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# EDITORIAL

## WEALTH, POVERTY AND DEPENDENCY IN BRITAIN

by *Stephen C. Perks*

WE ARE TOLD repeatedly today by socialists that “The poor are getting poorer and the rich are getting richer.” This is patently not true, as any comparison of standards of living enjoyed by all classes in our society today with those of previous decades and centuries will show. For example, I grew up in a poor family. My parents rented a two-up one-down terraced house with no kitchen, no bathroom, and rising damp. The only amenity in the house was a sink in the downstairs room with running cold water only. The toilet was in an outhouse at the bottom of the garden (unpleasant in the middle of winter!) and shared with other houses in the same terrace. Bath day came once a week when we brought up the tin bath from the coal-hole and filled it with water in front of the fire in the downstairs room. The main method of transport was “shanks’s pony,” i.e. one’s own legs, though we eventually got a motorcycle with a side-car and, incredibly, managed to get the whole family in, at least when we were young children. My parents were poor, but they were not on the bread-line; at least this standard of living was not considered abject poverty then. (And we never lived in a slum. I can think of some of my contemporaries back then who did live in slums, despite the fact that their parents earned considerably more than mine and lived in homes with modern amenities. Slums are not created by poverty, however much the advocates of State-planned wealth redistribution programmes would like us to believe they are, but by indolence and profligate living.) But definitions of poverty change. Today this would be considered abject poverty. Yet this was only 35 years ago, not quite a generation (I am now 41). It would be absurd to suggest that the poor today, generally, have to put up with this standard of living. The amenities we then lacked are now considered essential, though back then we got along without them.

When I think back to those days it seems like a totally different world now. The poor today are not experiencing a decline to these standards of living despite the inane propaganda put out by socialists and the mindless parroting of such disinformation by the media. Even during my childhood my parents’ standard of living increased considerably. This amelioration of their conditions has never been reversed, and my parents’ living conditions, due to my father’s ill-health (and thus limited choice of employment), were never on the avant-garde of social amelioration. When I was eight years old we moved to a house with some incredibly luxurious amenities—at least it seemed that way to us children, namely a bathroom, indoor toilet and kitchen with running cold and hot water, and this was followed a year or two later by the addition of a real space age device, a (second-hand) fridge, donated by a wealthier branch of the family. Our standard of living, even as members of the poor working class, never went backwards, even after my father’s death when we became a “one parent family”; it increased gradually but surely. It seems incredible to me that the idea that the poor are getting poorer, which is sheer nonsense, should have been received today with such credulity. That it has been taken seriously can only be due to the fact that so many of the trendy socialists, politicians and media people

alike, who peddle this gibberish have never experienced poverty; they simply do not know what they are talking about.

It is true, however, that standards of living among the poor today are not increasing at the same rate as increases in standards of living enjoyed by the rich; in other words that the poor are not getting rich as fast as the rich. But this is quite a different matter.

Nevertheless, our society is in danger of creating, indeed has already created, a permanent underclass, a class of people without employment, without prospect of employment, and thus without hope. This underclass is, to a large extent, dependent on the State for provision of the essentials of daily life. If our society is to be a healthy society, and our economy a growing economy that provides employment opportunities for those who wish to work, it is essential that we deal effectively with this problem, which threatens to undermine the economic strength of the nation and bring our society into internal conflict.

### The problem diagnosed

Dependency is a problem very different from poverty. The two may co-exist, but not necessarily. A very great many of those who are dependent on the State in our society today are classed as poor. But it is important that we understand the difference and do not confuse the two.

Poverty, as noted above, is not increasing in the country, at least not in absolute terms. Those who are classed as poor today are far better off than they have ever been before. This is not said in order to deny the existence of genuine poverty in relative terms, which it cannot be denied exists. But the underclass we are creating and have already created is, I believe, misconstrued as a poor class. The underclass in our society today is rather a class of people dependent on the State and without hope of freeing themselves from this dependency because the system does not permit them to do so (more of this below). Many of these dependents are the poorest in society. But others are not. They are no less dependent. Furthermore, some of those classed as poor in our society today are not poor in absolute terms, or even in relative terms, since their “poverty” is the result of their own life decisions and ordering of economic priorities. A man who will not save and order his priorities in such a way as to ameliorate his social condition and instead wastes his income on worthless pursuits and habits may seem poor to the onlooker, who sees that he does not have the material benefits and acquisitions of a prudent lifestyle that others enjoy; but such a condition is unrelated to genuine poverty. Indeed, others with *less* income may seem wealthier to the onlooker due to a more responsible ordering of priorities. No amount of State provision will ameliorate the former’s condition; it may even aggravate his condition by subsidising a profligate lifestyle.

Nonetheless, there are people who, due to their dependency, are poor comparatively speaking, and whose poverty is not due to an inability to budget or use the meagre resources available to them properly. Such, were our political and economic system of a different nature, would be able to ameliorate their condition considerably and escape the dependency that presently characterises their lifestyle.

Thus, the economic problem we face as a society today is misconstrued as the creation of an underclass that is defined by poverty and that cannot lift itself out of that poverty. The problem, rather, is that we have created a class of people dependent on the State and unable to climb out of that state of dependency because the system makes it impossible for most of those in this class to do so. Some of these people, indeed perhaps the majority, are poor in relative terms, a few perhaps

in absolute terms, and the great majority of these are considerably poorer than they would be were they not disadvantaged by the system, for example by structural unemployment. But the problem is not poverty *per se*: it is dependency. Most of the poverty in our society today is the result of this dependency. If we wish to do something about this problem we must diagnose the problem correctly. To aim at the wrong target cannot yield the right results. It is no good amputating a man's leg in order to relieve his indigestion. Yet this is what our governments have been doing for so long. The result has been that the patient has become more disabled and more dependent as a result.

Our underclass is essentially a class dependent on the State and this dependency is a far more serious problem in the aggregate in our society today than poverty considered in either absolute or relative terms. If we solve the dependency problem we shall in so doing solve the poverty problem for the greater mass of those experiencing it. Moreover, the correct resolution to this problem will result in the freeing up of existing resources and the creation of new resources to help the genuine poor whose poverty is the result of factors other than dependency on a system that has failed miserably to achieve its stated goals.

It is my contention that *dependency on the State* is the real problem facing us today, and that it is this that defines the underclass. This state of dependency is, I believe, a far worse condition for the majority of the underclass than a state of simple poverty. Men can live with poverty, and have lived with poverty, and yet live a meaningful and fulfilled life. Few can live with the kind of State-dependency that exists in our society today in the same way. It is a condition that debilitates and enslaves man; it breaks his spirit. A poor man has dignity if he is not dependent on others. A man totally dependent on the State has no dignity. He is a slave. Meaning and fulfilment are denied to him on a fundamental level. This fact may not be readily accepted or consciously acknowledged in the welfare State culture of our society, but its truth is borne out by so many current social trends, for example the increase in clinical depression and suicide, which characterise much of modern society compared with the societies of former generations.

Thus, the condition of the poor dependent man today is far worse than that merely of a poor man. Furthermore, the dismantling of the Christian faith in our society means that such people are in a wretched condition, spiritually far worse off than those in former generations who were materially poorer but who had at least some kind of faith and Christian vision of life and society that gave meaning and hope to their existence.

As Christians we should be concerned for these people; we should be motivated by compassion to try and help them to better their condition and create more real opportunities for work and thereby a means of escape from this debilitating state of dependency. The burning political question that faces our society today is how to do this, what means to use in order to effect this amelioration in the condition of the poor and dependent in society.

But for Christians this burning political question has another side to it. There is another factor in the equation, a factor that in fact dwarfs all other considerations; and it dwarfs all other considerations because it is this factor *alone* that will mean the difference between success and failure in our attempts to solve the problem, and it is simply this: what are the means that God *in his word* permits us to use to solve this problem? Our solution to the problem, in other words, must be consistent with the teaching of Scripture, with God's pattern for godly social organisation as this is set forth in the Bible. How we answer this question, the priority we give to the biblical pattern and biblical principles, ideals and norms will be decisive in our attempts to solve the problem because the nation that does not put its trust in God for salvation and does not seek to order its life by the light

of his word will perish. God will bless, and has blessed, those nations that put their trust in him.

The problem is not simply poverty. Poverty is actually a symptom of something else, and if we attempt to deal with the symptom and not with the root cause we shall not solve the problem, though we may make and indeed have, by such misguided diagnostics and quack remedies, made the problem far worse, for such are all that our governments, politicians and political pundits have offered us so far—for example “poverty causes crime,” rather than perceiving that a deeper problem causes both.

Our problem is that as a nation we have abandoned God; we no longer put our trust in him and look to his word to govern the life of the nation. We look instead to men, to the State, to provide us with the blueprints that govern our individual and social life. The result of this idolatry has been, quite logically, that society is now dependent on the State rather than on God. In other words the nation has put its trust not in God but in the civil government, which has, accordingly, bloated in size out of all proportion to what it should be and has been in previous generations. The former leads to freedom and national prosperity, the latter to servitude and poverty, not the least element of which is caused by the vast tax sums raised from the population by government in order to fund its oversized bureaucracy and vastly inefficient welfare system—and we must remember, socialist propaganda to the contrary, that most taxes are raised from the ordinary people, those in the lower and middle income brackets, not the rich in society. Our nation is beginning to learn this lesson the hard way.

Thus, the problem lies with the nation's spiritual apostasy from a Christian vision of life and society, and from a Christian vision of government in the whole of life, including the civil government. Our problems can be traced to this and therefore the answer to these problems must lie in returning to a Christian vision of life and society. And that means that we must attempt to solve the problems that face us *obediently*, i.e. by seeking to conform our society and nation to the Christian pattern set forth in the Bible.

So far I have been dealing with this problem in very general terms. What about the nuts and bolts? How has the system that operates in Britain gone wrong? What are the main features that characterise this economic and political debacle?

### **The creation of wealth vs. the control of wealth**

In Britain today we face a very serious social, economic and political problem. We are no longer *creating* wealth so much as seeking to *control* the wealth that already exists—other people's wealth that is. More and more businesses find that they cannot generate the profits needed to maintain their viability and keep pace with their subsidised competitors unless they play the politico-economic system. And businessmen and entrepreneurs will generally take the line of least resistance to making a profit. They are not the people as a general rule to defend the free market if they can earn more from a rigged market. This is short-sighted because it ultimately leads to socialism, restricted business opportunities and the decline, even proscription, of entrepreneurial activity. Nevertheless, businessmen need to make a profit now if they are to survive and therefore they do not generally defend the free market on principle unless they think they can benefit from it in the fairly short term. Hence the acceptance of a rigged economy by many businessmen.

This system is not capitalist, despite the so-called enterprise decade of the 1980s; it is a system of fascism—i.e. big business in league with big government—masquerading as capitalism. The regulations, red tape and bureaucracy that this system has created has made it extremely difficult for many businesses, and

certainly those with high moral principles, to *create* wealth on their own initiative, and even more difficult to employ others, without tapping into the resources made available via government in some way. Socialism, of which fascism is a type, brings with it this excessive regulation and control of economic life and access to the funds being redistributed by government as the most efficient means of surviving in the economic environment it creates. Many find that if they do manage to negotiate the red tape and bureaucracy, what little profit is generated gets taxed so heavily that all initiative is virtually destroyed. The result is an economic environment in which big business in league with big government is able to expand, but in which the small and medium-sized business and self-employed find it increasingly difficult to survive, let alone expand.

In other words this regulatory bureaucracy has created the situation in which it is actually easier to play the politico-economic system and seek to gain *control* of other people's wealth, via government grants and subsidies, licences, government-imposed restrictive practices designed to help favoured businesses and groups etc., than to create wealth through genuine economic enterprise. Thus, the whole economic system is capsizing. Instead of creating wealth, which will simply be taxed away by government and redistributed via the welfare system, businessmen increasingly seek to control, via the system, the wealth that already exists, i.e. they seek to get their hands on the money that is being redistributed via government subsidies in order to finance business enterprises. This is easier in our present system than the creation of wealth in a free market economy. It has been made easier by the nature of our bureaucratically regulated politico-economic system. The *system* penalises wealth creation and favours those who seek control over others' wealth as a means of economic amelioration. The system is thus severely stunting economic growth.

### **The debt problem**

The problems created by this system are exacerbated by the heavy debt-laden nature of our economy. The massive debt needed to start a successful business enterprise makes success more difficult since high interest rates and repayment of debt plunder the profits made in business, which are needed for further expansion, the creation of employment opportunities, greater capitalisation and thus general economic growth and social amelioration. In fact, the use of massive debt made available by the commercial banking system to fund economic enterprise is no better ethically than the use of funds made available by government subsidies, since both involve the fraudulent creation of money and manipulation of the economy by the government and its agent, the Bank of England. In the case of large-scale debt-funded enterprises the main difference is merely that the government-controlled expansion of the money supply needed to generate so-called investment and economic growth—in reality a boom, which of necessity must end in recession—is channelled into the economy through the commercial banking system rather than the government subsidy system.

The unwillingness of government to tackle this problem, which has been created by big bankers in league with big government essentially, means that the economy cannot raise itself out of bondage to the financiers and bankers who run the system for their own benefit. Instead the government merely tinkers with the system hoping to adjust it so that it will run more smoothly. But all this does is to make the problem worse, since the answer is reform on a fundamental level that big government does not have the political will to pursue. This is because both contemporary right- and left-wing parties derive their support from those institutions and sectors of the economy

that would suffer the most from having to behave with moral integrity in the marketplace.

### **The welfare alternative to playing the politico-economic system**

For many, however, there simply is not the opportunity, or else they do not have the necessary skills, to play the politico-economic system. Unemployment is high and small businesses are finding it harder to survive and more difficult to employ people. Many people have thus found themselves on the economic scrap heap. Since they cannot play the politico-economic system by setting up large debt-funded or government-subsidised firms they opt for the next best thing: playing the benefit system. This, of course, has a certain degree of social stigma attached to it today, but it is certainly no more immoral than big business' surviving on government grants and subsidies. Both are forms of dependency on the State, and both, because they consume vast tax sums, hinder capitalisation and stunt economic growth.

Many of those who do take the initiative find it almost impossible to survive in self-employment. In many situations only those with licences are able to show initiative, and the numbers of these licenses are usually limited and granted by local government. Even if a trader tries selling small consumables on the street corner or in pedestrian precincts the police will likely move him on. I remember being incensed by the one such incident during the high watermark of Thatcherism, when people were told to "get on their bikes." A street trader who had set up a stall for selling wrapping paper at Christmas time was moved on by the police because the traders in the precinct he was working complained that he was causing an obstruction. The real reason for the complaint was that the street trader was taking a *very* limited amount of trade away from those who rented shops in the precinct. So much for getting on one's bike! The group that owned the precinct was supposed to be a Christian group. Yet the Bible gives examples of gleaning laws, which stipulated that the corners of the fields had to be left for the poor to work them. This was hard, often back-breaking work. But it was an honest means of making a living. Likewise, anyone who knows about street trading in the middle of winter knows it is hard work. This was a prime example of the gleaning principle in modern society. Yet our law has granted privileges to certain groups and businesses so that the small man, the self-employed trader, finds it increasingly difficult to overcome the bureaucracy.

The result is that instead of earning their own living such people are constrained to turn to the welfare system for support. On top of this there is the vast number of welfare abusers. People turn to welfare as a means of living because it is easier than earning their living. The system has made it easier. And the more people turn to welfare the more the economy is taxed to pay for welfare—and tax payments made to support the benefit system are unproductive, i.e. they are made in return for nothing from those who receive the funds—and the more the economic system plunges into crisis.

### **The decline of Christian culture**

This whole situation is exacerbated by the decline of the moral foundations of the free market. In previous centuries our capitalist economy was underpinned by a Christian morality and concept of family life. This Christian culture is now being dismantled by legislation passed in Parliament and by the media, which is in many ways the vanguard of secular humanism. Thus, the underpinning institutions of capitalist economic organisation are virtually gone. These underpinning institu-

tions were Christian. Capitalism as a form of economic organisation grew out of Christian society. It has not existed outside the influence of biblical values, except among countries, such as Japan, that have self-consciously copied Western—i.e. Christian—capitalist economies.

The damage done by this dismantling of Christian culture has been enormous. Take the decline of the Christian concept of the family for example. When someone falls on hard times the family is often not able to help; or there are no family members who will help those in difficulties. Instead they are supported by anonymous State welfare, which has to be funded via taxes, which in turn have to be raised from those who create wealth. The more the Christian family disintegrates in this way, the more that taxes have to be levied from the family's breadwinner. The more that the breadwinner is taxed the less families are able to look after their own without help from the State. And the more dependent the family becomes on the State the weaker it gets as one of the fundamental pillars of society. It is a vicious circle. The abandonment of the family and its traditional role has created dependence on the State, which has weakened the family even more and led to even greater dependence on the State. The financial means available to the family to care for its own members has been confiscated by the State.<sup>1</sup> And whereas the family has proved its ability to fulfil this necessary function of caring for its members, the State has only proved its inability to provide effectively for the welfare of society, not only in financial terms but in psychological and spiritual terms also. The family, a successful means of providing for the helpless and disadvantaged in society, has been disinherited of the economic means necessary to fulfil its God-given function and has been replaced by an anonymous welfare State that does not work, is increasingly difficult to fund, is subject to massive abuse and has no effective means of dealing with such abuse, and is crippling our nation's ability to create the wealth that is needed to fund welfare properly through the family.

The nation's condition has now become pathological. We face the disintegration not only of a system of economic organisations that works and has proved its ability to supply our needs, but of society itself.

### The European debacle

This condition is made far worse by our involvement in the European Union. Europe has been such a baneful influence upon Britain that even under a UK "right-wing" government (Thatcher's) we became *more* socialist. European regulations and rules are strangling the goose that lays the golden egg, crippling our ability to create wealth—though for those who know how to play the Euro-politico-economic system there are even greater opportunities to control other peoples' wealth; they now have whole countries and nations at their disposal.

Europe is our nemesis, our Babylon. Yet many fail to recognise this because they are so preoccupied with seeking to get their hands on other people's wealth via Euro-government grants. They are blinded by their greed.

1. The British State consumes an enormous percentage of the average household's income. Income tax alone is 24 per cent and rises to 40 per cent for those who earn a little over £24,000 per annum. Sales tax, VAT, is 17½ per cent, and National Insurance, which is a hidden tax, amounts to around 13 per cent. On top of this there are the tariffs, import quotas and restrictions, which curtail the consumer's freedom and reduce his standard of living by protecting uncompetitive industries and obstructing competition. Then there is the shortfall between the kind of economy we have as a result of socialist economic planning—i.e. a less productive economy—and the kind of economy we should have under capitalistic organisation—i.e. a more productive and thus wealthier economy.

### The right answer

The answer to this pathological condition economically is to free up the economy again and create an environment in which people are able to *create* wealth, in which they are not hindered by government control. It must be easier and the rewards greater, the incentive more meaningful, for people to create wealth than to gain control over other people's wealth via the subsidy and welfare systems. In other words the answer, on the economic level, is capitalism—i.e. organisation of economic life on the basis of the virtues of honesty, hard work and thrift in a free society abiding by the rule of law with a limited civil government and in which ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange is in private hands. Such a system, however, is only possible in the first place, and sustainable in the long term, on the basis of a Christian culture.

