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EDITORIAL

CLEANING UP HUMANISM

by *Stephen C. Perks*

Most Christians realise that things are desperately wrong in our culture. But there is not the same unanimity about what should be done about this, or indeed if anything should be done at all. (I used to know someone who refused to pray for peace in the world because his eschatology informed him that this is not to be expected in the end times, which he believed we are now in, and he believed that to pray for peace in the world would therefore be to pray against God's will, despite the fact that Christ said "Blessed are the peacemakers"—Mt. 5:9.) Where Christians are convinced something should be done the usual response is to support Christian lobbying groups. The aim of these groups is to change the law or stop new laws being passed in the hope of preserving what Christians consider to be the Christian character of our society, or some element of it. Thousands of pounds are spent each year trying to stop Christian laws being abolished or non-Christian laws passed. Yet the success of these activities is limited. Even when there is success it is often short lived and a few years down the road the whole battle has to be fought again, and eventually the cause is lost. This is because the underlying culture will not support what Christians want. As a result they are, to use an old Yorkshire man's expression, farting at the wind. The fact is, the wind needs to change before such lobbying groups can have any lasting success.

But there is an underlying problem with such activism that is seldom recognised, and it is this, that Christians are often really very much in sympathy with the prevailing direction of the wind in any case; it is just the odd bits of damage that the wind does, the nasty little bits, that they do not like. The result is that Christian activism in Britain often amounts to no more than cleaning up secular humanism. The reason for this is that despite the desire to do something about the moral deterioration of society, which in itself is of course laudable, Christians often do not have a thought-out biblical world-view to guide their activism. And when confronted by such a world-view, the response of Christians is often one of horror. A Christian agenda for activism, based on a Christian world-view, often fares no better among Christians than it does among non-believers. The Christian activist agenda in Britain is, on the whole, quite humanistic in its perspective.

This is demonstrated by the fact that projects aimed at changing the culture, at doing something with long-term results, are usually met with opposition among Christians. Doubtless this can be explained by the fact that such projects require work and commitment from Christians in their lives, whereas supporting lobbying groups amounts to no more than a financial sacrifice, sending money to help someone else coerce politicians into fulfilling our responsibilities for us by passing and enforcing laws. This is not only a bad strategy for Christians to pursue; it is also an evasion of responsibility, of the Christian's calling to work out his faith.

For example, Christian home schooling is on the whole abominated in Britain by most clergymen and Christians, if it is thought about at all (though in recent years the number of home schooling families has begun to grow). Changing the

world-view that underpins our culture (secular humanism) is not on the Christian agenda. (Saved souls are on the agenda, in the sense of brands snatched from the fire.) If the money that has been spent uselessly on trying to reform humanist State education in the UK or on trying to get laws passed that will halt the decline in the State education system had been spent on Christian schools and promoting Christian home schooling it would, I believe, have had a significantly more positive and long-term effect in the lives of people that would issue in world-view changes in the next generation, and it is such changes of world-view that are required and produce lasting cultural transformation, not stopping bad laws from being enacted or saving a good law from being abolished. But this requires promoting an unpopular message, namely, that Christians should face up to their responsibilities as parents rather than abdicate everything to the State, and that message is taboo. Trying to get Christians to see this, to understand the pivotal role played by one's world-view, and the fact that if we do not have a Christian world-view we will have a non-Christian one, is very difficult in itself. This is because developing a Christian world-view requires thinking, and many Christians do not like thinking about their faith; it is deemed a fleshly or worldly activity. Instead they "feel" things. And too much thinking seems to get in the way of their spiritual "feelings." Trying to get Christians to realise that the education of their children must take place in terms of such a consistently thought-out Christian world-view is even more difficult. The result is not simply that Christians unwittingly imbibe a non-Christian world-view, i.e. a non-Christian perspective in terms of which to assess all issues regarded as secular in nature; this unwitting compromise with secular humanism is passed on to the next generation. The problem becomes compounded. When faced with the deterioration of society, instead of seeking to reverse the effects of this compromise, Christians respond by spending a great deal of time and money trying to clean up secular humanism.

The problem is really that Christians on the whole have bought into secular humanism, though they may not realise this. They think they have a Christian perspective if they want to stop pornography and gay rights, but seldom realise that protesting about these sorts of issues on its own will achieve very little unless our whole agenda is anchored in a Christian world-view, and that without such a world-view affecting the whole of our lives, campaigning on these issues will simply amount to cleaning up secular humanism. They will continue to send their children to State schools to be educated in terms of a secular humanist world-view that will propagate the very cultural ideals they think they are against but in fact unwittingly support. It is a gargantuan task to re-educate Christians about this. They are simply not interested in thinking about it (not interested in thinking much at all), and yet unless our minds are changed (which is what repentance means) our lives will remain the same. Difficult? Well, yes, but we have to try nonetheless.

And so it is that the work of many Christian lobbying groups, even though their aims are usually laudable aims, amounts so often to no more than an attempt to clean up humanism. But this, in the event, is counterproductive, because cleaning up humanism simply makes it more attractive to society, both to non-Christians and Christians alike, with the result that real cultural change in terms of the demands of the Christian faith is hindered at best or even abandoned in favour of a respectable humanism. But humanism, even in respectable dress, cannot save our nation from the moral, cultural, political and economic deterioration that we are now experiencing. Only Christianity can do that. Cleaning up humanism will not change our culture; it will certainly not Christianise it, any more than dressing a pig up in a three piece suite will enable it to

behave with exquisite manners at the vicar's tea party. We need to replace the humanist culture that dominates our society with a Christian culture, not dress humanism up as Christian. I would rather humanism wore its dirty ideals on its sleeves than have naive Christians dress it up to look like something it is not. The result of such dressing up is more damaging to our society than leaving it alone so that people can see it for what it really is. Why? Because after the beast has been scrubbed and cleaned and dressed up in fancy clothes, it remains a beast and will continue behaving like a beast, even though it may look more presentable; in other words it will continue to affect our culture according to its real nature. But, and here is the crucial point, it will be able to do its work *subliminally* for most people, who will be unaware of the consequences of its effects on society because of its superficial appearance of respectability. This seems to be particularly true for many Christians, who often fail to recognise the significance of the deeper issues.

For example, Christian lobbying organisations will work for Christian religious education in schools, or for religious education to be mainly Christian, and for controls on sex education etc. These goals are laudable in themselves. But the question of whether State education is a valid Christian ideal is not explored. The issue here is too difficult. Those who front lobbying groups do not wish to be perceived as extremists. They wish to appear reasonable in terms of humanistic criteria. They only want things from the government that any "reasonable" person would want.¹ They agree that the State should continue to tax people in order to provide State-funded and State-controlled education. They want only that RE lessons should be mainly Christian and sex education reflect our religious heritage etc.

But what about the English lesson, the maths lesson, the science lesson, the geography lesson, the history lesson, the assembly? (And Christians should not think that because the law requires a Christian assembly, their children will get a Christian assembly, or that because a teacher claims the assembly is Christian, therefore the assembly will be Christian.) The influence of the secular humanist world-view in these areas of study is far greater than its influence in the RE lesson, precisely because it is less obvious and in fact more authoritative for most people, including many Christians. Suppose we get schools with Christian RE lessons and no sex education? What then? Do we have a Christian school? Of course not. What if we have a school with Christian RE lessons, no sex education and all Christian teachers? Do we then have a Christian school? Not necessarily. It depends not only on what teachers are teaching but *how* they are teaching it. If the government, which claims to be religiously neutral, is in control, the ability of teachers to provide a Christian education

is severely limited, even if they understand the issues and wish to provide such an education (and not all do). But the government is not religiously neutral, even though it claims to be and even though many, if not most, think it is. It is humanist. Secular humanism is a religion. The modern State is a secular humanist institution, and therefore a religious institution. Likewise for schools. Schools are never religiously neutral institutions, because facts never speak for themselves, they are always spoken about by human beings with a theory or several theories. These theories will either acknowledge God's creative will as that which gives meaning to the facts, or they will deny God and his creative will as having any relevance to the meaning of the facts. There is no neutral alternative, no third way to approach the facts. Facts are always interpreted facts. One's interpretation of the facts either acknowledges God as Lord or it does not. We are either for Christ or against him. Either we think (i.e. interpret the facts) obediently, or we think disobediently.

