest manifestations of the Great Awakening in the American Presbyterian church occurred under the ministry of Rev. John Tennent. Building on the pattern of his own conversion, Tennent endeavoured to strip away the “dangerous security” enjoyed by those who, though growing up in Christians homes, had never had a definite experience of conversion.

Tennent’s own “conversion,” recounted by his older brother Gilbert, had involved an intense feeling of alienation from God and an impression of impending damnation. His brother recollected that though the lad was guilty of no great un-Christian conduct, nevertheless “For several Days and Nights together . . . he was brought to the very brink of Dispair, and would conclude, surely God would never have Mercy upon such a great Sinner as he was.”

“At the beginning of his Conviction,” wrote his older brother, “I endeavoured to heighten it, by representing to him the particular and heinous Aggravations of those Sins I knew or suspected him to be guilty of in a Dress of Horror; lest his Conviction should languish, and he relapse into a dangerous Security.” Only after four days



and nights, when the lad's agony had reached a pitch of near despair, did Gilbert alter his method and offer his brother an assurance of God's love and forgiveness.

This story, and others like it, are vividly recounted in Lewis Bevens Schenck's book *The Presbyterian Doctrine of Children in the Covenant*. Schenck, who occupied the position of J. W. Cannon Professor of Bible and Religion at Davidson College, North Carolina, has left us with an extremely valuable account of the theology of children implicated by the Great Awakening project.

Because the revivalists of the eighteenth century taught that a sudden conversion experience, preceded by a state of alienation from God, was the normal and only method for bringing souls into God's kingdom, they taught that children were enemies of God until they too experienced this type of conversion. The problem with this approach, Schenck argued, is that it failed to appreciate the covenantal standing of baptised children who, thanks to the slow and steady nurture of their Christian parents, would never be able to look back and remember a time when they did not know the love of God or desire to follow in his ways. "It was unfortunate" commented Schenck, "that the Great Awakening made an emotional experience, involving terror, misery, and depression, the only approach to God. A conscious conversion from enmity to friendship with God was looked upon as the only way of entrance into the kingdom. Sometimes it came suddenly, sometimes it was a prolonged and painful process. But it was believed to be a clearly discernible emotional upheaval, necessarily 'distinct to the consciousness of its subject and apparent to those around.' Preceding the experience of God's love and peace, it was believed necessary to have an awful sense of one's lost and terrifying position. Since these were not the experiences of infancy and early childhood, it was taken for granted children must, or in all ordinary cases would, grow up unconverted. Infants, it was thought, needed the new birth, as well as adults. They could not be saved without it. But the only channel of the new birth which was recognised was a conscious experience of conviction and conversion. Anything else, according to Gilbert Tennent, was a fiction of the brain, a delusion of the Devil. In fact, he ridiculed the idea that one could be a Christian without knowing the time when he was otherwise."

As the subtitle suggests, *The Presbyterian Doctrine of Children in the Covenant* is about the significance of infant baptism in the Presbyterian Church—a significance which, Schenck suggests, was greatly altered by the revivalist tendencies of the eighteenth century. Schenck's contention is that preoccupation with the appropriate mode of baptism has obscured the more important questions on the meaning and significance of the baptismal rite—questions which inevitably force us to consider the covenantal standing of Christian children.

Beginning with the Magisterial Reformers of the sixteenth century, Schenck shows that the Protestant tradition held to infant baptism, not as a means for bringing children into the covenant, but to recognise that children of believers already enjoyed a covenant relation with God

and a real vital membership in the Church. Such children, the Reformers taught, are not mere candidates for salvation, with the verdict still pending until they develop the cognitive apparatus necessary for conscious belief or the psychological conditions that must inevitably precede a "conversion experience"; rather, such children are "presumptively regenerate" in the same way that we presume that a faith-professing adult convert is regenerate. In the latter case, the presumption of regeneration (and therefore baptism) is made on the basis of the convert's profession of faith; in the case of the former, the presumption of regeneration is made on the basis of the promises God gives to believing parents (Psalm 128; Luke 18:16; Acts 3:39; 1 Cor. 7:14). Christian parents were entrusted with the awesome responsibility of being God's means for preserving and sustaining the faith of his children.

