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Volume ix, Number 2

April, 1999

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

Printed by Stuart Dick Printing Co., Kingsdale House, Martinet Road, Old Airfield Industrial Estate, Thornaby, Cleveland TS17 0AS, England.

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**Editorial office:** *Christianity & Society*, P. O. Box 2, Taunton, Somerset, TA1 4ZD, England.  
Tel. (01823) 665909 Fax. (01823) 665721  
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**Subscriptions:** four consecutive issues

**UK:** £12.00

**Europe:** £15.00 (airmail). Sterling only drawn on a bank in the UK or Eurocheque

**USA:** \$30.00 (airmail). US dollars only drawn on a bank in the USA

**All other subscriptions:** £20.00 (airmail). Sterling only drawn on a bank in the UK.

Cheques payable to: The Kuyper Foundation.  
For credit card payments see p. 32

**Subscription offices:**

**UK and Europe:** P. O. Box 2, Taunton, Somerset TA1 4ZD, England

**America:** P. O. Box 20514, Seattle, Washington 98102, USA

**All others & credit card payments:**

P. O. Box 2, Taunton, Somerset TA1 4ZD, England

# EDITORIAL

## THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY AND THE LIFE EVERLASTING

by Stephen C. Perks

IN Virgil's *Aeneid*, Book VI, the eponymous hero crosses the river Styx into the underworld in an attempt to communicate with his dead father, Anchises. Once in Hades Aeneas meets with the souls of the virtuous departed. Before he gets to meet his father, however, Aeneas is given a guided tour of Hades. In Hades there are many mansions: Limbo, where the souls of those who have died in infancy dwell; the Mourning Plains, where the souls of unhappy lovers dwell; then the abode of those who have died a violent death, suicides, those who have died in war. Then there is Tartarus, where the souls of those who have lived wickedly are punished. But the souls of those blessed people who have lived virtuously dwell in another part of Hades, Elysium or the Elysian Fields. This is the Graeco-Roman version of heaven. These souls exist as shades or spirits. They are ethereal bodies. They can communicate with Aeneas but when he attempts to embrace his father the shade "escapes" him. These souls are mere shades, *manes*, ghosts. (In Homer the shades of the dead are even more insubstantial than the souls that inhabit Virgil's Hades and have to drink blood in order to become substantial enough to communicate with the living.) In Virgil's *Aeneid* the shades of the dead, after being purified, await their turn to be re-born, oblivious of their former lives, into the world of the living. And so Aeneas gets to meet the souls of famous Romans yet to be born. Metempsychosis (i.e. the transmigration of souls) is also part and parcel of Virgil's vision of Hades.

The reason I mention all this is that there is much confusion in many people's minds about what happens after death, and it is not uncommon for notions that have been derived from paganism to be considered Christians beliefs. The recent media reporting of Glen Hoddle's religious views, which, once they were known, cost him his job (so much for humanism's doctrine of religious liberty!), was also symptomatic of the muddled ideas that many people have about what Christianity teaches (I know one school where the headmaster told his pupils in an assembly that Christians believe Christ is born again every Christmas). Hoddle was described, at least initially, as a Christian. Later, however, it transpired that he believes in metempsychosis. No doubt many Christians were appalled that someone who believes such a thing should be considered a Christian, since neither the Bible nor the orthodox creeds and confessions of the church know anything of such a doctrine. But should we really be surprised at this confusion when Christians themselves often have muddled ideas about this subject, ideas that scarcely have any better claim to the authority of Scripture than metempsychosis? Indeed, the notion that many Christians have of the "afterlife" or "heaven" as a place where the disembodied souls of the dead live is more akin to the Elysian Fields than it is to the biblical doctrine of the Resurrection, and indeed can be traced in some measure to the influence that Graeco-Roman paganism has exerted in the church throughout its history on the popular level.

It may come as a surprise to some, therefore, that the Bible does not teach such an idea of the afterlife as a disembodied "spiritual" existence where men and women are freed from the corrupting physical bodies that have tarnished the divine spark that is their soul. In fact, the Bible does not teach that man is made of two different, essentially incompatible substances: body and soul. What then does the Bible teach?

God created Adam out of the dust of the earth. He did not breathe into him a soul. Adam did not receive a soul into his physical body. Rather, God breathed into him "the breath of life" and Adam *became* a living soul. He did not *have* a living soul, he *was* a living soul as a result of God's breathing life into him (Gen. 2:7). As human beings we *are* souls. I do not have a soul in the same way that I have an arm. I *am* a soul. Of course my arm is part of me. But my soul is not part of me; it *is* me. I am always a living soul. When that ceases to be the case, when the breath of life departs from me, I am dead, I cease to be a living soul. Therefore, my soul is myself looked at from a particular perspective. My soul is me. The Hebrew word for soul, *nephesh*, means literally *that which breathes*<sup>1</sup> and is translated variously as *breath, mind, soul, life, person, self*. In Gen. 46:26 we read: "All the souls that came with Jacob into Egypt, which came out of his loins, besides Jacob's sons' wives, all the souls were threescore and six." Does this mean that their bodies remained in Canaan and only their souls went down to Egypt? Of course not, because the word "souls" here means *persons*. This is clear from the preceding verse: "These are the sons of Bilhah, which Laban gave unto Rachel his daughter, and she bear these unto Jacob: all the souls were seven." Clearly the text is referring to human beings, living beings, the sons of Bilhah, who are called souls (*nephesh*). The threescore and six souls (*nephesh*) of v. 26 are the people who went down to Egypt. When a man is no longer a living soul, when the breath of life departs from him, he is dead. His soul does not float off to some ethereal place where all the dead shades live.<sup>2</sup> The breath of life departs from him.

Moreover, v. 26 also has an important bearing on the popular notion of the origin of the soul. It is a common belief that the human being is composed of two parts or substances, body and soul, and that the individual soul is given by God at conception (this belief is based partly on a misunderstanding of texts such as Eccl. 12:7). But if this were true what would the Bible mean by saying that the souls came out of Jacob's loins? Souls, in this conception, are not thought to come from human parents but directly from God. Yet the Bible contradicts this. This only shows up the inadequacy of the bipartite understanding of man's nature, since the Bible does not teach that man is made of two components. It teaches that Adam was made of the dust of the earth (physical in nature) and that when the breath of life entered him he became a living soul. His soul did not enter him; the breath of life entered him and he became a living soul by virtue of his being brought to life. And the whole of humanity is descended from Adam.

So what happens at death? The answer to this question depends on whose point of view we approach it from. From the point of view of the here and now, at death the breath of life

1. J. Laidlaw, "Soul" in James Hastings, ed., *A Dictionary of the Bible* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1902), Vol. IV, p. 608a. The verb, *naphash*, means *to breathe strongly, pant* (*Gesenius's Hebrew Chaldee Lexicon of the Old Testament* [London: Bagster, 1859], p. DLVIII).

2. In 2 Pet. 2:4 the verb *ταρταρώω* is used, which means *to cast into hell* (i.e. Tartarus), from the Greek, *Τάρταρος*, the abode of the souls of the wicked in Virgil's *Aeneid*. *Τάρταρος* means "a dark abyss, as deep below Hades as earth below heaven, the prison of Cronos, the Titans etc." It later came to mean the underworld generally or "the regions of the damned" as opposed to Elysium (Liddell and Scott). However, Peter does not in this verse speak of the souls of dead people being cast down into the abyss, but rather of the *angels* that sinned.

leaves a man and he is no longer a living soul, he is dead. He returns to dust. To the world of the living, therefore, he ceases to exist in the way that man was created to exist, i.e. as a living soul. As a consequence the dead are beyond the reach of the living. This state is a judgement of God upon man's sin and therefore not a natural condition. It is a curse. Beyond this the Bible says very little. But it does say that "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Dt. 29:29). All the speculation in the world will not bring us closer to understanding this. The state of death is a state that God has chosen in his wisdom to say very little about beyond the fact that it is a curse, a judgement on man for his rebellion, and the very opposite of what God created man for. And more to the point, if something is not revealed, our desire to have some knowledge of it does not justify our cannibalising pagan ideas to fill in the gaps, which, unfortunately, is what so often has happened.

But from the point of view of the dead we must view things differently. Although the dead no longer exist as living souls in this life, and are therefore beyond the realm of the living here and now, we must not think that physical death is the end of man. The Bible teaches that there will be a *resurrection*, i.e. a bodily resurrection, and that the blessed state to which those who are believers are destined is this state of physical resurrection, resurrection of the body, as the Apostles' Creed confesses. The Bible does not teach that the eternal abode of the dead is a disembodied spiritual existence. It teaches that at the Last Judgement, at the end of history, there will be a physical resurrection. This has been part of orthodox Christianity for two thousand years. The idea of heaven as the eternal abode of disembodied spirits, though popular, has never been part of the orthodox faith confessed by the church catholic. The Apostles' creed knows nothing of it and teaches the resurrection of the body. I am told that when the early church said this creed they would thump their chests to show that they believed in the physical resurrection of the body.<sup>3</sup> This doctrine of a physical resurrection stuck out like a sore thumb against the pagan background of the Graeco-Roman world. In all the major doctrines of the Christian faith, Creation, Fall and Redemption, the Christian church confesses the complete opposite of paganism. These three doctrines defined the church against the pagan background of the Graeco-Roman world, against the evolutionism and humanism in which the world is eternal and in which man, whose spirit is a divine spark and whose material body is an encumbrance to him, saves himself by his own good deeds.

Furthermore, the Bible states that "it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgement" (Heb. 9:27). We are not told that it is appointed unto men once to die, then the disembodied limbo, where their souls of the dead wait for the Last Judgement. Rather, we are told that at death men pass from this life to the Judgement, i.e. the resurrection to judgement. For the dead there is no experience of an "intermediate state," no period of waiting for the Last Judgement. Man does not live on as a disembodied spirit. He *dies*. His next experience, therefore, is the general Resurrection on the Day of Judgement, when he is raised as a living soul once more. Therefore at death man passes from life in this world directly to the Resurrection, to the Last Judgement at the end of history, and then either into the life everlasting or into everlasting damnation (Mt. 25:31-46). Consider, for example, Christ's statement in Mt. 22:32 that "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." This statement was made in the context of a dispute with the

Sadducees over the *Resurrection*, which the Sadducees denied and Christ affirmed, not over the "intermediate state"<sup>4</sup> or "heaven," i.e. some disembodied state of "rest." The condition of the living patriarchs of whom Christ spoke is one of physical resurrection, *not* disembodiment.

The Bible never sets before us the idea of the Elysian Fields, nor a Christianised version of it, as the Christian hope. It sets before us the resurrection of the body and the *life* everlasting. A Christianised version of Elysium is really nothing more than the hope of *death* everlasting. Such a condition is not one in which man is a *living* soul but a *dead* soul, however such a state should be conceived. If there is no physical resurrection then Christ need not have been raised from the dead (cf. 1 Cor. 15:12-14). A Christianised version of the Elysian Fields may have been popular throughout much of the history of the church (along with the Roman teaching of purgatory, which also comes from the same stable as Virgil's vision of Hades; cf. also the Roman Catholic doctrines of Limbus Patrum and Limbus Infantum with Virgil's various environs of Hades); and it is still popular, even among Reformed and evangelical people. But it is not what the Scriptures teach. The condition of blessedness held out for the faithful in the Bible after the Judgement is the Resurrection, a bodily resurrection, not a disembodied "spiritual" existence.

Then what is heaven? Heaven is the abode or dwelling place of God, so to speak: "Our Father in heaven . . ." etc. It is where God is worshipped and where he is, in the picture language of the Bible, seated on his throne. The kingdom of heaven is a synonym for the kingdom of God (Mt. 3:2 cf. Mk. 1:5). Since God is not located in time and space in the way that the creation is, the language in the book of Revelation of God's throne room must be seen as anthropomorphic, i.e. picture language designed to communicate with man, whose life occupies time and space and who cannot conceive of reality outside time and space, the reality of the eternity in which God dwells. Therefore in his grace God condescends to speak to us in language that we do understand. God does not abide anywhere, yet he is everywhere. Hence, to speak of the abode or dwelling place of God is strictly illegitimate in the sense that we speak of the dwelling place of men, since God is not confined to a local presence as man is. But it is not illegitimate to speak of the dwelling place of God as a literary device, as an analogy or anthropomorphism, which is how the Bible presents heaven in the Book of Revelation. It is apocalyptic language and must therefore be interpreted symbolically.

But what about ghosts? Well, let me ask this question: Do the clothes of departed spirits have souls? This is not a frivolous question. Why are ghosts not always naked? If they are the souls of dead people, why do they have clothes? Where did they get their clothes from and what did they make them out of? Or did their clothes have souls? The point is this: the folklore does not make sense. It is obviously myth. But this is not to say that people do not see apparitions or experience strange phenomena, just that the explanation of such apparitions and phenomena as the spirits or souls of dead people is mythical, folklore. Such phenomena might be either natural or supernatural.

4. "The idea of an intermediate state took a larger and larger place in Judaism, and in this matter Christian theology to a great extent served itself heir to Jewish theology. But all this is in the strongest possible contrast to Christ's own teaching. His words fix our thoughts on the present life and the final issues. They know nothing of the speculations of later Judaism on the condition between death and the resurrection. They know nothing of the immense structure of doctrine which certain schools of Christian theology have erected on this infirm foundation. They give little or no place to the thought of an intermediate state" (S. D. F. Salmond, *The Christian Doctrine of Immortality* [Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1907], p. 276f.).

3. Unfortunately I have no reference for this, but if anyone can provide a reference I should be most grateful.

Perhaps both. There seem to be essentially two different types of ghostly apparition: the interactive and the non-interactive. The latter may be natural phenomena (the state our of knowledge—our science—is not yet advanced enough to determine whether this is so, but it is not beyond the realms of possibility and there has been some speculation that these phenomena could have a quite natural explanation). Interactive phenomena appearing as ghostly apparitions are somewhat different and probably demonic. One thing is sure, the souls of dead people do not come back to haunt the living. Devils may do that, but not dead people. We cannot communicate with the dead. Necromancy leads not to communication with the dead but to communion with demons posing as the departed spirits of the dead. This is why the attempt to communicate with the dead is classed as an abomination in the Bible. Moreover, God has said that man will die for his sin. Once he is dead he has gone from this world. It is rebellion against God to attempt to communicate with the dead in any form. It is an attempt to overturn God's decree.

Well then, someone may say, what about the appearance of Samuel to Saul when he consulted the witch of Endor? (1 Sam. 28:7-29). And what about Moses and Elijah on the mount of transfiguration? (Mt. 17:1-8; Mk 9:2-8; Lk. 9:28-36). These are not easy questions to answer. However, it is important to observe that the Bible does not say that the shade or spirit or soul of Samuel appeared to Saul. It may be that Saul expected some such thing. Doubtless the witch did not. She had been used to plying her trade of trickery, and what she got was the shock of her life when Samuel appeared. Whatever she was used to seeing when she consulted familiar spirits, the appearance of Samuel was certainly not an example of it. This was no shade. And the text does not give us to understand that it was. In answer to Saul's question "what sawest thou?" the witch replies "I saw a god [or gods—'elohim] ascending out of the earth" (v. 13). The NIV translates this as "I see a *spirit* coming up out of the ground." Likewise the *Good News Bible*. But this is a misleading translation. The King James Version has "I saw *gods* ascending out of the earth" (so also the Geneva Bible). Tyndale has "I see a *god* ascending . . ." <sup>5</sup> 'Elohim, though plural in form, can mean either *god* or *gods*. It can also in certain contexts be translated as *angels* and *judges*. The normal term for shades or ghosts in the Old Testament, however, is *rephaim*, and the term translated as "familiar spirit" in vv. 7 and 8 is 'ob. Keil and Delitzsch translate the witch's reply as "I saw a *celestial being* come up from the earth" and comment: "Elohim does not signify gods here, nor yet God; *still less* an angel or a *ghost*, or even a person of superior rank, but a celestial (super-terrestrial), heavenly, or spiritual being." <sup>6</sup> The form that appeared clearly did not correspond to what the witch expected or had been used to seeing. The apparition startled her and she appears to have perceived Samuel as some form of god or godlike being. Interpretations of this apparition vary considerably however. According to the marginal notes in the 1560 Geneva Bible, for example, this was not Samuel nor even the apparition of his shade, but Satan disguised as Samuel. Referring to v. 11, "And he answered, Bring me up Samuél," the marginal note states that "He speaketh according to his grosse ignorance, not considering the state of the saints after this life, and how Satan hath no power over them." And when it is said "and Saul knewe that it was Samuél" (v. 14), the note in the margin states: "To his imaginacion [i.e. Saul imagined it to be Samuel—SCP], albeit it was Satan, who to blinde his eyes toke upon him the

form of Samuél, as he can do of an Angel of light." While I agree, of course, that Satan has no power over the departed faithful (nor over the living except by God's permission—cf. Job 1:12, 2:6), I find this explanation unsustainable, especially in the light the subsequent dialogue between Saul and Samuel. What we have here is Samuel himself, not an impersonation; and it is the reality of Samuel's appearance, rather than the appearance of a mere ghost or spirit, that startles the witch. The godlike or celestial appearance of Samuel at this point is surely not without comparison with the appearance of Moses and Elijah on the mount of transfiguration, i.e. a *glorified* form.

Hence, Scripture does not here support the idea that the souls of the dead can communicate with the living.<sup>7</sup> However it came to pass that Samuel appeared, therefore, such an appearance was not the raising of his spirit or shade, but Samuel himself.<sup>8</sup> The same is true of the Transfiguration. These were not the shades or spirits of Moses and Elijah. They were Moses and Elijah in person—transfigured indeed, i.e. glorified (Lk. 9:31). But Scripture does not say that the disciples saw the shades or spirits of Moses and Elijah. It says "there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him" (Mt. 17:3). It is certainly not easy to say what happened in both of these incidents, i.e. how it was that Samuel, Moses and Elijah appeared out of their time. Scripture does not explain this, it merely teaches that these things happened. But however one interprets these incidents and however one understands them, they do not justify syncretism with paganism; they do not justify the adoption of pagan ideas of the afterlife and the rejection of the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body.

What of the nature of this resurrection body? The body that will be raised will be our *own* body, i.e. the body with which we have lived out our mortal lives as living souls in this world: "For *this* corruptible must put on incorruption, and *this* mortal must put on immortality" (1 Cor. 15:53). But it will also be a glorious, i.e. glorified, and incorruptible body (1 Cor 15:42ff., cf. the appearance of Moses and Elijah on the mount of transfiguration, and also Samuel's appearance to Saul). It will be like Christ's resurrection body (Phil. 3:21; Col. 3:3-4; 1 Jn 3:2), i.e. a *physical* body (Lk. 24:39), but with a spiritual rather than a natural or animal life-giving principle (1 Cor. 15:44).<sup>9</sup> We are told that Christ is the firstfruits (1 Cor. 15:20), i.e. the firstborn from the dead (Col. 1:18; Acts 26:23). Therefore his resurrection provides the paradigm or prototype for the resurrection of the believer. "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming" (1 Cor. 15:21-23).

Now, the Bible may give less information on this subject than some would like. And of course, "All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all." Therefore we must allow Scripture to interpret Scripture and seek to understand those things that are less clearly revealed in the light of those doctrines that are more fully revealed. But what we must not do is adopt pagan ideas as a stopgap because there is in the Bible insufficient revelation to satisfy our curiosity. Unfortunately, this is precisely what many Christians have done.

To conclude: the Bible teaches that "it is appointed unto

7. Salmond, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

8. If this interpretation fails to be convincing it seems to me the only other possible interpretation that is consistent with biblical teaching on the nature of man is that Samuel's appearance was a mere apparition, i.e. a vision, sent by God certainly, but nothing more.

9. Augustine, *City of God*, Bk 13, chpt. 22-23; cf. also Bk 22, chpt. 21; *Enchiridion*, chpt. xci.

5. The LXX has ἀνδρα ὄρθιον, "a man standing upright."

6. Keil and Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Books of Samuel* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, trans. James Martin), p. 263, my emphasis.

men once to die, *but after this the judgement*” (Heb. 9:27). It teaches the resurrection of the body and that the final state of the elect is in the Resurrection (Mt. 22:23, 28, 30, 31; Mk. 12:18, 23; Lk. 14:14; 20:23, 27, 36; Jn 5:29; 11:23-26, 25; Acts 4:2, 33; 17:18, 32; 23:6, 8; 24:15, 21; 26:23; Rom. 6:5; 8:11, 23; 1 Cor. 6:14; 15:12-56; Phil. 3:11; 2 Tim. 2:18; Heb. 6:2; 11:35; Rev. 1:5). The paradigm for this state of resurrection is provided by Christ himself, who is the firstborn from the dead (Col. 1:18). Christians have often confused this with “heaven,” adopting Graeco-Roman ideas of the underworld and Christianising them to produce a syncretistic notion of the “afterlife.” This is part of an ongoing legacy in the church from the Graeco-Roman world, and is all part and parcel of the form-matter or spirit-matter dualism that infiltrated the church early in its history and has caused much trouble, corrupting the views of many

believers. (Pietism has been another serious and debilitating consequence of the spirit-matter dualism that the church has adopted on a popular level). But although this syncretism has been popular in the church, it is not what the church has historically confessed; it is merely Christian folklore. The church has always confessed, on the contrary, the resurrection of the body. As believers we are not destined for heaven in the sense that this Christian folklore has portrayed it, namely as a disembodied “spiritual” existence, but for the Resurrection to life everlasting in fellowship with God. This is what Scripture teaches and what the church has always confessed as one of the principal tenets of the faith, as the Apostles’ Creed teaches: “. . . I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy Catholic Church; The Communion of Saints; The Forgiveness of sins; *The Resurrection of the body, And the life everlasting.* Amen.” *C&S*

# SHOOGLEIE<sup>1</sup> BRIDGE

## A RESPONSE TO *Bridge Building* BY ALISTER E. McGRATH

by Martin A. Foulner

ALISTER E. McGRATH is someone who has for many years been appreciated for both the depth and breadth of his scholarly writings, particularly in the realm of Reformation and post-Reformation studies. His latest<sup>2</sup> contribution, *The Genesis of Doctrine*, is an example of his willingness to tackle a subject which has been much neglected by evangelicals. His other works on Calvin and on Reformation thought have proved particularly helpful.