But instead of this answer, which has proved its success in the past, we have more socialism shoved down our throats, and this is increasingly the case the more closely we become entangled with the European economic debacle. This does not help the poor. It simply means that most people have less with which to help the poor, and it keeps the poor trapped in their condition of dependence on the State, a condition in which they are not able to help themselves. From the economic point of view socialism has *created* this problem; yet people are convinced, because they have been told so often by politicians, media people and (alas!) the "Christian" clergy that socialism is their only hope. Socialists have dismantled capitalism and Christian society and then blamed their own failure on what socialism has replaced, i.e. capitalist economic organisation in a Christian society. Yet the latter had proved its ability to lead to economic growth and social amelioration on a vast scale over the three hundred years preceding the advent of socialism as a form of economic—I should perhaps say *uneconomic*—organisation in Britain.

### Conclusion

If we are really going to help the poor, rather than just stinging the "rich," we must return to a capitalist economic system based on a Christian vision of society. This Christian vision of society maintains that "If any would not work, neither should he eat" (2 Thess. 3:10). Wealth is created by *work*. But unless people are allowed to work they cannot create wealth—and socialism makes it increasingly difficult for them to work efficiently and successfully, often impossible for them to work at all. Providing minimum social welfare for the unemployed in a socialist society is not the answer. Allowing them to work, to use their own initiative without penalising them so hard that they lose all will, is an important part of the answer. Making it easier for people to earn an income than to live off State welfare is also part of the answer. Making it possible for small firms to employ others more easily is another important part of the answer. All these things socialism obstructs.

There is an answer. Our economy could be got back on its feet in a surprisingly short time if there were the political will to reform the system and allow the economy to recover properly by *itself*, rather than planning another boom that will end in recession. Such planning is an intrinsic feature of socialism and invariably ends in failure. As it stands, however, neither left- nor right-wing parties in Britain today have the political will for this kind of reform; and our government's illicit love affair with Europe makes any attempt to put the situation right ineffective anyway, since Europe will not permit our government to stop the advance of socialism in Britain, let alone reverse it. This everyone knows except, it would seem, those government ministers who keep telling us that we have not surrendered our independence.

We need an economic revolution. But we need the political will to generate it, to free up markets and economic activity, to free people from the endless bureaucracy, taxes and disincentives that hinder the creation of wealth in the present system. We need also the political will to free Britain from the noose of Euro-legislation that is strangling the economy. But this revolution requires also the will on the part of the people of this nation, and I wonder whether the British people are so heavily hooked on State dependency that they will only vote for politicians who will keep promising them more of that same dependency. If the people do not have the political will to vote for the right kind of government—and we do not know this yet since they have not been given the opportunity—the nation will continue to be governed by the politically feeble-minded. It is not proposed here that the answer to our problems nationally is simply political, that the wretchedness and misery of the human condition caused by sin is remedied merely by political action. It is not. It is remedied by Christ's life and death on the

cross and by obedience to his word. But that means also that we must be obedient in our political life. There is not a square inch of this universe where Jesus Christ is not Lord, and where his law is not to govern the affairs of men and nations. The necessary economic and political reforms needed in society will not be achieved unless God prospers the nation and grants repentance and faith to the people of Britain, unless, to use religious jargon, there is revival and reformation. But God will not bless and prosper his people if they will not obey his word. We cannot sit back waiting for revival, doing nothing, while the nation perishes, hoping vainly that God will reward our indolence. We must be up and doing God's will; that is our calling and duty whether or not God gives the increase. Christians should seek a Christian vision of society, regardless of the outcome. But the Bible teaches, and history corroborates this teaching, that when a society does return to a Christian vision of society, it will be blessed materially as well as spiritually. C&S

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# THE VALUE OF CHURCH HISTORY

by Nick Needham

JOHN WILLIAMSON NEVIN, an American Reformed theologian of the last century, is someone whose writings I go back to periodically. As a mature Christian adult, Nevin made a quite striking confession of the sins of his youth. His greatest sin, he confessed, was that as a young Christian man, he had not been very interested in church history. Quite an unusual confession; I'm not at all sure what a psychologist would make of it. The thing that troubled Nevin and lay heavy on his conscience with regard to his youth was not lust, or drunkenness, or worldliness, or unbelief. It was that as a young person, preparing himself to serve his Saviour in the world, he had had a mind that was empty of any real appreciation of the history, the life-story, of his Saviour's church. This, Nevin later felt, was not just an intellectual defect; it was a spiritual sin. His lack of genuine concern for church history, his lack of historical orientation and insight, had (he felt) damaged his spiritual growth and usefulness, and warped his whole understanding of the faith. It was a sin that he needed to repent of in the sight of God.

Now we may perhaps not agree with Nevin's assessment of the exceeding sinfulness of not having a lively grasp of church history—or we may not agree with him yet. But Nevin's confession does give us a useful point of departure for our study. Is church history an optional extra in the Christian life? Is it just a hobby that some Christians are entitled to have, but which can never rise above the level of a leisure pursuit that happens to be interesting to some of us? Or is there, as Nevin felt, something spiritual about studying church history? Is there something arising out of our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ which makes the history of the church a necessary and vital concern of believers? I

want to argue that Nevin was right and that this is indeed the case. There is something unnatural and self-impoverishing, and even dangerous, about Christians who try to live their Christian lives divorced from any real consciousness of the history, the life-story, of the spiritual community to which they belong, the church of Jesus Christ. And this is a trap into which, I think, vast sections of the Evangelical world have sadly fallen.

I remember vividly that one of the first fruits of my own conversion in 1976 was a new and absorbing interest in history—specifically church history. Prior to my conversion I had had no interest in any kind of history. It was a subject I dropped as soon I could at school. But how different everything suddenly looked now that I was in Christ! I felt that by becoming a Christian, I had become part of a great spiritual community which stretched back through the landscapes of time to Christ himself. I wanted to know all about it. By the grace of God I swiftly discovered Henry Bettenson's two superb volumes on *The Early and Later Christian Fathers*, and G. R. Elton's excellent book on *Reformation Europe*. So I was immersed almost from the word go in the early church fathers and the Reformers. Those people and their deeds and writings came alive for me, taught me, challenged me, inspired me; I acquired a host of new friends and mentors—Irenaeus of Lyons, Tertullian, Athanasius, Basil of Caesarea, Augustine of Hippo, Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, Peter Martyr, John Calvin.

But how disappointed I was to be when I found that hardly any of my fellow Christians knew who or what I was talking about! "Cyril of Alexandria? The Monophysites? Philip Melancthon? The Augsburg Confession? What *are*

you talking about?” I encountered a general absence of history among my brothers and sisters: an almost complete mental vacuum, where the historical consciousness of the church’s life-story ought to have been. The basic Evangelical outlook seemed to be limited to the individual and his personal relationship with Christ, coloured by local church life and the latest Christian paperbacks. But as for the universal and historical church—he did not seem to be much in evidence. I’m speaking here about intelligent Christians, including pastors. What had gone wrong? Had anything gone wrong? What was the value of church history?

Let us begin our reflections on this matter with a quotation from C. S. Lewis. Lewis was speaking about the study of literature, but his comments have a strong bearing on church history too. “The true aim of literary studies,” Lewis wrote, “is to lift the student out of his provincialism by making him the spectator, if not of all, yet of much, time and existence. The student, or even the schoolboy, who has been brought by good . . . teachers to meet the past where alone the past still lives, is taken out of the narrowness of his own age and class into a more public world. He is . . . discovering what varieties there are in Man.”

“Provincialism.” “The narrowness of our own age and class.” Surely one of the greatest dangers in the Christian life is to allow ourselves to be swamped by the present. We are constantly bombarded from every side by propaganda on behalf of the values, beliefs, and practices of whatever happens to be the present fashion. Francis Schaeffer used to speak about “the present form of the world spirit”. Most people are dominated by that spirit of the present; all of us are affected by it, whether we like it or not. We might have thought that the remedy was to read the Bible and allow the unchanging truths of the gospel to cleanse and shape our minds. Of course, that is at least part of the remedy. But there is a fashion in the church as well as in the world. And we tend to read the Bible through the distorting lens of whatever happens to be the present Christian or evangelical or Reformed fashion. So unless we are endowed with an extreme independence of mind, even our understanding of the Scriptures is going to be cramped, censored and skewed by what C. S. Lewis calls the provincialism and narrowness of our own age.

You may know the humorous but rather devastating criticism that was made of the liberal theologians of a previous generation, those enlightened scholars who set aside the Jesus of the Scriptures and went off on a quest for the real Jesus, the so-called historical Jesus. I think it was Albert Schweitzer who said that these liberal gentlemen, in their search to discover the real Jesus (whom they supposed to be different from the biblical Jesus) were like men peering down into a deep well trying to see the “true Jesus,” and merely seeing at the bottom a reflection of their own faces. The terrible danger for us in reading the Bible as evangelical Christians, of whatever colour on the evangelical spectrum, is that all *we* will find in the Bible is a reflection of our own faces—a reflection of what our brand of church life already believed and practised. And so Scripture merely serves to confirm all our prejudices.

This is where I think a knowledge of church history can be very liberating. By exposing ourselves to other periods, other ages in the history of the church, we can—perhaps not perfectly, but to a large degree—be set free from the tyranny of present-day spiritual fashions. As those who have visited

the early church, the Middle Ages, the Reformation, we come back to the late 20th Century with a new sense of poise and perspective. We look at our own Christianity and our own church life, no longer as prisoners of the present, but as freemen of history, seasoned travellers who have seen and heard many marvellous things, and who can now evaluate the peculiar customs of our own time-zone from a larger standpoint. By learning how other Christians in other very different epochs understood and applied the faith, we are empowered to see aspects of biblical truth or practice that simply never struck us before, but which were blindingly obvious to a previous age; we are inspired to ask questions we would never have thought of by ourselves, but which in a previous age were the burning questions of the day; we are provoked and stimulated to reflect on what in our Christianity really is timeless truth, and what is just a passing fashion of our own day, which perhaps future generations will be amazed at.

Let me quote from C. S. Lewis again. He is speaking about our choice of Christian books to read: “Our upbringing and the whole atmosphere of the world we live in make it certain that our main temptation will be that of yielding to winds of doctrine, not that of ignoring them. We are not at all likely to be hidebound: we are very likely indeed to be slaves of fashion. If one has to choose between reading the new books and reading the old, one must choose the old: not because they are necessarily better, but because they contain precisely those truths of which our own age is neglectful. The standard of permanent Christianity must be kept clear in our minds, and it is against that standard that we must test all contemporary thought. In fact, we must at all costs not move with the times. We serve One who said, Heaven and earth shall move with the times, but My words shall not move with the times.”

Lewis here argues for the value of reading the old books because “they contain precisely those truths of which our own age is neglectful.” Surely he is right. Indeed, we could extend his argument to cover morality as well as truth. Just as different ages tend to emphasise some truths and neglect others, they equally tend to emphasise some virtues and neglect others. If we plucked an outstanding saint from our own segment of time, he would probably embody some Christian virtues at the expense of others, owing to that inevitable provincialism of one’s own age. We need the corrective of beholding Christian virtue as it is bodied forth in outstanding saints of other ages. To take our pattern of godliness from a Gresham Machen or a Martyn Lloyd-Jones is good as far as it goes, but it is not enough; we need to see the light of Christ’s perfection refracted through a Robert E. Lee, a Gaspard de Coligny, a John Wyclif, a Bernard of Clairvaux, a Maximus the Confessor, an Athanasius, in all their differing variety of times and circumstances. We will of course be struck by the similarities; the same fragrance of holiness exudes from all the saints. But we will also be struck by the differences, as one era catches some glimmering of Christ’s glory missed by another.

Now, to bring this down to earth, let me give you an example from my own life of the benefit of reading the old books and communing with the saints of another age. My favourite period in church history is the early church, the first four or five hundred years of the church’s life-story. When you read the theological writings of the early church fathers, you find that the great thing that concerned them, to

which they devoted their minds and hearts, their discourses and their songs, for which they were ready to fight and split the church and even die, was the doctrine of the person of Christ. Their thinking, their spirituality, revolved around who Jesus Christ is. Not so much what Christ did, or our personal experience of Christ, although these things are by no means absent from the fathers; but the central focus is on who Jesus Christ is—his person, his true deity and authentic humanity, the relationship between them, and the objective fact of our union with him. Sometimes this is even made a ground for criticising the early church fathers, that this was their emphasis. But I have found it very helpful.

In Mt. 16, vv. 13-16 we read: “When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, ‘Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?’ So they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’” Here we have the great confession of faith by Peter, in response to the Lord Jesus Christ’s question, who do you say that I am? Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God. He is the long-promised seed of the woman who will bruise the head of the serpent, the seed of Abraham in whom all nations will be blessed, the seed of David whose kingdom will last for ever. And he is also the Son of God, the divine and heavenly Son of his divine and heavenly Father. The Lord then tells Peter that this confession of faith in his divine-human person has been granted to Peter by the Father; it is a gracious gift of spiritual illumination, by which the Father has enabled Peter to grasp the true meaning of all that he has seen and heard about Jesus. And then, look at v. 21: “From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and rise again the third day.” It was only after Peter and the other apostles had been brought to understand who the Lord Jesus was, that the Lord began teaching them about his atoning work, his redemptive self-sacrifice on the cross and his life-giving resurrection. A proper appreciation of the Lord’s person preceded the Lord’s own teaching of the apostles concerning his saving work.

In our day and age, when the majority of unchurched people have completely lost their Christian heritage and haven’t a clue as to the person and work of Christ, surely the appropriate thing for us to do in communicating to them what the gospel is (those who will listen), is to follow the Lord’s own example. It seems to me to make little sense to ask unbelievers to respond to the cross if they don’t know who is hanging there. “Who is he on yonder tree, Dies in shame and agony?” They haven’t a clue who he is. And so the writings and the approach and the theological spirit of the early church fathers suddenly come into their own again. We find ourselves on the same wavelength. Our task today has become their task of 2,000 years ago. The fathers focused on the person of Christ: Who is he? “Who is he in yonder stall, At whose feet the shepherds fall? Who is he in deep distress, Fasting in the wilderness? Who is he that stands and weeps, At the grave where Lazarus sleeps?” Who is he? Who do you say that I am? That was the royal star of knowledge around which the minds of the early church fathers revolved, as they sought to communicate the gospel to their pagan society. Surely it should be our guiding star too, in our preaching and teaching today, as we follow the fathers in seeking to commu-

nicate the gospel to the unbelievers of our increasingly pagan society. In presenting the good news of salvation in Christ to them, we must begin by laying solid foundations in his person, before raising up the temple of his work. Christology precedes and undergirds soteriology.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, one of the most destructive weaknesses in much modern so-called evangelism is that evangelists call upon people to give their hearts to a Jesus about whom those people know nothing. Once upon a time, when our culture was at least nominally Christian, evangelists could more or less assume in their hearers a basic working knowledge of the gospel story. There was a real picture in people’s minds of who Christ is, formed by the drip-drip effect of such agencies as Sunday schools and church services, at a time when a majority attended church, where (for example) the New Testament Scriptures were read and the Apostles’ Creed was recited. All of that has now vanished. A friend of mine in Edinburgh, who is by no means extreme or right-wing in his theology, recently attended an evangelistic event, and commented to me afterwards that in spite of all the appeals to people to come to Christ, nobody ever bothered to explain to them who Christ was. The people might just as well have been walking forward to give their hearts to Buddha, Muhammad or Mickey Mouse, for all that was said of who the Lord Jesus actually is. No wonder that so much evangelism today runs out into a sort of content-free mysticism; people have emotional and even life-changing experiences of something or someone—but is it the Christ of the Scriptures?

Perhaps I should also say that I have often found among Evangelical brothers and sisters a better grasp of what Christ did than of who he is. That has always seemed topsy-turvy to me. Does it stem from a sort of religious selfishness, I wonder? What he did for me, the personal benefits I get out of him—I grasp those eagerly; but as for who my benefactor actually is—well, I’ll let the theologians argue about that. As long as I’m saved, that’s all that matters. I judge no-one’s heart, but I do wonder sometimes whether that attitude lurks at the bottom of much evangelical piety. Has our heritage of revival led to a one-sided dwelling on the personal, the emotional, the subjective dimensions of salvation, to the detriment of the objective dimension of the divine-human person of the Saviour? Perhaps we ourselves need to expose our minds and hearts to the robust and bracing objective focus of the early church fathers on the person of Christ.

Now all these thoughts about the need today to give a fresh prominence to the person of Christ in our evangelism, and the general perspective which these thoughts embody—this has all crystallised in my mind largely through my reading of and about the early church fathers. My study of the past has helped me to see something which I believe is of crucial importance in the present, in the church’s mission to a society that no longer has a clue about Christianity. That’s just one concrete personal example of the sort of service that church history can perform for us.

Thus far I have been suggesting the benefits that can come to us from a knowledge of our Christian past, the

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1. I do not mean that we should absolutely begin with Christology. In our day it is best to begin with God as Creator, man as creature, and the fall. But when we specifically present the gospel, the message of salvation, let us first teach people to give a right answer to the question, “Who do you say that I am?” before declaring the death and resurrection of that person.



liberating effect it can have on our minds, the way it can give us a sense of breadth and perspective from which to view the spiritual challenges and fashions of the present. Now I want to take the argument to a higher level. I am going to suggest that a proper understanding of the nature of the church must lead to a concern for knowing its life-story.

Francis Schaeffer was fond of saying that salvation is individual but not individualistic. When we are united to Christ, we are by the same token united to his church. As the apostle Paul says in Eph. 4:4, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling.” The same Spirit who dwells in the head dwells in all the members, making the members one with each other as well as with the head. Salvation, therefore, does not bear upon us as isolated individuals; it means becoming part of the church, being caught up into the community in which the life of the risen Saviour works. Now the church with which we become spiritually one is not only spread across the world, embracing every tribe, tongue, people and nation. It is also spread across the centuries, a historical community linking one epoch with another. We are one with the saints in all ages. That is the very nature of our salvation. If so, it is surely an unnatural violation of what we are in Christ to say, “I am not interested in the life-story of the community to which I belong.” To say that, or to feel it, is (I think) to reveal a deeply serious failure to grasp what the church is and what salvation is.