Such was the classic Protestant position until the decline of religion at the beginning of the eighteenth century. The privileges of Church membership, together with the duties incumbent on believing parents, began to be seriously neglected by the Protestant community. All too often, religion continued as a shell with the essential kernel sucked out, while many Church members followed the external rituals associated with being a Christian without the inner conviction. In order to accommodate the increase of functionally unconverted Church members, some Scotch and New England teachers began to suggest that it was entirely appropriate for a baptised child to be an external member of the Church and still be regarded as unregenerate, thus reversing the Reformation presumption of regeneration that was attached to all baptised individuals not under Church discipline. A corollary of this was the formulation of new theories on the significance of the visible Church and of baptism, including the idea that baptism can be separated from God's promises to parents and from the presumption of regeneration. Baptism became mere ritual, rather than a valuable seal of God's covenant. The visible Church was no longer seen as a group of those who were presumably true children of God, but a field out of which the true children of God were called, an institution in which they were trained. The impression was thus created that there was a covenant in which one could assume an entirely correct position without being regenerated. These ideas had practical consequences with regard to Christian nurture, for "when the status of children in the covenant was either not understood or not duly appreciated, in too many cases they were left to grow up in ignorance, left to their own course, in the hope that when they came to years of understanding they would 'know better' and be 'brought in'."

Not surprisingly, a symptom of this paradigm shift was that the practice of infant baptism began to fall into neglect. As Schenck puts it, "If parents themselves looked upon their children as having no more relation to the covenant of God and the church of Christ than children born out of the covenant and never baptized, if this was their theory and practice, it is not surprising



that there was a growing inattention to this sacrament. The question arose in many minds, to what purpose is baptism administered to children? Why bring children to an ordinance in the church of which the church herself makes nothing when it is over?" Great ambiguity consequently arose concerning the status of children in the covenant. As Dr. Gerhart put it in his book *The Efficacy of Baptism*, Presbyterian ministers "do not know in what light to look upon the baptized children of the Church: do not know whether they belong to the Devil or to the Lord, whether they are in the state of condemnation or a state of grace, whether they are in the kingdom of light or in the kingdom of darkness."

It was this state of affairs that left the Christian community wide open to the excesses and deviations of the Great Awakening. While it was entirely appropriate for the revivalists to insist that unconverted Church members must come to Jesus no less than heathens, their great error was to treat all baptised children as virtual pagans until they had an emotional conversion experience. As Schenck puts it, "The fact that a child was the child of believing parents, included in the covenant promise of God, made no difference. It was believed that they too must have this experience of conviction and conversion . . . all recognition of their standing in the sight of God as His children was lost." The slow, gradual process of the leaven in the three measures of meal was lost in favour of sudden extreme measures. Christian nurture, the great means prescribed by God for the realisation of the covenant blessings, had been "supplanted by spasmodic efforts, in revivals and otherwise, to bring a sudden and sensible change of religious experience."

Schenck shows that these revivalist conceptions influenced the Presbyterian Church and found expression in the recommendation to revise the Book of Discipline in order to remove baptised children from the possibility of Church discipline unless they had made a personal profession of faith. This debate, though in itself a trivial matter, forced the Presbyterian Church to vigorously analyse the standing that children of believers held in the family of God. While Dr. Thornwell and the Southern Presbyterians argued that baptised children should be immune to Church discipline in the same way that pagans are (since children are enemies of God until they make a profession of faith), Charles Hodge and the Princeton theologians defended the historic Protestant position of including children of believers within the family of God and subject to the same privileges, responsibilities and discipline that accompanies such a standing. Speaking of the former, Schenck writes that "The principle of the Reformed faith, that the child brought up under Christian influence should never know a time when love to God was not an active principle in its life, was displaced by an assumption that even the offspring of the godly were born enemies of God and must await the crisis of conversion . . . Instead of growing up with the spirit and character of members of Christ's family, appreciating their privileges and feeling their responsibilities, they were supposed to

grow up with the spirit and character of the world. The children of the church, with the seal of God's covenant on their foreheads, were practically cast out, to be classed and thence to class themselves in form and feeling with the ungodly and profane—a course from which Dr. Atwater believed, they and the cause of religion with them, would suffer irreparable loss."