Having recently read his book *Bridge building* (IVP, 1992), I felt it necessary to comment on his criticisms of the apologetic method of Cornelius Van Til. Whilst there were many very fine points in this book it is marred by the fact that, like so many critics before him, McGrath has fundamentally misunderstood—and thereby misrepresented—Van Til’s position.

Now granted, even the most ardent followers of Van Til recognise that his style, vocabulary and distinctive arguments lend themselves to misunderstanding. That being the case, we must therefore be especially careful in attempting to understand and respond to his writings. Anyone who is going to be critical of Van Til in print should take extra care that they have not misunderstood or misrepresented his

arguments. A philosopher of the stature of Van Til demands a more discriminating reading than McGrath has given us.

The three areas of McGrath’s critique of Van Til concern the unbeliever’s knowledge of God, the point of contact, and the use of evidence and reasoning in apologetics.

### I. KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

Regarding the knowledge of God as held by the sinner McGrath writes: “The Point of contact is thus an awareness or consciousness of the past presence of God and the present impoverishment of that presence . . . a latent memory of God . . .”<sup>3</sup>

However, the unbeliever is not simply vaguely aware of the “past” presence of God. He is *acutely* aware of the present presence of God all around him and even in his own being. The sinner does not cease to be the image of God because of the Fall. Far from suggesting that the sinner has forgotten God and would return to God if only he could remember better what he is like, Scripture clearly declares that the unbeliever actually does know God. Every fact testifies to that knowledge. The problem is not with his memory nor is it a lack of facts. The sinner has all the facts he needs and a *present* conscious knowledge of God. His problem is that he

1. Shooglie means *shaky, unsteady, tottery, insecure* (Mairi Robinson, ed., *The Concise Scots Dictionary* [Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1985]).

2. “Latest” is a dangerous word to use about someone who produces volumes as quickly as one can read them!

3. *Bridge building* (Nottingham: Inter Varsity Press, 1992), p. 21.

suppresses this *knowledge* and twists these *facts* in order to deny what is quite obvious to him. As Van Til has so lucidly written:

When the prodigal son left his father's house he could not immediately efface from his memory the look and the voice of his father. How that look and that voice came back to him when he was at the swine trough! How hard he had tried to live as though the money with which he so freely entertained his "friends" had not come from his father! . . . He did not want to be reminded of his past. Yet he could not forget it.<sup>4</sup>

These words of Van Til show us that the unbeliever does not need more facts he needs *repentance*.

McGrath further misunderstands the apologetic task when he suggests that

A "natural knowledge of God" is thus a distorted knowledge of God, in that anything which reveals less than the complete picture potentially presents a distorted picture. But as a starting point, it has real potential and value. And responsible Christian apologetics makes no claim greater than this: that our perceptions of God from nature can be taken up and transfigured by the Christian revelation, in Christ and through Scripture.<sup>5</sup>

The problem with the above attitude lies in asserting that finite, fallen man (blinded, and with an axe to grind), can autonomously interpret this revelation of nature *accurately*, yet without any reference to God. However, once we allow the right of man to interpret natural revelation without reference to God, how can we then refuse the right of the sinner to interpret *Scripture* by the same standards? As Van Til has argued:

The Arminian must grant that his opponent has rightly interpreted much of human experience in terms of the autonomy of the human mind and the ultimacy of chance. But if the natural man who works with the idea of autonomy can correctly interpret the phenomenal world aright without God, why should he be ready to turn about suddenly and interpret spiritual things in terms of God? If he is consistent with himself he will not do so.<sup>6</sup>

McGrath suggests that his apologetic approach has "potential" and that it "can be" taken up and transfigured. As we shall see from the writings of Van Til this is just too pessimistic. A Scriptural apologetic will actually demonstrate the *necessity* of Christianity and *prove* the existence of the Triune God of Scripture. To accept anything less is to compromise the clarity of natural revelation.

McGrath appeals to the great French theologian John Calvin in opposition to Van Til. Examining Calvin's *Institutes* McGrath makes the following comment which exposes the weakness of his understanding of Van Til

It is important to stress that Calvin makes no suggestion whatsoever that this knowledge of God from the created order is peculiar to, or restricted to, Christian believers. It is perhaps at this point that both Karl Barth and Cornelius Van Til find themselves unable to endorse thoroughly Calvinian insights. For Calvin asserts that anyone, by intelligent and rational reflection upon the created order, should be able to arrive at the idea of God. The

created order is a "theatre" (I.v.5) or a "mirror" (I.v.2) for the displaying of the divine presence, nature and attributes.<sup>7</sup>

Far from Van Til being unable to endorse such an idea, he goes much *further*: the unbeliever is not only *capable* of knowing God, but according to Van Til every sinner actually does know God, but uses his faculty of "intelligent and rational reflection" to suppress this knowledge.

It is an insult to the living God to say that his revelation of himself so lacks in clarity that man, himself through and through revelation of God, does justice by it when he says that God *probably* exists. "The argument for the existence of God and for the truth of Christianity is objectively valid. We should not tone down the validity of this argument to the probability level. The argument may be poorly stated, and may never be adequately stated. But in itself the argument is absolutely sound. Christianity is the only reasonable position to hold. It is not merely as reasonable as other positions, or a bit more reasonable than other positions; it alone is the natural and reasonable position for man to take. By stating the argument as clearly as we can, we may be the agents of the Holy Spirit in pressing the claims of God upon men" (*Common Grace*, p. 62). Accordingly I do not reject "the theistic proofs" but merely insist on formulating them in such a way as not to compromise the doctrines of Scripture. That is to say, if the theistic proof is constructed as it ought to be constructed, it is objectively valid, whatever the attitude of those to whom it comes may be (*idem*, p. 49).<sup>8</sup>

## II. THE POINT OF CONTACT

The second lapse in McGrath's critique of Van Til is in Chapter 1:4 of *Bridge building*, provocatively named "No Point of Contact." The implication is that Van Til destroys any meaningful point of contact between the believer and the unbeliever. Astonishingly he attributes to Van Til a position which he explicitly repudiates.<sup>9</sup>

As a preliminary point it should be noted that the break which Van Til made with the so-called "traditional" approach was necessary because modern epistemology (e.g. Kant) had destroyed the foundations of any "common" rationality. The only "common rationality" among materialistic naturalists is that everything must have a "natural" explanation.

It is therefore probably fair to speak of Van Til's apologetic as being a break with the older "Princeton" approach at least as regards the *foundations* of our apologetic method. In many ways this is true.<sup>10</sup> Yet how else can one proceed today since the foundation of traditional apologetics has been obliterated. Indeed this apologetic has only ever been

7. McGrath, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

8. Van Til, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

9. The very book which McGrath is quoting from contains a chapter called "The point of contact"!

10. Regarding the relationship of Calvin-Kuyper-Warfield and Van Til see *Defense of the Faith*, p. 151ff. For Van Til's relationship to Kuyper and Bavinck see *ibid.*, p. 208. Van Til of course did not see his position as requiring a choice between either Kuyper or Warfield but taking the best elements from both and giving the arguments of both a sound foundation. "The difference between Warfield and Kuyper on the question of apologetics is well known. Are we to be reprimanded in advance for not agreeing with Kuyper? Or for not agreeing with Warfield? Let us rather seek to listen to both Warfield and Kuyper and also to Calvin, and then do the best we can as we ask just what the genius of the Reformed faith requires of us." *Ibid.*, p. 222.

4. *Defense of the Faith*, (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, second, revised edition, 1963), p. 231.

5. McGrath, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

6. Van Til, *op. cit.*, pp. 143f.

successful where a Christian world-view already widely existed.

Yet we should not confuse Van Til's rejection of a traditional point of contact as a denial of any point of contact at all! Far from Van Til repudiating that we can have any point of contact with the unbeliever he is at pains to demonstrate that *only* on a presuppositional approach can we have any point of contact *at all*. Van Til argues that believers and unbelievers share every fact in the universe in common. Precisely because we are all creatures of the God of the Bible, created in his image. Only such an approach can adequately meet the chaos of modern epistemology. It alone can provide a *genuine* point of contact, because it alone recognises that the natural man does possess actual knowledge of the God of the Bible: it alone can defend all of Christianity.

Only presuppositionalism such as Van Til's can make the "maximum use of God-given resources for apologetics."<sup>11</sup> Christian Theism must be presupposed in order to make reality intelligible. Van Til puts it well when he concludes that "The best proof for God's existence is that without him you can't prove anything."

Popular defenders of the faith such as Josh McDowell and R. C. Sproul may prove that "a God" probably exists. Van Til replies that the triune God of the Bible *must* exist to account for anything. Gordon H. Clark may argue that Christianity is the most logical position. Or the philosophy which best meets the criterion of "consistency." Van Til replies that *only* Christianity is logical and it alone can account for logic itself. Francis Schaeffer argues that Christianity best satisfies the "manishness of man." Van Til shows that only upon the Christian world-view can the very things which make man what he is make *any* sense whatsoever. Most importantly only Van Til can take the arguments of McDowell, Sproul, Clark, Schaeffer<sup>12</sup> et al. and give them a rock solid foundation.

When we have a solid epistemological foundation, grounded upon the presupposition that all knowledge is only possible by presumption of the existence of Jehovah and the authority of his revelation to us, we can then (and only then) take the arguments for the logic, consistency, sufficiency and historical validity of Christianity, which these men have offered in their writings, and present them to the unbeliever as objectively valid.

### *The Failure of Natural Theology*

The "traditional apologetic" to which McGrath appeals, nourished by the cozy arguments of Joseph Butler (perhaps the worst example of this method), flourished merely because no one pointed out the impossibility of any "common sense" approach which every man can rationally (autonomously) determine. This traditional apologetic could not survive Kant, nor Darwin. In this regard it was astonishing to hear R. C. Sproul<sup>13</sup> bemoaning the loss of natural

theology in our day and desiring to revive it. It is just because this "natural" theology was so *unnatural* to the reprobate mind that it could not and has not survived the onslaught of modernity. Indeed attributing autonomy to the unbeliever has been the chief reason for the *demise* of natural theology.

Natural theology flourished until the nineteenth century merely because Christianity was dominant up to this point. It was only a predisposition to believe in an ordered, logical and rational universe which provided a nursery for the belief that nature revealed God. When that conscious belief in an ordered world faded so did the possibility of an appeal to the "neutral" facts of creation.

If an unbeliever thinks that the world is a product of chance and exhibits no "order" (e.g. the common appeal to such events as catastrophe, death, unpredictability etc.) he will conclude that the world is one of chaos, or that the God of this world is a capricious or a chaotic God or even two or more Gods. It would be quite logical for the sinner to explain the existence of good and evil as the actions of both good and evil gods, exactly as the ancient Greeks did. Thus "nature" reveals to the sinner only what his predisposed assumptions want it to reveal. The traditional method cannot overcome the unbeliever's presuppositions because appeal has been made to his own autonomy, based on the mistaken concept of neutrality.

The natural man then assumes that he has the final criterion of truth within himself. Every form of authority that comes to him must justify itself by standards inherent in man and operative apart from the authority that speaks.<sup>14</sup>

McGrath is utterly mistaken to claim that

Van Til thus declares that the possibility of a dialogue with those outside the Christian faith is excluded. There is no common ground. If you accept the presupposition of God, with all that this entails, you are already a Christian; if you do not, then you cannot even begin to see the merits of the Christian case. Only by total surrender to the presupposition of God can the non-Christian see the merits of the Christian case.<sup>15</sup>

It is difficult to imagine a *worse* reading of Van Til. Firstly, Van Til does not preclude dialogue with those outside of Christianity. What he denies is the ability of the unbeliever to account for *anything* on the basis of his own *espoused* presuppositions. For Van Til the dialogue is not a neutral quest for some alleged common ground but a challenge to the sinner to provide *any* ground for rationality except that of *Christian* theism. Someone who does not believe in a universe created and sustained by the God of Scripture cannot account for laws of logic or love, beauty, pain and good music.

There is no reason—on a materialist foundation—to believe in the possibility of rational thought. In a chance universe there is no foundation for uniformity of nature (destroying all scientific predication<sup>16</sup>). In a meaningless universe there can be no possibility of moral absolutes.

11. McGrath, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

12. For a detailed critique of the apologetic method of Gordon H. Clark, John Warwick Montgomery, R. C. Sproul & Francis Schaeffer, see the taped lectures by Dr. Greg L. Bahnsen, "Van Til's Presuppositional Apologetic," 9 tapes, available from James A. Dickson Books, 12 Forrest Road, Edinburgh, EH1 2QN.

13. R.C. Sproul vs. Dr. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Apologetics methodology debate*, 2 tapes.

14. Van Til, *Op. cit.*, p. 128.

15. McGrath, *Op. cit.* p. 38.

16. The argument for scientific predication on the basis of the uniformity of nature rests on the assumption that since something has always happened this way (e.g. in predicting that the sun will rise tomorrow) therefore it will do so in the future. Yet this presumption is exactly what remains to be proved. In other words this is begging the question.

Thus, the very act of rational speculation about the existence of God requires that God exists in order to make rational inquiry possible in the first place. The very existence of moral absolutes (good and evil) requires a God who can define and determine such standards. The problem of evil is thus a problem ultimately for the *unbeliever*, because he cannot even *define* either good or evil let alone *determine* that certain actions should or should not bind others.

The atheist (as he thinks he is) rails against God. In so doing he uses his rational mind, intelligible speech, logic, and a system of values; none of which he can account for by his own espoused presuppositions. As Van Til would reply, he is like the little girl who must climb upon her daddy's knee in order to slap his face. The very use of reason, logic and speech on the part of the atheist presupposes that our God exists. The late Dr Greg Bahnsen put it very well; "unbelievers can count but they cannot *account* for their counting."

### *The Apologetic Task*

The apologist's task is always twofold (in either order), proclamation of the truth *and* pointing out that without this truth the sinner cannot make sense of anything whatsoever. Thus, for Van Til the point of contact is not a one-way street along which Christians and non-Christians can walk and together examine (neutrally) the evidence of creation. The point of contact is a head-on collision with unbelievers at *every* point of *all* human knowledge.

There are no atheists, least of all in the hereafter. Metaphysically speaking then, both parties, believers and unbelievers, have all things in common; they have God in common, they have every fact in the universe in common. And they know they have them in common. All men know God, the true God, the only God. They have not merely a capacity for knowing him but actually do know him.<sup>17</sup>

To suggest therefore that Van Til denies the possibility of the unbeliever having a true knowledge of God is the exact opposite of the case. Rather

All men have not only the ability to know but actually know the truth. This is so even in the case of those who do not know all the truth that they would need to know in order to be saved. All men know that God exists and is their judge. Secondly, all men have become sinners through Adam's fall. All men therefore suppress the truth that they know. This suppression is perfect in principle. It is due to hatred of God; it is due to deadness in sin. Sinners use the principle of Chance back of all things and the idea of exhaustive rationalization as the legitimate aim of science. If the universe were actually what these men assume it to be according to principle, there would be no science. Science is possible and actual only because the non-believer's principle is not true and the believer's principle is true. Only because God has created the universe and does control it by his providence, is there such a thing as science at all. Thus the unity of science cannot be built on "common notions" that are common between believers and non-believers because their difference in principle has not been taken into consideration. Common grace is not a gift of God whereby his own challenge to repentance unto men who have sinned against him is temporarily blurred.

Common grace must rather serve the challenge of God to men to repentance. It must be a tool by means of which the believer as the servant of Christ can challenge the unbeliever to repentance.

Believers can objectively show to unbelievers that unity of science can be attained only on the Christian theistic basis. It is the idea of God's controlling whatsoever comes to pass that forms the foundation of science. And no one can or does believe that idea unless by the sovereign grace of God through Christ he has repented from his sin. Thus it is Christianity that furnishes the basis of the structure of science.<sup>18</sup>

When Van Til is properly understood it is obvious that none of the criticisms advanced by McGrath hold water. The possibility of rational debate with sinners is to compare world-views. The advantage of this approach is that the "point of contact" (which he denies that Van Til holds) can begin anywhere. One may start with the conscious awareness or residual knowledge of God in all people but one need not start here. One can as easily challenge the scientist who seeks to perform experiments ("can chance underpin uniformity?"), the political activist who crusades against injustice ("how can you define justice?"), the professor of literature, or music ("what makes word/sound combinations meaningful?"), the ethicist struggling with moral dilemmas ("what makes your good more good than his good?") or the student on a quest for meaning ("without Jesus Christ, nothing can have meaning").

We can immediately see that the possibilities for "contact" are as numerous as the interests of the particular sinner we may be speaking to; whether a journalist, gardener or nuclear physicist.

Everyone has a world-view and the apologist must point out that every non-Christian world-view is unable to make sense of either news, flowers or atoms. Once we have exposed the impossibility of making sense of reality on such faulty presuppositions we should then invite the journalist, gardener or physicist to assume our own God-given presuppositions. We can talk about the omnipotent Jehovah who made us in his image. The Fall and our redemption in Christ. The indwelling of the Spirit and the second coming. A Christian can account for all these things because of his world-view. On this foundation alone can news, flowers and atoms obtain their meaning.

Thus, we can *with* the unbeliever explore nature, use reason, and utilise "evidence" without allowing the unbeliever any autonomy.

### CONFRONTING THE SINNER

The following list gives a summary of some of the "facts" which we must bear in mind when engaging in apologetics.

- (1) The world is created and ordered by the God of Scripture.
- (2) This world reveals the same God as the God of Scripture [not just *a* god].
- (3) Natural revelation is perspicuous for all men.
- (4) Due to the Fall of man, nature requires Scripture to define it properly.
- (5) Man knows the God of Scripture (he has not merely a possibility of knowing him).
- (6) Everyone has presuppositions.
- (7) There are no "brute" facts. All facts are interpreted according to our presuppositions.

17. Van Til, *Op. cit.*, p. 38.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 174f.



(8) Fallen man has an axe to grind. He suppresses the facts.

(9) There is no possibility of neutrality.

(10) Only Christianity can account for any and all reality.

(11) Every philosophy or world-view borrows from the Christian world-view in order to make sense of reality.

(12) Any “fact” can be a starting point for debate. Thus the point of contact is everywhere.

(13) Apologetics must defend Christian theism as a “whole.”

We must, when confronting the unbeliever’s belief in God, recognise that sometimes a vague belief in God is just a convenient foil for rejecting the true God who confronts us everywhere. This would certainly account for the fact that most people will say that they believe in God; yet they hate Christianity. Van Til brings this home to us when he stresses that

Anyone who says “I believe in God,” is formally correct in his statement, but the question is what does he mean by the word God? In reality the natural man’s “God” is always a finite God. It is his most effective tool for suppressing the sense of the true God that he cannot fully efface from the fibres of his heart.<sup>19</sup>

Reread that last sentence. We must not miss the crucial importance of this insight. More than any other statement in the writings of Van Til, it illustrates just why it is essential that we adopt his apologetic method over against the method now prevalent in modern evangelicalism. If we allow the sinner the comfort of believing in a god without proving the necessity of believing in the God revealed in holy Scripture, we have failed in our apologetic task. Yet it is just at this point that all other apologetic approaches disintegrate before the natural man’s autonomy. They are unable to prize the sinner from the comfort of his autonomous fortress.

If we start with an acceptance of the natural man’s ability to interpret reality correctly, and seek to use natural theology to build upwards toward God, we will never be able to demonstrate incontrovertibly that *only* the triune Jehovah God can account for our existence and that this same God demands that every knee in heaven and on earth should bow before his sovereignty.

All the unbeliever needs is the belief that he has the freedom to interpret any fact according to his own authority, and he will use that freedom to exclude the claims of God upon him. He will accept his god only on his own terms; only enough god to satisfy his own conscience.

#### *The Gospel Today*

The Christian message as it is presented today generally attracts only young adults and only a small fraction of those. Why? Because Christianity is only presented as the best, or most effective choice in a very competitive marketplace. This accounts for the lack of success of the gospel in our culture. Essentially churches today consist of two types of people. Those who were brought up in a Christian environment and those who made decisions at crisis points (usually during the ages of 16-25: the crisis years).