In teaching anything, therefore, a way of understanding is also inevitably conveyed to the pupil, even where this is not understood or recognised, either by pupil or teacher. Teaching anything always involves the imparting of a particular theory of knowledge, which will be either obedient to Christ or disobedient to Christ. Knowledge is not a neutral issue. It is not merely about facts. It is about how we understand and interpret facts. And this is always a religious question because we understand the facts either obediently or disobediently; that is, we think either obediently or disobediently, and in teaching all subjects the teacher teaches the pupil to think in one of these ways, i.e. either in obedience to Christ or disobediently. Consequently, even Christian teachers who have not understood the epistemological issues may well teach their subjects, unwittingly, from a secular humanist perspective.

In fact this is often the case. And the constant obsession of Christian organisation and lobbying groups with the mere externals of the situation only exacerbates this problem. If only we had more Christians teachers, more Christian RE lesson, less sex education, better discipline, everything would be all right. But it would not. These things on their own will not get at the heart of the matter; they will not on their own automatically produce a Christian world-view. In fact this is quite obvious from our current situation. There is perhaps no other profession where the presence of Christians is greater than that of the teaching profession. State education in Britain is positively awash with teachers who are Christians. Has this produced any real change of basic perspective in the education system? No. It may upset many to hear this, but if the answer were yes would there be the frantic panic exhibited by Christian lobbying groups, who constantly send out mailings encouraging Christians to write to their MP or various Lords about Clause 28 and a host of other measures that overturn Christian virtues in the education system? Of course not. This does not mean that Christian teachers support the overthrow of Christian virtues in education. Of course not (though sometimes this does happen). The deterioration continues relentlessly *despite* the fact that so many Christian teachers are against these deleterious measures. The mere presence of Christian teachers does not, has not, and will not, in itself change the policy. As already mentioned the "victories" of lobbying groups are short lived in this environment (Clause 28 is a good example, since the government remains opposed to it and the issue will come up again, but there are others²), and even where there are legal

1. The whole notion of what is reasonable is, of course, also a religious question, since what is considered reasonable rests ultimately on one's understanding of the meaning and purpose of life, which is always and in every respect a religious conviction. Christians, though they believe in Christ as saviour—i.e. have a distinctively Christian soteriology—often fail to understand the implications of such faith for those areas of life that are not strictly within the compass of theology and ecclesiology, and perhaps certain areas relating to sexual and medical ethics. As a result their reasoning about issues considered as "secular" is often governed by the religion of humanism, not Christianity. Their world-view is thus syncretistic. But we should remember that what is reasonable for a consistently applied secular humanistic perspective is not reasonable from a Christian perspective. Reason is *God's* gift to man, a consequence of his creation in the image of God. Non-believers are only reasonable creatures to the extent that they reflect their Creator's image in their thinking. Where this is not the case, i.e. where sin determines the way that they think, they are not to be thought of as reasoning at all but as rebelling.

2. For those readers who are not familiar with the British education system, Clause 28 is a regulation forbidding the promotion of homosexuality in schools. The current Labour government wishes to abolish this prohibition. (Yes, you *did* read that correctly!)

victories, this does not mean that the practical teaching that goes on in schools will become Christian. Passing a law that states RE lessons should be mainly Christian will not produce Christian schools. For that we should need Christian RE lessons to be taught from a *Christian* perspective, not a humanistic perspective, and we should also need *all* lessons, including not only RE but maths, English, history, science etc. to be taught from a Christian perspective as well. And not only this. The whole ethos of the school would have to be Christian. Will passing laws achieve this? No. The Christian community's ability to affect areas such as education by lobbying activity is very limited and, in a culture that is as humanist as ours now is, simply ineffective. But lobbying continues relentlessly, and it costs huge sums of money. For what? Another legal defeat? Perhaps a victory at the first and second reading of some new bill. But eventually the third reading will put paid to all the efforts, which will have then been a waste of money. And if there is a victory at the third reading, the whole venture will more than likely be repeated in a few years, if that, ending in another crushing defeat.

Why? Because the cultural wind, so to speak, is so much against the success of such political fixes. Such measures on their own cannot change our culture. At best they are measures aimed at cleaning up secular humanism. But it does not work. And the money that is spent on this could be spent more tactically and with a greater measure of success, i.e. in a way that would produce long-term cultural reorientation in terms of the Christian faith. But the projects that would do this would require much more than money. They would require hard work and commitment from Christians themselves, rather than the effortless writing of a cheque to fund a lobbying group that tries to make the government pass a law requiring others to do for Christians what they should be doing for themselves. This is not to criticise the lobbying of government regarding legislation where it is valid, but this on its own cannot achieve the transformation of society from a non-Christian to a Christian culture. Such transformation requires Christians to put their own hands to the plough. The vast sums that have been spent by Christian organisations on lobbying government over education law could have been spent with far more lasting effect on the creation of Christian schools and the facilitation of Christian home schooling through resources and curriculum development, support groups to help and encourage the practice of Christian education by parents and the like. But for this to happen there would have to be commitment to this by Christians, by the churches, and particularly by church leaders, who are after all responsible for leading their congregations in the faith. What could have been achieved by this kind of thing by now could have had significant effects not only in the education of the next generation of Christians but in terms of the Church's witness to the world.

Instead, Christians seem on the whole so utterly committed to making sure their children get a good secular humanist education. Some even deny themselves sacrificially so that they can send their children to the very best of secular humanist schools, private ones, and no doubt feel very self-righteous about it. Would that they were prepared to make the same sacrifice to provide their children with a Christian education!

What on earth is happening here? This is a strategy guaranteed to produce defeat for the Church. Is there any wonder the Church is so powerless, has so little influence, is no longer listened to, is so irrelevant to the majority of people in our culture today? Indeed the Church is little more than an object of ridicule in our society. And while this continues she deserves no better. To proclaim Christ as Lord and then send one's children to be educated as humanists is ridiculous. Is there any wonder that so many of the children of Christian parents

eventually decide that Christianity is not for them and abandon the faith when they grow up? Of course, this does not happen in every case. But that does not justify giving our children a humanist education. And it happens often enough to cause us to rethink this whole issue.

The only way for Christians to change our culture successfully is for them to get involved in cultural activity. That means that we must engage the culture in which we live in terms of the cultural issues that determine the way we live, but in a way that brings the gospel to bear on those issues. If Christians want Christian education for their children they must provide it, not expect the government to pass a law requiring someone else to provide it for them. What is Christian in the least about that? If Christians want society to behave in a Christian manner they must get involved with creating the cultural conditions and means for that to happen; e.g. they must fund Christian schools that will provide Christian education to non-believers also, many of whom would be willing to send their children to Christian schools for the sake of their education (this is not hypothetical; such schools do exist, though there are far too few of them—I know of one Christian school where the pupils are mostly the children of Muslim parents).