*The Presbyterian Doctrine of Children in the Covenant* is more than just a history book. It is also a powerful apologetic for the fact that the children of believers are part of God's family. But perhaps the book's most valuable feature is the numerous challenges it contains for believing parents to train and nurture their offspring in a way consistent with the child's membership in God's family. Since training and nurture, not sudden conversion, is God's natural, normal and ordinary means by which the children of believers are brought to God, Christian parents have an awesome responsibility. Schenck lays out the parental responsibility in the penultimate chapter, quoting a number of Presbyterian writers on the subject of Christian nurture. The words of Lyman H. Atwater, from his article 'Children of the Church and Sealing Ordinances,' summarise this affirmative approach to nurture: "The parent covenanted on his part, so far as he acted for the child, or exerted influence in moulding his conduct, feelings, and principles, to guide him according to his bent in the formation of right practical habits; in short to train him to act, feel, and think as a child of God. And whether he remembers the time and manner of the beginning and progressive development of these states of mind and heart, or whether these have ingrained themselves so imperceptibly into the warp and woof of his inner being that he can mark no distinct epoch or hinge-point in his career, as the crisis of the new birth, it is enough that he can say, 'I am a child of God.'" *C&S*

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COMMENTARY ON THE NEW TESTAMENT  
USE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

EDITED BY G. K. BEALE AND D. A. CARSON

Baker Academic (America), Apollos (England), 2007

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REVIEWED BY DOUG P. BAKER

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THIS commentary on the New Testament's use of the Old Testament is, without a doubt, the most useful reference tool that I have added to my collection since I acquired Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* some years back. Yet it would be a great shame if it were only used as a reference book.

As I read through its careful and scholarly analysis of each use the New Testament makes of the Old Testament, I became increasingly aware of how very little the New Testament authors claimed that they had any new revelation to offer to the world. Yes, they had Jesus, and he was a new and more clear revelation of God, but as

much as a new revelation Jesus seems to be in the New Testament a new hermeneutic.

Was Jesus a new revelation of God? Yes. The beginning of the letter to the Hebrews emphasises that, and the whole New Testament seems to expound the statement. But the revelation of God in Christ set about a whole re-reading of the Old Testament. As we consider in detail the utter reliance of the New Testament authors on the Old, Jesus continually provides to them a new way to understand all that the Old Testament authors have said. They now have a new lens through which to understand the act of Creation (John 1, Romans 1–2, Ephesians, 1 Corinthians 15:45, and a host of others), the calling of Abraham, the slavery and redemption of Israel, etc.

The authors of the New Testament did not, as Old Testament prophets had, introduce new topics with the phrase “Thus saith the Lord.” Instead, from the Gospels through the letters and Revelation, they quoted the prophets of old and explained their significance in light of the new revelation of God in Christ Jesus. Jesus was their hermeneutic for understanding the Scriptures. Therefore the importance of a work like this commentary can in no way be overstated. If we want to understand the gospel of Jesus we must understand it in the terms in which it is presented to us and those terms are almost exclusively drawn from the Old Testament.

This prompts the question of the hermeneutical methods that the New Testament authors used in interpreting the Old Testament. While they each approached Scriptural interpretation somewhat differently, there are a few constants that are worth noting. As has already been stated they read it in the light of the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus.

It is also very significant that they extensively used a typological hermeneutic. Thus the historical events of the Exodus are used throughout the New Testament not to give a mere illustration of how Christ is saving his people, but to actually build the theological understanding of what Jesus is doing. They can use Scripture this way, not because they can proof-text their statements by saying that the Exodus story says what they are saying, but rather because they assume that the God who was at work in the Exodus is the same God who is at work in redemption and at work in us. They also assume that this same God will work now in a similar pattern to which he worked then. Paul does not claim that God gave him a whole new revelation describing the salvation that came in Christ. Rather he and the other New Testament authors built their understanding of this ultimate act of redemption by examining the workings of God’s redemption of his people from Egypt, from Babylon, from the Philistines, and so on.

In doing this Paul and the other New Testament authors seem to reason that just as a good author will build up to the climax of a story with repeated foreshadowing and variations on a theme, God has been authoring the history of the world and of his people as a building up to the climax of the revelation of his Son.

Interestingly, this very typological mode of interpretation that seems to have been the bedrock of the New Testament’s understanding of history and theology is somewhat out of fashion at present.

One of the principle rules of hermeneutics that has been repeatedly hammered into theology students (especially in a Reformed context) is that we must always ask the question: What did this text mean to its original audience. For example the use of the plural form for God in the first chapter of Genesis should not be taken as a reference to the Trinity because that understanding would presumably have been foreign to its original audience. The New Testament authors however were not willing to follow this rule quite the way it is often taught these days. Examining their uses of the Old Testament I was pleasantly surprised by how very careful they were in most cases in sticking very close to the original context to which they were alluding, generally including faithfulness to the way the texts would have been originally understood. However they emphatically did not allow themselves to be limited by that historical understanding. They worked from the older understanding by reading always through the hermeneutic of the fuller understanding that they had now gained through the recent revelation of God in Christ.