Of all the young people searching for reality and meaning in our culture, some will turn to a political ideology, a career, their family or even religion (any religion), in order to give meaning to their lives; but most will continue with a

vague undefined faith or a vague undefined agnosticism. Very few who have survived the crisis years will be convinced that they need Christ unless precipitated by a later crisis (bereavement, divorce, bankruptcy or the loss of some idol or other) which undermines their “faith.”

A further point to be understood is that today’s apologetic is essentially man-centred i.e. geared not to what God demands of us but what God can do for us. Even McGrath seems to take this approach throughout much of his book. He clearly has a genuine burden for the empty and unsatisfied souls who (increasingly) make up a large segment of our culture. And much of his reasoning here is valid for them. In the words of the Psalm 147, “God *healeth the broken in heart and bindeth up their wounds.*” But the point here is that an apologetic geared only to meeting a sense of emptiness or loneliness will only really appeal to empty and lonely people.

Many people go through life content with what they have, thinking that they have resolved the great questions of life. The apologist must be able to convince them of their folly. Apologetics must be able to dismantle *any* philosophy or world-view and demonstrate that *only* Christianity can suffice to account for our existence. It must defeat the confident Marxist, Buddhist, Moslem or Atheist as well as reach the lonely, the hurting and the seeking. The apologist is not just a crisis counsellor for the perplexed, he is the front line assault which destroys the opposition’s weaponry in preparation for the evangelist and theologian (in fact he is a bit of an evangelist and theologian as well). The apologist presents the same “facts” as the theologian.

And it is precisely Reformed preaching and Reformed apologetics that tears the mask off the sinners face and compels him to look at himself and the world for what they really are. Like a mole the natural man seeks to scurry under ground every time the facts as they really are come to his attention. He loves the darkness rather than the light. The light exposes him to himself. And precisely this neither Roman Catholic or Arminian preaching or reasoning are able to do.<sup>20</sup>

Van Til’s response to McGrath’s method would be to ask “Why, having granted the unbeliever the right to judge according to his own autonomous (i.e. God-less) reason, should you be surprised if the unbeliever chooses a different solution to his problem?” If you grant him enough autonomy to judge his condition, examine his options and make his choice you have given him enough “slack” that he never need admit his need of Jehovah God.

This is in no way to suggest that the unbeliever has a different knowledge from the believer. Nothing can be further from the truth.

Moreover, only if both parties, the unbeliever and the believer, have equal natural ability to use the gifts of God can there be an all-inclusive antithesis between them. The argument between Christians and non-Christians involves every fact in the universe. If it does not involve every fact it does not involve any fact. If one fact can be interpreted correctly on the assumption of human autonomy then all facts can. If the Christian is to be able to show the non-Christian objectively that Christianity is true and that those who reject it do so because they hold to that which is false, this must be done everywhere or else it is not really done anywhere.<sup>21</sup>

19. *Ibid.*, p. 203.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 149.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 171.

If the sinner did not have such true knowledge he would have some ground upon which to excuse himself. It is just because he is in possession of the truth but ignores or suppresses this truth that renders him guilty.

All men, whatever their ethical relation to God, can equally use the natural gifts of God. How could men abuse the gift of God if they could not use it? And what an easy way of escape for sinners it would be if the result of their folly was nothing more serious than the loss of their natural powers, and with it the loss of responsibility.<sup>22</sup>

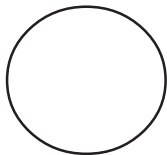
The covenant breaker does not lack true knowledge; what he lacks is a foundation for *any* knowledge that does not first presuppose the existence of Jehovah.

Christians can bear witness of this God only if they humbly but boldly make the claim that only on the presupposition of the existence of this God and of the universe in all its aspects as the revelation of this God is there any footing and verge for the interpretive efforts of man.<sup>23</sup>

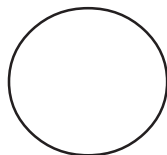
#### CHRISTIAN RATIONALITY AND SECULAR RATIONALITY

When we bear all this in mind we can see just where McGrath has misrepresented Van Til: by his denial of any “point of contact” in Van Til’s theology. To illustrate this he includes a Diagram which suggests that according to Van Til the believer’s rationality and the unbeliever’s rationality are two mutually exclusive circles. In fact his figure 3:2 (reproduced below) is misnamed “the point of Contact in presuppositionalist apologetics”; because according to McGrath’s diagram the point of contact is an unbridged void: there is *no* point of contact.<sup>24</sup>

*Christian Rationality*

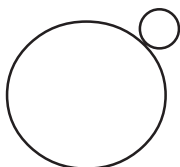


*Secular Rationality*



Yet McGrath’s citations of Van Til come from his book *Defense of the Faith* and from the central chapter which is actually named “The point of Contact”!

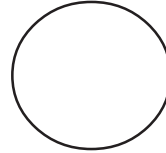
Here is a more accurate diagram to represent Christian and non-Christian Rationality



The large circle represents Christian rationality. The smaller circle represents secular rationality which rides “piggy-back” upon the Christian system in order to make sense of itself.

Shall we in the interest of a point of contact admit that man can interpret anything correctly if he virtually leaves God out of the picture? Shall we who wish to prove that nothing can be explained without God first admit some things at least can be explained without him? On the contrary we shall show that all explanations without God are futile. Only when we do this do we appeal to that knowledge of God within men which they seek to suppress. This is what I mean by presupposing God for the possibility of intelligent predication.<sup>25</sup>

Another figure might represent it thus

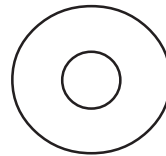


Here there is but one (shared) rationality only: Christian rationality. The idea of a secular rationality is but a *myth* because no rationality is possible on secular presuppositions.

The final point of reference in all predication must ultimately rest in some mind, divine or human. It is either the self-contained God of Christianity or the would-be autonomous man that must be and is presupposed as the final reference point in any sentence that any man utters.<sup>26</sup>

Without a valid reference point upon which to build rational thought, laws of logic, moral absolutes, etc. the sinner cannot know anything.<sup>27</sup>

However perhaps the best way to properly represent the relationship is as follows



Here we see clearly that any secular rationality can only exist within a world-view of Christian rationality. This diagram is the exact opposite of McGrath’s Figure 3.1.<sup>28</sup> It is not secular rationality which provides the basis of Christian rationality but the other way around. It is Christian theism alone which can account for the world as it is and as the sinner knows that it is.

Unless we stress the impossibility of non-Christian knowledge we will fail to drive the would-be-autonomous sinner to acknowledge his need of Jesus Christ. We must demonstrate his failure to account for anything on his own given presuppositions. Just as we might treat a cult as a heretical body which has perverted the teaching of Scripture so too in the natural realm we might view the unbeliever as an epistemological heretic who has perverted the teaching of nature and

22. *Ibid.*, p. 171 see ff. 23. *Ibid.*, p. 178 [see *ibid.*, p. 180].  
24. Note that he does not quote from Van Til at this point but from Sproul’s *Classical Apologetics*.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 200. A very good summary of his position follows on p. 201.  
26. *Ibid.*, p. 215.  
27. Please take careful note: presuppositionalism does not say that the sinner cannot know anything. Rather if he were *consistent* he could know nothing. The unbeliever is not consistent however, but borrows from the Christian world-view in order to know.  
28. His diagram reverses the true situation: presenting Christian rationality as a separate sphere existing within the larger sphere of secular rationality.

who must be shown his need of a biblical view of reason, authority, and ultimacy.

Having shown that Van Til clearly believes in a point of contact I believe that in reality *only* an approach such as his can present a *valid* point of contact. To assume, as McGrath does, the unbelievers approach to knowledge is thereby to destroy the possibility of a point of contact. Such a contact would only be an illusion because on his assumptions no knowledge would be forthcoming; only *skepticism*.

Since the sinner's perception of the world, and his abilities to reason are false, it follows that any conclusions reached by this means will also be false. If we are to examine the facts of the universe we must examine them as they really are: the revelation of the true God. To examine them from the unbeliever's point of view is to see them as they are *not*. We will never argue successfully from a false view of the evidence to a true view of God.

. . . facts and logic which are not themselves first seen in the light of Christianity have, in the nature of the case, no power in them to challenge the unbeliever to change his position. Facts and logic, not based upon the creation doctrine and not placed in the context of the doctrine of God's all-embracing Providence, are without relation to one another and therefore wholly meaningless.<sup>29</sup>

### III. EVIDENCE AND PRESUPPOSITIONALISM

Only as we bear this in mind will we understand why it is false to say that Van Til denies the use of evidence, or that Van Til does not present facts for God's existence, the resurrection, or the truth of the Bible. Such claims betray a woeful ignorance of the writings of Van Til, and yet are the most common objections raised against him.

What then of other apologetic approaches than presuppositionalism? Can we take the work of Butler, Warfield, Clark, Schaeffer, Sproul and Montgomery and graft them on to the root of Van Til's method? Yes. Much of the evidence offered by these apologists is both valuable and valid; once it is shorn of all appeal to autonomy and grounded on the epistemology of presuppositionalism.

Regarding the evangelical apologetic method (Van Til calls this method Arminian because it attributes a false view to man's interpretive abilities) which uses the arguments put forward by those such as Bishop Butler or (to cite a modern example) Josh McDowell, he praises their intentions but seeks to make them more effective

We also stress the fact that many of the things they [Arminians—M.F.] say about points of detail are indeed excellent. In other words our aim is not to depreciate the work that has been done by believing scholars in the Arminian camp. Our aim is rather to make better use of their materials than they have done by placing underneath it an epistemology and metaphysic which make these materials truly fruitful in discussion with non-believers.<sup>30</sup>

It is not the case that Van Til rejects the theistic proofs; but he presents them differently from the Thomist or the evangelical.

The [theistic—M.F.] proofs may be formulated either on a Christian or on a non-Christian basis. They are formulated on a

Christian basis if, with Calvin, they rest clearly upon the ideas of creation and providence. They then appeal to what the natural man, because he is a creature of God, actually does know to be true. They are bound to find immediate response of inward assent in the natural man. He cannot help but own himself that God does exist.

When the proofs are thus formulated they have absolute probative force. They are not demonstrable in the sense that this word is often taken. As often taken, the idea of demonstration is that of exhaustive penetration by the mind of man; pure deduction of one conclusion after another from an original premise that is obvious. Such a notion of demonstration does not comport with the Christian system. That system is analogical. Man cannot penetrate through the relations of the Creator to the creature. But this does not in the least reduce the probative force of the proofs. Man is internally certain of God's existence only because his sense of deity is correlative to the revelation of God about him. And all the revelation of God is clear.

If then they are used as witnesses it is because they have absolute probative force. They could not be used as witnesses if they had no probative force. To what God would they witness unless to the true and only living God? And if they witness to the true God they must witness to him as being what he is. And he is that One who cannot but exist. And when he is seen to be such the world is, in the same act, seen of necessity to be existing as the creation of God.

Thus the Christian-theistic position must be shown to be not *as defensible as* some other position; it must rather be shown to be *the position which alone does not annihilate intelligent human experience*. In other words Ridderbos tones down the objective claims of God upon men by saying that there is no absolute probative force in the proofs for the existence of God. This is in line with the idea of seeking common notions in some twilight zone of semi-neutrality between believers and unbelievers. And this is also in line with the idea that there is an area of factual interpretation where the difference between autonomy and regeneration need not be taken into account. This is in line in short, with the Romanist notion of natural theology which holds that man does justice by the evidence if he concludes that God *probably* exists. But all this is out of line with Calvin's *Institutes* which stress with greatest possible force that the revelation of God to man is so clear that it has absolute compelling force objectively.<sup>31</sup>

To formulate our apologetic in any other way is to let the sinner "off the hook" epistemologically and give him an excuse to reject the absolutely compelling evidence for the truth of our claims. We must start with the assumption that the Bible is true in order to reason for Christianity.

Herewith we are led back to the question of Scripture as identifying itself as the Word of God and of the system of truth set forth in Scripture as that in terms of which alone human experience in all of its aspects has meaning. The ideas of natural theology, discussed in the preceding chapter, and the idea of common grace, discussed in this chapter, must themselves be interpreted in terms of this self-attesting Scripture. If they are used independently of Scripture in order by means of them to effect a common territory of quasi- or complete neutrality between those who believe in God and those who do not, they are apologetically worse than useless. For then they make it impossible to distinguish clearly between the Christian and the non-Christian position. And in doing so the non-believer is not clearly shown why he should forsake his position. If it be allowed that he can interpret any aspect of experience in terms of his principles without destroying the very idea of intelligibility, he has a full right to claim that there is no reason why he cannot in terms of his principles interpret the whole of experience.<sup>32</sup>

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 229-30.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 146.

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 176f.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 178.

Clearly then, Van Til faithfully engages in historical apologetics. Faithful that is to the fact of Scripture. Faithful to a correct understanding of man as he really is. He believes in giving the “facts” as they are in the plan of God.

I would therefore engage in historical apologetics (I do not personally do a great deal of this because my colleagues in the other departments of the seminary in which I teach are doing it better than I could do it). Every bit of historical investigation whether it be in the directly Biblical field, archaeology, or in general history, is bound to confirm the truth of the claims of the Christian position. But I would not talk endlessly about facts and more facts without ever challenging the non-believer’s philosophy of fact. A really fruitful historical apologetic argues that every fact is and *must be* such as proves the truth of the Christian theistic position.

A fair presentation of my method of approach should certainly have included these basic elements that underlie everything else.<sup>33</sup>

In *Defense of the Faith*, page 204, Van Til shows the futility of a traditional apologetic which allows the skeptic to interpret the facts autonomously. According to Van Til the traditional apologist has not presented the facts *at all*, for

... he has not presented the facts as they are according to the Christian way of looking at them and the Christian way of looking at them is the true way of looking at them. Every fact in the universe is what it is by virtue of the place that it has in the plan of God. Man cannot comprehensively know that plan. But he does know that there is such a plan. He must therefore present the facts of theism and of Christianity, of Christian theism, as proving Christian theism because they are intelligible as facts in terms of it and in terms of it alone.

But this is also in effect to say that the Christian apologist should never seek to be an inductivist only. He should present his philosophy of fact with his facts. He does not need to handle less facts in doing so. He will handle the same facts but he will handle them as they ought to be handled.<sup>34</sup>

The folly of evangelical apologetics is in imbibing an essentially Romanist belief in the nature of man’s reason.

The evangelical does want to cooperate with the Romanist in proving the truth of theism. He argues that Protestants have many doctrines in common with Romanists, and that the existence of God is the most basic of them. Why then he asks in amazement, cannot Protestants cooperate with Romanists, in proving the truths of theism? Why not have the Romanist help us build the first story<sup>35</sup> of the house of Christian theism? After they have helped us build the first story of our house, we can dismiss them with thanks for their services and proceed to build the second story, the story of Protestantism, ourselves.

The answer to this is that if Romanists have helped us in building the first story of our house then the whole house will tumble into ruins. It has already been noted that when they build the first story of their house, the Romanists mix a great deal of the clay of paganism with the iron of Christianity. The concrete blocks may be those of Christianity, but the cement is nothing other than the sand of paganism. Woe to the Protestant who seeks to build his Protestantism as a second story upon a supposedly theistic foundation, and a first story built by Romanism or by Protestants in

conjunction with Romanists. Only a defective Protestantism can be built upon the perverted theism of the Romanists type . . . it has carried into its system certain foreign elements—elements ultimately derived by way of Romanism from paganism.<sup>36</sup>

A truly Protestant or Reformed apologetic must start with the assumption that no knowledge is possible without Christ. This is simply because no knowledge is possible on any other starting point. “*In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*” (Col., 2:3).

The Romanist-evangelical type of apologetics assumes that man can first know much about himself and the universe and *afterward* ask whether God exists and Christianity is true. The Reformed apologist assumes that nothing can be known by man about himself or the universe unless God exists and Christianity is true.<sup>37</sup>

If the natural man says anything correct “in detail about any fact, this is *in spite of* not because of his basically false assumptions.”<sup>38</sup> The natural man

... daily changes the truth of God into a lie. He daily worships and serves the creature more than the Creator. He daily holds the truth in unrighteousness (Romans 1:18). But what a time he has with himself! He may try to sear his conscience as with a hot iron. He may seek to escape the influence of all those who witness to the truth. But he can never escape himself as witness bearer to the truth.<sup>39</sup>

The foundation of unbelieving thought is that of chance. It is this presumption of chance that we must lay our apologetic axe to the root of. Yet it is just here that traditional methods fail utterly. By doing so Butler, Montgomery, Sproul etc. fail to adequately present the evidence for Christianity. All their facts are swallowed up by the unbeliever’s philosophy.

Now the Evangelical does not challenge this underlying philosophy of Chance as it controls the unbeliever’s conception of history. He is so anxious to have the unbeliever accept the *fact* of the resurrection of Christ that, if necessary, he will exchange his own philosophy of fact for that of the unbeliever. Anxious to be genuinely “empirical” like the unbeliever, he will throw all the facts of Christianity into the bottomless pit of Chance. Or, rather, he will throw all these facts at the unbeliever, and the unbeliever throws them over his back into the bottomless pit of Chance.

Of course, this is the last thing that such men as Wilbur Smith, Edward J. Carnell, and J. Oliver Buswell Jr., want to do. But in failing to challenge the philosophy of Chance that underlies the unbeliever’s notion of “fact” they are in effect accepting it.<sup>40</sup>

On this apologetic foundation, grounded upon the facts as they really are, we can demonstrate the certainty of Christianity. We can appeal to the “facts” because every fact testifies to the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. The heavens do not *suggest* the glory of God; they “declare” it (Ps. 19:1). The wrath of God is not *hinted* at from heaven but “revealed” (Rom. 1:18). We do not merely possibly *suggest* the existence of a god. We prove the necessity of the one, the only true and

33. *Ibid.*, p. 199. Van Til is responding to the criticisms of J. O. Buswell. I do not think I am being unfair when I say that most critics, including McGrath, have not “included these basic elements” and therefore failed to do justice to his position.

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 204-5. Also see ff.

35. I.e. storey.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 221.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 223.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 224. See the parable that follows between Mr. White, Mr. Black and Mr. Grey for a fine presentation of the difference between his approach and McGrath’s.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 231.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 242. See the whole of chapter 10 of *Defense of the Faith*, for a rebuttal of the traditional apologetic in action.

living God as he is revealed to us in the pages of his holy word and in every aspect of his creation.

By adopting the approach of Van Til we do not destroy empirical, rational or historical evidences: we make them *possible*. The arguments of Gordon H. Clark, Francis Schaeffer or R.C. Sproul must be utilised: but only when grounded upon and corrected by Van Til's approach.

Thus we can also make extensive use of Alister McGrath's own very worthwhile insights, but only when we have demolished the arguments of all unbelieving presuppositions. When this is done the sinner can have no answer. By this we will be able to ask "*Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?*" (1 Cor., 1:20). Only then can we preach Christ crucified effectively.

At this point McGrath's insights have *absolute* validity. At this point he demands that our preaching of the cross must have "content": that is to say the facts of the cross must be understood in their constituent parts, not just as some abstract concept, as he so effectively shows. This is the beauty of Van Til's method. We do not have one approach to the evidence for God (i.e. neutral autonomous reasoning), and another approach to the words of Scripture.

We must presuppose the biblical view of both nature *and* Scripture in order to be able to reason in the first place. This approach is not confusing apologetics and theology as John Warwick Montgomery alleges.<sup>41</sup> It is rather setting both apologetics and theology on the *only* valid foundation possible.

#### CONCLUSION

By way of conclusion I would like to say that *Bridge building*, has many very good insights which the apologist can utilise. His illustration of the prism and the cross is very good and

is one among many. Alister McGrath has a genuine desire to win the lost for Christ. He is imaginative and creative in his writing. It is a pity that he has so fundamentally misunderstood Van Til and attributed beliefs to him which he utterly repudiates. I would recommend that, having recognised the failure of McGrath to undermine presuppositionalism, we adopt Van Til's foundational epistemology and make far better use of McGrath's insights than he (given the weakness of his sandy foundations) has done.

McGrath compares the apologetic task of reasoning with the unbeliever with that of the Trojan horse that gets us inside the unbeliever's defences, allowing the evangelist to attack from within. I doubt if Van Til would sneak into Troy in a wooden horse. I rather suspect he would bulldoze his way through the front gates<sup>42</sup> with all theological guns blazing. He would then bind the Trojans (epistemologically of course) and preach to them Christ crucified.

When apologists take the time to actually understand Van Til they will see that his approach is not a threat to their defence of Christianity but rather the only way to rescue their apologetic method from faulty presuppositions and ultimately from *skepticism*. I hope and pray that Christians will consider these criticisms in the spirit in which they are offered. That we all will drink deep from Van Til's apologetic fountain and abandon the broken cisterns of the Thomistic, or Butler-type approach. In so doing we shall be, like Van Til, truly faithful to Calvin and to Scripture. May God bless our efforts to win the lost for Christ, and our desire to see that Christians have a solid basis on which to declare the unsearchable riches of Christ. C&S

41. R. Geehan, ed., *Jerusalem and Athens* (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971), p. 391.

42. Announcing that in reality the gates were but a barrier of water, defending a city of water, floating on a sea of water or something like that!