Likewise, if Christians wish to see the homeless problem and unemployment dealt with they must get involved with providing Christian services for those in need based on Christian work ethics, rather than leaving it all to the State—such an abdication of our responsibility to help the destitute does not fulfill the divine command of Scripture (James 2:14–16). If Christians wish to see the arts and media transformed by the gospel (and this is a vital area since these spheres are so formative for the life of our whole culture) they must get involved with the arts and the media. If Christians wish to see the political life of the nation Christianised and raised to a better level they must get involved with the political process, *not* in order that Christians might be relieved of their Christian responsibilities by the State however, but that they might be enabled to shoulder their responsibilities. For example, taking the issue of education again, a Christian political perspective would not be geared to relieving parents of their God-given duties in the education of their children, e.g. provision of State-funded and State-controlled schools, but rather tax reform that would empower parents financially to provide for their children's education themselves.

These are just a few of the areas that face us as Christians and demand that we engage with them as ambassadors of the gospel of God. Our remit in bringing the gospel to bear on life is as wide as life itself. No area of our life, individually or jointly as a society, is excused from this calling to bring all things into subjection to Jesus Christ.

This will require the development of a Christian world-view. Without this our ability to think and act consistently as Christians in the cultural melting pot will be severely inhibited.³ God will still save individuals. God will always save his elect. But we are commanded not merely to snatch brands from the fire; we are commanded to disciple the *nation* to Christ, the whole nation (Mt. 28:19). This cannot be achieved by means of lobbying activities. This is not meant to deny that such activities have a legitimate role; but such a role exists in a limited sphere, quite simply because politics is only one part of life, and we are never to look to it as an idol, i.e. as that which provides meaning

3. As a starting point for our thinking in developing a Christian world-view I can do no better than to point you to the new book by John Peck and Charles Strohmer, *Uncommon Wisdom: God's Wisdom for our Complex and Changing World* (The Wise Press, 2000). See page 26f. of this issue of *C&S* for a review of this book and the advertisement on p. 11 for details of where to obtain it.

and guidance for the whole of life. Only Christ provides such meaning in our world. Lobbying groups cannot take the place of Christian activism. And by activism I do not mean political *protest*, which is what it has often now come to mean for many. Rather, I mean hands on cultural engagement with the world that Christ came to redeem. This is our calling both as human beings created in the image of God (Gen. 1:28), and as redeemed sinners who serve Christ in the power of his Spirit (Mt. 28:18–20).

Christians must decide whether they want a Christian culture or whether they merely wish to clean up secular human-

ism. The way we answer this question, consciously or unconsciously, will produce very different results, because it will determine *how* we seek to affect our culture, how we seek to be active in society as Christians, and therefore it will determine the outcome of those actions. Our calling is to disciple the nation to Christ, to create a Christian culture, a Christian society and nation, not to clean up humanism. Our strategy must be geared to this. Therefore we must start *thinking*, and thinking not as a ghetto waiting for the end, but as an army poised to transform our culture for Christ. “For as [a man] thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Pr. 23:7). *C&S*

ALPHA AND THE OMEGAS?

by Peter Burden-Teh

PART IV: 8. CHRIST ALONE

Grounds for Criticism of Gumbel

EVEN though I have presented three flawed areas of Gumbel’s beliefs, which consequently impact on his Christology, I believe that I have to establish the reasons for this particular criticism.

Of the criticisms concerning Gumbel that I have read, they have accepted Alpha as having a biblical Christology. This is true even of *Falling Short*? by Chris Hand, which is the only published Reformed critique of Alpha. He states that “Alpha’s defence of the deity of Christ is reasonably good. It makes the case quite well and succinctly”.¹ However, Hand does go onto to say that Tillich “is a liberal thinker who can scarcely be claimed as an evangelical” and that Moltmann “is another liberal . . . [who is] quoted liberally and uncritically.”² But Hand does not integrate this criticism within his acceptance of Alpha’s Christology, just as he does not integrate the issue of sanctification with that of justification.

It may be said that I am being unfair to Gumbel because, although he has a tendency to name-drop, he does not accept the views of Tillich and Moltmann. But I cannot accept that. Is Gumbel so careless in his choice of name-drops that they become just random choices from a Book of Quotations? Or do these Christologies form an integral part of his and Alpha’s beliefs? Or does he accept them as Christians, according to their sincerely held beliefs? As the former situation is too ludicrous to consider, then it has to be either of the latter reasons. This can be seen from the way that he uses such people at critical parts of his Alpha presentation. But as will be shown, holding to either of these two latter reasons is equally as damaging.

The Christology of the Thirty-Nine Articles

There are two Articles that are of primary concern to us. The first of these is Article II, which states:

1. Chris Hand, *Falling Short*? (Day One Publications, 1998) p. 63.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

Of the Word or Son of God which was made very man

The Son, which is the Word of the Father, begotten from everlasting of the Father, the very and eternal God, and of one substance with the Father, took man’s nature in the womb of the Blessed Virgin, of her substance: so that two whole and perfect natures, that is to say the Godhead and Manhood, were joined together in one Person, never to be divided, whereof is one Christ, very God and very Man, who truly suffered, was crucified, dead and buried, to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for the actual sins of men.

But, as I have said in the first part of this series, the continuing problem is relating the formulation of these confessions, as a *sola exegesis*, not only to the period of the Reformation but also to the present. To help us understand the present problems, Morey has pointed out that “While the battle between Christianity and humanism, theism and atheism, faith and unbelief remains the same, the battlefield has shifted from the doctrinal to the pre-doctrinal, the theological to the philosophical, the theoretical to the pre-theoretical, the precepts to presuppositions, the biblical to the pre-biblical, and from exegesis to hermeneutics.”³

If we begin with the issue that the battle has stayed the same but the tactics have changed, then we can make the link from the New Testament, through the Church Councils, the Reformation and to the present. For what lies behind the Christological issues from the Early Church through to now is the issue of authority, including that of politics. For Moltmann this issue of authority means that “If Christian theology wants to get the better of modern atheism, it must first overcome the impact of atheism and show that the biblical God of the exodus of the people and the resurrection of Christ does not get in the way of human freedom, but rather the basis for it, preserves and defends it . . . But it will have to overcome the theocratic theism and the authoritarian principle in the churches which is legitimated by it.”⁴

3. Robert Morey, *The Trinity: Evidences and Issues* (Word Publishing, USA, 1996), p. 21.
4. Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology Today* (SCM Press Ltd, 1988) p. 24.

To take another perspective, from the Arians of the early centuries A.D., it has been said that “Theologically, the assertion that the Son is only like God undermined the Christian community’s conviction about the finality of Jesus Christ . . . The cultural significance of the Nicene theology is revealed in the disposition of the political Imperialists to be Arians. Imperialism as a political strategy was more compatible with the notion that Jesus Christ is something less than the full and absolute Word of God.”⁵

Whether Arian Statists or “Christian atheistic” socialists, the battle remains the same with only different tactics and using, in addition to what Morey has said, the widening basis of biblical manuscripts. Then as now the same question remains “What think ye of Christ?” The answer continues to come from taking “the Bible simultaneously with Christ and with God as its author,”⁶ resulting in the orthodox Christological creeds such as Nicene and Athanasian. These Creeds were upheld by the Reformers for the same reasons (Article VIII). In rejecting the theological and political consequences of this, the response, then as now, has been to say, “we will not have this man to reign over us” (Luke 19:14). But this God-Man Jesus Christ has said that “those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring them hither, and slay them before me” (Luke 19:27)

This relates to the second Article that has Christological significance, for if those people who will not have this God-Man Jesus Christ to reign over them, with his asking for their destruction, who are we to give credence to their sincerely held unorthodox Christological beliefs? This is the position of Article XVIII:

Of Obtaining Eternal Salvation only by the Name of Christ

They also are to be accursed that presume to say, That everyman shall be saved by the law or sect which he professeth, so that he be diligent to frame his life according to their law and the light of nature. For Holy Scripture doth set out unto us only the name of Jesus Christ, whereby men must be saved.