Can you imagine a godly Jew in the Old Testament saying, “I am not interested in the life-story of my people Israel. The history of Israel does not concern me. Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, King David—who are they to me? That’s just dusty old history. All that matters to me is my personal relationship with the Lord”? Can anyone seriously imagine a godly Jew taking such an attitude? If anyone can, their imagination is certainly more exotic than mine. God’s people in the Old Testament knew that they were part of an ongoing spiritual movement in history. They were steeped in that history—the story of their community’s relationship with the Lord of time and history. Surely it is the same with us. That Old Testament river of salvation history flows on into the New Testament and broadens out through incarnation and Pentecost to embrace all the tribes of Adam. We are now part of that history. We too are bound together in Christ with Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, and King David—and with Justin Martyr, Augustine of Hippo, the Venerable Bede, Anselm of Canterbury, John Huss, Martin Luther and Asahel Nettleton. This is our spiritual family into which we are baptised in Christ. The Saviour has bonded our souls, not just with those few believers we happen to be in physical contact with, but with all the saints in all ages. And as I suggested earlier, we need the wisdom and experience of the saints in all ages if we are to rise above the spiritual narrowness and provincialism of our own age (to borrow C. S. Lewis’s language). If we fail to appreciate this, I think we fail to appreciate both the doctrine and the reality of the church. The apostle Paul’s words about the local church in 1 Cor. 12, “The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you”—these words apply also to the universal church. We cannot do without the saints who have gone before us.

In addition to the general vitalising atmosphere of the universal and historical church into which Christ incorporates us, there are quite specific ways in which we need the

saints who have gone before us. Let me outline three of these ways which relate to theology, or what the church believes. We could of course look at things like worship and morality, but let’s just look at theology as the most obvious example. How do we need the historical church in our theology?

(i) We have the accumulated fund of the church’s wisdom in interpreting the Bible. If I come up with an interpretation of a Scripture passage which none of the great preachers or commentators have ever held, and which has serious implications and repercussions for Christian faith and life, it is highly unlikely that I alone am right and the historical church wrong. I suppose it is possible that the church had to wait 2,000 years for me to come along and deliver the goods; it is possible, but not very plausible. When I’m wrestling with a text, I always like to consult a historical range of commentaries and sermons to give some kind of ballast to my soaring and wandering mind: usually I like to look at Augustine and John Chrysostom from the early church period, Calvin from the Reformation era, Matthew Poole from the Puritan era, John Gill from the eighteenth century, and Jamieson, Fausset and Brown from the nineteenth.

This is an area in which I think evangelicalism, especially in its charismatic form, is very weak. I clearly remember in my early days as a believer being solemnly warned not to read commentaries. Just read the Bible and let the Holy Spirit speak to you directly through the Bible alone, I was told. There and then, as it seemed to me, the entire doctrine of the church was blown away. The assumption was that the believer is an isolated individual, as it were locked up in a room by himself with a Bible, expected to work it all out on his own. Yes, the Holy Spirit would help—but he would only help the individual on a private basis. Apparently everything the Holy Spirit had said to other Christians down through the ages as they read the Bible was of no account. I must cut myself off from all that and start again all by myself. What place is there even for preaching in such a view? Surely the Bible is the church’s book, before it is the individual’s book; we read and study God’s word, not as private individuals in spiritual solitary confinement, but as members of Christ’s body, a community submitting itself to the word which its Lord has spoken to us as a people.

By abandoning this perspective in favour of a radical individualism, in which everything tends to be reduced to “me and my Bible,” which itself soon melts down into “me and my feelings and impressions,” large sections of the evangelical world have opened the floodgates to everything that is cock-eyed, insubstantial and weird in their understanding of what the Bible teaches. In fact, in some forms of evangelical spirituality, the Bible becomes little better than a sort of magic book of personal guidance, divorced from historic, doctrinal and linguistic norms, in which my interpretation might utterly conflict with yours, but no matter, for that is how the Holy Spirit was “speaking to me personally” through that verse, and we mustn’t limit the Spirit, must we? And so professing evangelicals end up as thorough-going relativists. Here is the bitter long-term fruit of not taking church history seriously.

(ii) We sometimes find ourselves struggling, not so much with a verse of Scripture, but with a theological theme, a doctrinal conundrum. There is precious little point expending time and nervous energy trying to thrash out some personal solution of our own to the problem, if Gregory of

Nazianzus or John Owen have already done it. Especially in the fundamental matters of Christology, we have the great ecumenical creeds—the Nicene Creed, the Creed of Chalcedon—to help us. These represent, not the wisdom of one man, but the mature deliberations of many men in the church's formative years. We would be wise to take the Creeds as providential landmarks.

(iii) We can test our own positive theological ideas by their harmony with the past. By this I don't mean that we should only ever repeat what has already been said. But is there a continuity, a coherence, between what we are saying and what the church has previously taught? Or are we creating a sheer chasm, putting forward beliefs or interpretations which in important areas negate rather than build on the past? If so, we ought to think twice and thrice, and fast and pray, before drawing God's people into something so untried and untested. The church is not a laboratory and God's people are not guinea pigs. We need to beware of what C. S. Lewis called "chronological snobbery": the arrogant presumption that our generation knows better than any that went before it. When Martin Luther found himself at the storm centre of the Reformation, he agonised over whether he was right to split the church over issues where so many opposed him and could bring strong arguments from tradition against him. The simple fact that Luther did agonise over this puts him head and shoulders above many others who just go shooting off in all directions, fragmenting the church of Christ without a single qualm or a sleepless night. Not so Luther. He agonised. He fought demons of doubt.

However, Luther derived courage and comfort from discovering his own deeply felt insights in the writings of others who had gone before him. Chief of these was Augustine of Hippo; in so many ways Luther was merely standing on Augustine's shoulders. But Luther also gained strength from the writings of John Huss, the great Bohemian priest and martyr. "We are all Hussites without knowing it," Luther exclaimed as he read Huss's writings. "St Paul and St Augustine are Hussites!" And he derived much inspiration from the writings of the fifteenth century Dutch spiritual writer Wessel Gansfort—relatively unknown today, but well-enough known in Luther's time. Luther said of Gansfort, "If I had read his books before, my enemies might have thought that Luther had borrowed everything from Gansfort, so great is the agreement between our spirits. I feel my joy and my strength increase, and have no doubt that I have taught correctly, when I find that someone who wrote at a different time, in another land, and with a different purpose, agrees so totally with my views and expresses them in almost the same words."

There are three ways, then, in which we ought to frame our theological beliefs in the context of church history: the accumulated fund of the church's wisdom in interpreting the Bible; the great minds of the past blazing a trail for us through the dark forests of doctrinal difficulties; and the "pause and wonder" safeguard of continuity and coherence with the past when exploring new paths.

Let me close by mentioning one of the greatest problems that many evangelicals have in studying church history. The problem I have in mind, and I have met in myself as well as in others, is an inability to see the church in its official history. What do I mean by that? Well, I recently saw the latest booklist from a certain well-known evangelical bookshop. I turned to the part of the booklist dealing with church history.

What did my eyes behold? It was divided up into sections. Section 1 was headed "Early church to 1500"—the first fifteen hundred years of Christian history, from the apostles to the Reformers. That section had a sum total of two books on sale. Two books for the first fifteen hundred years of the church—which makes up the largest part of the Christian story. *Two books!* The next section was I think headed 1500-1600, and it contained books too numerous to count. So did each of the other sections, covering the seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Apparently, then, the Christian church ceased to exist pretty soon after the apostles, went into some sort of time warp or rapture, and reappeared as if by magic on October 31st 1517 when Martin Luther nailed up his 95 theses. Fifteen hundred years of Christian history written off. That is the problem: an inability among many evangelicals to see the church at all in the period of the early church fathers and certainly in the Middle Ages. The result is a falsification of the Lord's own promise, "I will build my church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Mt. 16:18).

In one sense, I can sympathise with this. Much of the patristic and mediaeval period does look alien to modern evangelical eyes. Take for example Bernard of Clairvaux, the celebrated French Cistercian monk of the twelfth century. We come to Bernard and look at him. What do we see? Well, for a start, he is a monk; that puts most Protestants off! But then we read some of his hymns, or hymns attributed to him—*Jesus Thou joy of loving hearts, O sacred head now wounded, O Jesus King most wonderful, Jesus the very thought of Thee*. Clearly a spiritually-minded monk. We read some of the writings he definitely wrote, and find rich food for our souls. But then we read his ardent advocacy of the Virgin Mary as our intercessor whose prayers we should seek. We frown again. But the frown instantly softens as we see Bernard in the next breath writing against the (then novel) doctrine of the immaculate conception. Mary, he asserts vigorously, was just as much conceived in sin as the rest of us. Then we look at his life and are touched and impressed by his character. But then we see him acting as the great papal publicity agent of the Second Crusade, and once more shake our heads. Finally we see the Reformers praising Bernard for his Augustinian theology and his penetrating moral and spiritual insights.

What do we make of the strange theological and spiritual mixtures, hybrids and coalescences that we find in the history of the church, especially in the Middle Ages? If we are to discern the Lord's body there, as it surely was there, we need some sort of angle of approach. Let me suggest five steps to sanity:

First, we remind ourselves that we often find the same weird mixtures in the evangelical world of today. I say no more. Second, we follow Luther and Calvin in gladly recognising theological truth and moral goodness wherever and whenever we see it—whether in Sava of Serbia, Raymond Lull, Thomas Aquinas, or whoever. Third, we reflect that the visible church in many ways is like a Christian writ large: a baffling blend of strength and weakness, truth and error, integrity and duplicity. Or if you prefer a corporate analogy, the visible church has often been like Israel in the Old Testament: a multi-coloured mixture of every shade of fidelity and apostasy. We do not therefore despise Israel. The visible church in the Middle Ages may in many ways have gone off in tragically misguided directions in theology, morality and worship. But we remember that it was the same

church that nurtured an Aidan of Lindisfarne, a Bernard of Clairvaux, a Bernard of Cluny, a Gregory of Rimini, a John Wyclif, and ultimately a Martin Luther. The Reformation was really the best elements of the mediaeval church trying to correct the worst elements. That, incidentally, is the most helpful and historical way of viewing the Reformation: not a heavenly bolt from the blue, shot down into utter darkness, but the best elements of Western mediaeval Christianity trying to correct the worst elements.

Fourth, we realise that we may be misunderstanding what a theologian or spiritual writer of a bygone age is saying, seriously misinterpreting his language and theological intentions. Calvin has a classic passage in the *Institutes* (3:12:3) in which he quotes at length approvingly from Bernard of Clairvaux and asks the reader not to be offended by Bernard's use of the term "merit." All Bernard meant by merit, Calvin says, is virtue or good works, without any implication of salvation by moral self-effort.

Fifth, we acknowledge that some of the strangeness may be our own fault. I suppose if you gave the very best of the writings of a Puritan like Richard Baxter to a modern-day evangelical, he might be bewildered or shocked by some of

it, simply because of that perennial problem of the provincialness and narrowness of one's own age which C. S. Lewis highlighted. When we find something strange in an early church father or a mediaeval monk, it may just be that the defect is on our side, and he is uttering a truth or revealing an attitude that we have sinfully or ignorantly neglected. There can be Protestant as well as Roman traditions which nullify the Scriptures.

If we take these five factors into account, we will be able the more easily to see the living features of the church in the midst of its often depressing official history.

Let us close with the quotation from C. S. Lewis with which we opened, only this time altering it slightly to suit our theme: "The true aim of church history is to lift the student out of his provincialism by making him the spectator, if not of all, yet of much, time and existence in the church's life-story. The student who has been brought by good teachers to meet the Christian past where alone the past still lives, is taken out of the spiritual narrowness of his own age and class into a more public world. He is discovering what varieties there are in Christianity." May the Lord help us to discover this for ourselves. *C&S*

# ST AUGUSTINE: HIS LIFE AND THOUGHT

by Colin Wright

## PART VII: AN AUGUSTINE ANTHOLOGY

*Thou hast formed us for thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in thee.  
Confessions, Bk I, chap. i.*

WE THOUGHT IT would be good at this point to let Augustine speak for himself. The following is a very brief anthology of Augustine's views on various topics to which we have been able to give little attention in previous essays. Hopefully these excerpts will give some further indication of the breadth and depth of his thought. They are chosen with no particular plan in mind. Our only desire is that they will be helpful and instructive.

Needless to say, the selection was made as a means of portraying what Augustine thought, and should not be regarded as necessarily endorsed by the author or *Christianity & Society*.

### **A Lamentation of the Greatness that was Rome**

*City of God, Book I, ch. 33*

Oh! infatuated men, what is this blindness, or rather madness, which possesses you? How is it that while, as we hear, even the eastern nations are bewailing your ruin, and while powerful states in the most remote parts of the earth are mourning your fall as a public calamity, ye yourselves should be crowding to the theatres, should be pouring into them and filling them; and, in short, be playing a madder part than ever before? This was the foul plague-spot, this the wreck of virtue and honor that Scipio sought to preserve you from when he prohibited the construction of theatres; this was his reason for desiring that you might still have an enemy to fear, seeing as he did how easily prosperity would corrupt and destroy you. He did not consider that republic flourishing whose walls stand, but whose morals are in ruins. . . . Depraved by good fortune, and not chastened by adversity, what you desire in the restoration of a peaceful and secure state, is not the tranquillity of the commonwealth, but the impunity of your own vicious luxury.

### **On the Compatibility of Christianity and Politics**

*Letter 138: Written 412 A.D. to Marcellinus, Augustine's long-standing friend who was a senior Roman official to whom was delegated the difficult task of bringing peace to the church of North Africa by resolving the Donatist schism.*

These precepts concerning patience ought to be always retained in the habitual discipline of the heart, and the benevolence which prevents the recompensing of evil for evil must be always fully cherished in the disposition. At the same time, many things must be done in correcting with a certain benevolent severity, even against their own wishes, men whose welfare rather than their wishes it is our duty to consult; for the Christian Scriptures have most unambiguously commended this virtue in a magistrate . . . if the commonwealth observe the precepts of the Christian religion, even its wars themselves will not be carried on without the benevolent design that, after the resisting nations have been conquered, provision may be more easily made for enjoying in peace the mutual bond of piety and justice. . . . But the perverse and froward hearts of men think human affairs are prosperous when men are concerned about magnificent mansions, and indifferent to the ruin of souls; when mighty theatres are built up, and the foundations of virtue are undermined; when the madness of extravagance is highly esteemed, and works of mercy scorned; when, out of the wealth and affluence of rich men, luxurious provision is made for actors, and the poor are grudged the necessities of life; when that God who, by the public declarations of his doctrine, protests against public vice, is blasphemed by impious communities, which demand gods of such character that even those theatrical representations which bring disgrace to both body and souls are fitly performed in honour of them. If God permit these things to prevail, He is,

in that permission, showing more grievous displeasure: if He leave these crimes unpunished, such impunity is a more terrible judgement. . . Wherefore, let those who say that the doctrine of Christ is incompatible with the State's well-being, give us an army composed of soldiers such as the doctrine of Christ requires them to be; let them give us such subjects, such husbands and wives, such parents and children, such masters and servants, such kings, such judges—in fine, even such tax-payers and tax-gatherers, as the Christian religion has taught that men should be, and let them dare to say that it is adverse to the State's well-being; yea, rather, let them no longer hesitate to confess that this doctrine, if it were obeyed, would be the salvation of the commonwealth.

## On Law and Self Defence

### 1. *On Free Choice of the Will, 1.5.11 to 6.15*

*Evodius* . . . So, if you don't mind, why don't we go on to consider whether inordinate desire is also the driving force in acts of sacrilege, most of which, as we see, are committed out of superstition?

*Augustine*: I think you're being too hasty. First, I think, we should discuss whether an attacking enemy or an ambushing murderer can be killed without any inordinate desire, for the sake of preserving one's life, liberty, or chastity.

*Evodius*: How can I think that people are without inordinate desire when they fight fiercely for things that they can lose against their will? Or if those things cannot be lost, what need is there to resort to killing for their sake?

*Augustine*: Then the law is unjust that permits a traveler to kill a highway robber in order to keep from being killed, or that permits anyone who can, man or woman, to kill a sexual assailant, before he or she is harmed. The law also commands a soldier to kill the enemy; and if he refuses, he is subject to penalties from his commander. Surely we will not dare to say that these laws are unjust, or rather, that they are not laws at all. For it seems to me that an unjust law is no law at all.

*Evodius*: I see that the law is quite severe against this sort of objection, for it permits lesser evils among the people that it governs in order to prevent greater evils. It is much better that one who plots against another's life should be killed rather than one who is defending his own life. And it is much worse for someone unwillingly to suffer a sexual assault, than for the assailant to be killed by the one he was going to assault. A soldier who kills the enemy is acting as an agent of the law, so he can easily perform his duty without inordinate desire. Furthermore, the law itself, which was established with a view to protecting the people, cannot be accused of any inordinate desire. As for the one who enacted the law, if he did so at God's command—that is, if he did what eternal justice prescribes—he could do so without any inordinate desire. . . But as for those other men [those who act in self-defence], I do not see how they can be excused, even if the law itself is just. For the law does not force them to kill; it merely leaves that in their power. They are free not to kill anyone for those things which can be lost against their will, and which they should therefore not love. . . I don't blame the law that allows such people to be killed; but I can't think of any way to defend those who do the killing.

*Augustine*: And I can't think why you are searching for a defense for people whom no law condemns.

*Evodius*: No law, perhaps, of those that are public and are read by human beings; but I suspect that they are condemned by a more powerful, hidden law, if indeed there is nothing that is not governed by divine providence. How can they be free of sin in the eyes of that law, when they are defiled with human blood for the sake of things that ought to be held in contempt? It seems to me, therefore, that the law written to govern the people rightly permits these killings and that divine providence avenges them. The law of the people merely institutes penalties sufficient for keeping the peace among ignorant human beings, and only to the extent that their actions can be regulated by human government. But those other faults deserve other penalties that I think Wisdom alone can repeal.

*Augustine*: I praise and approve your distinction, for although it is tentative and incomplete, it boldly aims at lofty heights. You think that the law that is established to rule cities allows considerable leeway, leaving many things unpunished that divine providence avenges; and rightly so. And just because that law doesn't do everything, it doesn't follow that we should disapprove of what it does do. But, if you wish, let us carefully examine to what extent evil-doing is punished by the law that rules peoples in this life. Whatever is left is punished inevitably and secretly by divine providence.

*Evodius*: I would like to, if only it were possible to get to the end of such matters; for I think this issue is infinite.

*Augustine*: Take heart, and set out confidently and piously in the paths of reason. There is nothing so abstruse or difficult that it cannot become completely clear and straightforward with God's help. And so, depending on him and praying for his aid, let's look into the question that we have posed. First, tell me this: is the law that is promulgated in writing helpful to human beings living this present life?

*Evodius*: Of course, for they are the ones who make up peoples and cities.

*Augustine*: Do these human beings and peoples belong to the class of things that are eternal, and can neither change nor perish? Or are they changeable and subject to time?

*Evodius*: Who can doubt that they are changeable and bound by time?

*Augustine*: Therefore, if a people is well-ordered and serious-minded, and carefully watches over the common good, and everyone in it values private affairs less than the public interest, is it not right to enact a law that allows this people to choose their own magistrates to look after their interest—that is, the public interest?

*Evodius*: It is quite right.

*Augustine*: But suppose that the same people becomes gradually depraved. They come to prefer private interest to the public good. Votes are bought and sold. Corrupted by those who covet honors, they hand over power to wicked and profligate men. In such a case would it not be right for a good and powerful man (if one could be found) to take from this people the power of conferring honors and to limit it to the discretion of a few people, or even to one?