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# HAMARTIOLOGY VERSUS ILLNESS IN SUBSTANCE ADDICTION BEHAVIOUR\*

by Tommy W. Rogers<sup>†</sup>

THE blinding, binding, and grinding enslaving power of sin may gain so much control that a person may become the virtual slave of sin (the inherent tendency toward evil in human nature). Consequently, the individual may be brought into bondage of specific wrongful acts (sins). One effect of sin is its power over the sinner. "In some cases sin gains so much control and power that a person cannot escape it."<sup>1</sup>

In contemporary society, numerous misbehaviours have come to be regarded as supposed diseases.<sup>2</sup> Increasingly, problems-in-living and moral failures are medicalised by being given either a medical or a psychological "diagnosis."<sup>3</sup> Irresponsible behaviour and belief have become medicalised as the supposed symptomatology of some "disorder," "behavioural dysfunction," "syndrome" or "addiction" which the individual supposedly "has" rather than the "doing" of sin for which the actor is responsible.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, "we have lost the notion of sin's slavery, the bondage of the will, and the self-deceit of our cravings, and blindness of unbelief. Misdiagnosing the disease, we fumble the cure, the great and gracious power of the gospel."<sup>5</sup>

## *Problematic Alcohol Consumption as Social and Spiritual Pathology*

Alcohol is recognised to be the most widely abused drug in America.<sup>6</sup> Contemporary normative consensus conceptualises

\* Initially developed in slightly abridged form in connection with COUN 645 at Liberty University, January, 1997. Attention has subsequently come to an intriguing compendium by Pastor Jim West of "snapshots of the drinking joys of the Protestant Reformers and some of their heirs," which provides a discussion of "The Christology of Wine-Drinking" as well as a rating of favourite beers. *Drinking with Calvin and Luther! The Reformational View of Beer and Wine* (Published by Jim West, 1996).

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1. Millard Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), p. 192.

2. Thomas Szasa, "Mental illness is still a myth," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, 14, No. 1 (Fall, 1995), pp. 34-39.

3. Ed Payne, "The medicalization of America," *Crosswinds: The Reformation Digest*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Winter, 1992), 88-89; Edward T. Welch, "Sin or sickness? biblical counseling and the medical model." *Journal of Pastoral Practice*, Vol. X (No. 2, 1990), pp. 28-39.

4. Peele, Stanton, *Diseasing of America: Addiction Treatment Out of Control* (Lexington, Ma.: D.C. Health, 1989); David Powlinson, "Healing for life 'sin'-dromes," *Crosswinds: The Reformation Digest* (Summer, 1995), p. 12f.

5. Ed Payne, "The medicalization of America," *Crosswinds: The Reformation Digest*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Winter), pp. 88-89, 14.

"alcoholism" as a clinically determinable physiological condition in which the individual supposedly "has lost control" and cannot stop drinking once taking a drink. The perception of "alcoholism" has been accompanied by a cultural shift from a supposedly "moralistic, punitive approach" toward a strategy of supposed "treatment." One properly seeks treatment rather than repentance for an "illness" which is producing illness symptomatology independent of the individual's self-determining capacity to exercise moral choice. However, there can be little doubt that the kind of drunkenness, whose practitioners Paul said will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:10), is exactly the same phenomena of chronic consumption of excessive amounts of alcohol and frequently accompanying behaviour (1 Cor. 5:11-13) which is widely regarded today as a morally neutral putatively medical condition which the drinker supposedly "has." In scriptural perspective, drunkenness is an act which the drinker does, not a condition which he "has," which causes the drunkenness.

## *Customising the Bible to Accommodate Contemporary Revisionists*

In their chapters "A Christian Response to Alcohol Abuse" and "The Biblical View of Alcohol," Balswick and Morland assert that Christians have "conveniently escaped taking responsibility for such social problems as racial discrimination and poverty" while preaching "against the evil of alcohol use among the poor members of ethnic minorities."<sup>7</sup> One gets the notion that any real sin involved is on the part of persons who uncritically accept the unequivocal condemnation which Paul speaks to the those who participate in chronic drunkenness ("alcoholism"). Paul, viewed from the standpoint of contemporary "Christian" insight, apparently manifests the most "unChristian" of attitudes.

Perhaps a more explicitly biblical view than that expressed by Balswick and Morland is presented in *The Encyclopedia of Biblical and Christian Ethics*.<sup>8</sup> The moral aspect of alcoholism is said to involve the choice to drink, while the disease aspect is said to be the effect of the alcohol on physical, emotional, moral, and spiritual health. Rather than a Balswickian reversal which focuses on the shortcomings of those who make a literal application of such Scriptures as Gal. 5:19, this view reflects an

6. Jack O. Balswick and J. K. Morland, *Social Problems: A Christian Understanding and Response* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1990); A. Spickard and B. Thompson, *Dying for a Drink* (Waco, Texas: Word Pub. Co., 1985).

7. *Sociology of Social Problems*, p. 204f. Balswick and Morland are a couple of sociological professorial types who purport to provide a "Christian" approach to contemporary social problems.

8. R. K. Harrison, *Encyclopedia of Biblical and Christian Ethics*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1992).

openness for the Bible's explicit condemnation of habitual drunkenness, but also leaves a window open for the medicalising of emotional and spiritual weaknesses which Scripture categorises as sin.

### *Scripture, Drinking, and Social History*

From the Colonial era through the first half of the nineteenth century, Americans consumed much more alcohol per capita than they do now.<sup>9</sup> The Bible, as well as centuries of Christian witness, makes it clear that the moderate consumption of alcohol is acceptable to God, who provides "wine that makes the heart of mortal men rejoice" (Ps. 104: 4, 15). When the revered colonial divine Increase Mather spoke of rum as "the good creature of God," he expressed an attitude that was in keeping with centuries of Christian opinion. The God who "sends springs to give drink to every beast of the field" is also the provisioning force of the gift of wine (Ps. 104:10-15).<sup>10</sup>

The Bible speaks of drinks made from grapes (Dt. 32:14) and other fruits (Num. 28:7, Dt. 14:26, Ps. 69:12, Is. 49:26; Song of Solomon 7:9, Ruth 2:14, Joel 1:5) or grains (Is. 1:22) fermented into varieties of alcoholic beverages (Hos. 2:3; 4:18; Neh. 1:10; Gen. 27:28, 37; Is. 27:2; Dan. 5:1, 2, 4, 23; Acts 2:13, 15). Scripture also recognises the libationary aspects of alcoholic drinks (Ps. 104:15, Esth. 1:10; 2 Sam. 13:2; Eccl. 2:3; 10:19; Zech. 10:7) as well as the medicinal aspects of moderate consumption (Lk. 10:34).<sup>11</sup> Paul advised Timothy to get off water and consume wine (1 Tim. 5:23).<sup>12</sup>

9. Joseph R. Gusfield, *Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics of the American Temperance Movement* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1963); *The Culture of Public Problems: Drinking-Driving and the Symbolic Order* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Harry Levine, "The discovery of addiction: changing conceptions of habitual drunkenness in America," *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, 39 (1979), pp. 143-74. "The good creature of God and the demon rum: colonial America and nineteenth-century ideas about alcohol, crime, and accidents." In R. Room and G. Collins (eds.), *Alcohol and Disinhibition: Nature and Meaning of the Link* (Rockville, Md.: DHHS, 1981).

10. Nissenbaum, noting that in the first quarter of the nineteenth century "[a]lcohol was generally served at ministerial ordinations and other ecclesiastical functions," comments that "[e]ven in the Puritan era, the New England clergy had accepted alcohol as what . . . the Reverend Samuel Parris of Salem Village, publically called 'the principal drink that is given to mortal man, being profitable not only to moderate thirst but also to strengthen the heart, and to revive the drooping spirit. (Another Puritan minister, the poet Edward Taylor, occasionally employed alcohol as a metaphor of divine grace. As Taylor once wrote, 'It's beer, / No nectar like it.'" S. Nissenbaum, *Sex, Diet, and Debilitation in Jacksonian America* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1980), p. 70.

11. The Mississippi legislator who made the famous "whiskey speech" (1948) when called on to express his view on prohibition, listed the injurious consequences of alcohol abuse, and stated that he was against it, and then enumerated the libationary aspects of the drink which warms the heart of man, and stated that he was for it, was not consciously presenting a biblical view; but, he was not inaccurate as to the Bible's recognition of the positive and negative aspects of this "good gift of God."

12. Is it presumption rather than hard evidence which restricts Paul's recommendation to Timothy to take wine as necessarily for its medicinal effect rather than for its depressant effect on the central nervous system. It may be that the Holy Spirit, being analytically all-incisive, may have recognised Timothy to have had a nervous stomach due to anxiety, codependency, low self-esteem, adjustment reaction to the responsibilities of adulthood, or other disordered mental state, and have directed Paul to recommend wine for its libationary effect. There is no real biblical indication that "a little wine for your stomach's sake" was for amelioration of epigastric distress rather than "its wine, wine, wine, that makes you feel so fine, its beer, beer, beer, than makes you want to cheer, on the old potato farm." Se-lah.

Wine was a mealtime beverage from time immemorial (Gen. 14:18; 27:25; Eccl. 9:7; 1 Sam. 16:20; Is. 58:1). Royal commissaries were stocked with liquors (1 Chron. 27:27; 2 Chron. 11:11), the customary beverage of royalty (Neh. 2:1; 5:15, 18; Dan. 1:5, 8, 16; Ezek. 27:16; Hos. 14:7). Noah utilised the fruits of the vineyard to the point of intoxication (Gen. 9:24). Alcoholic beverages were a suitable gift for superiors (1 Sam. 25:18; 2 Sam. 16:1, 2); were a commodity of trade and medium of exchange (Neh. 13:5); were part of the provisioning for journeys (Zach 9:4, 13; Jud. 19:19); were a medium of compensation for temple labour and supplies (2 Chron 2:8-10, 15); were suitable for tithing as support for priests and Levites (Dt. 18:3, 4; 2 Chron. 31:4-5; Neh. 10:37, 39; 13:5, 12) and were among the choice things sacrificed to God (Ex. 29:38; Lev. 23:13; Num. 15:15; 7:10; 28:14; 1 Sam. 1:24; 10:3; Hos. 9:4).

Jesus himself could be regarded as the archetype brewmaster who turned water into wine of such exquisite quality as to evoke admiring commentary. Wine "was on the table when Jesus celebrated the Passover the last time with his apostles, and he used wine when he instituted the memorial of his death."<sup>13</sup>

What the Bible does condemn is drinking inappropriately. This includes (a) drinking to the point of drunkenness, and (b) drinking in inappropriate situations. Special instances in which drinking is prohibited included members of the Nazarite order, pregnancy (Num. 6:2; 4:13-20; Amos 2:12, Judges 13:4, 5, 7, 14), and priests and Levites on duty (Lev. 10:8, 9; Ezek. 42:21). Drinking is forbidden to judges and administrative officials lest judgment be perverted (Pr. 31:4, 5), but the immediately following passage counsels those of heavy heart to "drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more" (Pr. 31:6, 7). The latter passage would appear to come very close to an endorsement of drinking as consolation.<sup>14</sup>

Proverbs also recognises the imprudence of being deceived by mocking wine and raging strong drink (Pr. 20:1) which "biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder" (Pr. 23:32). Proverbs unequivocally takes away the glamour from coarse and debased living (Pr. 23:21; 29-31). Scripture graphically depicts the consequences of the drunkard's indulgence (Ps. 107:27, Hos. 4:11; Is. 19:14). However, the Bible shows no awareness of a genetically predisposed drinker who drinks beyond moderation. There is no biblical exculpation of drinking beyond self-control and responsible behaviour as other than sinful indulgence. God's attitude toward the habitual drunkard is not tolerant (Dt. 22:18-21; 1 Cor. 5:11-13).

Transformation of "the good creature of God" into "the demon rum" was based on the very apparent relationship between alcohol consumption and the prevalence of moral and

13. *Aids to Biblical Understanding* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1971, 1659).

14. As a teenage "when in Rome live for Jesus" kamikaze it was my conviction that beer drinking, pool shooting, dancing, movie going, cigarette smoking, fishing on Sunday, and voting Republican were evils, giving an air of consent to Sodom, "here I stand, God help me, I cannot do otherwise"—a cauldron of sin-hating and self-righteousness impressive neither to God nor man (at least not in a favorable way). Of course I did not know *why* the things thought wrong were wrong, but I was quick to spend my quarters for the pamphlets by rip-snorting sin-fighting evangelists who said they were. It never occurred that if dancing and drinking was good enough for David, or if the elixir of the vine was the beverage of Jesus, the disciples, the apostles, and the great doctors of church history, that consuming a brew might not necessarily be an evil act *per se* in the mid-twentieth century. Ready to condemn the supposed "sins" of others, quick to judge, and full of gospel tracks—as if Jesus told his disciplines to be full of judgment, condemnation and print. Someone, perhaps Alfred E. Neuman, succinctly expressed it that "a self-righteous non-movie going, non-dancing, non-deoderant user with a sack full of gospel tracks is a self-righteous non-dancing stinker." Good Lord, forgive!

social ills among chronic inebriates. Benjamin Rush, colonial physician, signer of the Declaration of Independence, and early American temperance advocate, objected to hard liquor, but not to such fermented drinks as wine, beer, or elder. Rush conceded that custom, history “and even nature itself, all seem to demand drinks more . . . cordial than simple water.”<sup>15</sup>

Lyman Beecher, Congregational minister at Litchfield, Conn., was one of the few American clergymen to take up the cause of abstinence, but he did not do so *sola Scriptura*.<sup>16</sup> The later temperance creed, which regarded drinking as evil *per se*, superseded the cultural tradition of moderate social drinking. By the 1930s the temperance movement notion of alcohol as universally addicting “demon rum” gave way to recognition that the millennium was not to be ushered in by government prohibition of liquors for “beverage purposes.” It was largely superseded by a mixture of pseudomedical and religious ideas fostered by Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) in co-operation with the liquor industry. This ideology held that most people can drink moderately without becoming compulsive inebriates, but some persons have a biological vulnerability which results in “loss of control” or “when to say when.” This view fits well with the liquor industry’s purpose of marketing a nonaddictive substance except to persons with the “disease” of “alcoholism.”<sup>17</sup>

#### *The Disease Model and Other Views of Chronic Heavy Drinking*

Since the cause of alcoholism is recognised to be unknown,<sup>18</sup> alcoholism is sometimes described as a multivariate and multi-dimensional disease involving an interrelated variety of social, economic, psychological and biological factors. Variant views and hypotheses include:

*The putatively biblical view:* The biblical motif of the alcoholic engaging in sinful behaviour is widely regarded as religious superstition and dogma, an antediluvian perspective unenlightened by the superior wisdom of psychiatry, clinical psychology and professional counseling.<sup>19</sup>

*The biological view:* This hypothesis appears to be the “great hope” which surely will be discovered tomorrow, and which should be assumed as fact today. While studies have indicated that families of alcoholics tend to have a higher incidence of alcohol abuse, and some clinicians assert that the chronic syndrome (as opposed to mere abusive utilisation of alcohol) is found only among persons who are genetically predisposed, genetic or biochemical defects leading to alcoholism have not been definitively demonstrated.<sup>20</sup>

15. S. Nissenbaum, *Sex, Diet, and Debilitation in Jacksonian America*, p. 73.

16. Nissenbaum observes that “teetotalism” (complete abstinence) from fermented as well as from distilled drinks was incipient in New England in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. “The first periodical to advocate the practice—*The National Philanthropist*, founded in Boston in 1826 and edited for a time by William Lloyd Garrison—was printed under the motto, “Temperate Drinking is the down-hill road to drunkenness.” The temperance crusade of the late nineteenth century was energised by the secular salvation ethic promoted by the transcendentalist heresy which replaced Puritan biblicalism in New England.

17. Joseph R. Gusfield, *Symbolic Crusade*.

18. Robert Berkow (editor-in-chief), *The Merck Manual of Diagnosis and Therapy: Sixteenth Edition* (Rathway, N.J.: Merck Research Laboratories, 1992).

19. Gary Forrest, *The Diagnosis and Treatment of Alcoholism* (Springfield, Ill.: Thomas Pub. Co., 1978).

20. Berkow, Robert (editor-in-chief), *The Merck Manual of Diagnosis and Therapy: Sixteenth Edition* (Rathway, N.J.: Merck Research Laboratories, 1992); Herbert Fingerette, *Heavy Drinking: The Myth of Alcoholism as a Disease* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

Numerous speculative hypotheses—inherited variations in sensitivity to certain enzymes, the effect of alcohol on the flow of ions through nerve impulses, inherited variations in neurotransmitter release and uptake symptoms, production of certain morphine-like compounds—have been advanced to show that alcoholism is the result of a biological condition that the chronic heavy drinker “has” which causes the “alcoholism.” The belief that some genetic predisposition, some biological compulsion which mandates excessive and appetitive alcohol abuse, has to be the “cause” of intemperateness. Such is the perennial hope, the underlying faith, the persistent mythological aegis of the recovery industry, and the ultimate exorcism of the antiquated perception of chronic heavy drinking as deliberate behaviour for which the drinker is responsible. It is a promise which continues to remain unfulfilled.

*The alcoholic personality view:* Multitudinous studies have noted that certain personality and behavioural traits are frequently associated with problematic heavy drinking. Dependence, hostility, self-destructive impulsivity, sexual deviance, egocentricity, self-absorption, hedonism, are among the traits frequently encountered in the personality/behavioural makeup of “alcoholics.” While the caveat is generally noted that there is no identified “alcoholic personality,” the fact is that many of the accompanying traits frequently manifested by persons given to chronic heavy drinking are themselves specific manifestations of sins.

*The sociocultural hypothesis:* High rates of alcoholism are relatively low in cultures with consistent and clear cut normative patterns of drinking, and where intoxication is rigidly bounded by normative proscription. Rates are high in societies characterised where intoxication is relatively tolerated. The relatively low rates of problem drinking among Jews, Italians, and Chinese Americans, in contrast to relatively high rates of problem drinkers among Indians, Irish, and Mexicans, is likely indicative of the influence of cultural and societal factors. Fingerette persuasively argues that chronic heavy drinking represents a way of life rather than a medical entity.

*The Putatively “Medical” View:* “Alcoholism is considered a chronic illness of undetermined etiology with an insidious onset, and which shows recognisable symptoms and signs proportionate to its severity.”<sup>21</sup> However, these symptoms and signs turn out to be characterological and behavioural rather than medical. *The Merck Manual* summary of criteria by which it instructs the medical practitioner to apply the label of “alcoholism” advises that persons with this “disorder” exhibit characteristic behaviour which interferes with work and social responsibilities. But, the “diagnosis” is a wholly social construction based on indices of behavioural choice and their consequence(s).

The imprimatur for the medicalisation of behavioural traits as supposed “illnesses” or “disorders,” *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association (DISM-IV)*, speaks of the “alcohol use disorders” of (a) “alcohol dependence” (a pattern of obsessive use with pathological physiological consequences, such as development of tolerance or withdrawal syndrome), and (b) “alcohol abuse,” which is diagnosed by irresponsible and problematic behaviour associated with the use of alcohol without the criteria for dependence.<sup>22</sup> The biochemical determinist theory of supposed “loss of control” or “dependence” is based almost entirely on behaviour in that people do permit alcohol to overpower the will rather than on any experimental demonstration of biological incapacity.

21. Berkow, *The Merck Manual*, p. 1551.

22. American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DISM-IV)* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Association, 1994), p. 195-96.



The fact is, however, that the heaviest of drinkers do moderate their drinking in response to disincentives.<sup>23</sup> Experimental studies have shown that the range of effects of alcohol depend as much on placebo as on pharmacological action.<sup>24</sup> Further, societal attitudes toward alcohol are such that alcohol abuse serves a variety of excuse functions wherein people chose behaviour which they separate from their true self as if the behaviour was an element of their inebriation.<sup>25</sup>

Playfair, who draws extensively on the insights of Fingarette, suggests that the disease concept has become so dominant in many Christian programmes dealing with addictive behaviour that the church could be guilty of “the diseasing of Christianity.”<sup>26</sup> Adoption of the disease concept of behavioural, characterological, and personality deficiencies has become so pervasive that reportedly “Christian counselors now view stealing, lying, infidelity, hotheadedness, *ad infinitum* as supposed diseases that must be treated.”<sup>27</sup>

#### *The Twelve Steps Programme as an Integrative Approach to Combatting Addiction*

The successful evangelising by Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) for a biological explanation of “alcoholism” has been regarded as a major impetus for adoption of the notion of “alcoholism” as a disease in 1956.<sup>28</sup> Many churches make use of the well known Twelve Steps programme with various alterations. The Twelve Steps programme has been criticised for supplanting what the Bible describes as sin with a humanistic substitute “[r]ather than allow God’s Word and wisdom to direct and shape the church’s policies about addictive and destructive behavior . . .”<sup>29</sup> Blattner,<sup>30</sup> by contrast, suggests that AA waffling between explicit declaration of the God and Christ of the Bible for a more eclectic Higher Power reflects a practical effort to overcome the instant resistance among persons who have had their share of sermonistic moralising. Blattner expresses opinion that the Twelve Steps approach has helped many heavy drinkers recognise the true nature of their problems. Many reportedly have come to understand root difficulties to which addiction or other compulsive behaviour is a response, and to appropriate God’s grace to learn a holier and healthier response.