No commentary can be, and this one is not, truly complete. It seems to rely almost exclusively on wording similarities to pick out the New Testament/Old Testament parallels. Thus stylistic echoes are not treated, even when they are so plain as when Jesus echoed the blessing on the new couple (Be fruitful and multiply) with what is sometimes called the Great Commission (make disciples of all nations). Nevertheless, although we may each be sorry to see some pet echo omitted, there seem few that were missed. Overall this is a masterful and scholarly work that will not be soon surpassed.

This commentary will, I’m afraid, usually be used merely as a reference book in helping pastors to prepare sermons. That is fine in its way, but it can be so much more. It is really a rather thorough examination of how the Bible does, and how we should, understand the Bible. C&S

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ROBERT LEWIS DABNEY:  
A SOUTHERN PRESBYTERIAN LIFE  
BY SEAN MICHAEL LUCAS:

Presbyterian and Reformed, 2005, 295 pages  
including indices, ISBN: BX9225.D2L83 2005

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REVIEWED BY STEPHEN HAYHOW

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In 1967 a well reputed republisher of Christian and Reformed works republished the *Discussions of R. L. Dabney*, probably for the first time since the late nineteenth century. It was published in three volumes: the first couple

of volumes were concerned with directly evangelical and theological matters, whilst the third volume contained Dabney's writings on science and the Bible, human rights, secularised education and literature—his, so-called, secular Discussions. Originally there had been four volumes; volume III *Philosophical* and Volume IV *Secular*. Later *Sprinkle Publications* re-published the original final volumes, unedited, giving us a clear view of Dabney's theology, political and social philosophy.

Since the nineteenth century biography of Dabney by Thomas Cary Johnson, there has not been a full biography of the great American theologian. Therefore the appearance of *Robert Lewis Dabney: A Southern Presbyterian Life* from Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing is most welcome.

R. L. Dabney (1820–1898) was a theologian, a Southern Presbyterian pastor, and Confederate Army chaplain. He was also chief of staff and biographer to Stonewall Jackson. Dabney's name is often mentioned in the same breath as James Henley Thornwell, both of whom were Old School, strongly Calvinistic and Presbyterian, as well as being social conservatives.

He was at times a missionary, a school master, a pastor, a teacher, theologian, writer, biographer, military chief of staff, and not least a preacher. Dabney was one of those rare characters who could fill many roles and all of them competently during his lifetime.

Sean Michael Lucas gives us an honest and fair evaluation of Dabney. He does not refrain from criticism and does not idolise his subject. His cultural and theological blind spots, his, by modern standards, racism and social views are openly discussed and criticised fairly.

On the positive side, Dabney held a full-orbed theology of all of life. An example and illustration of this is Dabney's response to the onset of State education. Dabney published an essay, *Secularised Education*, and I want to use this as an example of Dabney's prophetic relevance.

Dabney set the question out, as follows, "Who is the agent entitled to control education? What is right education? These questions are interdependent. Two answers have been proposed to the first in history: The State, the Church." But Dabney turned this around and showed that all objections against the Church administering schools according to their confession of faith might be turned against the State administering the schools according to its confession: atheism. All arguments for the State administering funds to different confessional, religious schools falls down as, in practice, it is impossible to operate and may involve the views of one grouping being imposed upon another. The only option with State education is "to secularize the State's teaching absolutely, limiting it to matters merely secular, and leaving parents or the Church to supplement it with such religious teaching as they may please, or none. Some Christians, driven by the difficulty which has been disclosed, adopt this conclusion." But this is where our objections lie the strongest.

First, Dabney asserts that all education, the formation of souls and citizens is inescapably religious:

"Why may not the State teach reading and writing without any religious adjuncts, as legitimately as the mechanic thus teaches his apprentices filing, planning, or hammering?" Because dexterity in an art is not education. The latter nurtures a soul, the other only drills a sense-organ or muscle; the one has a mechanical end, the other a moral. And this answer cannot be met by saying, 'let it then be agreed that the State is only teaching an art, a dexterity that, for instance, of letters.' For the State refuses to be understood thus: it claims to educate; as is witnessed by the universal argument of the advocates of this State function, that she has the right and duty of providing that the young citizens shall be competent to their responsibility as citizens. But these are ethical. Again, if the State professed to bestow, not an education, but dexterity, equity would require her bestowing not only the arts of letters, but all other useful arts. For only the minority can ever live by literary arts; the great majority of children have equal rights to be taught the other bread-winning arts. Thus government would become the wildest communism. No, the State cannot adopt this evasion; unless she says that she educates, she can say nothing." Therefore a religiously neutral education is impossibility.