*Evodius*: Yes, it would.

*Augustine*: Now these two laws appear to be contradictory, for one of them gives the people the power to confer honors, while the other takes it away; and the second one is established in such a way that the laws cannot both be in

force in one city at the same time. Shall we therefore conclude that one of them is unjust and should not be enacted?

*Evodius:* Not at all.

*Augustine:* Then, if you like, let us call a law “temporal” if, although it is just, it can justly be changed in the course of time.

*Evodius:* Agreed.

*Augustine:* Then consider the law that is called the highest reason, which must always be obeyed, and by which the wicked deserve misery and the good deserve a happy life, and by which the law that we agreed to call “temporal” is rightly enacted and rightly changed. Can anyone of sense deny that this law is unchangeable and eternal? Or can it sometimes be unjust for the wicked to be miserable and the good happy, or for a well-ordered and serious-minded people to choose their own magistrates, while a licentious and worthless people is deprived of this power?

*Evodius:* I see that this law is indeed eternal and unchangeable.

*Augustine:* I think you also see that nothing is just and legitimate in the temporal law except that which human beings have derived from the eternal law.

2. *City of God, Book I, ch. 17.*

It is not lawful to take the law into our own hands, and slay even a guilty person, whose death no public sentence has warranted.

### On Suicide

1. *City of God, Book I, ch. 22*

But they who have laid violent hands on themselves are perhaps to be admired for their greatness of soul, though they cannot be applauded for the soundness of their judgement. However, if you look at the matter more closely, you will scarcely call it greatness of soul, which prompts a man to kill himself rather than bear up against some hardships of fortune, or sins in which he is not implicated. Is it not rather proof of a feeble mind, unable to bear either the pains of bodily servitude or the foolish opinion of the vulgar? And is not that to be pronounced the greater mind, which rather faces than flees the ills of life, and which, in comparison of the light and purity of conscience, holds in small esteem the judgement of men, and specially of the vulgar, which is frequently involved in a mist of error? . . . For suicide we cannot cite the example of patriarchs, prophets, or apostles; though our Lord Jesus Christ, when he admonished them to flee from city to city if they were persecuted, might very well have taken that occasion to advise them to lay violent hands on themselves, and so escape their persecutors.

2. *City of God, Book I, ch. 26*

But this we affirm, this we maintain, this we every way pronounce to be right, that no man ought to inflict on himself voluntary death, for this is to escape the ills of time by plunging into those of eternity; that no man ought to do

so on account of another man’s sins, for this were to escape a guilt which could not pollute him, by incurring great guilt of his own; that no man ought to do so on account of his past sins, for he has all the more need of this life that these sins may be healed by repentance; that no man should put an end to this life to obtain that better life we look for after death, for those who die by their own hand have no better life after death.

### On War

1. *City of God, Book I, ch. 21*

They who have waged war in obedience to the divine command, or in conformity with his laws, have represented in their persons the public justice or wisdom of government, and in this capacity have put to death wicked men; such persons have by no means violated the commandment, “Thou shalt not kill.”

2. *Letter 189: written 418 A.D. to Count Boniface, governor of the province of Africa, and responsible first for allowing the Vandals access to North Africa and then for sternly defending his province against them. He was in command of the besieged Hippo Regius as Augustine lay dying there in 430 A.D.*

Do not think that it is impossible for any one to please God while engaged in active military service. Among such persons was the holy David, to whom God gave so great a testimony; among them also were many righteous men of that time . . . Think, then, of this first of all, when you are arming for the battle, that even your bodily strength is a gift of God; for, considering this, you will not employ the gift of God against God. For, when faith is pledged, it is to be kept even with the enemy against whom the war is waged, how much more with the friend for whom the battle is fought! Peace should be the object of your desire; war should be waged only as a necessity, and waged only that God may by it deliver men from the necessity and preserve them in peace. For peace is not sought in order to the kindling of war, but war is waged in order that peace may be obtained. Therefore, even in waging war, cherish the spirit of a peacemaker, that, by conquering those whom you attack, you may lead them back to the advantages of peace. . . Let necessity, therefore, and not your will, slay the enemy who fights against you. As violence is used towards him who rebels and resists, so mercy is due to the vanquished or the captive.

3. *Against Faustus the Manichaeon, Book XXII, Sections 73-74*

According to the eternal law, which requires the preservation of natural order, and forbids the transgression of it, some actions have an indifferent character, so that men are blamed for presumption if they do them without being called upon, while they are deservedly praised for doing them when required. The act, the agent, and the authority for the action are all of great importance in the order of nature. For Abraham to sacrifice his son of his own accord is shocking madness. His doing so at the command of God proves him faithful and submissive. This is so loudly pro-

claimed by the very voice of truth, that Faustus, eagerly rummaging for some fault, and reduced at last to slanderous charges, has not the boldness to attack this action. It is scarcely possible that he can have forgotten a deed so famous, that it recurs to the mind of itself without any study or reflection, and is in fact repeated by so many tongues, and portrayed in so many places, that no one can pretend to shut his eyes or his ears to it. If, therefore, while Abraham's killing his son of his own accord would have been unnatural, his doing it at the command of God shows not only guiltless but praiseworthy compliance, why does Faustus blame Moses for spoiling the Egyptians? Your feeling of disapproval for the mere human action should be restrained by a regard for the divine sanction. Will you venture to blame God Himself for desiring such actions? Then "Get thee behind me, Satan, for thou understandest not the things which be of God, but those which be of men." Would that this rebuke might accomplish in you what it did in Peter, and that you might hereafter preach the truth concerning God, which you now, judging by feeble sense, find fault with! as Peter became a zealous messenger to announce to the Gentiles what he objected to at first, when the Lord spoke of it as His intention.

Now, if this explanation suffices to satisfy human obstinacy and perverse misinterpretation of right actions of the vast difference between the indulgence of passion and presumption on the part of men, and obedience to the command of God, who knows what to permit or to order, and also the time and the persons, and the due action or suffering in each case, the account of the wars of Moses will not excite surprise or abhorrence, for in wars carried on by divine command, he showed not ferocity but obedience; and God, in giving the command, acted not in cruelty, but in righteous retribution, giving to all what they deserved, and warning those who needed warning. What is the evil of war? Is it the death of some who will soon die in any case, that others may live in peaceful subjection? This is mere cowardly dislike, not any religious feeling. The real evils in war are love of violence, revengeful cruelty, fierce and implacable enmity, wild resistance, and the lust of power, and such like; and it is generally to punish these things, when force is required to inflict the punishment, that, in obedience to God or some lawful authority, good men undertake wars, when they find themselves in such a position as regards the conduct of human affairs, that right conduct requires them to act. . . . A great deal depends on the causes for which men undertake wars, and on the authority they have for doing so. . . . When war is undertaken in obedience to God, who would rebuke, or humble, or crush the pride of man, it must be allowed to be a righteous war.

### On the Status of Women

#### 1. *On the Literal Meaning of Genesis, III. 22*

Although the physical and external differences of man and woman symbolise the double role that the mind is known to have in one man, nevertheless a woman, for all her physical qualities as a woman, is actually renewed in the spirit of her mind in the knowledge of God according to the image of her Creator, and therein there is no male or female. Now women are not excluded from this grace of renewal and this reformation of the image of God, although on the physical

side their sexual characteristics may suggest otherwise, namely, that man alone is said to be the image and glory of God. By the same token, in the original creation of man, inasmuch as woman was a human being, she certainly had a mind, and a rational mind, and therefore she also was made to the image of God. But because of the intimate bond uniting man and woman, Scripture says merely, "God made man to the image of God." And lest anyone think that this refers only to the creation of man's spirit, although it was only according to the spirit that he was made to the image of God, Scripture adds, "Male and female He made him," to indicate that the body also was now made.

#### 2. *On the Literal Meaning of Genesis, IX. 5*

Now, if the woman was not made for the man to be his helper in the begetting children, in what was she to help him? She was not to till the earth with him, for there was not yet any toil to make help necessary. If there were any such need, a male helper would be better, and the same could be said of the comfort of another's presence if Adam were perhaps weary of solitude. How much more agreeably could two male friends, rather than a man and a woman, enjoy companionship and conversation in a life shared together.

Selections are taken from the following editions:

*City of God*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979 [1886])

*Letters*, Nicene & Post-Nicene Fathers (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979 [1886])

*On Free Choice of the Will* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub Co., 1993), translated by Thomas Williams

*On the Literal Meaning of Genesis*, Ancient Christian Writers Series (New York: Newman Press, 1982)

*Against Faustus the Manichaeon*, Nicene & Post-Nicene Fathers (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979 [1886]) C&S

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# Any Questions

## USURY AND THE POOR LOAN

by Stephen C. Perks

*How can the term “poor” represent a qualification of the usury statutes in Ex. 22:25 and Lev. 25:35 when God in his word does not provide an objective standard by which to judge who is poor and who is not poor? If the taking of usury from a poor covenantal brother is a particularly egregious sin, why does God not clearly instruct us about how to recognise a poor brother so we may know and instruct others, in order to avoid sin? Is this evaluation of who is poor and who is not poor a wholly subjective evaluation?*

(An article on usury was published in *Christianity and Society*, Vol. iv, No. 3, July 1994, by Stephen C. Perks, in which the position was taken that interest may be charged on non-charitable poor loans, but that interest, following the biblical commandments, should not be charged on charitable loans to poor believers).

YOU ASK HOW the term “poor” can qualify the Old Testament prohibition on usury when there is no objective standard of poverty given in the Bible. First, the Bible itself makes this qualification. It therefore addresses a specific context in which the ban on usury operates. This in itself is of very great significance for our understanding of the application of this law. It establishes very clearly that this is not a general ban on interest. It shows that interest *per se* is not evil, that there are situations in which interest may be charged without sin. The fact that the Bible does not give an objective standard of poverty does not alter this fact. So, whether we accept that usury on non-charitable loans such as modern commercial or consumer type loans to those who are not poor is legitimate or not we still have to deal with this and explain the qualification in the text itself. Those exegeting these texts from a total ban position—such as C. S. Mooney—would still have to explain this qualification. But, I believe, they would have considerable difficulty in doing so, i.e. in exegeting the texts thoroughly and consistently, if they were to insist, as they would have to do, that this qualification does not mean what it so plainly says, namely, that the law addresses the poor (C. S. Mooney, of course, while claiming that the Bible prohibits usury on any kind of loan to anyone, in a whole book on the subject, does not even try to deal with this qualification, and not surprisingly, since the mere consideration of it would have rendered his position so obviously untenable). In other words, they would have to explain this qualification relating to the poor in some other way, indeed in a way that actually makes the ban applicable to the rich as well as the poor, since their premiss is that this law forbids lending money at interest to the rich, something that happens all the time in Western economies. (It is also worth noting that the biblical ban covers not only pecuniary loans

but the loan of *anything* on interest, Dt. 23:19-20. This would make any form of rent immoral also.) Those espousing the total ban theory, therefore, would have to explain the biblical ban and demonstrate how this ban would work in modern Western societies, in which the rich lend to the rich at interest all the time, why it applies to the rich as well, while at the same time explaining away the reference to the poor. In the total ban literature I have read the attempt to deal with this qualification is never made. Yet those touting the total ban theory (such as Mooney and the Jubilee Centre in England) seem to think that those who hold to the position that the ban only applies to the poor brethren have their work cut out for them showing how it does not apply to the rich, as if the onus fell on the limited ban theorists to prove it only applies to the poor. This both amuses me and confuses me at the same time. I have yet to see one piece of exegesis on this biblical qualification—of *any* standard, let alone of a convincing standard—from the total ban position. I should like the total ban theorists to answer me this question: How can the term “poor” *not* represent a qualification of the usury statutes in Ex. 22:25 and Lev. 25:35? I think the time they have taken in answering this question already (and they have been studying this issue for well over a millennium) shows the difficulty they have in defending their position. I surprises me that people still hold to this school of thought when it has so consistently failed to provide an answer for the main question confronting it—indeed from the biblical point of view (as opposed to the economic), the *only* question confronting it. This is a new twist on an old tale: it seems obvious to everyone that the emperor’s clothes have worn through completely, except for the one or two people who cling for dear life to what is, from the biblical point of view, a totally indefensible theory.

Second, when you say “objective standard” this can only mean an *absolute* standard. An objective standard of poverty specified in the Bible (if there were one) could only mean that this is an absolute standard. Were there such an objective standard in the Bible we should always have to refer to this standard as the basis of our definition of poverty in all circumstances and in all social settings. This would make the ban almost impossible to apply to the great majority of the poor in modern Western societies because it would fix this objective standard at the level of poverty relevant to the Israelite society of Moses’ day or first century Palestine. The standard of poverty operative for someone making poor loans in Moses’ day would be quite irrelevant to modern societies. In other words, an objective standard would render the ban on usury useless as a law to be applied



in all societies except those very similar to biblical Palestine. I think this is why the Bible does not specify an objective standard of poverty. I do not think this law is so limited. But such a limitation would be the inevitable consequence of an objective definition of poverty in a world where there is either progress or decline of social standards and where there is more than one possible culture and economic form of organisation in which the believer has to apply God's law. The law under such a definition would be practically useless to us.

Third, bearing this in mind, consider what Jesus said: "The poor you have with you always" (Mt. 26:11). But this cannot mean poverty as defined *then*, i.e. the poor by the standard of first century Palestine. Jesus cannot have been saying "You will always have this standard of poverty," that this is *the* standard of poverty, and that this level of poverty you will always have with you. That has patently been proved incorrect by history. The poorest of people in the West have a standard of living and a standard of health care and welfare that the poor of first century Palestine could never have dreamed of. If there were an objective standard of poverty given in the Bible, a definition that tied poverty down to certain conditions, which of necessity would have to be the conditions relevant to biblical Palestine, this statement, "The poor you will always have with you," could not be true wherever and whenever there is the kind of progress that has been experienced by modern Western societies.

Therefore, fourth, if interest-free poverty loans were linked to that first century Palestinian standard, or to the standard of poverty of Moses' day, as they would have to be if these standards were taken as objective standards, many in our society today who need poverty loans without having to pay interest would be unable to secure such loans on biblical grounds because their standard of living is way above that absolute standard of biblical Palestine. Yet these people are still considered poor relative to the rest of society and if they are to live in our society they need such help—and they cannot choose not to live in our society; only the rich can choose where they live. This text, therefore, and many others that command us to help the poor in our midst, would be totally irrelevant to modern Western societies. It would mean that we no longer have any duty at all to help those less fortunate than ourselves unless they fell to the level of poverty experienced by the poor of biblical Palestine, which is unlikely for the vast majority of the poor in our societies.

If poverty were to be defined by such an objective standard based on the standards of poverty current in biblical Palestine, those considered poor in our society today would suffer much more since there would be no help for them until they fell to this absolute level. They would have to be far poorer than they are today before the commandments requiring charity came into operation. This would affect not only their every day standard of living, but also their standard of health as well—a major factor in the consideration of poverty. Acceptable standards of health in biblical society were far below those operative today in Western society.

Poverty, therefore, is relative to society. It would be very difficult, perhaps impossible for most people, to live in Western society today as the poor lived in first century Palestine, or even in eighteenth century England, though I

have seen such conditions in a rural situation, which today would be considered way *below* the poverty line, a form of *extreme* poverty. But if an objective biblical standard were operative those classed as poor today in the West would not be eligible for help until they fell to such extreme levels of poverty. An objective standard of poverty for determining the validity of an interest free poor loan would be impossible to apply to current relative poverty standards. This would make the biblical law irrelevant and useless. But I believe this law is not useless and that it can be applied in the modern world.

And if such an objective standard were given in the Bible it would of *necessity* have to be much lower than modern standards of poverty and in line with standards in biblical Palestine, since if it were more in line with modern standards the non-poor in biblical society would have had to provide help for the poor in accordance with a standard of living and welfare that would probably have been *above* their own standard of living, or at the least in line with it, and the Bible does not require this—though socialism does. Many of the *rich* in biblical Palestine were poorer in many ways than the poor in modern Western societies—they could not even dream of hot and cold running water, toilets, central heating, penicillin, houses without damp (come to think of it, my parents had a hard time dreaming of some of these when I was a boy!—see my Editorial article). Yet these are taken for granted today, and even the poor are expected to be able to have these things. Thus, an objective biblical standard of poverty used for assessing the needs of the poor would render our responsibility to help these people virtually null and void, and it would render the biblical commandment to help the poor useless also. This is why I think there is no such objective, i.e., absolute, definition in the Bible. God is merciful. His word can be applied even today.

Therefore, poverty cannot be defined in terms of an objective standard if the biblical prohibition on charging interest on poverty loans is to remain relevant to the poor in modern Western societies, as I believe it is. It is this lack of an objective biblical standard that makes these laws practicable in our society. The poor in our society live like kings compared with the standards of first century Palestine, better in some things—health care for example. Yet they are still poor in our society. Jesus told us they would be with us always, and this in itself seems to validate a relative definition of poverty. Therefore, the existence of poverty in modern society does not invalidate the biblical promise (Dt. 15:4-6) that an obedient society will be a prosperous society blessed by God, as the West has been. That prosperity means that even the poor have a level of health care and welfare, housing, sanitation, etc., that would have made Solomon's mouth fall open.

Perhaps an absolute (rather than a relative) definition of poverty could be given, but such would lead to fewer people being helped by charity, not more. The important thing is not that charity is given to as few as possible, which would be the inevitable result of the application of an absolute definition of poverty, but that charity is given in terms of *Christian* criteria not humanistic criteria.

Also, Dt. 15:4-6 states that if we obey God as a society poverty will be eradicated. Yet God still gave laws about how to help the poor, e.g. the ban on usury to poor believers and God-fearers. The eradication of poverty is an ideal that we must work for, and also a promise that has been realised

in the West. The usury laws are still relevant, I believe, even though poverty on a scale and standard experienced in biblical times is almost unheard of in Western society. But these laws could not be relevant if the Bible appended an objective definition of poverty to them. Virtually nobody would be eligible for interest free poverty loans under such an standard.