If the addiction behaviour reflected in habitual and repetitive drunkenness is a lifelong incurable disease for which the “alcoholic” is not responsible, then Scripture is manifestly wrong in condemning of the habituated behaviour of chronic problematic drinkers as sin. Scripture either has to be accommodatively contextualised, or God has verified himself incapable of understanding the complexity and causative dynamics of chronic inebriation.

#### *Developing a Biblical Perspective on Alcohol, Drinking and “Alcoholism” Versus a Non-Biblical “Christian” Perspective*

It has been reasoned that since God pronounced the material body very good (Gen. 1:31), to place *sinful behaviour* of

the body in the category of physical causation is contrary to scriptural teaching.<sup>31</sup> However, the body may be a problem according to the way it is programmed by the soul,<sup>32</sup> the triumph of sinful desires for bodily gratification which is a component of sensuous, earthly, demonic wisdom (Eph. 5:11). As DeMar<sup>33</sup> has observed in comment on a study which claims that a maternally inherited gene may influence whether Johnny is sodomite, the ultimate question is what humans *do* rather than whatever traducian tendencies and proclivities they inherit.<sup>34</sup>

Commentators on drinking, wine, and alcohol almost ubiquitously point out that “Biblical writers reflect a variety of views on the utilisation of alcohol”<sup>35</sup> That descriptive portions of Scripture are not appropriately authoritative for proscriptive purposes aside, one gets the notion that the assurances that Scripture supposedly recognises a “variety of views” on alcohol consumption is meant to provide a platform for legitimising the argument that no consistent viewpoint or authoritative model of praxis can be determined from Scripture.

Actually, the Bible presents a discernable consistency with regard to “alcoholism.” Some “Christian” writers deftly make a slight of hand shift from drunkenness to biblical openness on drinking in moderation. They correctly assert drinking *per se* is not prohibitively condemned by Scripture, but erroneously use that premise to conclude that Scripture is open with respect to toleration of drunkenness. The *coup de grâce* may be added by making the condemnation of drunkenness the object of condemnation. Then, the church may be enjoined to respond to “alcoholism”—the modern argot for what the King James describes as “drunkard”—in the same compassionate and exculpatory form with which it is appropriate to respond to any illness of which the ill person may be a victim.

There are biblical contexts in which the act of alcohol consumption itself *is* sin based on explicit biblical enjoiner. In other instances, such as drinking as an act of rebellion, as an act of defiance of parental authority, or as failure to abstain for conscience sake in order not to cause a brother to stumble, may make drinking sinful in context. Perhaps the distinction between the non-sinful consumption of strong drink and the sinful consumption of alcohol is suggested by Mt. 15:11 that “[i]t is not what goes into the mouth that defiles, but what comes out of the

work.” *Pastoral Renewal*, Vol. 13, No. 6 (May-June, 1989), pp. 3-12.

31. Ed Payne, “Addiction as besetting sin,” *Journal of Ethics in Medicine*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Fall, 1993), pp. 96-99; “Modern therapies and the church’s faith,” *Journal of Biblical Counselling*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Fall, 1994).

32. Jay Adams, “The biblical perspective on the mind-body problem,” *Journal of Biblical Ethics in Medicine*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (Spring, 1993), pp. 21-30.

33. Gary DeMar, “Oh, brother!,” *Biblical World View*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Jan., 1996), pp. 14-15.

34. However, cavalier condemnation of the “alcoholic” is not required by recognition that the locus of moral responsibility for participation in alcoholism lies within the self-determining qualities of the individual. Caution is made that Christians, speaking from the standpoint of safety, may find it overly easy to condemn the behaviour and life choices of sinners whose behaviour may be as adaptive as the behaviour of those exercising condemnatory judgement would be if they were in equivalent circumstances. Shakespeare or Ho Chi or some bard cautioned about the beam and the mote, and the neglect of weightier things of the law. As an adolescent exposed to perennial evangelistic assaults (growing up in Southern U.S.A. in a pre-TV era when rip-snorting evangelism still lingered as a major entertainment), I can recall numerous rantings about drinking, dancing, or not paying bills. I do not remember any admonition or instruction for businessmen to apply just weights and measures, or for father’s not to provoke children to wrath.

35. Balswick and Moreland, *op cit.*; Harrison, *op cit.*; *Aids to Biblical Understanding*.

23. Herbert Fingarette, *Heavy Drinking: The Myth of Alcoholism as a Disease* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

24. Jim Orford, *Excessive Appetites: A Psychological View of Addictions* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1985), p. 181.

25. C. R. Snyder, *Excuses: Masquerades in Search of Grace* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1983).

26. William Playfair, *The Useful Lie* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1991).

27. Playfair, *The Useful Lie*, p. 23f.

28. Stanton Peele, *Diseasing of America: Addiction Treatment Out of Control* (Lexington, Ma.: D.C. Health, 1989).

29. Playfair, *The Useful Lie*, p. 82.

30. John Blattner, “The twelve steps: why they work; how they

mouth.” Accordingly, the effects of alcohol on human behaviour, and the behaviour of the persons who consume alcohol, would seem to be a pivotal factor in God’s sight as to whether that consumption is sin.<sup>36</sup> There is no biblical justification for presuming that the “alcoholic” is not morally responsible for both the consumption and the consequential behaviour. The biblical motif would seem to be amply capsuled in Eph. 5:18: “be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess . . .”

Irrespective of the degree to which Scripture is culturally tinged, reasonable argument can be made that Scriptural perception of sin is not dependent on the changing vagaries and political influences reflected in the *Diagnostic Manual of the American Psychiatric Association*. Rushdoony<sup>37</sup> has well observed that it is an *abomination* for Christians to disagree causally with what God has said as though the Bible is valid only when men give their consent. Nevertheless, convincing argument can be made independent of biblical authority that people are active agents rather than passive victims of addiction, and that addictions are fully behavioural maladies which are not subject to medical interventions.<sup>38</sup>

Simultaneously, recognition that consequences have causes should not cause Christians to dismiss automatically the post-traumatic effect of precipitating events in subsequent behavioural patterns of mankind as mere psychobabble.<sup>39</sup> The fact is that much behaviour, sinful though it is, and responsible though the sinner may be, is symptomatic of underlying distress which reflects psychological and physiological dynamics. The consequence of a root of bitterness springing up (Heb. 12:14), or the failure to exercise forgiveness (Mt. 6:12), or of ignorance of the wiles and snares of Satan (Eph. 6:11; 4:27; 2 Tim. 2:26), are illustrative scriptural recognitions of the potential impact of precipitating events on underlying behavioural patterns. Hopelessness, strong emotions, job problems, and other temptations all can magnify bentness toward the creature and excuses to turn to idols for comfort.<sup>40</sup> Determination of the existential relationship between symbolic behaviour which represents a sinful response to one’s intrapsychic and social environment may be a crucial variable in determining the most applicable biblical choice for intervention.<sup>41</sup> Further, as Welch

36. Acknowledgement is made that a Liberty University reviewer suggested this statement represents an out of context use of Scripture since the Scripture cited is not contextually related to consumption.

37. Rousas J. Rushdoony, “Abominations,” *Chalcedon Report*, No. 379 (Feb., 1997), p. 1f.

38. Fingarette, *Heavy Drinking*; Peele, *The Disease of America*.

39. I think of an article supposedly exposing psycho-babble in which the Mrs of a “youth minister,” who had seduced at least one vulnerable church belle, and whose counselors thought that a root of the problem springing up could be found in the offender’s experiential history, excoriated the counselors by asking “whatever became of sin”? Obviously, sin was quintessentially present in peculiarly heinous form in the church’s “youth ministry.” If the counselors sought to exculpate the sin of the transgressing “youth minister” because behaviour is a consequence of multiple dynamic factors, choices, and decisions, that is one thing; but, to identify those dynamics and seek to bring healing and discipline into those areas of deficiency is quite something else. One might as validly query the Mrs “whatever happened to conversion?”

40. Welch has pointed out that because Christians do not recognise the breadth of the biblical view of human life, they are unprepared to interpret the proclamations of science biblically. Consequently, when confronted with technical-sounding proclamations of science and medicine, they tend to be easy prey for medical model interpretations of behaviour, and are easily persuaded that Scripture is limited if not erroneous in its statement about mind, spirit, and moral responsibility. Edward T. Welch, *The Brain and Mental Illness* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1991).

41. L. Powers, “Acting-out and the dynamics of victimization.” *Pastoral Psychology*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (Sept. 22-30, 1992).

observes, “[s]cripture clarifies that, although we are always morally responsible, we are responsible *according to the purposes in our heart*.”<sup>42</sup>

Welch has aptly cautioned about the consequences of an inadequate view of Scripture which too readily explains behaviour or epidemic as the result of sin or divine retribution. He notes that the church’s explanation of the cholera epidemics in 1832 and 1849, which explained the cholera epidemics as retribution for sin, took a toll on ecclesiastical authority when answers to the 1866 cholera epidemic were perceived as affected more by public health measures than by prayer and fasting. Welch notes that the medical or disease model of problem behaviour today is accompanied by an unprecedented arsenal of technological and pharmacological wonders which appears to be overwhelming in its claims that all forms of deficient and/or irresponsible behaviour which the Bible explicitly recognises as sin are given biological explanations. But, counselors who see schizophrenic symptoms abate after a trial of medication may begin to wonder, “Will the biological revolution eventually find a treatment for adultery, stealing, lying, insolence, and coveting?” Consequently, to fail to develop an explicit biblical perspective that is adequate to include and explain developments in biological and humanistic personology is to risk a step toward “practical atheism.”

#### PRINCIPLES RELATING TO ALCOHOL USE AND ALCOHOL ABUSE DERIVABLE FROM SCRIPTURE AND EXPERIENCE

1. *Alcohol is among God’s gift’s to mankind.* Wine and strong drink, like other gifts of God, may be wrongfully used. Even honey, which in biblical analogy references a high state of blessing (1 Sam. 14:25-30, Dt. 32:13; Pr. 16:24; 24:13, 14, Ps. 19:9, 10; Ps. 119:103) can be sinfully abused by indiscriminate consumption (Pr. 25:16; 25:27). Scripture recognises the proper and moderate use of the elixir of the vine as a good gift of God, while simultaneously recognising the debilitating and judgment-perverting aspects of inebriation. Scripture also holds man responsible for the exercise of proper restraint and as a morally accountable agent<sup>43</sup> who is responsible for the exercise of the self-determining capacity for regulating his behaviour.

2. *Moderation is all things is the underlying biblical principle applicable to alcohol consumption.* The Bible does not call for

42. The biblical emphasis on accountability before God is qualified according to the purposes in our hearts and according to our capacity, thus putting the biblical perspective in the position of upholding universal biblical standards while recognising individual differences in capacity. Welch draws attention to a Christian family that had ongoing disciplinary problems with a daughter until it was recognised that she was unable to process requests that were rapid or long. Although younger children were able to understand, her world of language was relatively chaotic. Accordingly, what had been considered sinful disobedience was recognised as shaped by a lack of ability (fewer talents) in one area. Welch, *Counselor’s Guide to the Brain*, p. 30f.

43. As a matter of application of biblical thought form to public policy, alcoholism is not a civil right which others are obligated to compensate. There should be no laws prohibiting insurance failure to cover addictions “treatment.” Certain eleemosynary institutions, such as the “Veteran’s Administration,” should not burden the innocent for nurture of the guilty. Similarly, private insurance contracts, including arrangements for public employees, should not require that all persons share the cost of “treatment” of addicts. Sharkey reports that most persons who cannot afford hospital insurance benefits cannot afford it because of mandates requiring mental health and addiction benefits. Joe Sharkey, *Bedlam: Greed, Profiteering, and Fraud in a Mental Health System Gone Crazy* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), p. 148.

sawdust trail condemnation of all alcohol consumption. However, drinking which causes another to stumble, or which places an individual in a situation of lessened responsibility with consequence for harm, or which is in violation of civil law, are illustrative situations in which a compelling biblical case for abstinence could be persuasively made.

3. *Scripture is unequivocal that neither “thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God”* (1 Cor. 6:10). Habitual drunkenness is a manifestation of unrighteousness in the same category with such behaviour as fornication and adultery. That the body shall be presented to God as a living sacrifice is only a reasonable service (Rom. 12:1) to live in newness of life in the body.<sup>44</sup> The body has desires, and develops appetitive behaviour, which are programmed by the sin nature. Scripture demands that the sinful habits of the body must change. While the physical body can have a profound effect on the heart (spirit or essence of a person as a spiritual being), and can even make a person more susceptible to being tyrannised by sin, the body is not the source of sin (2 Cor. 4:16) (Welch, 1990). Payne<sup>45</sup> has aptly suggested substituting the term “besetting sin” (Heb. 12:1) for “addiction” in recognition that the primary problem in “loss of control” in chemical or other behavioural addictions is spiritual rather than medical.

That gambling may have a physical basis on operations of opiate-like endorphines may provide something like a drug dependence in gambling behaviour, or that people may consume liquor because the flesh lusts for its consumption, does not provide a scriptural exculpation for sins of the body on the ground that the body seeks chemical satisfaction. Men are morally responsible for things done in the body (2 Cor. 5:10) (Welch, 1990). Addictive pharmacology illustrates the reality of “out of control” in the sense of slavery to sin (e.g., Gen. 4:7; Rom. 7:14-25) (Welch, 1990). Addiction does not negate the biblical principle of responsibility for moral/spiritual control “to be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess” (Eph. 5:18).<sup>46</sup>

4. *An understanding of sin must be recovered in the counseling and pastoral ministry enterprises.* Counseling in general may take a Rogerian view of seeking to help the sinner feel better about his or her sin. Pastoral counseling and recognition of biblical standards for behaviour and moral accountability should not be deflected to the medical trade. Illnesses of the body, including organically premised illness which have an impact on mental and behavioural functioning, are the proper province of the physician. Destructive emotions and behaviour belong in the realm of soul care.

Biblical healing comes from understanding the nature of sin. Sinful acts often stem from sinful attitudes; they are not simply isolated events.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, instead of necessarily fo-

44. Jay Adams, “The Biblical perspective on the mind-body problem.” *Journal of Biblical Ethics in Medicine*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (Spring, 1993), pp. 21-30.

45. Payne suggests that addictive compulsions and habits might be properly viewed in biblical context as a “a repetitive, pleasure-seeking behaviour that is habitual in spite of moral or physical reasons (i.e., harm) that [presumably] should rationally [from the perspective of third person observation] preclude its practice and that displaces spiritual obligations.” Ed Payne, “Addiction as besetting sin.” *Journal of Ethics in Medicine*, Vol. 7, No. 1, (Fall, 1993), pp. 96-99.

46. Drunk once? Maybe more than once? No, it does not mean eternal damnation reserved for the devil and his angels anymore than being covetous on occasion, or that Noah is “lost” because he overly indulged in alcoholic elixir on at least one somewhat sordid occasion. But, it is rather clear, to whatever extent the apostle Paul’s writings may be credited with authority, that the thought-form and life-style of redeemed men will *not* be that of alcoholism, (no matter how officially “ethical” alcoholism, adultery, homosexuality, fornication, Gaia worship or other forms of idolotry and unrighteous in expediency may be in the highest echelons of civil society) (1 Cor. 6:8-13).

47. This observer recently heard someone discussing an ac-

cusings on specific acts (sins), focus is appropriately made on attitudes that underlie specific acts of sin.<sup>48</sup> Precipitating factors do have an impact on subsequent patterns of behaviour which often are symbolically reflected in interactions with the psychosocial environment. Terrell,<sup>49</sup> seeking to isolate areas in which medicalisation should be prevented and in which pastoral counseling is desirable, specifically highlights the area of “alcoholism.”

Shogren and Welch<sup>50</sup> have aptly defined addiction as a lordship problem: At root drunkards are worshipping another god. Drunkenness violates the command, “You shall have no other gods before me.” Alcohol worship is a form of self-worship. Addiction behaviour is marked by such self-centredness that a lengthy list of sins is likely to be committed by an addict against his family and others.

5. *Since addiction behaviour is a spiritual problem, it is appropriately subject to spiritual remedy.* Drunkenness is a slavery which rules outside of God’s kingdom. Recognition of this truism does not mean instant miracle deliverance from addiction behaviour any more than conversion means instant deliverance from other characteristic personality and behavioural traits. It does mean an altered perspective and intent of the heart. Welch draws attention to the necessity for participants in chemical addiction to build a wall that guards the heart. This includes understanding the idolatrous nature of addiction, and coming to know and live in obedience to a God who is bigger than the addict’s own desires. The addict must learn to know the Sustainer-Creator-Redeemed God and worship that God in lieu of the addict’s god of self-worship, and prepare for the ongoing battle that comes with being in God’s kingdom.<sup>51</sup> C&S

quaintance of theirs who graduated a decade ago from “Family Life Christian Center” (the high school appendage of Jimmy Swaggart Bible College and accumulative enterprises). The topic was a current assessment of the status of many classmates: arrests for drug violations, fornications, addictions and various criminal offenses were reported as ubiquitous. Heart righteousness is not likely to be successfully poured in from the top.

48. M. McCavanagh, “The concept of sin in pastoral counseling,” *Pastoral Counseling*, Vol. 41 (No. 2, 192), pp. 75-87.

49. Hilton Terrell, “Physician and pastor, co-laborers,” Part 2, “When the power is, and applications of it.” *Journal of Biblical Ethics in Medicine*, Vol. 7 No. 2 (Spring, 1993), pp. 31-44.

50. Gary Shogren and Edward T. Welch. *Running in Circles: How to Find Freedom from Addictive Behavior* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1995).

51. Edward T. Welch, “Sin or sickness? Biblical counseling and the medical model.” *Journal of Pastoral Practice*, Vol. X (No. 2, 1990), pp. 28-39.

## BOOK REVIEW NOTICE

In *Christianity & Society* Vol. VIII, No. 2 (April 1998), p. 28f., we reviewed a book by David Norrington called *To Preach or Not to Preach* (Paternoster Press, 1995). In the publisher information at the head of the review it was stated that the price of the book is £19.99. We have now been informed by the author that this information is incorrect and that the correct retail price is £10.99.

# JOHN MILTON'S ANATOMY OF PARLIAMENT

by Colin Wright

## PART I

ONE of William G. T. Shedd's recommendations to prospective candidates for the Christian ministry in his *Homiletics and Pastoral Theology* was to put the reading and study of William Shakespeare and John Milton close to the top of their list of professional duties.<sup>1</sup>

Modern ministers of the gospel have largely abandoned even the pretence of the kind and level of scholarship Shedd took for granted. Nevertheless they would almost to a man (or woman) have some acquaintance with the work of Shakespeare. John Milton's work is another kettle of fish. He is hardly known or read in Christian, let alone Reformed, circles now. This ignorance of Milton, by the clergy especially, is almost perfectly reflected in the world of scholarship at large, particularly ignorance of his prose writings. His work is rarely studied at all at school level now.<sup>2</sup> In the light of Shedd's estimate of Milton this represents a radical departure from the place Milton held in the affections of former generations of scholars.

Milton deserves better treatment, and it is my wish to see Christians take a renewed interest in his writings. This is not because of any predilection for Miltonian theology—some of his views I find particularly obnoxious—but because he was a great writer in a great age. Also, for all his unorthodoxy in some areas, he articulated many of the concerns of the orthodox with an unusual clarity. What is particularly fascinating about Milton's ideas is the sense of realism that they have. They were born out of the turmoil and trials of real life; they were answers to real burning questions that could not be evaded—they were not mere academic exercises. What is particularly instructive about his ideas is their origin and root in English history.

My particular concern is with Milton's *prose* writings. They have had neither the interest nor the attention that has been devoted to his poetical works. This is not surprising. His poetical works can be more easily analysed as an academic exercise—the poetic form takes precedence over the ideas, which are relegated to a secondary and antiquarian interest. His prose, however, has an urgency about it; it discusses issues of the day with a directness that compels serious consideration of the *content* even more than the style. And one thing the modern generation does not want is to face or consider seriously Milton's preponderantly *Christian*

ideas. In addition, Milton himself gave priority to his poetic productions—he said that he wrote his prose with his left hand, his poetry with his right hand.<sup>3</sup>

### THE CONTEXT OF MILTON'S DEVELOPING THOUGHT

#### *Education*

John Milton was born on Friday, 9 December 1608 not far from Cheapside in London. He was baptised in the parish church of All Hallows in Bread Street a few days before Christmas.