Secondly, Dabney noted that true education is a *spiritual process*. "True education is, in a sense, a spiritual process, the nurture of a soul. By spiritual, the divines mean the acts and states produced by the Holy Ghost, as distinguished from the merely ethical. The nurture of these is not human education, but sanctification. Yet education is the nurture of a spirit which is rational and moral, in which conscience is the regulative and imperative faculty; whose proper end, even in this world is moral. But God is the only Lord of the conscience; this soul is his miniature likeness; his will is the source of obligation to it; likeness to him is its perfection, and religion is the science of the soul's relations to God. Let these statements be placed together, and the theological and educational processes appear so cognate that they cannot be separated."

This is so because it is the person, the soul, the whole man that is being educated and this educational process cannot be partitioned into religious and non-religious elements.

Thirdly, the practicality of teaching a neutral secularised perspective is unsustainable: "If secular education is to be made consistently and honestly non-Christian, then all its more important branches must be omitted, or they must submit to a mutilation and falsification, far worse than absolute omission. It is hard to conceive how a teacher is to keep his covenant faithfully with the State so to teach history, cosmogony, psychology, ethics, the laws of nations, as to insinuate nothing favourable or unfavourable touching the preferred beliefs of either the evangelical Christians, Papists, Socinians, Deists, Pantheists, Materialists, or Fetish worshippers, who claim equal rights under American institutions. His pedagogics must indeed be 'the play of Hamlet, with the part of Hamlet omitted'."

Moreover, to do so is to remove the child from his



spiritual heritage: “Shall the secular education leave the young citizen totally ignorant of his own ancestry? But how shall he learn the story of those struggles, through which Englishmen achieved those liberties which the colonies inherited, without understanding the fiery persecutions of the Protestants under ‘Bloody Mary,’ over which the Pope’s own legate, Cardinal Pole, was sent to preside? How shall the sons of Huguenot sires in New York, Virginia, or Carolina know for what their fathers forsook beautiful France, to hide themselves in the Northern snows or the malarious woods of the South, and read nothing of the violation of the ‘Edict of Nantes,’ the ‘Dragonades,’ and the wholesale assassination of St. Bartholomew’s day, in honour of which an ‘infallible’ predecessor of the Pope sang *Te Deums* and struck medals? . . . They show that Christian truths and facts are so woven into the very warp and woof of the knowledge of Americans, and constitute so beneficial and essential a part of our civilization, that the secular teacher, who impartially avoids either the affirmation or denial of them, must reduce his teaching to the bare giving of those scanty rudiments, which are, as we have seen, not knowledge, but the mere signs of knowledge.”

Fourthly, on what basis shall the authority of the teacher be exercised? “One very obvious and yet not the weightiest application of this truth is to the discipline of the school itself. No training of any faculty takes place without some government. On what moral basis shall the teacher who wholly suppresses all appeal to religion rest that authority which he must exercise in the school-room? He will find it necessary to say to the pupil, “Be diligent. Be obedient. Lie not. Defraud not,” in order that he may learn his secular knowledge. But on whose authority? There is but one ground of moral obligation, the will of God, and among the people of this country he who does not find the disclosure of that will in the Scriptures, most often finds it nowhere. But this teacher must not inculcate this Bible. Then his mere might must make his right, or else the might of the parent, or of the magistrate, to whose delegated authority he points back. Or his appeal may be to mere self-interest!”

Dabney’s fifth reason was that we need the best men to teach our children. Who are they? He answers: “The best are true Christians, who carry their religion into everything. Such men neither can nor will bind themselves to hold so influential a relation to precious souls for whom Christ died, and make no effort to save them. So the tendency must be towards throwing State schools into the hands of half-hearted Christians or of contemptuous unbelievers. Can such be even trusted with an important secular task?”

Then sixthly, it is impossible to divide life up in the religious and secular portions, because “obligation to God covers all of every man’s being and actions. Even if the act be correct in outward form, which is done without any reference to his will, he will judge it a shortcoming. ‘The ploughing of the wicked is sin.’ The intentional end to which our action is directed determines its moral

complexion supremely. Second, Our Saviour has declared that there is no moral neutrality; ‘He that is not with him is against him, and he that gathereth not with him scattereth abroad.’ Add now the third fact, that every man is born in a state of alienation from God; that practical enmity and atheism are the natural outgrowth of this disposition; that the only remedy for this natural disease of man’s spirit is gospel truth. The comparison of these truths will make it perfectly plain that a non-Christian training is literally an anti-Christian training.”