### Questioner's response

*Your reply leaves me without the clarification I was hoping to get. Let me come at it another way; by way of analogy.*

*What if I were a civil magistrate in a Christian society, and were called upon to adjudicate a usury law suit. The plaintiff in this suit accuses the defendant of charging unlawful usury because the plaintiff claims that he (the plaintiff) was a poor man. I now come to you, as my ecclesiastical adviser, seeking your insights as to what the law of God says regarding what constitutes a "poor" man. What kind of counsel and instruction could you give me? To what texts would you direct me to help me establish this criteria? How could you assist me in objectively determining if the plaintiff's claim to be poor was a valid claim, according to God's law, thereby establishing or cancelling his legal claim to have been charged unlawful usury.*

*While the foregoing situation is hypothetical, its focus is no small matter. The plaintiff is alleging a violation of the Eighth Commandment: a felony offence. If the plaintiff is found to be bearing false witness then the matter will require the civil penalties which would have been visited on the accused, had he been convicted. But the question remains: how will I establish the objective and legal validity (or invalidity) of the plaintiff's claim. To what objective biblical criteria may I turn to establish the validity of his claim to be poor? Knowing that the law of God, prohibiting usurious loans to the poor, applies to all men at all times and in all places, by what biblical standard will I, as the civil magistrate, adjudicate the matter before the court? Your appeal to "Christian criteria" may be rhetorically satisfying but it is of little help in a situation requiring a defensible judicial decision.*

*I know that you would agree that if we are going to advance a distinctively Reformed, theonomic socio-political/judicial theory, then we must be able to answer the situation I have described above. I do not yet understand how, within the framework of the discussion you advanced in your reply to my first question, you can provide a judicial decision based upon extrapolation from biblical case law.*

You ask: what if a civil magistrate had to handle a court case brought by a poor man against a usurious creditor and needed a definition of poverty? My answer to this is as follows: It is not within the jurisdiction of the civil magistrate to adjudicate on this matter. It is not a matter that should be brought to court in the first place. I cannot see how anyone could sue someone for refusing to lend him money at zero interest. Even if the plaintiff maintains he is in desperate poverty the court has no jurisdiction biblically. Where does the Bible put this matter within the jurisdiction of a court? Yes, those who are wealthy and refuse to lend to such a person are disobeying God and their uncharitable actions will be condemned. But this is just the point: their actions are uncharitable; they are not a violation of a principle of justice. If this were a matter of justice even non-believers would have a claim to such non-interest bearing loans, since justice is equally applicable to all without respect of persons. This latter point is a fundamental premiss of biblical justice as administered by the magistrate. There is one law for all, believer or non-believer, Jews or foreigner. But if non-

interest bearing charitable loans were a matter for the magistrate then clearly this would be an instance where there are two different standards to be enforced by the magistrate, since the biblical ban on usury is not applicable to loans to foreigners.

You say "Knowing that the law of God, prohibiting usurious loans to the poor, applies to all men at all times and in all places . . ." This is just the point. God's law does not prohibit usurious loans to *all* poor men; it prohibits usurious loans to fellow Israelites and sojourners. The Jews were permitted to charge interest on loans to foreigners (see Dt. 23:20 where this is spelled out clearly, though it is also made clear in the ban as stated in Exodus and Leviticus). The question of usurious loans is therefore not a matter of justice but of *charity*. Failure to lend at zero interest to my poor brother in the faith is *not* a transgression of the Eighth Commandment and therefore he has no grounds for taking me to court. It is to be sure a transgression of God's command that I should have compassion on the poor. The Eighth Commandment forbids stealing. The command to have pity on a poor man does not involve a reciprocal right on behalf of the poor man; it does not give him title to a portion of my wealth, and therefore he has no right to sue me for withholding an interest free-loan. I have stolen nothing from a poor man, though I have refused him charity, and if I have a responsibility before God to help him (i.e. if he really is a poor brother and if I am able to help him), God will judge me for my lack of charity. But the Bible does not, in the usury laws or anywhere else, give to the magistrate the jurisdiction to determine whether I have or have not been uncharitable to the poor.

I think C. S. Mooney argues that the Bible forbids usury to all men. But he fails completely in his book to deal with the biblical teaching that usury may be charged to those that are not of the faith or living under its external requirements. He just ignores this. Unfortunately, it does not go away. Any attempt to argue that the Bible's prohibition on usurious loans to the poor applies to *all* men will shipwreck on this point. Dt. 23:19-20 specifically says that usury may be charged on loans to a foreigner. It does not in any way qualify this by saying "provided he is not poor." It is permissible to lend on interest to a poor foreigner. The ban on usury to the poor only applies to fellow Israelites and sojourners, not to all poor people. This being the case, the usury ban cannot be in the sphere of the magistrate's jurisdiction, where the law must be applied equally to all. The magistrate must not be a respecter of persons (Dt. 1:17; 16:19; Pr. 24:23). I have not seen anyone who argues for a total ban on usury deal honestly with the biblical teaching yet. Dt. 23:19-20 blows the whole total ban argument to pieces. Mooney's tactic is to waffle a lot and hope no one notices that he has not dealt with the problem. We have to start with the biblical facts, and your question does not recognise this biblical fact: interest may be charged to the foreigner, period—not to the wealthy foreigner, but to the foreigner whether he is rich or poor.

This issue, therefore, is one relating to charity not public justice. Not all of God's laws are within the jurisdiction of the magistrate; in fact only a small number are, compared with the whole. Most of God's commandments are for self-government, family government etc. The State only gets involved where there are penalties specified for sins that the Bible teaches the magistrate must punish. Your problem is

not simply that the magistrate does not have an objective standard of poverty to guide his judgement; neither does he have a biblical penalty. So even if he finds in favour of the plaintiff, what penalty is he going to dish out? God has not given him one, unless it is argued that not lending money is theft and therefore double restitution is applicable, but this seems incredible to me. How will any one argue that the creditor has stolen from the poor man? God has not put this matter within the jurisdiction of the magistrate. This latter problem, i.e. the lack of a biblical penalty, is more difficult than the problem of not having an objective definition of poverty

Many theologians and Reconstructionists seem to have completely failed to grasp the fact that many of the commandments in the Bible are for self-government and do not constitute State-enforceable statute law. *Torah* means *instruction, direction, precept, not statute*. Of course the *torah* contains instruction and precepts that the magistrate must abide by. But that is only one part of it. Not all of the commandments we find in the *torah* are commandments for the State's statute books. In fact very few are. To treat biblical law (*torah*) in this way, as if it were all statute law for the magistrate, is simplistic and misleading; indeed it is a form of Statism (and bad theonomy). There are other institutions and forms of government that God has established to govern man's life besides the State, and these spheres need instruction, direction and precept too. We do not assume that all direction given in the *torah* relates to the church or the family, and neither should we assume it all relates to the State. Rushdoony has been making this very point for donkey's years, but theologians seem increasingly unwilling to listen and the movement now is clogged up with legalists who have their nicely constructed statute books, which seem to cover every aspect of other peoples lives. God has given us a great deal of freedom. He has also instructed us in his law (*torah*) how to live and expects us to follow his instruction. The greater part of this instruction is for self-government. We are to use our liberty to glorify God. Maturity requires this self-government, obedience to God's word. God also requires us to respect other people's freedoms and responsibilities under his law without meddling in their lives. This respect for legitimate freedom is due from the church and the State as well as from the individual. All authority is limited by God's word. The *torah* is not a book of statutes; it is a book of guidance. Its precepts and instruction must inform the work of the magistrate also, of course, as it must inform every other sphere of life and culture. But this does not mean that the magistrate must pass as statute law every precept in the Bible. His sphere of duty relates to those matters that God has put within his jurisdiction. The matter of usury is not within his jurisdiction. If it were there would not be the problem of a standard of poverty to be used by the magistrate; the Bible would provide guidance on this for the magistrate, and there would also be a suitable punishment made clear for those who transgress. The very fact that the Bible has not provided the magistrate with guidance on these things demonstrates that this is not a matter for his judgement.

Charitable loans are a matter of charity, not justice. I am not required to show the same charity to everyone that I am required to show to fellow believers or to my family. If I were everyone would have an endless claim upon me. Such would be a form of socialism—and an extreme form. What the

Bible says is this: families must look after their own; then, if there is no family, the brethren in the faith should look after those who are poor among them. Also, the brethren must have compassion on those without the faith. But I am not required by God to lend at zero interest to non-believers any more than I am required to educate and clothe them, as I am required to educate and clothe my children. I most certainly have a moral responsibility to look after my own family in this way. But my responsibility to other people's children is not the same. This is a matter of charity not justice. The laws regarding usury fall into the same category. No one has a right to an interest-free loan just because he is poor, any more than he has a right to be educated or employed. Believers have a responsibility to help poor believers, but this responsibility does not imply a reciprocal right for the poor that can be enforced by the magistrate. God will judge us if we are not compassionate on those who need our help when we can help them. This the Bible shows clearly. But it never lays this down as a matter of justice, disregard for which must be remedied by the State.

It is not that I deny that the rich should help the poor and that God holds them responsible. On the contrary, it is precisely this point that I wish to make. It is you and I as individuals, as members of a family and the church, and as members of society, who have a duty to help the poor, *not* the State (i.e. the ministry of public justice). The Bible does not teach us that the *magistrate* has a duty to the poor. Indeed it teaches the very opposite. The magistrate must always pursue justice and may not respect the person, whether he is poor or rich, in his administration of justice. The magistrate may *not* take up the cause of the poor according to Scripture (Lev. 19:15); he may only take up the cause of justice. It is you and I that have the duty to help the poor, not the magistrate. The whole idea that a socialist society is a caring society is nonsense. It is those who do not wish to help the poor, who will not shoulder the responsibility that God has given them to help those less fortunate than themselves, that insist the State should look after the poor. By passing this responsibility to the State they disobey God's command that they as individuals, family members, and members of church and society should help the poor, and insist that *others* do what God has commanded them to do, since the State has to levy taxes in order to provide for the poor. The whole notion that socialists want a caring society is a nonsense. Socialists refuse to help others themselves. Instead they require others to do what the Bible teaches they themselves must do. And they insist that the State finance help for the poor by taking the money off others by force. This the Bible calls theft. This is a breach of the Eight Commandment.

But the Bible does not put helping the poor within the jurisdiction of the magistrate. If it did we should have the major premiss for Christian socialism. And since the Bible does not offer us an objective definition of poverty that means a relative definition would prevail and therefore socialism we should have with us always.

The Bible does not give the magistrate the right to tell me whom I should have compassion on. This is something I must do as a responsible Christian. It simply cannot be that State officials can come round and tell me that I must be compassionate on this person or that person or else I will be taken before the courts. There is a never ending supply of bums who will milk this system for all it's worth as well as the genuine poor, as we have today. The whole point about

Christian charity is that it is personal and is therefore more able to sift out the unworthy from the worthy recipients. If the State were to enforce the usury ban it would have to tell individual people to lend money to others. This would be discriminate. The State would have to decide who could and who could not afford to loan money. In short, it would be for some far worse than the tax-based system we have now, and better for others. The system would be totally at the mercy of those wanting loans. There would be less justice in this than there is in the present system where taxes do the job—and there's no justice in that.

I cannot see how the enforcement of this usury ban by the magistrate would work at all unless some form of socialist system were set up. It would be totally arbitrary and quite tyrannical. The poor, and more to the point those who are poor as a result of their improvident lifestyle, and the deliberate spongers and fraudsters, would never cease from exercising their rights and claiming loans from those wealthier—or just more provident—than themselves. And they would see this as their *right*, for indeed it *would* be their right under the law. But this is not biblical and it is not their right under God's law. What you propose is nothing less than The Bums' Charter! It would make living off others the right of everyone who refused to live a provident lifestyle. Since a seven year maximum loan period on charitable loans is required by the Bible, this would mean the poor and the bums would have the right to live off others without ever paying back what they have borrowed. When the State is not involved there are no such rights and I may refuse a loan to someone whom I do not consider worthy. This judgement the Bible places in the hands of the creditor, not the State.

In short, the Bible does not put the usury ban within the jurisdiction of the magistrate; and to attempt to do so would be to overturn the theonomic principle of limited government in which the State acts only within its God-ordained jurisdiction in matters of public justice. The enforcing of the usury ban by the magistrate would be a form of State-enforced wealth redistribution; i.e. a form of socialism. The usury ban is a matter of charity and compassion not justice. The magistrate's jurisdiction is justice not charity. The judgement as to whether someone is worthy to receive a poor loan is left to the creditor.

My reference to "Christian criteria" as being the important consideration in this matter was not meant to be another way of devising a standard of poverty by which to judge a man's condition. What I have argued is that the definition of poverty is relative. But the criteria by which we judge whether a particular person is worthy of our help must be Christian. By *worthy* of our help I do not mean the level of poverty he is experiencing, but whether he is deserving of help, in other words whether he is *genuinely* poor. Again, this is an area where the decision must be left to the individual creditor. The problem with so much State welfare is that, effectively, no moral criteria at all can be imposed on those seeking charity, because everyone has a "right" to help from the State, or so it is thought. And this is certainly true in the sense that the magistrate must be even-handed. The Bible requires this of him. He must never respect the person. Justice is the right of all without distinction. But charity is not. This is the obvious reason why the magistrate, of all people, is unable to distribute alms to the poor effectively and properly according to biblical principles of charity and work ethics. When charity is put into the hands of the

magistrate all have an equal claim. He may not distinguish between claimants on the basis of a personal judgement of a claimant's character, i.e. whether the claimant *deserves* his help. All, no matter how improvident or indolent they are, have a right to justice. When the ministry of justice is confused with a ministry of charity, which must of necessity apply a very different method of assessing a claimant's needs if charity is to be distributed according to biblical principles, the result is inevitable: the magistrate must redistribute wealth in society according to the principle of even handedness—the justice principle. But this is theft in the name of justice. The problem results from confusing two entirely different spheres, i.e. by placing within the jurisdiction of the magistrate something that should never have been his to distribute.

Many who live improvident lifestyles, who waste and squander their incomes, and then expect to live off the sweat of others, can work the State welfare system much more easily. It is much harder for them to work a private, decentralised welfare system. The individuals administering the welfare at the grass roots level can make an assessment of the claimant's need much more realistically. They may even know the claimant, or know others in the community who can provide testimonials for him. Christian organisations and individuals who wish to help the poor should apply Christian principles in assessing such people, not humanistic ones. This is what I was driving at. But again, this does not presuppose some Christian objective standard of poverty. This is a question of *who* is deserving. For example, some homeless people have chosen this lifestyle. They beg on the streets and want people to give them a free ride. But they are not prepared to do any work for what they receive. The Statists and humanists say, "The State should give them welfare" or "they should be helped by the rich" etc. It is assumed by some that these people have a right to our help. If they are genuinely in poverty we have a duty to help. This does not imply a reciprocal right on their behalf to be helped. The Bible teaches that people, even poor people, do *not* have a right to be kept in the lifestyle to which they have become accustomed, even if that lifestyle is at the bottom of the ladder; it teaches, rather, that they must *work* for their keep (if they are able). "If anyone will not work, neither let him eat" (2 Thess. 3:10). This applies even to those living on the streets. The Bible does not say "If a man *cannot* work etc." Therefore there are those who need our help who are not able to help themselves. But there are also very many who *will not* work, even when they are given the opportunity, and this is why they have an impoverished lifestyle. If someone is not willing to work in return for the help he receives when he is able he is not deserving. Biblical work ethics applies to charitable causes also. This is the kind of Christian criteria I was thinking of. This kind of criteria would function whatever the standard of poverty was used. It does no one any good to be given such charity without these conditions attached. It merely confirms them in their indolence. These kinds of considerations are more important in dealing with the poverty problem than some objective, abstract definition of poverty. Such a definition is not workable. Even individual needs within a given culture vary greatly, so that it is doubtful that an objective or absolute standard of poverty tied to that culture would be effective in every instance. Individuals and organisations making charity available have to make judgements as to who the deserving poor are. C&S

# THE GOSPEL IN CENTRAL ASIA: A FORGOTTEN STORY

by John Peck

OUR EUROPE/ROME-ORIENTATED textbooks of church history easily obscure for us vast areas of Christian mission done by other communions. We seldom hear of the missionary work done in the last century by the Russian Orthodox Church in the Urals, for example. And the work of Raymond Lull (fl. 1300), theologian and missionary to Islam, is badly neglected. Or the origins of the Mar Toma Church in South India. Or westwards: in 314, two centuries before Augustine reached Britain, the British church sent at least two bishops as delegates to the Council of Arles. They came from centres that straddled the centre of Britain—Caerleon in Wales, and York. And that church was in full communion with Irish churches. From Ireland during the following centuries missionaries went all over Europe, as far as Austria and North Italy. In the seventh century, the Christian culture in Ireland was a finishing school for young nobility in Western Europe. In the tenth, Brendan almost certainly reached Newfoundland.

The fourth century also saw the establishment of the church in Armenia, Georgia, and Abyssinia, and the appearance of a distinctively Eastern style of church life centred on Antioch and Edessa.\*<sup>1</sup> Most of them sided with Nestorius in the controversy over the nature of Christ as divine and human, and became known as “Nestorian” churches. The work of these churches is my particular interest in this paper. Many of the dates are taken from contemporary synodal records.

An important piece of background awareness in all this is that travel across the Asian continent, even over thousands of miles, was not as rare or unusual as we tend to think: there had been trade with India as far back as Solomon’s time; the Romans traded perfumes, jewellery, and cosmetics for silk along the famous “Silk Road” to China in the first three centuries A.D. In the ninth century Alfred the Great sent Sighelm, Bishop of Shireburn, and a priest, Athelstan, from England to India, with offerings for St Thomas in gratitude for victory over the Danes. They returned with gifts of jewels and spices.<sup>2</sup>

## The Church in Babylonia and Persia

Christianity tended to find its first converts among the Jews; Paul’s missionary work began with the synagogues. It

was after all, a Messianic sect. Jews were widely dispersed: they were settled at least as far east as Mosul,\* where it is recorded that they had a “Hebrew Fort”—a phrase indicating a Jewish community—and, of course, Acts 2:9 refers to Jews from Elam, Parthia, and Media.

In Babylonia the Christian population was increased by the captives from the conquests of Sapur I (238-269 A.D.). The capture of the Emperor Valerian in A.D. 260 sheds light on the power of Persia, whose well-organised empire comprised a greater landmass than Rome’s (Rome’s famous postal system was imported from Persia. “Compel” in Mt. 5:41 is a Persian loanword). This appears to have given rise to two co-existing Christian communities. A respected theory suggests that the indigenous ones, having largely Jewish origins, were called “nasraye”; the newcomers, “krestyane.”

*Circa* 104 A.D. Mshiha says that Adai, an early missionary, ordained Pkidha as first Bishop of Arbela.\* In 116 Simson, Bishop of Adiabene\* (North East Iran), was martyred, largely as a result of Magian hatred of his successful missionary activity, preceded by the work of a converted high official, Rambaxt, in the rural districts. References to subsequent bishops support the fact of an active community in Arbela, the capital. Sozomen, a fifteenth century historian, says: “the majority of the Adiabenans were Christians.”

In Media, the success of the Christian movement was enough to arouse persecution under King Valagas II (A.D. 78-146).

In 225 A.D. there is reference in the *History of Mshiha-Zkha* to a bishopric in Dalmaye (the Dailams,\* near the Caspian), and “. . . when Ardasir (founder of Sassanids, died *circa* 260) conquered (King) Ardavan (*circa* 224) there existed more than 20 bishops in the Sassanian empire.” Hence when the Sassanian dynasty was established, Christianity was firmly organised in the western provinces of Iran. The Syriac Didache (*circa* 250) also refers to Christians in that area. At about the same time the church is found in Socotra,\* in the Indian Ocean.