He awoke into no mean world; *Shakespeare* (1564-1616) was then forty-four, his mightiest works all completed though many yet unpublished; the poet *George Herbert* (1593-1633) was then a mere lad of fifteen, while *Ben Jonson* (1574-1637) the poet and dramatist was at his height at thirty-four. The philosopher *Francis Bacon* (1561-1626) was, at forty-seven, still ten years away from being Lord Chancellor of England. But the world had already made the acquaintance of his brilliant *Essays* (1597) and *The Advancement of Learning* (1605). John Donne (1572-1631), at thirty-six, was busy writing his famous poetry and sermons. Spenser (d. 1599) and Marlowe (d. 1593) had but a few summers past been illuminating the literary skyline. And John Boies and his colleagues were eagerly burning the midnight oil to produce, three years hence, the most influential literary publication of the last four hundred years: the Authorised Version of the English Bible.

John's father, also John, was forty-six years of age when the future poet was born, and his mother Sara was thirty-six. Both parents were devout Christians.

John Sr, as we shall call him, was brought up in the old faith but as he approached manhood he began to take a keen interest in the new faith, much to his father's annoyance. Matters came to a head when the son was about twenty years of age; his father, Richard Milton, caught him in the act of reading the English Bible. John was forced to leave home disinherited. His father never forgave him this betrayal of the family faith and the breach was never healed.<sup>4</sup> Thus did the father of our illustrious subject begin adult life by parting

1. William G. T. Shedd, *Homiletics and Pastoral Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1966 [1879]).

2. We can only speak here particularly of Great Britain.

3. There is no complete edition of his prose work in print right now. The last edition to be published was the Yale University Press series of 8 volumes in the 1950s. Most of the volumes are out of print and likely to remain so.

4. Richard was forgotten by the family; so much so that the poet never mentioned his grandfather in print, and his brother Christopher,

with all for the riches of glory in Christ. No doubt in years to come this attitude of stubborn refusal to bow the conscience would be imparted to his offspring.

John moved out of the Oxfordshire home at Stanton St John, just a few short miles north west of Oxford, and headed for London to seek his fortune. He became articled to a scrivener by the name of James Colbron, and by 1590 was himself active in the same profession.

Scriveners were not the most liked of characters in Elizabethan, or even in later Stuart, England. Whilst acting the part of a notary and a contract lawyer, by John's day the scrivener's chief task had become that of moneylender. One contemporary described the scrivener as "the instrument whereby the Devil worketh the frame of this wicked work of usury, he being rewarded with a good fleece for his labour." What he was objecting to was that they borrowed at one rate and lent at a higher, and also charged for the professional duties in writing up the legal contracts. Envy is by no means a modern phenomenon! Another described the scrivener as "a Christian cannibal that devours men alive. . . his life is so black that no ink can paint it forth, he is one of the Devil's engines to ruin others." But John Sr never attracted such criticism. His business ethics were always regarded as exemplary, and he brought to what was regarded as a seedy profession the integrity and acumen of a true Puritan.<sup>5</sup> His famous son could later write of him, without fear of contradiction, as "distinguished by the undeviating integrity of his life."

John and Sara dedicated their infant son to the Christian ministry. It was a commitment gladly made but one which would take a hefty toll on their middle class income. His biographer says:

John Milton was born into neither poverty nor riches. As the son of a prospering, respected citizen, he must have played on an ordinary street with the boys and girls of ordinary neighbours, and twice on Sundays sat stiffly in church alongside these children, accepting Christianity as a living religion. Love and understanding surrounded him. From an older sister and, soon, a younger brother he could learn the lessons of give and take, and in his teens he was destined to have a trusted friend. If we leave grandly unexplored the mystery of natural gifts, and do not try to set a date for the troubling sense of isolation that comes in time to the gifted ones, John's childhood may be said to have differed from that of most of his contemporaries in a single important respect: when his devoted parents early dedicated him to God's service, they had the good sense to instill in their son an enduring love of learning.<sup>6</sup>

John was not the first child of this union by any means. The couple had already buried several infants over a period of perhaps ten or more years. Only one, a daughter they christened Anne, had survived infancy. Such painful losses are especially influential in inducing a strong bond with the

though a Catholic, could not remember his grandfather's Christian name when John Aubrey interrogated him in later life.

5. John Sr counted among his clients a certain John Cotton, though it is unclear whether this was the famous divine. Cotton made several investments with the scrivener over a number of years. Economically-minded readers might be interested to know that John Sr did not operate a fractional reserve system. He borrowed from men like Cotton on clear and precise contracts for fixed terms. This money was then lent out on similar contracts with securities arranged for both borrower and lender.

6. William Riley Parker, *Milton, A Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996, 2nd ed.), Vol. 1, p. 7.

few who survive their early years. We know of no significant quarrel between father and son. The parent's disdain for the youth's poetic ambitions seems to have been the only cause of any friction between them. The father adored his son and lavished a fortune on his education.

Undoubtedly a significant influence on the young Milton was that of the parish church. In 1611, when John was nearly three years of age, Richard Stock became the new incumbent of the parish. Stock was a Puritan, a blunt, practical man whose sermons spoke to the point. In addition, he regularly catechised all the parish children; boys and girls on alternate days. On top of this thrice-weekly diet of Scripture teaching and the two long if homely sermons, John probably saw a lot of Stock at home too. The pastor was frequently involved in assisting his parishioners with wills and other legal matters and would doubtless have dealt often with John's scrivener father. The parish of All Hallows, a tightly knit community consisting of less than four score dwellings, was populated by businessmen; it reeked of the burgeoning middle class and their Protestant work ethic. Among its number could be found men like John Venn, a silk merchant, who would one day become a Member of Parliament and later sign the king's death warrant.

John's early education was undertaken by a private tutor, a young and vocal Scotch Presbyterian by the name of Thomas Young.<sup>7</sup> Young imbued Milton with a love of Latin and classical literature. By the age of ten he was also an ardent poet, no doubt the result of Young's influence and, in particular, of the classical poetry to which he introduced his charge. It was probably also from Young that Milton first imbibed his early Presbyterian views of church government and his attachment to that party, though we have no clear indication of this. Many young men seem to have grown up around this time and accepted the Presbyterian way as the biblical pattern, without any real personal study of the subject. What each of them understood by it is open to question, and it would therefore have been no surprise when a number of them later deserted the ranks with little seeming change of theology.<sup>8</sup> When Young left England in 1620 to

7. There is some debate as to the position of Young in Milton's education. Some biographers, e.g. Don M. Wolfe, place him in St Paul's as Milton's teacher there, but Parker's research, which places him as Milton's private tutor before he entered St Paul's, is almost certainly more accurate. Cf. Don M. Wolfe, *Milton in the Puritan Tradition* (London: Cohen & West, 1963), p. 2. Wolfe's work is disappointing in its historical analysis, leaning to generalisations and often displaying little understanding of Milton's historical context. It ends up being patently false. In one passage, for instance, he refers to "the average city Puritan" as one who "distrusted the culture of the aristocracy, cared little for art and music, recoiled from delight in sensuous pleasure . . . He wore plain clothes, and cut his hair short" (p. 4). He could only maintain this by un-puritanning most of the Puritans; only the Roundheads, for instance, cut their hair short and so got their nickname. See Lucy Hutchinson, *Memoirs of Colonel Hutchinson* (London, Dent, 1908), p. 95.

8. See esp. John Owen's description of his own "conversion" to Independency or Congregationalism. Speaking of an earlier book—*The Duty of Pastors and People Distinguished*—written by him in 1643 when he was but twenty six, he reminisced: "The controversy between Independency and Presbytery was young also, nor, by me clearly understood, especially as stated on the congregational side . . . Only, being unacquainted with the congregational way, I professed myself to own the other party, not knowing but that my principles were suited to their judgement and profession, having looked very little farther into those affairs than I was led by an opposition to Episcopacy and ceremonies. Upon a review of what I had there asserted, I found that my principles were far more suited to what is

become pastor of the English church in Hamburg, the decision was made to send John to St Paul's grammar school, within walking distance of his home.<sup>9</sup> Young remained Milton's life-long friend, dying when Milton was forty-seven.<sup>10</sup>

Home life played a significant part in the moulding of the future poet also. John's parents were concerned about developing the whole man in truly biblical and Puritan fashion. The father's passionate interest in music was enthusiastically shared with his offspring and though, as we remarked above, the parents instilled in their eldest son an abiding passion for learning, it was many a year before the father could be reconciled to junior's interest in poetry. John Sr was well known for his musical talents. In Thomas Ravenscroft's *The Whole Booke of Psalmes* Milton Sr contributed two settings of the tune *York* and a harmonisation of *Norwich*. As Riley informs us: "Whatever tune the populace sang about scriveners, the Englishmen who gathered together to sing psalms were indebted to the skill of Milton [Sr] after 1621."<sup>11</sup> It is not without significance that some of the son's earliest literary essays were metrical versions and paraphrased poetic forms of the Psalms.

#### At University

Milton was admitted to Christ College, Cambridge on 12th February 1625, only two months after his sixteenth birthday. This would not have seemed inordinately early for a bright student in the early seventeenth century. Bishop Hall was admitted to Oxford at fifteen and John Howe commenced his studies there at seventeen. Four years younger than Milton, John Owen, his great Cromwellian compatriot, was to enter Oxford at a mere twelve years of age. But this was exceptional even in that period.

We are given no explicit reasons why Cambridge should have been chosen in preference to Oxford. Most of Milton's friends were Oxford men. On the other hand, his pastor Richard Stock was Cambridge educated. So too was the All Hallows curate Brian Walton, later famous for his *Polyglot Bible*, to which John Owen took such keen exception. Perhaps, also, Oxford still retained too many unhappy memories for the father. Furthermore it needs to be remembered that it was Cambridge and not Oxford that was the training ground of Puritan ministers, John Owen and John Howe being notable exceptions. Milton's intentions at this time were unwaveringly set on the Christian ministry, an ambition that was only thwarted by the Laudian tyranny.

His undergraduate studies would have done little to further his future course as a political thinker or poet.

the judgement and practice of the congregational men than those of the presbyterian." *A Review of the True Nature of Schism* (1657) in the *Works of John Owen*, Vol. 13, p. 222-3 (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1967).

9. William Riley Parker, *Milton, A Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996, 2nd ed.). I am indebted to Parker for much of the biographical material included here.

10. This is the Thomas Young whose initials are found in the acronym SMECTYMNUUS. The others are Stephen Marshal, Edmund Calamy, Matthew Newcomen and William Spurstow. Under this pseudonym they published a reply in 1641 to Bishop Hall's defence of episcopacy. Milton came to their defence by writing *Animadversions upon The Remonstrant's Defence against Smectymnus* in reply to Hall's rejoinder, and in the following year (1642) wrote *An Apology for Smectymnus* in reply to the anonymous *A Modest Confutation*, that sought to discredit Milton's earlier argument by defaming his character.

11. Parker, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

Cambridge examinations and exercises would have concentrated on the medieval requirement of skill in disputation. Parker's description is revealing:

From their freshman year Cambridge boys were trained to argue, in Latin, on any subject (the subjects were unimportant) according to traditional, well-defined techniques of ancient logic and rhetoric. They were trained to give classical illustrations, to overwhelm their opponents with reputable authorities, and to embellish their learned bickering with graceful allusions. Conviction was irrelevant; one must be prepared to debate either side of a question. Reason and common sense were also irrelevant, for, in practice, success in argument depended upon one's effective use of the established techniques. . . . Such was the ideal at which Milton's four years of undergraduate instruction had been directed.<sup>12</sup>

But perhaps we should observe that the intention was well-meaning, if overdone. The training to debate both sides of an argument was a powerful method of teaching the need to look at an argument from every possible angle before hurrying into a commitment to one side or the other. It is not as if no facts were relevant in Milton's university course, but the facts were secondary to the methodology of debate being taught. Obviously the students were expected to read widely and deeply to obtain the "ammunition" for their arguments. Nowadays, teenage boys are given no instruction in the methodology of debate, of forming arguments or dissecting them, of searching out faulty conclusions. Their heads are filled with the facts (i.e. *subjects*), but they have no idea how to use them.<sup>13</sup>

Milton graduated Bachelor of Arts in April 1629 and proceeded to the three year Masters course. This too was largely built around the development of disputational skills and deeper reading in scholastic and Aristotelian philosophy. Milton hated it and both in public and private excoriated the futility of it all. Though genuine intellectual thinking had moved on considerably since the Renaissance and Reformation, Oxford and Cambridge persisted in their medieval scholastic curricula. As late as the 1690s John Locke was still writing stinging criticisms of their outdated systems in his *Essay on Human Understanding* (not that he wrote anything much better!). Nevertheless, course requirements were few and Milton had wide scope to indulge his own predilections in study. He continued to read widely, though much time was spent in developing his poetical skills.

But for all the downside of his study requirements, university opened up a whole new world to Milton. It has often been said, with some degree of truthfulness, that one should go to university for an education not a degree. This was particularly so for Milton. He rubbed shoulders with many who, like him, would one day walk the public stage. He influenced and was influenced by them. Whatever political or religious stance many of them later took, was the result of the university melting pot into which they had all been cast. Three of Milton's contemporaries at Christ College—Robert

12. Parker, *op. cit.*, p. 51-52.

13. See Dorothy L. Sayers' brilliant and informative essay "The Lost Tools of Learning (1947)" reprinted in *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, vol. IV, No. 1, Summer 1977, pp. 10-25. UK readers may obtain a free duplicated version from C. Wright, 22 Afan Valley Road, Cimla, Neath, SA11 3SN if the request is accompanied by an A4 SAE. Another useful critique of modern shortcomings in this respect is Susan Stebbing, *Thinking to Some Purpose* (Harmondsworth: Pelican Books).

Chestlin, George Ecoppe and Robert Pory—were ejected from their churches under the Protectorate.<sup>14</sup> He would also have conversed with John Shaw later to become a favourite among Cromwell's preachers. Samuel Bolton (1606-1654), Puritan, later to become a member of the Westminster Assembly and author of numerous books including *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom*,<sup>15</sup> was among his acquaintances. Bolton was a powerful figure at Christ's, becoming a Doctor of Divinity there and rising to become Master of the college. In 1651 he was appointed Vice-Chancellor of the University, a post he retained until his untimely death in 1654.

Another of those who suffered under the Great Ejection of 1662, John Hieron, was a classmate of Milton's. We shall quote Parker, whose long list is highly illuminating. Of Milton's contemporaries at Christ's, he writes:

William Boteler and Thomas Bate both died fighting for the King in 1644. Charles Lucas became a famous cavalry leader, fought for his royal master at Marston Moor, and was shot after the surrender of Colchester in 1648. Justinian Isham lent money to Charles and suffered imprisonment for his loyalty. . . Edward Hartop, on the other hand, raised a regiment for the Parliament. Henry Massingberd was created a baronet by Cromwell, and his brother Drayner was a colonel in the parliamentary army. . . The paths of Milton and his College contemporaries later crossed in strange ways. The father of George Downham was to license one of Milton's pamphlets addressed to Parliament. One of the members of that Parliament was William Ellis, who became Solicitor-General under both the Cromwells. Another was Luke Robinson, two years junior to Milton at Christ's, who became an original member of the republican Council of State and voted for John Milton's appointment as its Secretary for Foreign Languages.<sup>16</sup>

Whatever the value of the "official" education at Cambridge, the influence of involvement with a generation of students who thought so keenly and lived so fully was considerable.

#### *Private Studies and Travels*

In the five year period that followed the award of his Master's degree, Milton engaged in a programme of intense study at his father's home in Hammersmith and later at Horton. He would probably have maintained, if asked, that it was here that he gained his real literary education. The majority of his time, he tells us in *Second Defence*, was spent delving into the Greek and Latin classics. We know however that his interests were much broader, and that he read avidly in history and even kept abreast of the latest developments in mathematics and musical theory. The classics strike us today as a rather dry and cloistered subject of study. However, they were certainly not viewed that way in Milton's day. The study of the Greek and Latin masters was often cited as the root cause of all the social and political upheaval

of the times. Later in the century, Thomas Hobbes was to fulminate against the Universities for their teaching of the classics:

Men, grown weary at last of the insolence of the priests, and examining the truth of those doctrines that were put upon them, began to search the sense of the Scriptures, as they are in the learned languages; and consequently (studying Greek and Latin) became acquainted with the democratical principles of Aristotle and Cicero, and from the love of their eloquence fell in love with their politics, and that more and more, till it grew into the rebellion we now talk of.<sup>17</sup>

We also know that he studied Dante and Boccaccio, and from his commonplace book we learn that he read deeply in the history of the Christian church. He also, as far as time allowed, studied a number of volumes of the works of the early Fathers.

After his mother's death in 1637, Milton decided to explore the continent. For nearly two years, in 1638 and 1639, he journeyed through France, Switzerland and Italy, meeting and discoursing with eminent minds in the great centres of learning. Despite his Protestant convictions he enjoyed amicable relations with the great humanist scholars of Italy and made the acquaintance of Galileo. In Geneva he spent time in the company of the great Protestant theologian, John Deodati. Deodati's nephew lived in London and had been a close friend of Milton's for many years.

It was while he was in Italy that he heard the news of the political unrest in England, and of the struggle that was developing between king and Parliament. Charles, like his father James, had little use for constitutional niceties. He was firmly of the opinion that his royal position gave him the right to treat Englishmen as his chattels, to dispense monopolies of trade at his pleasure, and to raise tax revenue without the consent of Parliament. It was in the light of these actions in particular that Milton began to develop his political theory. Important questions had to be answered: What was the nature of royal office? How was it granted, and how could it, if at all, be revoked? What place did the people themselves have in the determination of the laws by which they would be governed, and what say did they have in how they would be taxed? What place did Parliament occupy in relation to the king, and in relation to the people? What did it mean, to say that England was a monarchy? And not least, in what ways, if any, was Charles deviating from the constitution in his current actions?<sup>18</sup> Milton determined to hurry home and see what contribution he could make to the support of Parliament and the defence of English liberties. In our second essay we plan to offer an insight into the manner in which he entered the lists of that noble struggle. C&S

14. It is not always easy to recognise the integrity, the courage or the self-sacrifice of those who differ from us. On "our side" they are martyrs for the cause, but opponents only get "what's coming to them."

15. Samuel Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1964 [first published 1645]). The republication of Bolton's excellent and truly theonomic work by the Trust warrants our admiration and gratitude. "The law," he said, "sends us to the Gospel for our justification; the Gospel sends us to the law to frame our way of life."

16. Parker, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

17. Thomas Hobbes, *Behemoth, or the Long Parliament*. Quoted in David Armitage, Armand Himy, Quentin Skinner (eds), *Milton and Republicanism* (Cambridge: University Press, 1998), p. 6.

18. It is important to stress here, against the misconceptions of those readers who live in countries that have so-called *written* constitutions, that England too has a constitution. It does not admit of being reduced to a rational plan like most modern, post-Enlightenment constitutions, e.g. France and the USA, but it is clearly defined in the traditions of our institutions, being developed piecemeal over more than a millennium. Even in these apostate days, politicians still find it difficult to cut across those constitutional traditions, most of which are deeply imbued with Christian principles.

# HUMANISM: TRUST IN MAN—RUIN OF THE NATIONS

## A SERMON ON ISAIAH, CHAPTER 3<sup>†</sup>

by *Jean-Marc Berthoud*

THE third chapter of Isaiah shows us that where we place our trust has great importance. It will inevitably have repercussions, not only of a personal and spiritual kind, but also politically and socially. While placing one's trust in God will produce a healthy personal life and hence a healthy society, placing one's trust in man—the heart of all idolatry—will result in disorder in personal life and produce a corrupt society. Such self-worship will surely bring about the judgement of God on the individuals who practise it, but it will also bring about the wrath of God against the societies and nations which turn away from the living God they knew by placing their trust in creatures rather than the Creator. The prophet describes these effects of this deadly error in Isaiah Chapter 3.

Our text is divided into three parts:

A. The judgement of God is pronounced against the societies and the nations which place their trust in man (vv. 1-7).

B. God evaluates the state of the kingdom of Judah and pronounces his divine judgement upon those who thus lead the nation to its destruction (vv. 8-15).

C. Finally, Isaiah describes the corrupting effects of this trust in man upon the behaviour of the women belonging to the leadership of Jerusalem and Judah.

### A. THE JUDGEMENT OF GOD UPON THE SOCIETIES AND NATIONS WHO PLACE THEIR TRUST IN MAN

#### 1. *God removes all support*

The inhabitants of Judah had declared their independence in the face of God and undertook to manage their political affairs without him, excluding the Sovereign God from their lives, trusting in themselves and their ability to handle secondary causes, i.e. created causes: external alliances, fortification of cities, financial power, international

commerce, military strength, and even the invocation and manipulation of occult powers. Now God enters into judgement against Jerusalem and against Judah, and his judgement will take a very precise form, that of taking away all support (legitimate and illegitimate) by which his people has replaced the exclusive trust which it was to place in God.

*See now, the Lord, the LORD Almighty  
is about to take from Jerusalem and Judah  
both supply and support. (v. 3:1a)*

It is God himself, the God of the covenant, the Lord—*Yahweh*—the Sovereign God of all the earth, the Lord of hosts—*Adonai Sabaoth*—who intervenes to take all support from both Judah and Jerusalem. He will show his people the vanity, the stupidity, the insanity of leaning on idols and especially this supreme idol: man.