This Article is the only one that has an anathema stated in it. This anathema is for showing an indifferent attitude towards the salvation procured by the Lord Jesus Christ. From the title given to this Article, it must be seen that it does not refer to non-Christians, but rather to those who have an understanding of Christianity. In this respect, it appears to have been directed against Christians who say that “other Christians” can be saved by their beliefs, Christological and Soteriological, so long as they are sincere and hold to their respective beliefs. For the Reformers, this included those who demonstrated an indifference towards Roman Catholicism. As to the last sentence of this Article, it needs to be seen not only in the contexts of texts such as Acts 4:12 and Gal 1:8, but also in the context of the character and authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, as revealed throughout Scripture.

Gumbel and Tolstoy’s Christology

In the first chapter of *Questions of Life*, Gumbel tries to show that Christianity is “exciting, true and relevant” as

5. Joseph Leith, *Creeds of the Church* (Aldine Publishing Co., USA, 1963), p. 29. As quoted in Rousas Rushdoony, *The Foundations of Social Order* (Thorburn Press, USA, 1978), p. 15.

6. Cornelius Van Til, *Protestant Doctrine of Scripture, In Defense of the Faith* (Presbyterian and Reformed, USA, 1967), Vol. 1, p. 61. As quoted in Greg Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic* (P&R Publishing, USA, 1998), p. 103.

opposed to being “boring, untrue and irrelevant,”⁷ which were his views before accepting Christianity. (The latter phrase is the title—with a question mark—of the video released to support the National Alpha Initiative.) He then uses the statement about Jesus Christ being the Way, the Truth and the Life as a basis for subheadings related to the idea that Christianity is “exciting, true and relevant.” Under the subheading of “Direction for a lost world,” Gumbel describes Leo Tolstoy’s pursuit of “success, fame and importance” and his eventual realisation that “only in Jesus Christ do we find the answer.”⁸ In our materialistic society, which is lost and needs direction, Gumbel posits the example of Tolstoy to those who have, and to those who seek, wealth and status: as Tolstoy found the answer in this Jesus Christ, so will you.

Before I begin an examination of Tolstoy’s unorthodox Christology, there are other people to whom Gumbel could have referred. To take two appropriate examples from Peter Masters’s “Men of Purpose,”⁹ there is Fred Charrington, who forsook a family business and fortune, and Henry Heinz, who established a family business and fortune. I suspect that more people-on-the-street have heard of Charrington and Heinz than Tolstoy, but then Gumbel must have his reasons for recommending the latter as an exemplar of “an authentic Christianity that is exciting and relevant to today’s world.”¹⁰

It is true, as Gumbel indicates, Tolstoy did pass through a critical period on completing “Anna Karenina.” But after searching “in every field of science and philosophy”¹¹ his said conclusion of vacuous staring into the infinities of space, time and matter¹² is not the major result. Instead, “he came to believe that the most important task of his life was to synthesise the wisdom of the East and West.”¹³ He did find that “the peasant people of Russia had been able to answer these questions [of life] through their Christian faith.”¹⁴ But not as Gumbel implies. True, the peasants’ “faith made it possible for them to go on living—but it was inseparable from Orthodox ritual and dogma which he, from a rationalist point of view, found repugnant.”¹⁵

This repugnance is seen in “Miracles and the Miraculous,” where Tolstoy comments that “To say that Christ arose in the body implies that the sense of those for whom he rose in the body acted irregularly, and contrarily to those relations of the senses which always recur and are accepted by all, and therefore one can only pity the diseased state of these men. But to say that Christ lives spiritually in man and that we live in others and others in us, is to express the ordinary, unquestionable truth comprehensible to every man who lives in the Spirit.”¹⁶

With this denial of the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, Tolstoy also believes that “the God of Saboath and his Son, the God of the Priests, is just as little and ugly and impossible a God—indeed far more impossible—than a God of the flies would be for the priests, if the flies imagined

7. Nicky Gumbel, *Questions of Life* (Kingsway Publications, 1995), p. 12.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 14–15.

9. Peter Masters, *Men of Purpose*. (The Wakeman Trust, 1989), p. 91ff. and p. 23ff.

10. Nicky Gumbel, *op. cit.*, back cover.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

12. *Ibid.*

13. R. Christian, *Tolstoy: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 213.

14. Nicky Gumbel, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

15. R. Christian, *op. cit.*, p. 215.

16. Leo Tolstoy, *Social Evils and their Remedy* (Methuen & Co., 1915), p. 209.

him to be a huge fly only concerned with the well-being and improvement of flies.”¹⁷ Such was Tolstoy’s disgust and abhorrence of priests, he has written what are two infamous chapters (39 and 40) in “Resurrection.”

In view of this, it should not be surprising that the Russian Orthodox Church, in a belated action, excommunicated Tolstoy in February 1901. After his excommunication he penned his “Reply to the Synod” in the form of a creed. One of the credal statements declares that “I [Tolstoy] believe that the Will of God is most clearly and comprehensively expressed in the teaching of the man Christ—to regard whom as God, and to pray to whom, I deem the greatest sacrilege.”¹⁸ However, it is an open question as to the views of Archbishop Sergei of Solnechnogorsk, the Chancellor of the Russian Orthodox Church, concerning Alpha using an excommunicated member of his church as an example of finding “the answer in Jesus Christ,” when the Archbishop visited the HTB Conference in July 1998.

But how would Tolstoy’s rationalistic Christology work out for Alpha’s life with a relationship with God? His form of christological anarchism finds its fullest expression in “The Kingdom of God Is Within You.” “He asserts that [governments] are all essentially immoral and exist for the advantage of the rich and powerful, persecuting the masses of mankind in their use of force in wars, in maintaining prisons, and in collecting taxes.”¹⁹ Furthermore, for Tolstoy, “Music is potentially evil because, like the presto in ‘The Kreutzer Sonata,’ it may arouse feelings which cannot be satisfied by the music itself. Sexual passion is the root of all evil . . . [for] carnal love is selfish and that unselfish love needs no physical consummation.”²⁰

*Gumbel and Tillich’s Christology*²¹

At the conclusion of the opening chapter of *Questions of Life*, Gumbel summarises his points as follows: “Christianity is not boring; it is about living life to the full. It is not untrue; it is truth. It is not irrelevant; it transforms the whole of our lives. The theologian and philosopher Paul Tillich described the human condition as one that involves three fears: fear about meaninglessness, fear about death and fear of guilt. Jesus Christ meets each of these fears head on.”²²

It would be fair to assume that Tillich is part of this Christianity that Gumbel is presenting which is not boring, not untrue and is not irrelevant. In connection to this, it also fair to assume that Gumbel’s Christ is Tillich’s Christ.