Dabney argues with the clarity and forthrightness of a man who sees all things in terms of Christ and his Lordship. Lucas has done us a great service in giving a full and detailed life of this great man to the Church of Christ once again. Here are Dabney’s parting shots on the secularisation of education: “. . . a non-Christian training is an anti-Christian training.” *C&S*

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### THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF ESCHATOLOGY

EDITED BY JERRY L. WALLS

Oxford University Press, 2008, hardback, 724 pages  
including index, ISBN: 978-0-19-517049-8

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REVIEWED BY STEPHEN PERKS

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THIS massive handbook covers the subject of eschatology from a wide variety of sources. Part I deals with biblical and Patristic eschatology, the eschatology of world religions, including Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu eschatology. Part II deals with eschatology within distinct Christian traditions and theological movements. Part III deals with particular theological issues in eschatology, e.g. millennialism, annihilationism, Unitarianism, resurrection, heaven and hell, and also philosophical and cultural issues such as eschatology in relation to politics, human nature and personality, ethics, epistemology, the fine arts and pop culture.

This is a handbook and therefore although eschatology is looked at from a very wide variety of aspects and viewpoints this is achieved at the expense of depth. I could only find two references to Joachim of Fiore from the index, and his eschatology is only briefly summarised. It would perhaps be unfair to expect great depth from a handbook covering such a wide subject matter, and so this is not necessarily a criticism, but like many of these handbooks I find personally that this means the volume has a fairly limited usefulness. I would probably be more likely now to turn to the internet initially to get information of this type than consult this volume. While in pre-internet days a volume like this would have had some use therefore, I wonder whether it is really as necessary in the age of the information super highway available via computer. This is not to suggest in any way that the internet will replace



books generally, at least any time in the near future, but it might make *this* kind of book somewhat redundant.

On the practical side of matters, the book will open flat and stay open flat in the middle but not at the front or the back due to the fact that it is perfect bound. This is a major failing of this kind of book. It is meant to be used as a reference book, and yet one of the chief practical requirements of a reference book is its ability to be used on a desk and consulted easily without the user having to stop it closing all the time. If cars were this badly designed we'd all be on shank's pony. *C&S*

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DICTIONARY OF  
MAJOR BIBLICAL INTERPRETERS  
EDITED BY DONALD K. MCKIM

Nottingham, UK: Intervarsity Press, 2007,  
ISBN: 978-1-84474-194-6  
Downers Grove, USA: Intervarsity Press, 2007,  
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Hardback, 1106 pages including indices

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REVIEWED BY STEPHEN PERKS

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THIS large volume is the second edition of the *Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters* published originally in 1998. The original volume was reviewed by me in *Christi-*

*anity & Society*, Vol. IX, No. 4, (October 1999). This edition is much larger both in terms of the number of pages (the First Edition had only 643 pages) and the physical size of the book. The Preface to this Second Edition claims that there are new contributions from over a hundred scholars. It also advertises two of its own shortcomings as not having enough essays on women biblical interpreters and not enough essays on non-Western interpreters.

My review of the First Edition in 1999 was a favourable one and I cannot see any reason to change this, though the question raised above regarding the *Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*—i.e. has its usefulness been superseded by the internet?—seems appropriate here as well, especially in view of the fact that internet articles can be continuously updated and revised without the expense and effort of having to print a new edition of a major reference book. There are four fairly insignificant references to Joachim of Fiore but still no article on him, which, given the deleterious influence he exerted upon subsequent interpreters of the Bible and history, I find rather disappointing. There seems to be a lack of any good study of Joachim that does not require fluency in mediaeval Latin. Much of the eschatological garbage we have to put up with today from evangelicals and fundamentalists originates to some extent from his over active imagination.

The book still suffers from the same problems as the *Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, i.e. it will not stay open flat easily unless it is opened in the middle half of the book. The problem is not as bad with this Second Edition as with the First though, owing to its larger size. *C&S*

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EDITOR: STEPHEN C. PERKS

STEPHEN PERKS is the Director of the Kuyper Foundation. He has lectured in the UK, Europe, America, New Zealand, Australia and Africa on a wide variety of issues dealing with the application of Christian principles to contemporary society and has written a number of books and numerous articles and essays dealing with issues such as law, education, theology, politics and economics.

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