The consequences of such unfaithfulness are, however, not simply spiritual and individual ones. Such falling away from God also has disastrous social and political consequences. For such deceitful trust in man leads to the collapse of society.

This destruction has two aspects, one material, the other structural. When examining these two aspects closely, we will see that God strikes his people in a very precise manner by taking away from them the very means in which they had wickedly placed their trust.

#### 2. *God removes the material supports*

God removes from Judah and Jerusalem “All supplies of food and all supplies of water” (v. 1b). These are the means—water and bread,—most essential to the survival of the nation, which are removed first. Since Judah had offended the Creator, it is only just that the blessings of the creation covenant should be taken away from it first. Bread and water vanish like smoke. There is drought and famine. The material foundation of the life of the country disappears. True, natural causes, secondary causes, will produce this famine. But these real secondary causes are totally under the control of the Sovereign God who uses their normal functioning in

<sup>†</sup> Preached at the Evangelical Baptist Church, Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1997. Translated and adapted from the French by Ellen Myers.



his good will: as blessing or curse, as required by the behaviour of his people.

### 3. *Structural supports are removed*

Then follows the disappearance of the elites of the country. The structures of the government of the nation break down. The elites are no longer there. God removes from Jerusalem and from Judah

*the hero and the warrior,  
the judge and the prophet,  
the soothsayer and elder,  
the captain of fifty and man of rank,  
the counselor, skilled craftsman, and clever enchanter.* (vv. 2-3)

On the historical plane this prophecy doubtless refers to the first deportation from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 598 B.C. Then, by a dramatic act of war, an act showing the transcendent power of God upon history, the elites of Judah were transported to Babylon (2 Kings 24:14-16).

But our text speaks to us above all about another form of God's judgement—immanent, sociological and historical—where God acts through the normal process of decomposition of a society which rejects the rules of its health and life. By this means God destroys *today* the social structure of the nations which knew him at one time but which today rise up against him. Let us see how Isaiah describes the process of the collapse of the government structures of the kingdom of Judah

(a) The first to disappear are *the hero, the champion, the top-notch soldier and warrior, the brave soldier*. What is mentioned here first is the ability of a country to defend itself. In 598 B.C. this ability was destroyed by the defeat suffered by Judah at the hands of the Babylonians and by the deportation of all her military and civil high officials to Chaldea. But as we can see everywhere in the West today, it is possible to make the defensive ability of a nation disappear by the self-destruction of its structure of command. A country which has known God and which rejects him, will see the military means necessary to assure its defence disappear pursuant to its apostasy.

(b) Then God removes *the judge and the prophet*. Here, too, we can see the disappearance, by internal corruption, of these two functions so essential to life and the healthy structuring of every society: the exercise of justice and the exact discernment of good and evil. The magistrate who represents here the power of the State may himself become weak. The ability to govern may disappear. The virtues of strength and prudence which give authority to the one who is in charge of governing a nation may be taken from him. The magistrates may become so weak that they become unable to extricate themselves from the currents of opinion which blow the public here and there.

But there is more. The prophet is mentioned here with the judge. The prophet of the time of Isaiah—he who faithfully proclaims the word which God has given him to announce to the people and its leaders—must be associated with the obedient church which also must accomplish this prophetic task. For God has not given the church the use of force as a means of allowing her to impose the truth she must proclaim to the nation; on the other hand, the State, the magistrates, while they have force (the sword—Rom. 13), are not able by themselves to define exactly and justly the difference between good and evil. For that the magistrate

depends upon the faithful preaching of the word of God by the church, which will give him the insight he needs to accomplish justly his necessary task. And today, the word of prophecy—that is, the faithful preaching of the word of God by the church—has been removed from our nations by God himself. By what is nothing else but a terrible judgement, God has permitted the unleashing of destructive critiques of the Bible in university theological departments and seminaries. The consequence of this has been the disappearance of the faithful preaching of God's word in almost all the churches.

(c) God will remove *the soothsayer and the elder*. Once biblical preaching has been removed, once the administration of justice no longer has a transcendent root in God and his infallible law, men—who have an irresistible need for certainties—turn to those who claim to have revelations about the beyond: the soothsayers. The wise elders of the land rely on these false revelations, and by doing this they lose all their wisdom; instead of being a support of those who rule the nation they become a source of confusion and weakness.

When the politicians consult the soothsayers—or the fraudulent preaching of supposedly responsible Christians (or that new form of divination called “public opinion polls”)—power is close to having lost all real authority, all ability to rule the country rightly.

(d) Next God removes *the captain of fifty and the man of rank*, that is those who have administrative charges at the local level (the group of fifty) and at the level of the royal government, those in the favour of the king.

(e) Next God removes *the counselor and the skilled craftsman*. Those who have common sense disappear, or else, if they still exist, they are prevented from speaking up, and thus the counsel they might have given is lost for all. The disintegration of the country goes to the destruction of honest trades, the disappearance of capable, conscientious and honest workers. What a disaster for a country when one can no longer find good craftsmen!

(f) Finally, and here we are struck by the biting irony of the prophet, God will even remove those who have become the preferred counselors of the ruler, the *clever enchanters*, the experts in the occult arts. It is not without punishment, the prophet tells us, that one turns away from God, that one rejects his good law, the law which, as one of its principal functions, gives the nation healthy structures, the law which is the source of social life and public health.

### 4. *The disappearance of the healthy structures of society—injustice and anarchy*

The nation has revolted against God. It has placed its trust in man and in purely human and earthly means. God and the demands of his law have been totally discarded from public life. The result? God himself removes all the healthy structures of society (v. 1). But the extent of his judgement is not limited to removal. He does more. He gives. He gives the land new leaders, not for its good but as a consequence of his first judgement in order to complete the destruction of the nation which has rebelled against him (v. 4). The normal purpose of the authority given by God is to repress the forces of chaos present in every society (Rom. 13). Now God will give Judah weak leaders. This will result in an increase of the anarchy which has taken root in the country. Thus we read in our text these terrible words:

*I will make boys their officials;  
mere children will govern them.  
People will oppress each other—  
man against man, neighbour against neighbour.  
The young will rise up against the old,  
the base against the honourable.  
A man will seize one of his brothers  
at his father's home, and say,  
"You have a cloak, you be our leader,  
take charge of this heap of ruins!"  
But in that day he will cry out, "I have no remedy,  
I have no food or clothing in my house;  
do not make me the leader of the people." (vv. 4-7)*

Thus the judgement of God on those who place their trust in man is not limited to taking away every support they have, but even gives them false supports, harmful supports, supports which will totally destroy the nation.

(i) *The government of boys*

These are no longer the legitimate authorities of the country: elders, leaders in war, judges, parents, teachers, entrepreneurs, who hold the destiny of the nation in their hands, but simple boys, young people, adolescents. The world is upside down. Children give orders to their parents, students to their teachers, soldiers to officers, church members to pastors, the people to the government. In a word, it is opinion and opinion makers who rule as masters.

Our text speaks to us above all of that spirit of adolescence which becomes for some the permanent form of their character. For in every unstructured society many people remain adolescents all their lives. They never reach the state of adulthood; they take their dreams for realities, and if unfortunately they obtain power, they even impose their Utopias on their entire societies. It is such perpetual adolescents, the Robespierres, the Saint Justs, the Lenins, the Hitlers, the Mao Tse Tungs, the Pol Pots (and many other contemporary figures could be added to this list) who have established the era of totalitarianism, the era of idealist Utopias, which shed blood and destroy every human community.

Today there are numerous nations ruled by boys! E. J. Young well explains the full meaning of our text "In all probability Isaiah does not speak here simply of those who are young in age, but of those who in their experience and abilities are so weak and incompetent that they act like young people . . . This lack of maturity, of judgement and of decision can cause immense harm to the nation . . . The nation would be afflicted by a mass of inept bureaucrats and leaders coming from the dregs of society. When men whose experience and maturity are those of children seize the reins of the state, chaos must inevitably follow." And this is the chaos which our text goes on to describe.

(ii) *Conflict and anarchy*

The most heated competition follows social co-operation. Class war, war between the generations (and the sexes), enmity of each man against his neighbour, replace the harmony of the elements of society which are made to complement and help each other.

Under the weak conduct of incapable leaders everything breaks apart; anarchy takes hold; men with naturally evil hearts show themselves openly as enemies of their neighbours. Society becomes a pack of rats tearing each other

apart. As there is no longer a public power to restrain evil, the most perverse elements of society gain the upper hand. Since justice is no longer oriented by a transcendent loyalty, no longer based upon the law of God, the judge perverts the exercise of his function even to the point of justifying the criminal and condemning the innocent. Here Isaiah puts his finger on the characteristic elements of such a society.

(a) Oppression and force determine the habitual behaviour of the entire people. The strongest, most rapacious, most cynical triumph. The strong gain and the weak are crushed. As the English say: life has become a rat race.

(b) Children will treat old people with arrogance, adolescents will torment their elders, the young will contemptuously attack the old. This is because the child, due to the destruction of the biblical structures of family and school, has simply not been educated; his bad inclinations have not been restrained. The Commandment to honour one's parents has been forgotten. People no longer understand the meaning of this ordinance of Leviticus: "Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the LORD" (Lev. 19:32).

(c) Finally, without the respect of the young for the older generations there cannot exist any transmission of knowledge, nor any wisdom. It is evident than in such a society what is vulgar and vile will gain the upper hand. This is what is called the cultural collapse of society, the rule of the lowest, ugliest and weakest denominator.

There is no remedy in such a situation. It is the universal rule of mediocrity. In such a situation of spiritual, moral, social and political anarchy, an appeal is made to any kind of social upstart to try to remedy the situation. But this is done on an exclusively political basis. The criteria of choice are the most insignificant: "You have a cloak! You do well on stage. You look good, you please women voters" etc. But no one thinks himself able to rebuild such a heap of ruins. Everyone walks past, claiming not to have the vocation of nurse, social worker, and not able to undertake the healing of the State. Everyone declines, refusing the responsibility of public affairs. And doubtless it is better thus when we think of the men who in recent history discovered in themselves a vocation as saviours of their nation: a Napoleon, a Lenin, a Mussolini and a Hitler. Stalin, the "little father of the people," actually saw himself as "the chief engineer of society."

B. HOW GOD VIEWS THE STATE OF THE NATION

*Jerusalem staggers, Judah is falling,  
their words and deeds are against the LORD,  
defying his glorious presence.  
The look on their faces testifies against them;  
They parade their sin like Sodom; they do not hide it.  
Woe to them! They have brought disaster upon themselves. (vv. 8-9)*

Jerusalem staggers. No, worse, she breaks down. And the cause of her national breakdown is evident. By their words and their deeds, in theory and in practice the entire nation has turned against God. Moreover, when she finally turns towards God, it is not to return to him in a movement of repentance and faith, but to flout him, to insult him, to defy his glorious presence (v. 8).

Their very audacity testifies against them, the text tells

us. That is, they no longer even seek to cover by a varnish of pretended piety the expression of their feelings of hate against God. Like Sodom they even publicise openly and spread out in plain daylight, with arrogance and pride, their hateful sins. They do not even try to hide their vices as do the hypocrites who by their very duplicity indirectly approve of the good they did not do. Abandoned to this perversion man affirms in this manner that he is free, that he can rightfully commit any infamous deed whatever. And woe to those who would dare to reproach him in the slightest! This is the lawless spirit, the very spirit of the Antichrist, the supreme enemy of God, of man and of society.

*Woe to them! They have brought disaster upon themselves.  
Tell the righteous it will be well with them,  
for they will enjoy the fruit of their deeds.  
Woe to the wicked! Disaster is upon them!  
They will be paid back for what their hands have done* (v. 9b-11)

One reaps what one sows. But this principle is equally valid for the righteous, for him who stands upon the righteousness of Christ. Thus there appears in this dark picture one marvelous promise: “Tell the righteous it will be well with them, for they will enjoy the fruit of their deeds” (v. 10). In the general catastrophe of the nation God preserves a righteous remnant, a remnant whom he will maintain, protect and lead without fail and in triumph into his kingdom.

God notes the state of government of the rebellious nation and raises up his tribunal for the judgement.

*Youths oppress my people,  
women rule over them.  
O my people, your guides lead you astray;  
they turn you from the path.* (v. 12)

The world is turned upside down. Youths, women, weak and capricious beings oppress the people. These very leaders, the ones who should lead the people aright, are the very ones who lead them astray, who make them lose the right way. And not only do they lead the people in the wrong ways, but they even work to efface all the traces which could still show the good way. They wipe out, they spoil, they make impassable, they swallow up the way of the truth and life in the labyrinths of lies which they oppose to God’s law. Now the disaster of the nation is at its zenith, evil can hardly go any further. In this extremity God arises to judge:

*The LORD takes his place in court;  
he rises to judge the people.  
The LORD enters into judgement against the  
elders and leaders of his people:  
It is you who have ruined my vineyard;  
the plunder from the poor is in your houses.  
What do you mean by crushing my people  
and grinding the faces of the poor? declares the Lord,  
the LORD Almighty.* (vv. 13-15)

The vineyard of God is his people. This people does not belong to the elders and the leaders. They are not its absolute owners, free to do to them what they like. And even if they were its owners, they should not exploit the vineyard God has entrusted to them with such greed, not leaving anything for the poor to glean.

### C. FEMINISM: THE PRESENT IMAGE OF HUMANISM

Next the prophet examines the effects of this tendency of the man to place his trust in himself, to idolise himself (humanism), upon the woman. He discovers that while this self-reliance of man brings about the collapse of his authority, i.e. his feminisation (hence a collapsed society without strength), it has, on the other hand, a contrary effect upon the woman who becomes masculine and man-like. This is what we call today *feminism*. In fact, feminism is but a by-product of humanism. If the man abandons what gives him his strength, the trust he puts in the true God, he will inevitably see the woman in her turn lose all trust in man. We must remember that while the man is the glory of God, the woman is the glory of the man. While the man is the helper of God, the woman is the helper of the man. As the man will be, so will his wife be. If the man is godly and faithful, that is, truly man, and fully manly, his wife, his opposite, will be truly woman. Thus the bloom, the femininity of the woman will depend upon the fact that her opposite will be truly a man, that is, a man who depends upon God and not on himself. Thus, when the man rejects his relation of dependence upon God, the woman, his opposite, becomes unable to live out a relation of real dependence towards him. It is then that she will undergo an irresistible attraction to autonomy, independence, false liberty. Here we see the true source of feminism. To fight this scourge which destroys the body of society, we must attack the problem at the root: the self-dependence of man, his idolatry of himself. For while humanism is the worship of man, feminism is the by-product. It is the worship of woman. And both bear the mark of revolt against God.

Isaiah begins by a description of the feminist mentality of his time:

*The LORD says, “the women of Zion are haughty,  
walking along with outstretched necks, flirting with their eyes,  
tripping along with mincing steps,  
with ornaments jingling on their ankles.”* (v. 16)

In a few words we have here a gripping portrait of the physical walk of these proud women, a full-length portrait from neck to ankles, from head to foot. The attitude of these women is characterised by their *pride*. They think of themselves very highly; they rank at the top in their own eyes. Their entire attitude is the opposite of humility and modesty. Their entire bodies show a feeling of superiority and mastery. Everything about them is designed to announce the passage of a proud and wanton woman. Their entire attitude suggest that the society of Judah has come to practise hedonism, an ethic which sees in pleasure and physical happiness the only purpose in life. For them—and in this they are the true reflection of their men—life is summed up by the old proverb “Let us eat, drink and have sex, for tomorrow we die.” This is the worship of appearances, the will to manipulate others. E. J. Young well explains the true result of such an attitude: “When women are consumed by total vanity and entirely centered upon themselves, the cancer of moral decadence consumes the very heart of the nation.”

But God does not put up with this pride of women any more than that of the men. While for the latter his judgement consists in the destruction of their false idols, for the former he will tear off the tawdry finery of their false beauty:

*The Lord will bring sores on the heads of the women of Zion,  
The LORD will make their scalps bald.  
In that day the LORD will snatch away their finery:  
and bangles and headbands and crescent necklaces,  
the earrings and bracelets and veils,  
the headdresses and ankle chains and sashes,  
the perfume bottles and charms,  
the signet rings and nose rings,  
and fine robes and the capes and cloaks, the purses  
and mirrors, and the linen garments and tiaras and shawls.  
Instead of fragrance there will be a stench;  
instead of well-dressed hair, baldness;  
instead of beauty, branding.* (vv. 18-14)

How will this come to pass? By war. The catastrophe which will cast this civilisation of rare sophistication to the ground is invasion and the destruction of war: “Your men will fall by the sword, your warriors in battle” (v. 25). Then the prophet

turns to the gate of the city—the place where the elders, to whom the government of the city was entrusted, assemble—to describe the calamity: “The gates of Zion will lament and mourn; destitute, she will sit on the ground” (v. 26).

Here the holy city is described as a woman sitting comfortless on the ground. Her pride is finally humbled. And this state of complete humiliation is what we must all pass through if we want to find again our true Lord, that Branch of the Lord who is the glory of the Father and who will know how to take care of his spouse, Jerusalem, the holy city, nourish her with his own life, and clothe her with his glory. This is the theme to which Isaiah turns in the next chapter of his prophecy:

*In that day the Branch of the LORD will be beautiful and glorious,  
and the fruit of the land will be the pride and glory of the survivors  
in Israel.* (Is. 4:2) C&S

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# Book Reviews

## THE BONDAGE OF THE WILL—A DEFENCE OF THE ORTHODOX DOCTRINE OF HUMAN CHOICE AGAINST PIGHIUS

BY JOHN CALVIN  
(EDITED BY A. N. S. LANE  
TRANSLATED BY G. I. DAVIES)

Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1996,  
244 pages + xxxix (including indices),  
paperback, £19.99, ISBN 0-85364-718-6

REVIEWED BY COLIN WRIGHT

It was with intense gratification that many of us received the news last year, albeit over forty years too late, that Tom Finney was to get a knighthood. But the significance of that event cannot begin to be compared with the magnificent work of Messrs A. Lane and Graham Davies in translating and editing this great text of Calvin's. Doubtless they will never get that sought-after letter from the Palace—our modern sense of priorities is definitely and seriously askew—but a Christian spirit would suggest a peerage even could be justified for their contribution to the English church.

This is the second volume in the series *Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought*. It is being published in English for the first time, having been written in 1543. Why such a delay should ever have occurred is inexplicable. A second projected part, later published as *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* also suffered scant attention from the English speaking church. It was not translated until 1856 when Henry Cole published an excellent translation. But it never made its way into the classic English edition of Calvin published by the Calvin Translation Society. This too is mysterious. That

Calvin's *Sermons on Election and Reprobation* were also out of print in English for over 400 years (from John Field's 1579 edition to Engelsma's 1996 edition) only adds to the mystery. One is tempted to ask whether the church has had a problem with the contents, but that's a matter I don't want to go into here.

The editor, A. N. S. Lane, and the translator, Graham Davies, have done their work exceedingly well and are to be congratulated for a fine volume. Davies' translation manages to retain the dignity of Calvin's Latin text while producing eminently readable English. Lane's editing is superb, the footnotes are meticulously researched, highly informative and apt, making this one of the best published translations I have seen of any work. In many instances the footnotes act as a useful commentary on important aspects of the debate. For instance, when Pighius argues for the necessity of the church for interpreting Scripture Lane perceptively informs the reader (page 54, n.99) “It is ironical that while Calvin argues for the impossibility of obeying God's Word, Pighius argues for the impossibility of understanding it.” While on page 137 (n. 4) he draws our attention to the crunch issue of the debate between Pighius and Calvin: “Here is the classic Reformation divide: for the Reformers, the true church is that which truly preaches the word of God; for Rome the true meaning of the word of God is that given to it by the church.” The editor has also written an excellent introduction to the whole that is both instructive and a delight to read. Too often introductions are boring academic pieces that merely pad out the intended volume; here we have one that we only wish could have been longer. Both editor and translator have thoroughly researched their field and are masters of their subject. At least from their viewpoint this has been a labour of love rather than a pecuniary-driven venture. Attention to detail has been extraordinary; even the tracing and checking of Calvin's quotations took considerably longer than the original writing of the book, and numerous international Calvin scholars have been co-opted to make this as good a volume as it can

be. It will be a standard for years to come.

But if we can thus laud the editor and translator, what might we say of the author? This work is a *tour de force* by any standard. It is to Christian literature what Handel's *Messiah* is to Christian music (and written at about the same furious speed!). The reviewer would die a happy man if he could produce just one volume like this in his lifetime.

Calvin wrote *Bondage and Liberation of the Will* as a reply to Pighius's attack on his *Institutes* in his ten-book *Free Choice*. Albert Pighius was a Dutch Roman Catholic and, at the time in question, provost and archdeacon of St John's Church in Utrecht. Calvin felt that a response was called for. But this was not because he believed that he could convince either Pighius or his camp-followers. On the one hand, he believed it essential to publicly rebut Pighius' equally public misrepresentations of Protestantism. Pighius was not a nobody. Regarded as one of the foremost Roman Catholic polemicists of his day, he was considered important enough to be appointed a delegate to the colloquies between Protestants and Catholics at Worms in 1540-41 and Regensburg in the summer of 1541. In addition he had held high office in Rome serving three successive Popes.