Rather than beginning at this point of Christology, we can begin with the three fears stated by Tillich that are referred to by Gumbel. But Gumbel does not explain these fears: they are posited and left to one’s own interpretation. To understand the basis of these fears we need to appreciate where Tillich is coming from. This can be achieved by

suggesting that one replace Gumbel’s reference to Tillich with Bishop Robinson’s “Honest to God.” For “Honest to God” is “just a plateful of Tillich fried in Bultmann and garnished with Bonhoeffer,”²³ to quote James Packer. Packer goes onto to say that “in America, it is disputed whether it is more accurate to call Tillich a theist or an atheist.”²⁴ He concludes that “[Tillich’s] teaching is not a reaffirmation of Christianity, but a denial of it.”²⁵

If Tillich’s teaching is a denial of Christianity, how is he using meaninglessness, guilt and death? For Tillich, there is no historical Fall. “The notion of a moment in time in which man and nature were changed from good to evil is absurd, and it has no foundation in experience or revelation.”²⁶ Although he denies the Fall, he holds to the Hellenic “myth of the transcendent Fall of souls”²⁷ which he relates to his existential “transition from essence to existence.”²⁸ This transformation from essence to existence is an “estrangement from God, from men, from himself.”²⁹ However, this estrangement is not only man’s meaninglessness but also sin. So for Tillich there is no distinction between meaninglessness, estrangement and sin: the terms are compatible with each other. Thus unbelief becomes introspection with the denial of “the ground of being and his world.”³⁰

But what is the “ground of being”? This is Tillich’s “God”: “God cannot be called a self because the concept ‘self’ implies separation from and contrast to everything which is not self.”³¹ Tillich’s “God” is an impersonal atheistic Ground of Being. Because God is not a Being but only an impersonal atheistic Ground of Being, a divine nature cannot be attributed to Jesus. According to Tillich, “a literalistic understanding of the symbol ‘Son of God’ is a superstition which has done much harm in Christianity.”³² Tillich’s Christ has no deity but has only the man-ness that is within each man.

With no God there can be no resurrection, so the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus (not Christ) are symbols: the former of the subjection to existence and the latter of the triumph of existence. Christ (not Jesus) is said to have triumphed over existential estrangement. Salvation is for each individual to triumph over existential estrangement, for there is no vicarious atonement.³³

So what is the consequence of this salvation? How would Tillich’s existentialist Christology work out for Alpha’s relationship with the Ground of Being? Although it is not clear how one recognises a transition from existential estrangement to essential living, this christological atheism is a combination of culture and politics. As Moltmann points out, “for Tillich, the body of faith is not the church, but culture . . . [For] the abolition of the division between sacred and profane in culture follows from the existential concept of religion. Religion is a dimension in all culture.”³⁴ Equally it

17. Leo Tolstoy, *Tolstoy’s Letters* (Charles Scribner & Sons, USA, 1978), Vol. 1, p. 298.

18. William Curtis, *A History of Creeds and Confessions of Faith* (T. and T. Clark, 1911), p. 103.

19. Ernest Simmons, *Introduction To Tolstoy’s Writings* (University of Chicago Press, USA, 1968), p. 105.

20. R. Christian, *op cit.*, p. 230.

21. In the writing of this section on Tillich, I would express my debt to Herbert James Pollock for the understanding of Tillich gained from his unpublished manuscript “The Muted Trumpet: Theology and Hermeneutics from Tillich and Bultmann to Liberation and Process.”

22. Nicky Gumbel, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

23. James Packer, *Keep Yourself From Idols: a discussion of Honest to God by John A T Robinson*. (Church Book Room Press Ltd, 1963), p. 5.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

26. Paul Tillich, *Miracles, A Preliminary Study* (London, 1952), p. 16.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 30 and p. 31–32.

29. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (London, 1953) Vol. 1, p. 280.

30. Paul Tillich, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (London, 1964), p. 37–38.

31. Paul Tillich, *The Meaning of the Christian Faith in Creation* (London: Fontana, 1964), p. 244.

32. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, p. 192.

33. Paul Tillich, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, p. 72.

34. Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology Today* (SCM Press Ltd, 1988), p. 82f.

is politics, for according to D'Arcy, Tillich believes that positive lessons can be learned from Marx.³⁵

Gumbel and Moltmann's Christology

Gumbel twice refers to the theologian Jurgen Moltmann in the book *Questions of Life*. The first occasion is when he is explaining why Jesus died on the cross. Gumbel writes that "On the cross, God revealed his love for us. He showed that he is not a God who is aloof from suffering. He is 'the crucified God' (as the title of the book by the German theologian puts it)."³⁶ At such a crucial part in explaining about Christ's death, it is fair to assume that Gumbel would accept Moltmann's beliefs concerning God and Christ, and vice versa. This is particularly reinforced when Gumbel mentions John Stott at the end of the same paragraph in which Moltmann is mentioned. Why should Gumbel accept one but not accept the other?

The second occasion that Gumbel refers to Moltmann is when he is discussing the gifts of the Holy Spirit.³⁷ Assuming we know where Gumbel is coming from, and what he is explaining, it is again fair to infer that Moltmann's theology and Christology reinforces Gumbel's statement.

Before I begin an examination of Moltmann's unorthodox Christology, it should be said that Gumbel could have referred to Martin Luther, who used the original phrase, *Deus Crucifixus* (Crucified God), which was adopted and reinterpreted by Moltmann. Or perhaps Gumbel cannot use Luther or his theology for the reasons mentioned in Part II, chapter 6 of this series of articles. And again, perhaps it is more acceptable to be identified as an ecumenical liberal, associated with Moltmann, than a Protestant fundamentalist, associated with Luther. So how and why is Moltmann reinterpreting Luther?

One of the important influences on Moltmann was Ernst Bloch, under whom Moltmann studied as a student. In 1959, Bloch produced his monumental *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (The Principle of Hope), through which he sought to reinstate a revised form of Utopianism as central to Marxism. Although he was a thoroughgoing materialist he drew on biblical and later theological tradition for categories in which to describe his philosophy of hope. According to Moltmann, these categories "Ernst Bloch took over . . . from Tillich in order to give the Marxist critique a religious rather than an irreligious form."³⁸

The irony is that Bloch appears to be better known amongst "Christian Marxists and Socialists" than among Materialist Marxists. Moltmann responded to the challenge of Bloch and took up many of his insights in *Theology of Hope*. In this respect it is necessary to read *The Crucified God* in the light of *Theology of Hope*. For Moltmann says that "This book [The Crucified God], then, cannot be regarded as a step back. *Theology of Hope* began with the resurrection of the crucified Christ, and I am now turning back to look at the cross of the risen Christ."³⁹

In *Theology of Hope*, Moltmann states that

The risen Christ remains the crucified Christ. The God who in the event of the cross and resurrection reveals himself as "the same" is

the God who reveals himself in his own contradiction. Out of the night of the "death of God" on the cross, out of the pain of the negation of himself, he is experienced in the resurrection of the crucified one, in the negation of the negation, as the God of promise, as the coming God. If "atheism" finds its radical form in the recognition of the universal significance of Good Friday, then it is a fact that the God of the resurrection is in some sort an "atheistic" God.⁴⁰

Alister McGrath believes that Moltmann refers "a little cryptically, one feels,"⁴¹ to the "death of God." Seeing through the cryptic phrasing, Nicholls writes that

Where the radical theologians in America understand the death of God through Nietzsche, Moltmann goes back behind Nietzsche to the young Hegel, and thus is able to understand the death of God dialectically as a moment within a historical process . . . Moltmann wants to understand the resurrection of Jesus in this way. Jesus is to be announced to modern man as risen again even from the death of God. Hence, again following Hegel's dialectical thought, Moltmann understands the death as still contained in, and not simply abolished by, the resurrection. The God of the resurrection is therefore an "atheistic God."⁴²

With this understanding we can proceed, albeit in a brief form, with a résumé of Moltmann's Christology.