Burkitt and other scholars of comparable status make a strong case for the apocryphal Acts of Thomas being originally a mid-third century work, in Syriac. It includes reference to Thomas as going as a missionary to India, and converting one King Gundaphar. However fictional the work might be (and some of it does stand up), it is significant that such a story should be current then, especially when we remember that Mani, self-styled apostle of Jesus in the third century (born 216), also visited India. Clearly such contacts were not uncommon. (The Manichaeans subsequently adopted it into their literature along with several other

1. Asterisks following place names in the text refer to place names shown on the map on page 23.

2. Robinson, *History of Christian Missions*, p. 65 and Fortescue, *Lesser Eastern Churches*, p. 361.

apocryphal Acts.)

Christianity was confronted for much of the period of its expansion in Persia particularly by bitter opposition from the Magians (the product of a Zoroastrian revival), even when the monarchy was tolerant (as most Persian kings were).

In the mid-third century (before 276) Christians were sufficiently strong in Persia to provoke Kartir, founder of Zoroastrianism as the Iranian state religion, to attempt to suppress them. In an inscription under Bahram II (276-93), Kartir boasts of the triumph of the Magians over other religions, including Christians. The boast appears to have had limited justification. By 363 (in the reign of Sapur II), Christianity had gained influence among the Persian aristocracy; among the martyrs was Pirusnasp, a close relative of Sapur II; and even Sapur's mother professed Christianity. Constantine's conversion meant that when Sapur was at war with Rome (under Constantius, A.D. 338) Christians in Persia were part of a hostile society. Some 16,000 martyrs are recorded, (among them was Bishop Simon of Seleucia-Ctesiphon,\* the King's winter residence). Eusebius speaks of "a large number of Christians" in Persia, and records a letter from Constantine to Sapur II on behalf of the Christians in his domain.

Aphraates, the foremost theologian of the Persian church was born toward the end of the third century—about contemporary with Athanasius. A monk in a monastery near Mosul, he is said to have been bishop of the province. His teaching, in 22 *Homilies*, in Syriac, is clearly independent of the Western debates, with noticeable Talmudic influence. Of particular interest is his treatment of the Holy Spirit as feminine! Wigram suggests that in the West this was replaced by the "enthronement of another figure as the Queen of Heaven." (Burkitt has a useful survey of this tradition of theology.)<sup>3</sup> The spiritual aristocracy of the church was celibate—a vow often associated with baptism rather than ordination. The priority of the faith here was more about morally, rather than intellectually, sound teaching.

Bardaisan (Bardesanes) of Edessa was a remarkable second century philosopher, polemicist, and poet, ("as a poet he may be considered one of the founders of Syriac literature"). He refers to Christians in Gilan\* and Bactria.\*

The split between the Persian-Babylonian churches and the West in the fifth century was only partly theological, viz over the Nestorian view of the person of Christ. In some respects it was almost certainly a semantic problem. The style of thinking of eastern Christians was in this respect more nearly Semitic in character, in which a holism in the human personality was taken for granted. Hence the likelihood is that Nestorius and his followers were not properly understood by the West. When one considers the confusion that existed in the West over the uses of *substantia*, *persona*, *hypostasis*, and *ousia* this is highly likely. If language created conflicts among Latin- and Greek-speaking people, who shared roughly the same traditional world-view, imagine the problems between those and Syriac, expressing a substantially different one! There were also political forces at work to accentuate this, and to prevent further interchange of thought. In the intermittent conflicts between Persia and Rome, Christians seen in communion with Rome were

easily seen as possible defectors; and it was a natural protection to maintain a distinction.

Nestorius (Patriarch of Constantinople) was condemned by Cyril of Alexandria, who had him anathematised by the Council of Ephesus in 431, for speaking of Christ as if He were two distinct "persons," i.e. human and divine. Cyril's motives were mixed, to say the least; he achieved his aim at the council of Ephesus by starting the proceedings before the eastern churches arrived; and even then his victory rested on imperial support. Nestorius' work, *The Bazaar of Herakleides*, is extant, and scholarship is divided as to its import. But the eastern church tended to approach theology from a different point. It started from Christ's humanity; it followed an inductive method of reasoning from Scripture. Alexandrians started with Christ's deity, and used an allegorical method of exposition. Moreover, the Christians in the vicinity of Nestorius' ministry had a tendency to monophysitism, which Nestorius may have been trying to resist.

The "Syrian" Christian church grew to such extent as to have its own great scholars and library at Edessa, and a school founded by Barsoma at Nisibis\* that lasted for 1000 years. By the time of the Moslem invasions in the seventh century Christians held many of the leading political offices of the Persian Empire. So much so that the Moslems found it impossible to administer the territory without them. One scholar asserts, "Islam discovered Aristotle through the Nestorians." (Islam, in turn, brought him west). Matti Moosa says that they were the first to introduce Greek medicine into Baghdad.

From then on Nestorian missions spread eastwards dramatically, from Armenia across to India, Ceylon, and Travancore. They penetrated to Malabar, South India, where the converts used a Syriac liturgy and revered Nestorius and Theodore of Mopsuestia. (Theodore's posthumous excommunication by the West, after a lifetime ministry of unimpeached orthodoxy, is a typical example of ambiguity in these controversies.) Portuguese travellers recorded seeing Nestorian churches there in the sixteenth century. In about 547 A.D. Cosmas, in his *Christian Topography* (book xi), reports the presence of Christians in Burma and Siam by the sixth century.

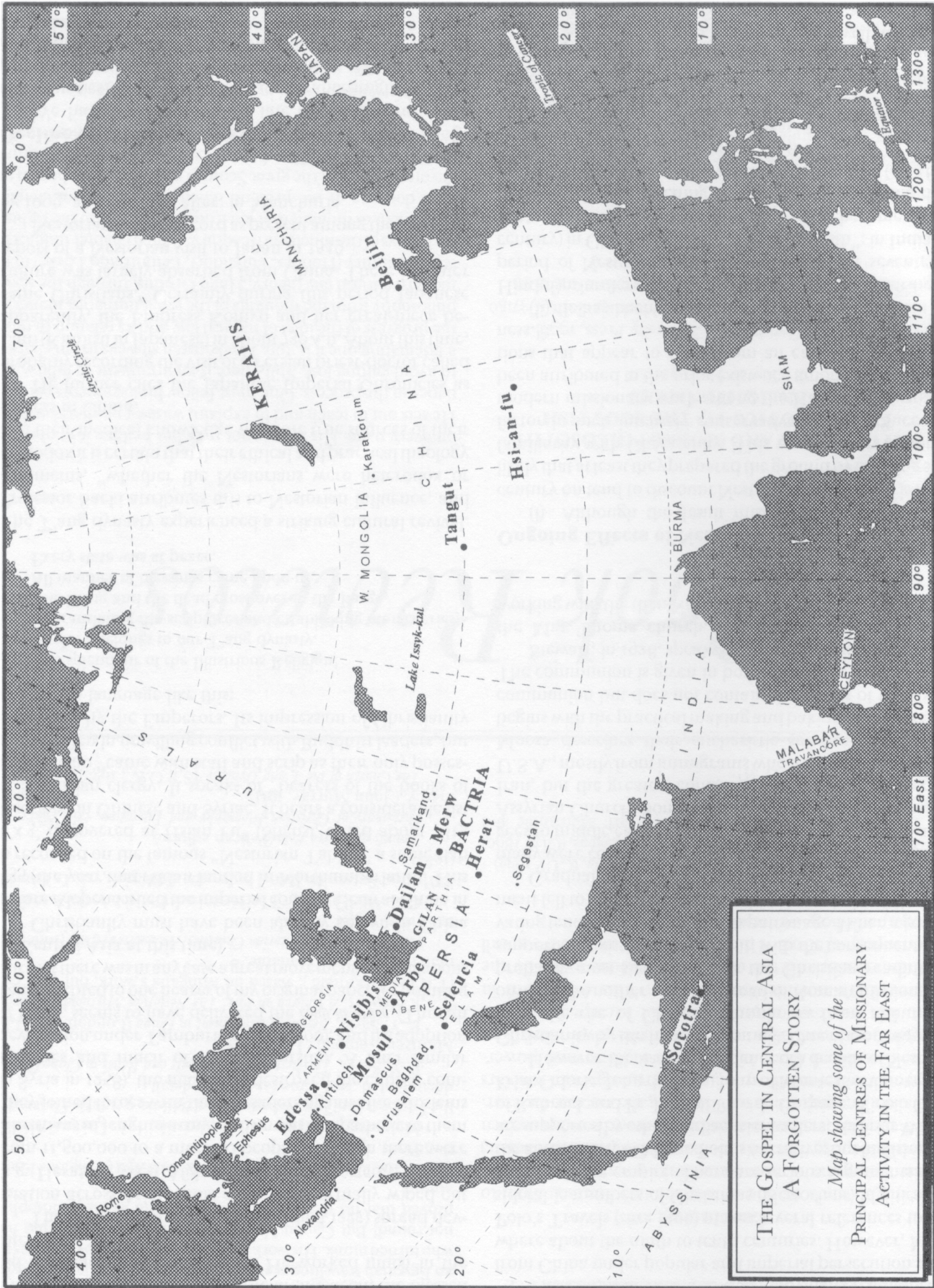
About 200 A.D., Bardaisan (*Book of the Laws of the Nations*), wrote, "Nor do our (Christian) sisters among the Gilanians and Bactrians have any intercourse with strangers." Records show bishoprics established at Merw\* and Herat\* in 424.

In 498, King Kawad in exile found Christians among the Turks (then located in West Mongolia) and White Huns.<sup>4</sup> In 530, the bishop of Aran taught the Turks to write. In 549 a bishop was ordained for the Huns, and the gospel was translated into Hunnish. (In 782 the Turks had their own metropolitan. At the same time one was envisaged for the Tibetans, set up probably at Tangu\*)

They reached Mongolia, where they alphabetised the Mongolian language. There are Christian graves in Mongolia (near Lake Issy-kul,\* South East Kazakhstan) which date from the tenth to the fourteenth centuries. Inscriptions on them refer to Christians from as far afield as India, Persia, Manchuria, and North China\* (Beijin). Among approximately 300 gravestones there are those of "nine archdeacons, eight doctors of ecclesiastical jurisprudence and Bib-

3. F. C. Burkitt, *Christianity Outside the Roman Empire*, (CUP 1899), p. 65; Fortescue, *Lesser Eastern Churches*, p. 361.

4. Mingana, "Early Spread of Christianity in Central Asia and the Far East," in *John Rylands Library Bulletin*, 9 (1925), p. 302f.



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lical interpretation . . . 46 scholastics, two preachers, and an imposing number of priests.” A typical inscription is, “In the year 1616 which is that of the Turkish Snake (*circa* 1304 A.D.). This is the grave of Sabrishō, the archdeacon, the blessed old man and the perfect priest. He worked much in the interests of the church.”

The invasions of Jenghis Khan (died 1227) spread devastation across Asia; whole cities were virtually wiped out (e.g. Herat, in West Afghanistan, was reportedly reduced from 11,500,000 to a mere 40 people.) Though there were Christians in Jenghis’ army, and he was sympathetic to them (they joined forces with the Crusaders against the Moslems in Syria in 1258), the massacres destroyed the church communities and much of their leadership. A later similar devastation under Tamburlain (*circa* 1400), and his adoption of Islam, seems to have delivered the *coup de grâce*. (Though I am indebted to one hearer of my original paper for pointing out that there was in any case a great movement of populations in Central Asia at this time).

Christianity must have been already known in China before Alopen visited the imperial court in Central China in 635 (the year that Aidan landed in Northumberland). This is recorded on the famous “Nestorian Tablet,” a stone slab 9’x3’ discovered at Hsian Fu\* (Shensi, dated about 781), inscribed in Chinese and Syriac. It bears a considerable list of Nestorian clergy. It speaks of “bearers of the books of truth,” who “came with staff and scrip as their only possessions,” often in unwilling conflict with Buddhist leaders, but supported by the Emperors. Its impression of Christianity appears in language like this:

The splendour of the Illustrious Religion!  
Its glory belongs to our T’ang dynasty.  
By translating the scriptures and establishing monasteries,  
The living and the dead cross over in the Barge,  
All manner of blessings came upon us,  
Every state was at peace.

The T’ang dynasty experienced a striking cultural revival. Professor Saeki attributes this to Nestorian influence, and comments, “whether the Nestorians were heterodox or orthodox it is certain that their ethical and practical theology and their medical knowledge were the true sources of their success in China.”<sup>5</sup>

He further cites the Japanese Imperial Chronicles as probably recording the visit of a Persian priest-doctor called Limi (Rimitsu in Japanese) in about 736 A.D. About this time, apparently, the Empress Komyo and her great-niece became Christians.<sup>6</sup> Certainly during this period Japanese culture was largely absorbed from China. There is a later report of a Nestorian visit to Japan in 1549.

Nestorians are on record as present among the Keraites,\* by 1009, and not long after, in Manchuria.

### Decline of the Nestorian Churches

We have already seen the fate of the Central Asian communities. Their physical disappearance might be compared, on a much smaller scale, to the effect of the Massacre of St Bartholomew on Protestantism in France.

In China, the decline was slower. (Indeed, Professor Saeki argues that the church still exists there as a secret society<sup>7</sup> to this day.

The common theory is that Christianity disappeared from China under popular and imperial persecution somewhere about the ninth to tenth centuries. However, Marco Polo’s *Travels* (*circa* 1300) makes several references to considerable numbers of Christians (Nestorians) in cities scattered over the empire. There are serious arguments about the authenticity of Marco Polo’s narrative; but his assertions are supported by other mediaeval travellers, viz Friar William of Rubruck and Fr. John of Pian de Carpine; Nicolo Conti, Friar Odoric, John de Cora, John of Monte Corvino (1305).<sup>8</sup>

However, there is clear evidence of a decline of Nestorian Christianity by the fifteenth century. One reason may have been the rise of Chinese xenophobia from about 1360 onwards.<sup>9</sup> Another was the spread of Roman missions. But probably most significant was the Christian readiness to support the existing government, with the consequent enervating tendency to depend on its patronage. When a government fell to Islamic power, the church tended to fall with it.

Gradually the Nestorian churches declined in vigour: many were converted to Rome. They were frequently refugees to middle eastern politics. They are now known as the Assyrian Church. Some still live in the borders of Iraq and Iran, but the greatest concentration is found in Chicago, U.S.A., mostly from immigrants who left Iraq after 1933. M. Moosa describes their eucharistic service: “The liturgy begins with the practical making and baking of the bread for communion but does not contain the words of institution. The communion is given in both elements . . .”

Stewart, in 1928, speaks of a recent spiritual renewal in the Mar Thoma church, supporting eight missionaries working with the then National Missionary Society of India.

### Ongoing Effects of Nestorian Missions

(i) Although the Jesuit missions from the sixteenth century on tend to discount Nestorian influence, it is highly likely that at least they prepared the ground by creating some familiarity with Christianity. This would be an important factor in such intensely conservative cultures. Success of modern missionary work among the Karens of Burma has been attributed to the prior existence among them of traditions that appear to come from an earlier Christian witness.<sup>10</sup>

(ii) It has been pointed out that both Buddhism and Hinduism underwent some profound changes during the period of Nestorian success. Amidism (post seventeenth century) in China taught a “salvation by faith”; in India, the avatar (incarnation of deities) movement became prominent, with bakhti teaching on salvation by believing devotion to the god. Sometimes, especially in the Gita (*circa* 600), it is surprisingly like the Sermon on the Mount.

(iii) By the time the Turks migrated to Asia Minor they had become a comparatively civilised people; the only known civilising influence in that period was the Nestorian churches, who had become influential at court.

(iv) Mingana remarks “We need not dwell here on the well-known fact that the Syriac characters as used by the

5. P. Y. Saeki, *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China* (Tokyo: Maruzen Company Ltd., 1937), p. 112.

6. J. Stewart, *A Church on Fire: The Nestorian Missionary Enterprise* (T.&T. Clark, 1928), p. 189.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 297.

9. Stewart, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

8. Mingana, *op. cit.*, p. 314ff.

10. See *ibid.*, p. 305ff.



Nestorians gave rise to many Central Asian and Far Eastern alphabets, such as the Mongolian, the Manchu, . . . lineal descendants of the original Uighurian forms which were certainly derived from the Nestorian Syriac characters.”<sup>11</sup>

### Conclusion

This might teach us one or two salutary lessons. First, to realise that even the most conscientious textbooks can have large blind-spots, (after all, not many scholars read Aramaic) and there can be more to a history than we have been given to realise. Second, this church’s work did not last for ever. Great as it was, and many as its martyrs, saints and scholars were, it suffered from bigotries, brutalities, and power-struggles, and most of its achievements have vanished from sight. But our own churches are not exempt from such failures. Let’s not idealise the story. This treasure is in earthen vessels, and the church everywhere exists by the sheer mercy of God. Third, let’s be careful who we call heretics, and how we treat them! *C&S*

### Literature:

- L. E. Browne, *The Eclipse of Christianity in Asia*, (CUP 1933)  
 F. C. Burkitt, *Christianity Outside the Roman Empire*, (CUP 1899)  
 B. E. Colless, “The Traders of the Pearl: Mercantile and

11. Mingana, *op. cit.*, p. 341.

Missionary Activities of Persian and Armenian Christians in South East Asia,” in the periodical *Abr Nahrain*, ed. Owman (Melbourne University 1978).

Cosmas, *Christian Topography*. Cosmas (mid sixth century) was an Egyptian travelling merchant, especially in India and Ceylon, who turned monk. His work aimed to prove that the earth was flat, not round! But Canon Venables asserts “later researches have proved that his descriptions are as faithful as his philosophy is absurd.”

Diana Leatham, *The Church in the Dark Ages* (Religious Education Press, 1955).

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P. Y. Saeki, *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China* (Tokyo: Maruzen Company Ltd., 1937).

P. Y. Saeki, *Nestorian Monument in China* (London: S.P.C.K.).

J. Stewart, *A Church on Fire: The Nestorian Missionary Enterprise* (T.&T. Clark, 1928.). Based on Mingana’s work, but with extra material, and very readable.

A. R. Vine, *The Nestorian Churches: A Concise History* (Independent Press, 1937).

Geo. Widengren, “The Nestorian Church in Sassanian and Early Post Sassanian Iran,” in *Incontro di Religioni*, ed., L. Lanciotti (1984)

*Travels of Marco Polo* (Pelican edition).

*Dictionary of Christian Biography and Literature*, eds Wace and Piercy, (John Murray, 1911).

*The Church of the T’ang Dynasty* (S.P.C.K., 1938).

# Book Reviews

## NATURAL LAW AND MORAL PHILOSOPHY FROM GROTIUS TO THE SCOTTISH ENLIGHTENMENT

BY KNUD HAAKONSSSEN

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996,  
 341 pages (including bibliography and index): cloth, £37.50  
 (US \$54.95), ISBN 0-521-49686-1; paperback, £13.95  
 (US \$19.95), ISBN 0-521-49802-3

REVIEWED BY COLIN WRIGHT

THIS IS A BIG BOOK. Not a *fat* one, by Gary North’s standards of reckoning, but definitely a big one. Still, at nearly 400 pages (there’s an excellent 30 page bibliography) it presents a daunting challenge to the reader. Books, of course, do not look as fat as they used to. Ask any collector of second-hand books. But this is largely illusionary as modern scientific paper-making has succeeded wonderfully well in producing a much thinner and finer quality material. Four hundred pages of my 1734 edition of Turretin are more than twice as thick as this volume.