Calvin was particularly concerned to buttress the faith of new converts to Protestantism against the misrepresentations of Pighius's *Free Choice* and to provide an antidote to them for those on the threshold of leaving Rome who might come into contact with this libel. He felt, too, that failure to say anything might well be construed as conceding the strength and validity of Pighius' arguments. And although Pighius directed his attacks at Protestantism generally, he was astute enough to realise that to be really effective he needed a focussed target and that this meant supremely Calvin's *Institutes*. Thus Calvin also felt a personal responsibility for answering Pighius.

Calvin found the work difficult because of lack of time and lack of resources. But even more annoying was the lack of consistency and direction in Pighius' argument. Rather than develop a systematic argument for the Reformed point of view Calvin was forced more or less to follow the meanderings of his opponent. Nevertheless he made an excellent job of producing an orderly response. In particular, he concentrated on two exceedingly important themes. The first was the relationship between Holy Scripture and tradition; the second was the relationship between patristic theology, especially Augustine's, and that of the Reformers.

The debate about Scripture and tradition is dealt with in reply to the second of Pighius's ten books. It is a masterpiece of close, lucid reasoning by Calvin. Against Pighius he argues for the supremacy of Scripture over all other authorities. For him there can be no intermediary between Scripture and the heart. Now, while we generally maintain that a return to Calvin implies a going-beyond Calvin, on this issue much of the later material seems to be a regression rather than an advance on his insights. For the debate has not gone away. Many within the Reformed tradition now wish to enmesh the authority of Scripture within the context of a traditionary authority. While they would deplore and anathematise the traditions accumulated by Rome over the centuries they nevertheless are looking to bind our faith to a so-called *catholic orthodoxy*, mainly centring on the creeds of the patristic era; an orthodoxy that seems to imply a refusal to allow Scripture the final word. Some have gone to what one might call extremes on this. In Internet discussions, the American Jay Rogers has maintained (and with little or no opposition voiced) that the early creeds are *infallible and without error*. He has also insisted that the validity of the authority of Scriptural books depends on the *imprimatur* of the church. It is difficult to see *by what authority* he can promulgate such statements; evidently their authority cannot be based on Scripture without serious logical difficulties. In the light of the

seriously cavalier manner in which American fundamentalism has perverted the *Sola Scriptura* doctrine to enable it to teach anything and everything it likes this violent reaction is understandable, though it is none the less reprehensible for that. Rogers has not thereby settled the issue of the locus of ultimate authority; he has simply opened a can of worms.

Others are attempting to create a more informed position. In particular Andrew Sandlin is developing what he calls the idea of *historical conditioning*. It is difficult to say much on this at present as his work is only in draft form and not for public discussion. But while we think his argument contains a number of useful insights we are not convinced that it improves on the position of Calvin.

Calvin's position is quite clear. He asserts that "the only consensus of the church is that which is throughout suitably and fittingly in agreement with the word of God" (p. 80).

One of the concealed assumptions of the catholic orthodox brigade is that the decisions of former generations are in some way *authoritative* for succeeding generations. The reasoning behind this, as we said above, is largely animated by a perversion of the *Sola Scriptura* idea in American fundamentalism. It is a worthy if ill-conceived attempt to find some locus of authority that will maintain the importance of Scripture while yet preventing the excesses and distortions of the fundamentalists. We would ask whether this is even necessary, or is it perhaps a case of Uzzah-type zeal? See 2 Sam. 6:1-7. We must clearly distinguish between the conditioning effect of history (which is real enough, and can have either a beneficial or deleterious effect) and the *possible normative nature* of that conditioning. That is, simply because I am brought up to think in a certain way does not in and of itself mean that I am morally obliged to continue in that course. The question arises, What is the criterion that establishes the validity of a particular historical effect? For a criterion of sorts is evidently necessary. On each and every occasion in which an historical event impinges on my experience, I must have a means of deciding whether or not it makes any requirements of me, i.e. whether it is authoritative. And this criterion cannot be itself historical. For that would simply be a self-refuting historicist approach. The criterion must, *of necessity*, stand over and above history if it is to decide the validity of historical issues. Surely God, and God alone, is in this position. Therefore we would maintain that ultimately *Scripture and Scripture alone*, as God's only word to man on every issue, is what each and every man, each and every family, each and every congregation (church), each and every voluntary association, and each and every civil government must take as its *canon*, its infallible measuring rule. This is what Calvin so lucidly puts forth in this volume.

We likened the attempt to counter fundamentalist distortions of *Sola Scriptura* with Uzzah's over-zealous hand upon the Ark. We did not do this lightly. It is becoming clear that a considerable force is arising within the theonomic constituency that is quite puritanical in its opposition to freedom. Its repressive nature is surfacing in its visible attempts not so much to bring man under God's law but to bring him under God's law *as put into the hands of men*. That is, God's law has become for them a law which must always be enforced by a human authority. But most biblical law (certainly not all) is not like this. And man's attempts, whether Christianly-directed or otherwise, to enforce conformity and uniformity are quite unscriptural. In reference to the defence of Scripture Spurgeon once made the remark that one does not defend a tiger by caging it but by letting it run free. We feel that much of the attempt to defend scriptural teaching by appeal to the extra-biblical authority of a catholic orthodoxy is thus more misguided than erroneous, and we would strongly recommend a study of, and return to, the position espoused by Calvin in this volume.

In his third book Pighius seeks to pit the patristic writings against Protestantism. This was his big mistake. One might as well challenge Mike Tyson to ten rounds in the ring as challenge Calvin to a debate on the writings of the “church fathers,” particularly Augustine. Calvin’s grasp of Augustine borders on the phenomenal; it has been suggested that he knew most if not all of Augustine off by heart. In his brilliant study *Saint Augustine dans l’oeuvre de Jean Calvin* (1957) Luchsius Smits has uncovered in Calvin’s writings 1700 quotations from Augustine and a further 2400 references to him. Certainly in this volume he is completely at ease in handling his writings even though, as the editors point out, he had few volumes to hand at the time. There was no way Pighius could win this debate. The chapter is a piece of consummate writing and a lesson to all who would enter the lists as polemic theologians. Calvin had, as we say, done his homework. This was not the work of a moment, not a mere flicking through a few volumes to find a handful of quotes to bolster a flagging argument. Calvin knew his material thoroughly; he had been engaged in hard study of it since early youth and now it was paying off. It is not without considerable justification that at one time Calvin was referred to as *Augustinus Redivivus* (Augustine Resurrected).

I have only two criticisms of this volume, one internal, the other external. Internally, it was unfortunately a rush job by Calvin, to get the book finished in time for the Frankfurt Book Fair of 1543. In all he spent no more than two months on it. But though this would not have been noticeable to anyone unless it had been pointed out, clearly we would have had an even grander volume if Calvin had had the time and, above all, the resources that were then unavailable to him. Of the publication itself we can only say that it is a pity that such historic works have to see the light of day in paperback form. This is an enduring work and both the work itself and the high standard of editing and translation deserve much better treatment. Nevertheless we do not wish to apportion blame to the publisher for this; it is clear that this is the outcome of today’s market conditions. Better a paperback that people will buy and read than a hard back that lies unopened on a warehouse rack. But I shall be getting my copy bound as soon as possible.

Postscript: Our American readers may well be asking: *Who is Tom Finney?* Finney is to English football what Babe Ruth is to American baseball, and then some. The USA’s demolition, last year, of world champions Brazil now puts them in the realm of *real* nations. So I thought they might like to know this. C&S

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## BAPTISM: MEANING, MODE AND SUBJECTS

BY MICHAEL KIMMITT

Trelawnyd: K&M Books, 48 pages,  
£2.00 (inc. P.&P.), paperback, ISBN 0-9523041-1-2

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REVIEWED BY STEPHEN C. PERKS

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THIS is a brief and useful introduction to the subject of baptism from a paedobaptist perspective. As the title shows the main point is to show the meaning and mode of baptism in the Bible and the subjects of baptism, i.e. who should be baptised.

For an introductory booklet of 48 pages the author deals ably and thoroughly with his subject and the book will be of benefit to those who wish to get a basic understanding of the biblical arguments for the paedobaptist position. It will be a handy resource to lend to people who are interested in the paedobaptist position. As a book for those who are convinced

anti-paedobaptists it will not be convincing, but there again I doubt any book of any size specifically about baptism would be. As a paedobaptist who was once a Baptist (i.e. an anti-paedobaptist) I have always found approaching this subject with anti-paedobaptists merely on the merits of the argument for paedobaptism of little use. Arguments about specific Scriptures that deal with baptism will simply go round in circles. What drives convinced anti-paedobaptists, I think, is not a particular exegesis of specific texts, and therefore no amount of counter-exegesis from a paedobaptist perspective will convince them. In this respect, though I disagree with their position and their arguments for it, I often find that anti-paedobaptists have a more thought-out position on the specific issue of baptism; but when it comes to the broader theological issues underpinning their overall perspective there is not usually the same degree of thought and reflection on Scripture. Thus, the underlying theological presuppositions of their world-view need to be exposed for them and they need then to examine these presuppositions in the light of Scripture. If they are prepared to do this there may be some positive results. This issue is really much broader than baptism *per se*, and ultimately takes in the foundations of one’s whole theological perspective. There are other issues involved with the paed/anti-paedobaptist argument though (see below).

However, the purpose of this booklet is not to address this much larger subject but rather the specific exegesis of the texts on baptism. It achieves well what it aims at, and this is why it will be very useful in right context. It may also be useful if used in tandem with the broader approach of tackling the presuppositions that drive anti-paedobaptist thinking. What I have to say below about this issue in a more general way is not meant to undermine this endorsement.

Although it is beyond the scope of the booklet I do wonder why there are so many booklets and arguments on paedobaptism but not equally as many on paedocommunion. Presbyterians, for example (the booklet was published for a Presbyterian church), are for ever going on about baptism. But there is not a similar concern for paedocommunion. At one point the author says: “Charismatics and Pentecostals generally will argue that the text from John the Baptist [Mk. 1:8] points to a two stage process: first conversion, symbolized by water baptism, and then a second and subsequent ‘Baptism of the Spirit’! However it is clear that there is no support for this in the Epistles—and indeed the reverse is stated in the 1 Cor. 13 passage which has just been quoted. In the case of Cornelius and his relatives and friends we see that the word is preached, the Holy Spirit converts and they are the baptised with water. We have here both the external and the internal reality” (p. 10).

But in that case why should a two stage process be introduced for children? Why should children have to wait until they are older before they receive communion? This is precisely to introduce a two stage idea. Indeed, I have even heard the concept of confirmation argued by Presbyterians. If baptism signifies complete conversion why should children, who are deemed suitable subjects of it, then be refused communion by so many paedobaptists? This seems hardly ever to be addressed. Neither is it addressed here. It sometimes seems that one kind of argument is suitable for charismatics and Pentecostals, but the same argument becomes awkward in a debate with paedocommunionists, and therefore some form of two-stage approach is adopted. This is a very poor way to argue with anti-paedobaptists about the need for paedobaptism because the very thing they will immediately come up with if they find the arguments for paedobaptism convincing is paedocommunion. They are then faced with precisely the *opposite* kind of argument from paedobaptists that had been used in the debate over paedobaptism. This will seem inconsis-

ent to anti-paedobaptists; and it will seem so because it is inconsistent. Paedobaptists do their case no good by being so contrary. The paedobaptist resorts to the very kind of argument against paedocommunion that the anti-paedobaptist used against paedobaptism, and this will only then strengthen the anti-paedobaptist's opinion that his argument against paedobaptism was quite valid after all, since the paedobaptist is now using precisely the same argument against paedocommunion. So the paedobaptist undoes his own case. Anti-paedobaptists see through this double standard. When anti-paedobaptists eventually become paedobaptists they often have a much more consistent approach and embrace paedocommunion as well. This is something the paedobaptist case has so far, in the main, failed to take account of, and it is a serious impediment to the paedobaptist cause. In one sense, we must ask how paedobaptists expect to make converts with such an inconsistent approach. Another booklet on paedobaptism will not add much to the already large mountain of admittedly good books on the same subject. What is needed is not another book on baptism, but a more consistent overall approach that takes in communion as well. Such may achieve far more. But then, most paedobaptists are not paedocommunionists. But they have given their own case for paedobaptism away by their arguments against paedocommunion.

My point is this: there is nothing lacking in the paedobaptist argument for paedobaptism, certainly nothing in this booklet. But what about the rest of the case for the inclusion of children in the covenant, which is, after all, the main thrust of the case for paedobaptism? This is missing almost completely. To argue for paedobaptism without arguing for paedocommunion is only half the story—less than half the story actually. Inclusion of one's children in the covenant means far more than just baptism. It means communion too. And what about education etc. The implications are far reaching. What is needed is not ad hoc arguments about baptism, but a systematic covenant theology that will undergird the whole of life. The problem with much of the paedobaptist literature is that it is really only half-cooked. It's okay as far as it goes, but does not go nearly far enough. The problem for most paedobaptists is that such a theology would expose their own lack of commitment to the covenant, the half-baked nature of their covenant thinking. Until they are prepared to practise what they preach and "go covenantal" all the way why should they expect others to follow them only a little way down the road. I know Baptists who give their children a covenantal education and I know paedobaptists who are happy to abandon their children to humanistic schools. Who truly understands the covenant? (Rom. 2:25-29) Who does the Father's will? (Mt. 21:28-31) The anti-paedobaptist who provides a Christian education for his children, or the paedobaptist who abandons them to a humanistic education? These are extremely pertinent questions that demand an answer from paedobaptists.

Now, I have no reason to believe that Michael Kimmitt is anti-paedocommunion. He may be for all I know, or he may not be. Neither do I know what his attitude to Christian education is; he may very well be committed to it for all I know. He does not mention either issue (even in the "Implications" section of the book at the end). But this is just the point. Surely the case for the inclusion of the children of believers in the covenant should not leave out the issue of communion. Nor should it leave out the serious implications of having one's children baptised, such as education. And most paedobaptists are not paedocommunionists, nor are they committed to Christian education—I speak of the UK and make no accusations for other countries. There is no point in going over the same subject again and again while leaving out of consideration those issues that face us today that are so relevant to the

subject, that naturally flow from it. There is no challenge of the gospel in this. The challenge of the gospel to Christians today, to stand out from the humanist culture of our society, is not confined merely to whether a child is baptised—even non-believers have their children baptised; it's the respectable thing to do. Rather, the real challenge of the gospel today is this: having had your child baptised, will you shoulder the responsibilities and follow out the implications of what that means? The non-believers have their children baptised, but they do not take up the responsibilities that baptism implies. Will the Christian? Will the Christian raise and educate his children in the Lord, or will he send them to a godless humanistic school. The Christian does not stand out by having his children baptised. But he does by giving them a Christian education. These are the issues paedobaptists should be addressing today. We know their arguments for practising the rite (they have been rehearsing them for hundreds of years, and hardly anyone in the church has failed to hear the arguments they have so loudly proclaimed). What we do not know is whether they will live up to the implications of what that rite means. The world is eagerly awaiting their response. This is where they will make a difference, both in their own time as a witness, and in the future through the education of the next generation.

Until this witness and this commitment to the meaning of paedobaptism is clearly seen, the arguments for the mere performance of the rite will continue to mean very little for the majority of those to whom paedobaptists so eagerly proclaim their cause. *C&S*

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## *Letter to the Editor*

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Dear Sir

I write part of this letter at a disadvantage: unlike Jean-Marc Berthoud, I have not had the opportunity of reading Comenius, either in the original or in translation. Inevitably, this will be a critique of his criticism!

First, his analysis of Comenius' desperate, even despairing prayer, which he concedes to be "so ardent, so sincere, and so moving" is misplaced. It is all too easy to pick to pieces such sentiments when one has not gone through such a harrowing ordeal and seen all that is near and dear to one snatched away, truth seemingly on the scaffold, error on the throne.

But is the cross absent from that prayer? I venture to suggest that such an absence is apparent rather than real. A few sample extracts, with the likely Scripture allusions, brings this out: "O Lord Jesus Christ, divine and human Intermediary [1 Tim. 2:5], only Saviour of the world [John 14:6; Acts 4:12], who by the incomprehensible counsel of the wisdom of God [Acts 2:23; Eph. 1:11] has been placed as the only visible centre of the heaven and the earth [Eph. 1:20, 21], so that to you and in you all the needs of every creature come together [Col. 1:16-20], and at the same time every gift of the divine treasury and the divine grace [Col. 1:19; 2:3]."

Instances like this could be multiplied throughout this prayer. It would also explain the seemingly Gnostic flavour of its language, since by common consent the language of the Ephesian and Colossian letters seems to borrow the language and terminology of Gnosticism while standing the basic premises of Gnosticism upside down. At all events it would be most unlikely that Comenius would have been ignorant of Christ's objective act of dying on Calvary for the sins of mankind.

Again, it is all too easy to condemn Comenius for paying heed to foolish prophesies; in the atmosphere created by the Thirty Years' War, when everything seemed to be falling apart, it was all too easy to clutch at any straw, however feeble.

As for the education theories, many of them are without doubt sound sense. Schoolmasters firm, but not severe? A close collaboration between master and pupils, with parental support? It would be more than interesting to see how many who have had authority over children have been all too quick to cite the command, "Honour your father and mother," but ignored the other, equally important flip side, viz. "Fathers do not exasperate your children, in case they lose heart" (see Eph. 6:2-4; Col. 3:20, 21). As for girls being educated as well as boys, this was advocated almost a century before by Thomas Becon, one of the lesser English Reformers, and for a religion that was based on an ability to read the Bible and the Prayer Book such a programme made good sense. Or does Reformed Christianity visualise a woman always having to ask her husband or other male relatives for answers, while she is left in utter ignorance? That may suit the agreeable *Taliban*, now imposing an analogous regime on Afghanistan; but is it agreeable with what Scripture itself sets out? In any case, in Elizabethan England we hear of girls being educated along with boys, and with a highly educated woman on the throne, fluent in several languages, they had a good role model!

Furthermore, while education should not be child-centred, it should certainly be child-related. Common observation shows that the only thing that children have in common is the inheritance of original sin. As far as intellectual endowments are concerned, they are all individuals, covering all the range from those who will never be able to manage more than simple manual labour to those who are comfortable tackling university level work before they are even in their teens! Here Comenius appears to contradict himself; on the one hand, he seems to advocate putting all through the same educational mincing-machine regardless of talents, while on the other he appears to advocate taking into account the "age and capability" of the pupil, thus (by implication) advocating educating children to the limits of their individual abilities. It is possible that he did not realise how others would take his theories, and it would be more than just interesting to see whether he would recognise his theories in the form they have assumed in their application.

Regarding your editorial "Euphemisms for Murder," the following remarks are in order. While "abortion" may well have been a technical medical term covering all terminations of pregnancy, whether spontaneous or induced, one cannot escape the fact that popular usage has come to label the former as a miscarriage and reserves abortion as a term for the latter. We may not like this, but for good or ill we seem to be stuck with it. The second consideration refers to the Offences Against the Person Act of 1861. What may not be known is that this Act did permit the inducement of an abortion *if the mother's life was endangered by the pregnancy continuing!* However, in practice very few doctors were prepared to carry out such a procedure, even when faced with a stark choice between saving one life (the mother's) and being left with two death certificates to fill in. The problem was that the onus was on the doctor to prove that what he did was permissible within the terms of the 1861 Act. To put it bluntly, if you had the money, not to mention a doctor who could overawe police chiefs and public prosecutors, it wasn't much of a problem. If you were one of the "lower orders," and especially of the "labouring class" it was well-nigh impossible.

With regard to euthanasia, the problem here is of a word of good meaning (it signifies "dying well") acquiring the wrong overtones. Yes, it amounts to assisted suicide, and while the latter may not be condemned specifically in Scripture, the

scriptural context of the three such recorded, viz. Saul (1 Sam. 31:4-6; 1 Chron. 10:4, 13, 14), Ahithopel (2 Sam. 16:21-23; 17:1-4, 23), and Judas (Mt. 27:3-5) show it up in a sufficiently bad light; they look like the actions of despairing men. It also affects the doctor-patient relationship; from a fatherly general practitioner he would become (and in totally the wrong sense of the term) a *holy* man, a dread-inspiring "wholly other" whose involvement in the deliberate ending of life would cause him to be looked at in the same light as a witch-doctor, an undertaker, or a hangman. As assisted suicide it contravenes the teaching of every major religion represented in Britain, and it is ironical that while the institutional church has been giving its trumpet an uncertain sound the other religions have been much firmer.

Indeed, the secret of "dying well" is not resorting to short-cuts such as a lethal injection or an overdose of pain-killers. It is rather through one's being at peace with God and totally resigned to his will, not in any fatalistic way, but recognising that his grace is all-sufficient (2 Cor. 12:9), allowing God's power to be made perfect in weakness.

Yours faithfully  
Barry Gowland.

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