Surprisingly, Moltmann comes close to describing the "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" on only a few occasions. One of these occasions is when he says that "The 'Lord Gods' [crucifixes] in the Tirol compel one to think of the career of Jesus and what happened on the cross in connection with the Father of Jesus Christ. It is not the same father in the two places. The unknown Father of Jesus Christ has nothing to do with those idols of the father which lead to the Oedipus complex."⁴³

Although Moltmann speaks of salvation in terms of the "Psychological Liberation of Man," what is of importance here is that he refers to two fathers of Jesus and that the Father of Jesus Christ is an unknown God. This unknown God, I believe, for Moltmann is like Horkheimer's philosophical "Wholly-Other": "we do not know what God is . . . [the] old theological principle [of] *Deus definiri nequit*."⁴⁴ For Moltmann there are only two forms of serious atheism—Camus and Horkheimer,⁴⁵ the latter is an atheism of "the longing for righteousness." It is here that Moltmann refers to the "trinitarian event of God," for he will not speak of the Trinity of God in terms of theism. Moltmann follows Whitehead's "Process Theology" in condemning moral, political and philosophical theism as "idolatry."⁴⁶ That word "event" is crucial: it is used as a non-historical occurrence. For he later says that "the Trinity means the Christ event in the eschatological interpretation of faith. The Trinity therefore also means the history of God, which in human terms is the history of love and rebellion."⁴⁷

Moltmann continuously uses a Hegelian dialectical methodology in his theology. He supports this even from Schelling's words: "Every being can be revealed only in its opposite.

40. Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (SCM, 1968), p. 171.

41. Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Blackwell, 1994), p. 222.

42. W. Nicholls, *Systematic and Philosophical Theology* (Penguin Books Ltd, 1971), p. 346.

43. Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, p. 307.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 224.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 252.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 250.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 254.

35. Martin D'Arcy, *Communism and Christianity* (Penguin Books Ltd, 1956), p. 54.

36. Nicky Gumbel, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

38. Jurgen Moltmann, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

39. Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (SCM, 1974), p. 5.

Love only in hatred, unity in conflict.’ Applied to Christian theology, this means that God is only revealed as ‘God’ in his opposite: godlessness and abandonment.”⁴⁸

This use of opposites for dialectical purposes is used throughout his description of “God”: “what happened on the cross was an event between God and God. It was a deep division in God himself, in so far as God abandoned God and contradicted himself, and at the same time a unity in God, in so far as God was at one with God and corresponded to himself. . . . God died the death of the godless on the cross and yet did not die. God is dead and yet is not dead.”⁴⁹ Thus Moltmann’s “unknown Father of Jesus Christ” is like Horkheimer’s “Wholly-Other”: unknown, dialectical, revealed in opposites and an event.

Consequently, Moltmann’s Jesus Christ is not “God Incarnate.” But just as there are two fathers so there are two Jesuses; one who is the political rebel and the other who is the Christ. “By his resurrection Jesus was made Christ, Son of God, Kyrios, by [this atheistic and unknown] God.”⁵⁰ This adoptionism suits Moltmann because the “resurrection of Jesus from the dead by [this atheistic and unknown] God does not speak the “language of facts,” but only the language of faith and hope, that is, the “language of promise.”⁵¹ If the resurrection was not a factual occasion, then what of the crucifixion? For Moltmann, Jesus [not God Incarnate] “died not only because of the understanding of the law by his contemporaries or because of Roman power politics, but ultimately because of his God and Father. The torment in his torments was this abandonment by God.”⁵² He continues that “the cry of Jesus in the words of Ps. 22 means not only ‘My God, why hast thou forsaken me?’ but at the same time, ‘My God, why hast thou forsaken *thyself*?’”⁵³ Moltmann cannot accept vicarious atonement because it “cannot display any intrinsic theological connection with the resurrection.”⁵⁴ Not only, for Moltmann, did Jesus abolish “the legal distinction between religious and secular, righteous and unrighteous, devout and sinful. . . . [but he also] revealed God in a different way from that in which he was understood in the law and the tradition and was perceived by the guardians of the law.”⁵⁵ And not only was the death of Jesus a philosophical and existential abandonment but it was also a political abandonment: “To this extent, one can say that crucifixion at that time was a political punishment for rebellion against the social and political order of the *Imperium Romanum*.”⁵⁶

So how would Moltmann’s theological politics (for there is a similarity even in terms between Horkheimer’s philosophical politics of Critical Theory and Moltmann’s theological politics of Critical Theology⁵⁷) work out for Alpha’s life with a relationship with God? His form of “Christian Atheism”⁵⁸ first has an eschatological faith, where “the trinitarian God-event on the cross becomes the history of God which is open to the future and which opens up the future.”⁵⁹ With this eschatological faith there is the absorption into “political Christianity and in liberation struggles, and [understanding oneself] as part of this movement, the more [one] surrenders the area of personal devotion and

existential sensitivity to the meaning of life to political conservatives or unpolitical. . . . mission groups.”⁶⁰

Gumbel and the Redemptorist Christology

Empathy by Gumbel towards Roman Catholicism, in its various forms and beliefs, is not a surmise on my part, for he clearly demonstrates it when referring to Tom Forrest as an example of Christ’s command of “Go.” Gumbel writes that it was this “Roman Catholic priest who first suggested to the Pope, the idea of calling the 1990s ‘The Decade of Evangelism’.”⁶¹ First, it would be contradictory for Gumbel to use this as an example of biblical evangelism and message unless he accepts Roman Catholic teaching, in this case, that of Tom Forrest, on Soteriology and Christology. Secondly, it would be foolish to say that Gumbel is referring to the command “Go,” without referring to the content of the message, because if it was true then he could equally have referred to Jehovah Witnesses or Mormons in their adherence to the command “Go.” Thus Gumbel’s use of the example of Tom Forrest and the command “Go” has to be linked to the message that Tom Forrest in particular is proclaiming.

But what message is Tom Forrest proclaiming? We cannot use Roman Catholicism as a monolithic term, for within it are many divergent forms of belief and practice, contrary to popular belief and the smoke screen from the Vatican. First it needs to be said that Gumbel’s reference to Tom Forrest as a priest is as helpful as saying that Tony Blair is a socialist. What kind of socialist? What kind of priest? For Roman Catholicism is more divided than the Labour Movement of the United Kingdom, but the former has more spin than the latter. What Gumbel has failed to mention is that Father Tom Forrest CSSR is a Redemptorist.

Who, you may ask, are the Redemptorists? The Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer (CSSR) was established by Alphonsus Liguori in Scala, near Naples, in 1732. Today this congregation has communities situated within major countries of the world. The CSSR held to very conservative Roman Catholic beliefs and promulgated the various ancient Rites. Liguori fought against Jansenism and Febronianism. A prominent Redemptorist, Victor Deschamps, Cardinal of Malines, advanced the cause of papal infallibility at Vatican Council I. Under the title of “Our Lady of Perpetual Help,” Redemptorists nurture devotion to the “Blessed Virgin.” But just as there was mutual development between Vatican Council I and Redemptorists, so Vatican Council II was their undoing. For some Redemptorists, they believed that the Vatican Council II rescinded their core conservative beliefs. As a result, the CSSR divided into two branches in 1969. Some conservative Redemptorists held meetings with Archbishop Lefebvre to discuss the future. The *Novo Ordo* Redemptorists followed the *Novo Ordo* Mass and Constitutions and the Transalpine Redemptorists, with the blessing of Lefebvre, continued to adhere to their respective ancient rites and traditional Rules, as codified by Liguori.