Even more daunting than its size is the content of this excellent volume. Professor Haakonssen challenges the reader

on every page. His style is not racy but neither is it laboured. He sets out to teach and to explain, wasting neither words nor paper in the process. One must follow his arguments carefully to avoid getting lost. Still, there is an argument to follow, and a fascinating one it is, too. Haakonssen surveys in ten chapters the progress of the idea of natural law and its relation to moral philosophy from the thoughts of the great humanist pioneer of modern natural law theory, Hugo Grotius, through the seventeenth century (Hobbes, Pufendorf, Leibniz and Locke) to the early days of the nineteenth century. A final chapter unfolds the movement of thought that led from natural law to the rights of man doctrine of the present. There are individual chapters devoted to each of the great Scottish moral philosophers in this tradition—Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, Adam Smith, John Millar, Thomas Reid, Dugald Stewart, James Mackintosh and James Mill.

This work is hailed in the blurb as “a major contribution to the history of philosophy.” This is unquestionably true. Professor Haakonssen has done an admirable job in providing such a comprehensive guide to the development of (mainly eighteenth-century) Scottish philosophy, the movement known as the Scottish Enlightenment. And he has succeeded without at any stage resorting to summary statements. All his arguments and descriptions are fully worked out for the reader to

follow, though we should stress that this volume was not written for beginners to the field. It assumes a fair understanding of philosophical terms. Also, the reader will find the discussion much more instructive if he has some acquaintance with the “celebrities” involved. Their works are quite accessible to the modern reader. Adam Smith is available in an excellent modern edition (the Glasgow Edition published in hardback by Oxford University Press and paperback by Liberty Fund). Thomas Reid’s *Philosophical Works* are available in a 1983 facsimile reprint of the 1895 edition. Francis Hutcheson’s 7-volume *Collected Works* were reprinted in 1969-71 and Dugald Stewart’s 11-volume *Collected Works* were reprinted under the supervision of Haakonssen himself in 1994. The works of Locke, Leibniz and Hume are also readily available in untemped editions (but beware of abridgements!).

Although this volume began as independent essays the author has admirably adapted them here, fusing them into a single strand of thought. However, the chapters are still sufficiently independent to allow the interested student to gain a great deal from the study of a single chapter on a particular person. This book will undoubtedly become the standard reference work to consult when studying any of these Enlightenment thinkers.

The concept of *natural law* gets short shrift from Christians these days. Only recently I was told that the damning accusation against Herman Dooyeweerd is that he held to a theory of natural law. Ergo, he was a humanist. No further argument was considered necessary. In general the idea of natural law is viewed solely from the perspective of theistic humanists. But this is a naive understanding of the term. Like most great terms it has been used by many people to mean many things. Professor Haakonssen’s exposition makes this fact painfully clear in the thinking of the Scottish Enlightenment philosophers. One must always look much deeper into a person’s meaning before judging on the evidence of mere language. This reminds me of the difficult time Thomas Chalmers had getting accepted by the evangelical party in the Church of Scotland for some years after his conversion because he did not speak their “language.” There are probably as many meanings of natural law as there are philosophers. In his book on *Conscience*, William Ames—no mean Puritan!—could write:

Naturall Law, is the same, which usually is called the Eternall Law: but it is called Eternall, in relation to God, as it is from eternity in Him; it is called Naturall, as it is ingrafted and imprinted in the Nature of man, by the God of Nature.

Calvin, too, was known to use the phrase “law of nations” in a similar way. Natural law philosophers often speak of the laws of nature and of nations. Some of the proponents of the Scottish Enlightenment were not consciously anti-Christian. They were attempting, though in a quite invalid manner, to buttress the Christian faith,—at least what they regarded as such. And it must be remembered that genuine Christians were certainly tempted by similar arguments; the great American theologian of the nineteenth century—Robert Lewis Dabney—publicly proclaimed his support for the common-sense philosophy of Thomas Reid.

In the light of this confusion it is not surprising that many Christians have a problem with the concept of natural law. Followers of Cornelius Van Til, particularly, seem to be hostile, seeing it as so inimical to their presuppositionalism that even the term is anathema. Unfortunately they proceed to label everyone who uses the term as *ipso facto* at variance with presuppositionalism. Their intent is commendable, their philosophical naivete not so. But in Ames’ sense, I cannot see how Christianity can be without a doctrine of natural law. For

otherwise, how could peoples and individuals who have never crossed paths with the Decalogue as revealed through Moses ever be held accountable, as they surely are? That these people do not have a clearly articulated, formal systematisation of that eternal law in the fashion of modern rationalist man, let alone along the lines of biblical revelation, does not warrant the conclusion that they are without that law—as Paul clearly indicated (Rom. 2). Calvin made the important observation in his *Institutes* (especially Book I, chap. 6, sect. 1) that such law existed but that its failure lay in the fact of the clouding effect of sin on man’s mind. Revelational law was not different but largely illuminatory and explanatory of that law. He compared revelation as providing a pair of spectacles that would enable the wearer to see more clearly the law with which he was already more than familiar.

Of course, the real problem arose when this law was secularised by humanists, men such as Philip Melancthon (see our review of Kusakawa’s *The Transformation of Natural Philosophy: The Case of Philip Melancthon* in *Christianity & Society*, Vol. V, No. 3, July 1995) and, more importantly, Hugo Grotius. The latter in particular, like many who followed him, thought that this law could be divorced from the law-giver. “Natural” came to signify “existing independently of anything or anyone.” It was just there. (Later philosophers would derive it from man’s own fiat.) But once this bifurcation had been achieved endless problems ensued regarding its nature, its origin and its authority, in addition to its content. Many of those who did not wish to make this bifurcation were, nevertheless, forced towards it in practice by their having succumbed to the Thomistic-scholastic secular/sacred divide in reality. For them this natural law, even though ultimately from God, was discoverable (i.e. as a formalised system) independently of revelation by human reason alone, using scientific techniques. What’s more, they were often unaware that they were making it superior to, and more authoritative than, Scripture revelation. For Scripture could at best, they thought, only apply to Christians, whereas their natural law—derived by the neutral procedures of science—would have to be agreed to by all people. It is clear from reading their arguments that they were oblivious to an assumption on their part of major proportions: most of what they accepted as morality was naturally evident. This assumption was totally invalid. It completely ignored the fact—as most modern humanists ignore it—that the Western psyche is the result of over one thousand years of Christian indoctrination. Their attempts to find common elements among other peoples was specious at worst, naive at best. Virtually their only links with other peoples was at the periphery of those cultures, where Christianity had already made serious inroads.

We would suggest that Calvin was right. A genuine moral philosophy must begin with the “spectacles” of Scripture to throw new light and clarity upon who we are and who God (the lawgiver) is. If the Bible is at all correct in its delineation of our depravity then we are in no position to begin a study of ethics from within our own constitution. Criminals do not make the best jurists! Natural law in the Scottish Enlightenment sense is a non-starter. Our Saviour himself drew attention to the fundamental law of life in the Pentateuch: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (Mt. 22:34-40).” How this is to be worked out through the Decalogue, the case laws and the wisdom literature is matter for a separate essay, as are the problems that such a moral philosophy would raise (quite different from those of humanistic one). *C&S*

**JUSTIFICATION IN LATE MEDIEVAL PREACHING:  
A STUDY OF JOHN GEILER OF KEISERSBERG**

By E. JANE DEMPSEY DOUGLASS

Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989 (Second edition), 218 pages  
(including index and bibliography), cloth, £50.00  
ISBN 90-0409047-9

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REVIEWED BY COLIN WRIGHT

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THERE ARE SOME stars that shine from age to age, casting their light over many a generation; others rise and, after a brief and glorious blaze, sink back into darkness and oblivion. At the beginning of this century in Britain, the name on every Bible student's tongue was Peter Taylor Forsyth. But no-one reads him now. What light he radiated—and it was pretty murky stuff in places—went out with his passing from the world.

At the end of the fifteenth century one of the most talked of divines was Doctor John Geiler of Keisersberg, renowned preacher at the cathedral in Strasburg from 1478 to 1510. In his day he enjoyed an unusually wide influence. Ever heard of him? I suspect not.

Now, don't reach for your library tickets. You're probably better off sticking to Spurgeon's more enlightening six-pack called *New Park Street Pulpit 1855-60*. Herein, undoubtedly, lies the main reason why most of us have never heard of JG, and why we really don't need to lose any sleep over the fact. The Reformation light outshone him, like the sun does a candle.

Nevertheless, from a historical point of view, does he not warrant our consideration? (One of my pet hates about evangelicalism—at least in Britain—is its very restricted interest in history. This is largely because it lacks a real historical sense; its interest is purely hagiographic. It is concerned with its own heroes and not much else. One has only to witness the recent debate over Harry Stout's scholarly study of the life of George Whitefield to detect the limits of its vision. Turning icons into mortals is just not Evangelically Correct.) An appreciation of the Reformation must surely include an understanding of its origins in medieval life and thought. Many were aware of the need for reform, from a wide range of perspectives within the church and, Geiler among them, obviously played their part in bringing it about. Douglass's analysis of Geiler's significance for the Reformation is a thoughtful one (p. 207f.). She concludes her estimate with the claim that “. . . Geiler was indeed a fifteenth-century reformer, but by no means a fifteenth-century Protestant.” She recounts an interesting story of a young and enthusiastic admirer of Geiler's: Jacob Sturm. It could probably be told of scores of such young men:

His [Sturm's] tutor as he went off to the University of Freiburg was Wimpfeling. Sturm eventually found his vocation as Stettmeister of the city of Strassburg and leader of the Reformation. We know that he was one of Geiler's enthusiastic admirers and was present at Geiler's death. When Wimpfeling attacked his former pupil for going over to the Reformation, Sturm replied, “*If I am a heretic, it is you who have made me one.*” (p. 208)

What chagrin must have appeared on the faces of these Wimpfelings who, having taught their charges the rudiments of a biblical faith, now found these charges carrying their lessons to more consistent conclusions. The name of Staupitz, forever linked to that of Luther, also springs to mind.

Indeed, it is difficult to place Geiler, if we are looking to see which “team” he played for. One might instance his commitment to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception as proof of his apostasy. On the other hand, what about his proclaiming

the “black monks to be devils, the white monks as the devil's mother, and the grey monks a mixture of the other two?” (p. 80) An even more interesting tale is told of pope Adrian VI's order to the senate of Strasburg in 1523 to condemn Lutheranism and burn heretical books. They replied that “long before Luther's day they had heard charges against the priests and monks, similar to those brought by the men accused of heresy, from Geiler” (p. 9). As Douglass also points out, many of the directions taken first by the Reformers in Strasburg were first evident in the preaching and reforms of Geiler.

Maybe, I keep asking myself, just maybe, the reason the church is so impotent today is that it is addressing the wrong issues. In seeking to be “orthodox” or “Reformed” it harks back to and iconises much earlier warriors of the faith. Its fight becomes a tilting at the windmills of a foe that no longer exists. It is re-fighting a battle settled long ago, whilst it ignores the battle of the day, because this is contained in books that are unreadable since their authors are outside the pail. The Reformation grew out of a living controversy and men like Geiler were part of it, despite the fact they did not come up to later standards of orthodoxy.

Douglass's analysis of Geiler's sermonic material is very interesting but hardly enthralling. It is a work of obvious scholarship and will be of considerable value to those who look for a thorough understanding of what he taught. Particularly helpful for those who read Latin are the footnotes. The reader is warned that fully half of this tome is footnotes. And nearly all of them are long stretches of Geiler's Latin texts. Which makes it a pretty short book for non-Latin types. It will not appeal to all, but for scholars of the late medieval and early Reformation periods it has proven to be a standard work since it first saw the light of day in 1966. It is a useful accessory to the more well-known *Harvest of Medieval Theology* by Heiko Oberman, Douglass's mentor. *C&S*

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**THE KINGDOM AND THE POWER:  
REDISCOVERING THE CENTRALITY OF  
THE CHURCH**

By PETER J. LEITHART

Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1993, xiv plus 269  
pages, including indices, ISBN 0-87552-300-5

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REVIEWED BY STEPHEN J. HAYHOW

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THE REFORMED FAITH has always, historically, placed a great importance and significance upon the institution of the church. The Reformers loudly announced the three marks of the true church: the word, sacraments and ecclesiastical discipline. In a previous review (*C&S* Vol. VII. No. 2 1997), of Brian Gerrish's Calvin study, *Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin* (T. & T. Clark) I have pointed this out. To reform these areas was key to the progress of the faith in the remainder of life.

In fact when Jesus issued his people with their mandate, the Great Commission, he declared, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name . . . teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Mt. 28:19-20). The calling of the disciples is to disciple the nations, to comprehensive transformation, not merely as isolated individuals.

But how is this to be done? The means are *baptism* and *teaching*. Thus the church is the sharp edge of God's method for transforming culture and the nations. Instruction in the word,

primarily the ministry of elders in the church for the equipping of the saints, and then of fathers in their households and every believer as he or she has the opportunity, is key; but also sacraments—baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Thus when we read on into Acts and then the epistles we find that the establishing of a vibrant and faithful church is at the forefront of the apostolic strategy.

Moreover, the early church was largely bereft of political clout, but it exerted its considerable influence at ground level, through worship, prayer, through practical aid to the poor and the needy, the abandoned and the helpless. No campaigns, no protests as such, but steady, faithful and unabated efforts for the Kingdom of Christ. It is not that these methods of protest are not permissible, but the early church was forced to achieve its ends without them.

Peter J. Leithart’s *The Kingdom and the Power: Rediscovering the Centrality of the Church* has been written in an endeavour to alert us to where our power and our calling lie. His concern is a renewed activism evident in the American churches, but not an accompanying revival of interest in the church. If we are to fight the war with humanism, we must fight as Christians, and that means we must fight as the church and self-consciously so. To fight as the church, we must first be the church. We are not just another interest group, a fringe lobbying group for God.

We should not however think that Leithart is proposing a new pietism, a retreat from the culture wars, but instead he wants to draw our attention to where our most potent weaponry for the battle resides: in the church, its ministry of the word, sacraments and discipline. Thus, he writes,

But I am not advocating a renewed “pietism,” a withdrawal from engagement with the world. What I am calling for, on the contrary, is a return to the early church’s belief that, as historian Jaroslav Pelikan has commented, the “notes” of the church (one, holy, catholic, apostolic) are central to the Church’s mission and to Christian social and political mission particularly. This book is not a summons to retreat from the world, but a rally cry to conservative Christians to engage the world—not as isolated Christians or as an interest group, but as *the church*. (p. 22)

The discussion begins with a survey of different models for understanding the Kingdom of God: the millennial, the eschatological, ecclesiastical and the sacramental. Each of them reveals some aspect of the dynamic of the Kingdom of God, but some have suffered neglect. This does not mean that the Church is the Kingdom (p. xii) in some kind of simplistic sense, but it does mean that the relationship is closer than that generally realised in modern discussions of the Kingdom of God. Thus Leithart gives this definition of the Kingdom: “the new world order that Christ established in His life, death, resurrection, and ascension, a new order of things that will be fully revealed and established at Christ’s return.” (p. 17)

Thus there is a relationship between Christ’s dominion over *all things*, since his advent-death-resurrection-ascension, and the Church. It is Christ’s rule in and over his Church that is the key to his dominion over all things. It is as the Church—the body of Christ—that we work out his claims in all areas of life. Key to understanding our calling and commission is the fall of Satan, the radical change brought about by the appearance of the Son of Man in the flesh. Ironically, it is precisely the heavenly nature of the Kingdom of God (chapter 4) that distinguishes the church from the world and is the source of our power. As the church we are called to conquer the world for Christ, and it is because we are a heavenly people, that we *can* have an earthly impact. Christian culture, the vision of Christendom, is *only* possible because we are a spiritual people. We must not construct a false antithesis between being spiritual,

and being practical or culturally relevant. The former enables the latter. The fact that the Kingdom is of heaven, does not render it irrelevant in history, rather it is because it is a heavenly Kingdom that it *will* have an impact in history!

To say that the kingdom of God is heavenly, then, is not at all to detract from its reality or “solidity” or its importance to our earthly lives. Jesus taught that the earthly kingdom has come to earth in His person and work. Under the influence of the heavenly kingdom, the earth is to be transformed into a temple-city that reflects the glories of the heavenly city of God. (p. 79)

The coming of the Kingdom means we have access to the holy place (chapter 5). There are numerous insights that could be noted and discussed. I would like, however, to concentrate upon what, to my mind, are some distinctive and unique contributions to our thinking on the Kingdom and the church.

One of the most useful insights in *The Kingdom and the Power* is the way that Leithart interweaves the sacramental/worship life of the church with our world-calling, our cultural mandate. Rather than undermine or relegate the cultural mandate with its comprehensive claim upon the whole of life, Leithart provides us with, and calls us back to, a paradigm which connects worship and life. The worship of the church of Christ, the hearing of the word of God and the celebration of the sacraments is part of life, and is intimately connected with our life-task in this world. Worship and the celebration of the Supper prepare us for the task we are given. They are not unrelated. In fact they are inter-dependant. As we go out from worship with the blessing of God (Numbers 6) resting upon us, we are now fit to carry out our tasks. It is not only that the word instructs us in our world-changing task, but worship-word-sacrament fashions us for the task.

In pages 118ff. Leithart sets forth a refreshingly joyous and feast-centred portrayal of the Lord’s Supper. It is true to say that the Reformed approach has laboured under an introspective, individualised form of the sacrament for too long. However, Leithart reminds us that this is the feast of the Kingdom. The reality of the Lord’s presence with his people is expounded in real terms, rather than philosophical terms, or in the midst of an anti-Romanist polemic. These truths are discussed upon their own merits. This is a refreshing approach that is successful in orienting our thinking afresh in this familiar area of the sacraments. However, it is at this point I must offer a minor criticism. The chapter, “The King’s Table,” closes with a section on what Leithart calls the “Eucharistic World-view.” Borrowing from Geoffrey Wainwright, Leithart attempts to draw out a sort of philosophy of the eucharist. He writes, “The kingdom is not something even ‘supernatural’ added to the ‘natural’ life of the world. Against all these, the Eucharist teaches that it is precisely *this* world—this material, physical world of eating and drinking—that is the matter of the kingdom of God. The kingdom is, ultimately, this world transfigured by the Spirit” (p. 124).

I can’t help thinking that this “transfiguration” view of the Supper is dependant upon a kind of sacramentalism that Leithart would not be prepared to adopt. I am not, of course, accusing him of closet papist sympathies, or of secret affinities with Constantinople, but simply that, to my mind, he has borrowed a concept from an alien system (i.e. transubstantiation) but for obvious reasons has not imported the theological background. In the Protestant and Reformed doctrine the bread and wine is not transfigured—but the worshipper *is* as this is truly a sacrament. Perhaps this was the point that Leithart was endeavouring to expand upon. I am not suggesting that Leithart thinks the elements are changed, but it seems the philosophising calls for that preceding assumption.