But what of Fr Tom Forrest CSSR? According to the *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*⁶² he was born

48. *Ibid.*, p. 27. See also p. 184 and p. 255. 49. *Ibid.*, p. 244.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 179. 51. *Ibid.*, p. 173. 52. *Ibid.*, p. 149.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 151. 54. *Ibid.*, p. 183. 55. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 136. 57. *Ibid.*, p. 69 and p. 226.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 251. 59. *Ibid.*, p. 255.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

61. Nicky Gumbel, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

62. Stanley Burgess and Gary McGee, (eds), *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Regency Reference Library, Zondervan Publishing House, USA, 1988), p. 314.

in the USA and was ordained, in 1954, as a priest in the CSSR, working then in the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. Forrest was director of the International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Office and was also chairman of the Council for Catholic Charismatic Renewal, first in Brussels then Rome, from 1978 to 1984. He is also on the Council of Reference for the March For Jesus. His charismatic “Baptism in the Holy Spirit” was in 1971.

How does this relate to his Christology and to Gumbel’s use of him as an example of the command “Go”? In 1990, at the *Indianapolis Congress on the Holy Spirit and World Evangelization*, Forrest addressed the audience as follows:

I’m going to start off this morning with an announcement . . . I’m not only a Christian; I am a Catholic. I have been a Catholic for sixty-three years, and I just love being a Catholic [enthusiastic clapping] . . . So evangelization is never fully successful . . . until the convert is made a member of Christ’s body by being led into the Church . . . That’s what the Church is [The visible sacrament of salvation], and if that is what the Church is, we have to be evangelizing into the Church [clapping]. What does that mean in practice? . . . you don’t just invite someone to become a Christian. You invite them to become Catholics . . . Why would this be so important? Let me just quickly give you a few reasons. First of all, there are seven sacraments, and the Catholic Church has all seven [clapping] . . . We don’t just have the Eucharist as a symbol of the body and blood of Christ; we have the body of Christ; we drink the blood of Christ [enthusiastic clapping]. Jesus is alive on our altars . . . We become one with Christ in the Eucharist . . . As Catholics we have Mary [clapping]. And that Mom of ours, Queen of Paradise, is praying for us till she sees us in glory [clapping]. As Catholics we have the Papacy, a history of popes from Peter to John Paul II. As Catholics—now I love this one—we have purgatory [clapping]. Thank God!⁶³

Several key points from Forrest’s address can be related to Redemptorist teaching, but we will only examine his Christology. It would be fair to assume that Forrest was instructed from Ligouri’s *The Glories of Mary*⁶⁴ as a seminarian and, as can be observed from the above transcript, he has not lost any ardour for “Mom.”

By using *The Glories of Mary* as the source material it will become apparent that the more that is added to the biblical revelation of Christ, the more that is subtracted from his office and nature as Christ, the Son of God.

1. Mary is given a place belonging to Christ.⁶⁵ “And she is truly a mediatrix of peace between sinners and God. Sinners receive pardon by . . . Mary alone.”⁶⁶ “Mary is our life . . . Mary in obtaining this grace for sinners by her intercession, thus restores them to life.”⁶⁷

2. Mary is glorified more than Christ. “The Holy Church commands a worship peculiar to Mary.”⁶⁸ “Many things . . . are asked from God, and are not granted; they are asked from Mary, and are obtained, for She . . . is even Queen of Hell, and Sovereign Mistress of the Devils.”⁶⁹

3. Mary is the gate of heaven instead of Christ. “Mary is called . . . the gate of heaven because no one can enter that

blessed kingdom without passing through her.”⁷⁰ “The way of salvation is open to none otherwise than through Mary, and since our salvation is in the hands of Mary . . . he who is protected by Mary will be saved, he who is not will be lost.”⁷¹

4. Mary is given the power of Christ. “All power is given to thee in Heaven and on earth, so that at the command of Mary all obey—even God . . . and thus . . . God has placed the whole Church . . . under the dominion of Mary.”⁷² “Mary is also the Advocate of the whole human race . . . for she can do what she wills with God.”⁷³

5. Mary is given the glory that belongs to Christ alone. “The whole Trinity, O Mary, gave thee a name . . . above every name, that at Thy name, every knee should bow, of things in heaven, on earth, and under the earth.”⁷⁴

And the Roman Catholic Church is opposed to women priests? They have one. With the Redemptorists it is Mary the Christ. This unbiblical Mary that they have made, with the denigration of Christ, the Son of God, to being a mere servant of Mary, has usurped the place, the power and the glory of the biblical Christ.

But how would Forrest’s usurped Christology work out for Alpha’s life with a relationship with God? His form of Christological Mariolatry has to be accepted as truly Christian on the grounds that Gumbel has said “in one sense it is not so important what denomination we are—Roman Catholic or Protestant . . . What is more important is whether or not we have the Spirit of God. If people have the Spirit of God living within them, they are Christians, and our brothers and sisters.”⁷⁵

And as Gumbel has used Forrest as an example of the command “Go,” then Gumbel accepts Forrest as a brother because he has the [charismatic?] Spirit of God living within him. On this basis so should all the Alpha churches who have accepted Alpha. [But I do not believe that the Roman Catholic Church is as inclusive towards Gumbel.] Moreover, if that is true for Forrest, then Alpha encourages people to accept everyone on the notional basis of “Spirit of God,” irrespective of their Christology, as “our brothers and sisters.” And on a different tack, will Gumbel rewrite Alpha to be more explicit, and less couched in Trinitarian terms, about Mary the Christ, which is the “Gospel According to Rome” (as the title of the book by the ex-Catholic James MacCarthy⁷⁶ puts it)?

Gumbel, Roman Catholicism and Not Christ Alone

I said that some people may think that I am being unfair to Gumbel because, although he has a tendency to name-drop, he does not accept the views of Tillich and Moltmann. I cannot accept this. Is Gumbel so careless in his choice of name-drops that they become just random choices from a Book of Quotations? This is too ludicrous to consider. My line of examination has been based upon comparing Alpha against Articles II and XVIII. Does the Christology of these four people form an integral part of Gumbel and Alpha’s beliefs? Or does he accept them as Christians, according to

63. Stanley Mawhinney, *Evangelical Catholics: A New Phenomenon* (Christian Ministries Incorporated, Ireland, 1992), p. 41–42.

64. Alphonse Ligouri, *The Glories of Mary* (Redemptorist Fathers, USA, 1931).

65. I would acknowledge the work of Brian Scwertley and Stephen Pribble at www.reformed.com/pub/rc.htm

66. Alphonse Ligouri, *The Glories of Mary*, p. 82–83.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 80. 68. *Ibid.*, p. 130. 69. *Ibid.*, p. 127, 141, 143.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 160.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 169f.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 180f.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 193.

74. *Ibid.*, p. 260.

75. Nicky Gumbel, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

76. James MacCarthy, *The Gospel According To Rome* (Harvest House Publishers, USA, 1995).

their sincerely held beliefs? I pointed out that holding to either of these two positions is equally as damaging.

For my ongoing criticism of Gumbel being empathetic towards Roman Catholicism, it is necessary to show that Tolstoy, Tillich, Moltmann and Forrest, or more accurately their beliefs, are underneath the umbrella of beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church. Obviously Forrest has a place there and, surprisingly, so do the others. Moltmann has, at times, collaborated with the Roman Catholic Johann-Baptist Metz, “a leading figure in political theology, seeing Christianity as a constructive critique of society and the church.”⁷⁷ Tolstoy, although opposed to the clerical priesthood, would find aspects of his beliefs in Henry Wieman, who sought an empirical approach where God was a supreme value, and in Boff and Gutierrez, where “the Marx of liberation is, in part, an anarchist Marx.”⁷⁸ Meanwhile, Tillich would find some consensus amongst such philosophers as Marcel and Teilhard. Gumbel’s referral to these people seems to indicate empathy towards Roman Catholicism, particularly with this example of the Redemptorist Tom Forrest.