However, we should move away from this criticism, with the encouragement that the author's purpose has been to deepen our sense of reality in the Supper and the very real connection that it sustains with regular Christian living. By not making the Supper some kind of "peak" experience, but part of the fabric of life in Christ he has drawn our attention to a forgotten reality.

I hear that this book has not sold as well as it should have. This is regrettable and certainly supports the author's opening thesis. While the Reformed churches have been ecclesiocentric, they have been pietistic and retreatist. This is not the thrust of true ecclesiocentricity as Leithart has expounded it. He affirms, as we must, unequivocally that culture and worship are inter-related. We cannot change the world except as the church—this is a lesson we desperately need to re-learn. *C&S*

**WELFARE REFORMED:  
A COMPASSIONATE APPROACH**

EDITED BY DAVID W. HALL

Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing,  
Legacy Communications, 1994, pp.xix plus 232

REVIEWED BY STEPHEN J. HAYHOW

THE WELFARE STATE, where it has been realised in the West, is now crumbling. Only now is it being seen as the monumental failure that it is—by some. However, as we move into the new statism of economic and political alliance with Europe, we will experience and witness only a revived appetite for welfarism, emanating from a centralised bureaucracy. Brussels is already notorious for its mismanagement and pure wastage of funds in the name of help to the poor. Practically any minority group, of whatever weird and wonderful ethical persuasion or practice has been supported in this way. Thus as more and more money has been poured into relieving the "needs" of the "poor," so the poor have expanded as a strata in society: in short, welfarism breads "poverty." While the contributors to *Welfare Reformed* speak exclusively to the American situation, the nature of the problem is unchanged worldwide.

In the foreword to this symposium on welfarism and charity, Richard J. Neuhaus writes, "In the last thirty years, literally trillions of tax dollars have been spent on "helping the poor," with the result, they are told, that there are more poor people than ever and they are worse off than ever" (p. x). If this is so, then welfare statism must be the greatest scam of modern history. The absurd fact is that economists, politicians and sociologists are not questioning the principles behind welfarism, but are screaming for more welfare, and more state intervention.

The contributors to this symposium are Richard J. Neuhaus, R. C. Sproul, R. C. Sproul Jr. Doug Bandow, George Grant, Michael Bauman, E. Calvin Beisner and F. Edward Payne. They all share the same view that welfarism is a huge failure and it is high time for the church to act and finally take up her God-ordained role. While they differ on some of the details, the basic approach shows an underlying commitment to the Reformed faith (except for the Roman Catholic Neuhaus of course!). They all share the view that poverty is rooted in a personal spiritual allegiance and that the Christian faith applied is the only source of help, health and prosperity for the truly needy. They are careful to distinguish the worthy from the unworthy poor; they expose the disastrous legacy of statism, and

promote personal responsibility and faith, as well as the institutions of the family and the church as the prime means of aid to the poor. Only at one point was this reviewer disappointed to see one contributor content to resort to state welfare (see p. 104), but even here David Hall maintained strictures that would severely minimise even this allowance of state provision of welfare. Nearly all other contributors are staunch anti-state welfarists to the core.

The contributions are all of a high standard, outlining the problems systematically, but very much limited to the US scene as one might expect. The truly outstanding contributions however come from George Grant, E. Calvin Beisner and David Hall's historical essay on the Reformation period.

George Grant's "The Three Essential Elements of Biblical Charity: Faith, Family and Work" is a brilliantly lucid summary of the faith-family-work ethic of Scripture. Packed with scriptural illustration and reference, Grant lays out masterfully the material in his usual perceptive and snappy manner. Grant starts by firmly stating the effects of sin in our consideration of poverty and human need, underlining responsibility and personal faith. Out of this flows a discussion of the family, and then the biblical work ethic. This is an excellent contribution.

E. Calvin Beisner's "Poverty: A Problem in Need of Definition" sets out to lay down biblical guidelines for a definition of poverty. Other measures are relative and therefore self-contradictory. Beisner instead provides ample statistical evidence to back up his allegations and then proceeds to offer a scriptural definition of the nature of poverty. He shows that an individual's need of the absolute essentials (i.e. food, shelter and clothing) only constitute a biblical definition of need. Today the poor own a video, drive a car and are generally overweight (at least in the US!). The biblical classification expounds real need and destitution. Beisner shows how the desperate condition of poverty is itself a driver to self-effort. e.g. if you are hungry you will work.

David Hall's "Earlier Paradigms For Welfare Reform" provides a great deal of useful material on Calvin in Geneva, Luther and the Roman Catholics. I found the material on Calvin very insightful. Calvin managed and set up a whole charity/welfare system that was church based and necessitated the office of the diaconate.

All in all this is a worthwhile study, giving both a biblical, social and historical perspective on a vital issue. The work is practical and yet intellectually thorough. This is, in my opinion, one of the best all-round books on the subject. *C&S*

**BACK TO BASICS:  
REDISCOVERING THE RICHNESS OF  
THE REFORMED FAITH**

EDITOR: D. G. HAGOPIAN

Presbyterian and Reformed, 1996, 319 plus viii pages  
including Scripture index and extensive bibliography,  
paperback, ISBN: 0-87552-216-5

REVIEWED BY CHARLES A. WEBSTER

THIS BOOK HAS all the merits and none of the defects of multi-authorship. As an introduction to the Reformed faith it is of quite outstanding perspicuity, thoroughness and devotional warmth. The editor states that, "all theology is for doxology and devotion. He is Lord, and we exist to glorify and enjoy Him all the days of our lives. And that is about as basic as it gets. Oh, how we need to get back to basics!"

The material covered by the book is set out in four sections: conversion, covenant, church, and Christian life. Each section begins with a helpful introduction by the editor and ends with a list of study questions. Each of the authors is from America and they are all masters of the art of expounding Reformed theology. Indeed the reviewer detects in the book more than a little of the influence of the late Greg Bahnsen though, strangely, his name is missing from those listed in the acknowledgements and the bibliography!

In the section on conversion, God's sovereignty looms large. Douglas J. Wilson ensures all the usual related issues are covered: election, responsibility, the atonement and its extent and they are explained in such a way as to give the reader a biblical basis for true assurance of salvation over against much of contemporary Arminian free-will presumption.

In the section on covenant, the majestic panorama of divine grace is surveyed throughout history with its culmination being found in the life and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. So rich is Douglas Jones' treatment of the covenant that the reader was left meditating on the great privilege it is to be a Christian. In the section on the church, Roger Wagner impresses upon his readers the obedient necessity for believers to be part of the church in contrast to the popular isolationist/free agent attitudes of so many today. In the Christian life section—the editor's own contribution—Reformed doctrine is seen in its fullest application. You believe, therefore you obey. You know, therefore you act. The book is informative and searching. It instructs and encourages the reader to live and work at being a Christian.

Who should read this book? Would it be a good gift for a new Christian? Anyone with an interest in developing their

knowledge of the truth would benefit from reading it, including the new Christian. The study questions are useful for private and group study. This is by far the best book I have read on the subject to date. *C&S*

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FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND  
DECLARES THEONOMY "INCONSISTENT" WITH  
THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

IN A REPORT given at the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland during its annual meeting in May, Theonomy was declared to be inconsistent with the Westminster Confession of Faith and with the Bible. The report stated: "It is essential that the General Assembly declare that the teachings commonly known as Theonomy or Reconstructionism contradict the Confession of Faith and are inconsistent with Biblical doctrine."

This amounts to a move to have members who hold to Theonomy banned from office in the church. Unfortunately the report has misrepresented Theonomy at crucial points and therefore has misinformed its readers, and, consequently, the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland.

An interesting factor came out in the report, viz its criticism of Theonomy because of its "bias towards free market economic conservatism." This prejudice against economic freedom is perhaps understandable in the light of the recent General Election result in Scotland, but it would have been unthinkable to Thomas Chalmers, the founder of the Free Church, a man who was every bit as committed to "free market economic conservatism" as any living Theonomist. *C&S*

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## Letters to the Editor

Dear Sirs:

Your April 1997 issue has arrived. Though it is full of interest, my eye naturally lighted on some comments about me in a letter from Mr. Tim Wilder.

Mr. Wilder quotes a very brief statement I posted into an internet discussion group. This was part of a larger and ongoing conversation with some self-declared anarchists. A couple of sentences wrenched from the give-and-take of discussion is hardly the same as a fully nuanced, theoretically argued, and publicly proffered publication of one's position; and for Mr Wilder to assume otherwise is . . . well . . . quite strange.

One of my minors in college was political philosophy, and to some degree I've kept my hand in over the years. Those wishing to know what I believe can readily consult my 1985 essay "Rebellion, Tyranny, and Dominion in the Book of Genesis," published in *Tactics of Christian Resistance: Christianity & Civilization* No. 3; or my book *The Bible and the Nation*; or any number of shorter pieces, all available from Biblical Horizons, Box 1096, Niceville, FL 32588 USA. Since Mr. Wilder is aware of this material, his summary caricature of my position is . . . odd.

Finally, Mr. Wilder states that the ostensible inadequacies of my thinking demonstrate the lack of any philosophical political theory in Christian Reconstructionist and Theonomic circles. Since I am neither, having left these circles largely

behind a decade ago, my views are quite beside the point as regards theirs. Since Mr. Wilder is well aware of this, his attempt to link us is . . . weird.

Thank you for allowing me to set matters straight for your readership.

James B. Jordan

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Editor:

I wish to mention several things relating to Wilder's response to Wright's review of Hall's *Servant or Savior?* Wilder's response appeared in the April, 1997 issue.

Both Wilder and Wright lament that Christian reconstruction lacks a "philosophical political theory." My perspective is that this is an aspect of its genius. Philosophical political theories ordinarily are spun in the abstractionist minds of messianic *philosophes* and engender complex and tyrannical bureaucracies. By contrast, alert Christian reconstructionists are Christian libertarians (see my essay in the July, 1996 issue of *C&S*). That is, we hold that the state has a simple, minimal role whose complexity may extend to nothing more that checks and balances, including a limiting constitution. Philosophic theories of civil government usually entail extensive extra-

Biblical authority. I don't deny we need something of a theory of resistance, but caution that as it tends to become highly developed and philosophically derived it loses its exegetical mooring. At least Calvin's—which permits lower magistrates to resist the tyranny of higher magistrates—has some Biblical warrant. The Bible permits lethal resistance to immediate threats to life and property (Ex. 22:2); it forbids revolution or coercive resistance designed to alter the social order (Rom. 13:2). Societies are changed by regeneration, not revolution. Statist tyranny is evil; so is wanton rebellion.

Nor do I endorse Jordan's subservient views, which Wilder quoted. It seems as though Jordan's theory of the state, like his theory of the church, is masochistic.

Andrew Sandlin

Editor, *Chalcedon Report* and *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*  
President, National Reform Association

### Colin Wright's Reply:

Dear Andrew

As an argument against constructing a philosophical political theory you say: "Philosophical political theories ordinarily are spun in the abstractionist minds of messianic *philosophes* and engender complex and tyrannical bureaucracies." I agree wholeheartedly with this statement. But why is this so? Because, as you infer, that's the way philosophical political theories are? I hardly think so. The real reason, to my mind, is because this is the cop out that Christians have been making for generations, as David Hall has tellingly portrayed, leaving "messianic *philosophes*" the run of the park to do as they like. While the cat's away . . .

I think you are aware that the conclusion you have drawn does not really hold water; you could not bring yourself to state that philosophical political theories of *necessity* are spun in the abstractionist minds of messianic *philosophes*, only that they are *ordinarily* so. Why qualify it if the implication is so strong that we should never engage in such activity?

Allow me to clarify one point. It seemed evident to me that Tim Wilder's assertion did not mean that Reconstructionists do not have *any* political theory but rather that they have one that is by and large *primitive*. That is, one that has not been worked out consciously in any great detail. The implications do not get explored. Consequently, the theories are inconsistent at best and can be aptly described as half-baked.

Yet, at bottom you and I are committed to the same philosophy. I understand this from your brilliant essay on "Christian Libertarianism" in *Christianity & Society*, to which you refer me. There you state clearly and forthrightly: "In the sphere of civil authority, it means the state may not impose any law not expressed in or deduced from Scripture. It means no warrant exists for the state's regulation of the economy (beyond the assurance of just weights and measures). It means the state may not tax citizens to furnish education, welfare, or health benefits. Holy Scripture alone marks out civil and criminal laws." No-one has expressed it better. But you will not work out the implications of this. You feel that to do so would "engender complex and tyrannical bureaucracies." This is my problem (and I believe Tim Wilder's problem) with Reconstructionist political thinking (ordinarily!). It is a grand position that has got stuck at a few good thoughts and reduced them to slogans. Why do I say this? Because in so many areas I read such blatant denials of it, in the same breath as it is affirmed. I will instance just one case which has had an airing lately. It is Chalcedon's commitment to economic protectionism in the USA. In *Easy Chair Tape* #354, on "Unemployment," you asked Rushdoony for his views on this topic. You saw no reason to demur from

the fierce denunciation of free traders as socialists in disguise by both the Rushdoonys and Douglas Murray. You recently published an article in *Chalcedon Report* by Al Cronkite making the same accusations. You insist that the issue is a matter of indifference as far as Reconstruction is concerned. But you fail to see that both your *via media* and Rushdoony's protectionist views are absolutely inimical to the great statement of yours I quoted above: "no warrant exists for the state's regulation of the economy (beyond the assurance of just weights and measures)." I do not understand how the clear implication of this can mean anything less than that the state has no right to tell me with whom I may, and with whom I may not, trade.

That neither you nor the equally gifted Rushdoony can see this glaring inconsistency in your position points up the lack of depth in your theory. And while you two, of all people, cannot get your act together, the rest of Reconstructionist thought in the States will surely flounder.

We cannot escape the consequences of our ideas by not fully working them out. A failure to labour at consistency will only result in the worst elements of our thought coming to the top of the heap to haunt us. This has happened time and again in history. Even the "simple, minimal role whose complexity may extend to nothing more than checks and balances, including a limiting constitution" that you advocate has profound implications; implications that will not go away simply because you choose to ignore them.

You add further in support of your thesis that: "Philosophic theories of civil government usually entail extensive extra-Biblical authority." But of course you cannot mean that they *entail* extra-Biblical authority, for *entail* means *to logically follow*. And if it logically follows then there is no *usually* about it; it is *always* the result. I take it you do not want to go this far. But if not, you are conceding that it does not always do so and that, in fact, *it need not do so at all*. Thus I would contend that your argument is no argument at all; it is simply a scare story to deter people from going in a direction you do not like, but for which you have no cogent argument.

Let me state categorically, Andrew, I have no intention of allowing any "extra-Biblical authority" in my political theory or of "losing my exegetical mooring" as I develop it. I am aware of the dangers, particularly as a student of John Milton whose ideas were sometimes coloured by a Renaissance humanism which I do not wish to take on board. Of course I may, and probably will, stray as much as the next man (or even you!) but I look to people like yourself to provide in your books and articles a critical reflection on what I do to curb this. But in your arguments in this letter I find little of the help I have got from your other excellent writing. I do not believe your exegesis is anywhere near correct on Romans 13. From whence do you draw the conclusion that Paul here "forbids revolution or coercive resistance designed to alter the social order?" I do not see it even suggested let alone *entailed*. This is not the place to go into extensive exegesis (though we could do that in later debate). Suffice it to say that this passage conveys to my mind that *legitimate* state power has a divine origin and authority. And because it does, the Christian must never regard his obedience to it as a matter of mere prudence in the face of physical force but of (what you would call) moral or religious necessity (v. 5). The rulers Paul refers to in vv. 3 and 4 simply do not match what we have in London or Washington at this time. Considering the preponderance of their unbiblical deeds they are precisely what Augustine refers to as bands of robbers whose claim to legitimacy is conferred by nothing but the addition of impunity to their tyranny.

You further insist that "societies are changed by regeneration, not revolution." I do not believe this is true. Societies are only ever changed by revolution of some sort. In his earlier

writings Rushdoony himself was known to use the expression for what Christians must be in society. He remarks with evident approval at one point that “Rome saw the early church as a revolutionary and tax-dodging organisation.” (*Position Paper* #21) But you will no doubt say that I am playing with words. Precisely, but only to point up that this is exactly what *you* are doing when you use your terms so ambiguously. You say that “the Bible permits lethal resistance to immediate threats to life and property.” Why do you not apply this, then, to the bailiff and the tax-gatherer who use the cloak of “government agent” to rob citizens of their biblically mandated private property and sometimes even of their health or life? Believe me, this is no exaggeration; even in your own country government agents hold up people at gunpoint and rob them of their vehicles under the pretext of their being involved in drugs, others are put out of their homes for the same reason and some have been killed in this process of confiscation. Waco proves just how murderous the current administration can be. Are you telling me that submitting to this is a *moral requirement* of the Christian faith? I repeat what I stated categorically in my review of David Hall’s book: the only reason for holding back from physical resistance to these rascals is that we don’t have the power to succeed. Until we do, we exercise prudence; we turn the other cheek; we go the extra mile.

I cannot see how your position differs markedly from that of Jim Jordan. In both instances *de facto power* is always transformed into *de jure authority*. I have no doubt that both you and Jim have much more complex political theories than this would suggest.

Nevertheless, you include this element—albeit inconsistently—in those theories. This is why I suggest you need to work out a far more reasoned, consistent, and extensive political theory that can only be regarded as *philosophical*. Hopefully you will be able to find some time to develop such a theory in debate in this journal. C&S

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### EDITORIAL NOTICE

IT IS WITH regret that we announce that Andrew Sandlin has resigned as Associate Editor of *Christianity & Society*. In his resignation letter Andrew said: “statements in the latest issue of the journal [Vol. VII, No. 2, April 1997] establish, to my mind, a pattern of belief and action that counter my own deeply held and articulated views and therefore would render the retention of my name on the masthead an uncertain sound to the journal’s readers.” He has also mentioned that his time is being increasingly consumed by Chalcedon work.

Andrew has expressed the desire that we receive his resignation with finality and refrain from seeking to discuss the matter with him. In his resignation letter he did not give any more specific reason than this for his resignation, though he has since indicated that the issue addressed in his letter to the editor in this issue has some bearing on the matter. Whatever difference there is over this issue we do not think it warrants Andrew’s resignation, neither do we think his continued association with us would cause confusion to our readership. We have never taken the position that there must be complete unanimity between our authors or editors and we have always encouraged debate on issues that the journal seeks to address, knowing full well that much of the thinking that has to be done in these areas will of necessity be tentative. Furthermore, we consider debate and discussion an essential process in the church’s growth in its understanding of the truth and its calling and mission in the world. Therefore we encourage it.

Andrew has made a significant and much appreciated contribution to *Christianity & Society* during his time as an Associate Editor. His articles have been stimulating, informative and challenging and we shall miss his contribution. Despite his resignation as an Associate Editor, however, we very much hope that he will be able to make *some* contribution to these pages in future. C&S

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