However, although these four people’s views can be found within Roman Catholicism, there are contradictions between the beliefs of these people and what Gumbel has said in *Questions of Life*. Gumbel is in contradiction with his

use of Tolstoy, Tillich and Moltmann because Gumbel prays to a supernatural God,⁷⁹ speaks of this God dying for people⁸⁰ and mentions a bodily resurrection.⁸¹ Also there are contradictions connected with the outworking of the Christian faith. As Alpha is narcissistic and hedonist, it is in no position to consider or undertake the rigors of the politically motivated faith of Tolstoy or Moltmann. So, if Gumbel is in contradiction with them, why mention them? One reason that seems apparent to me is that he “is very happy to be called catholic, or evangelical, and charismatic and a liberal because [he sees] value in the Catholic view of the Church, the evangelical emphasis on the Bible, and the liberal emphasis on using our minds in a critical study of the Bible.”⁸² But where is the critical study in devising this apologetical evangelism, for Gumbel seems not to have thought through the issues in order to make a consistent application.

In conclusion, regarding Article II, Gumbel has presented a confusing and contradictory demonstration of Alpha’s Christology. That is bad enough, but what is worse is that according to Article XVIII, Alpha is indifferent towards the salvation procured by the Lord Jesus Christ through its acceptance of other people’s sincerely held unscriptural beliefs about Christology and Soteriology. *C&S*

77. John Bowden, *Who’s Who in Theology* (SCM Press, 1990), p. 86.

78. Linda Damico, *The Anarchist Dimension of Liberation Theology* (Peter Lang, USA, 1987), p. 10.

79. Nicky Gumbel, *op. cit.*, p. 87ff.

80. *Ibid.*, p. 47f.

81. *Ibid.*, p. 36f.

82. Andy Peck, “The alpha phenomenon” in *Christianity* (May 2000), p. 18.

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THE JOINT DECLARATION ON THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION BY THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH¹

by David Estrada

An historical step?

THE Joint Declaration made by Catholics and Protestants on the doctrine of Justification was an event that has recently held the attention of both the religious and the secular media. The Declaration is a summary of the conclusions reached by Catholics and Lutherans after a long series of contacts and dialogues held since 1972. Never before, it is said, has a doctrinal controversy between Catholics and Protestants been conducted under such a friendly and charitable atmosphere and with such a spirit of reconciliation and ecumenicity. The thunders of doctrinal bellicosity and the anathemas of heretical condemnation of the past are totally absent in the Declaration—something we acknowledge as essential in any attempt to overcome doctrinal differences and to start afresh in the true path of ecumenism.

Since the doctrine of justification was central to the Lutheran Reformation—“the ruler and judge over all other Christian doctrines,”—it was on this “first and chief article” that Lutherans and Catholics centered their discussions. Both parties acknowledged that the doctrine of justification is more than just one part of Christian doctrine: “It stands in an essential relation to all truths of faith, which are to be seen as internally related to each other.” (3.18). By appropriating insights of recent biblical studies and drawing on modern investigations of the history of theology and dogma, the post-Vatican II ecumenical dialogue has led to a notable convergence concerning justification, “with the result that the Joint Declaration is able to formulate a consensus on basic truths concerning the doctrine of justification” (2.13). The basic agreement between Lutherans and Catholics has put an end to the condemnations and mutual anathemas of the past. The doctrinal condemnation of the sixteenth century—in so far as they relate to the doctrine of justification—appear in a new light: “. . . the teaching of the Lutheran churches presented in this Declaration does not fall under the condemnation from the Council of Trent. The condemnations in the Lutheran confessions do not apply to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church presented in this Declaration.” (5.40, 41).

The biblical message of justification

The consensus is presented as the result of “listening together to the good news proclaimed in Holy Scriptures.” A long list of Bible references appears in the Joint Declaration and on the basis of these texts it is concluded that the foundation and presupposition of justification “is the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ. Justification thus means that Christ himself is our righteousness, in which we share through the Holy Spirit in accord with the will of the Father. Together we confess: by grace alone, in faith in Christ’s saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works.” (3.14, 15).

The Declaration under examination

There is much in the Declaration that is good and sound and in basic agreement with all the Protestant confessions. The problem arises once the Declaration enters into what is called the “explication” of the common understanding of justification. With the explications, the consensus fades away and we fail to see any real change in the traditional Catholic doctrinal position. The expression “we confess together” is repeated again and again, but it is not synonymous with “we agree together.” Each church “confesses” its particular doctrinal stance on justification, yet a close reading reveals that what they confess is not one and the same doctrine of justification. In spite of the alluring and enthusiastic pronouncements of “basic agreement” there is no real fundamental agreement between the creeds of the two churches. The more we scrutinize the document, the more apparent it becomes that the fundamental differences between Catholics and Lutherans still persist and that the agreement reached in the Declaration is more verbal than real. By resorting to conciliatory language, the dividing issues are presented in a vague and subtle tone. Words and expressions which even in ordinary everyday language have distinct meaning, are used as synonyms in the Declaration.

1. *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, by the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church*. Received from the Vatican via Internet (http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifi...01999_cath-luth-joint-declaration_en.html).

The synergistic tension in Catholicism

Far beyond the difficulties of trying to reach formulas of agreement with the Protestant position, the real problem

with Roman Catholicism is to conciliate her firm defence of “grace alone” in salvation with her no less firm defence of justification “through baptism,” and the subsequent meritorious character of good works. An element of synergism runs through the Catholic conception of justification and threatens the absolute character of grace in salvation. It is of no avail to resort to intricate and elaborate scholastic subtleties to try to solve this problem. The tensions and conflicts of the Catholic position are constantly and noticeably latent in the way the doctrine of justification is presented. This can be particularly seen in the way Catholicism understands baptism, faith, good works and human co-operation in connection with the doctrine of justification.

Faith versus Baptism

A good example of equating terms of differing meaning as theologically synonymous is found in the way in which the Declaration uses the words “faith” and “baptism.” According to the Declaration, Lutherans and Catholics “confess together that sinners are justified by faith in the saving action of God in Christ. By the action of the Holy Spirit in baptism, they are granted the gift of salvation, which lays the basis for the whole Christian life.” (4.3.25).

Is it correct to say that “justification by faith” amounts to the same thing as “justification through baptism”? Is there biblical support for such an identification? According to the teaching of the Scriptures, *faith* is the instrumental cause of justification. Faith is the act of receiving and resting upon Christ for salvation. From the beginning to the end the salvation of the sinner is a work of grace. Men are not justified for what they are or for what they do, but for what Christ has done for them. The ground of justification is the righteousness of Christ imputed to the believer. It is by faith that we receive the righteousness of Christ and are accounted righteous before God. We are justified by faith, or through faith, or upon faith. Faith in Christ is in order to justification. (Gal. 2:16; Rom. 1:17; 3:22, 25–30; 4:3, 5, 16, 24; 5:1; Gal. 3:8,9; 5:4–5; Phil. 3:9). Faith and grace are wholly complementary: “Therefore it is of faith, in order that it might be according to grace” (Rom. 4:16). If we were to be justified by works, in any degree or to any extent, then there would be no gospel at all. Justification is that by which grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life; it is for the believer alone and *it is for the believer by faith alone*. It is the righteousness of God from faith to faith (Rom. 1:17; 2:22). This is the teaching found also in all the Lutheran creeds, where the doctrine of justification through faith alone is indicated as the highest and most important article of the faith, and as the key to all the doors of Scripture.

This inseparable connection between *faith* and *justification* is, and has been, very much ignored by Rome, which defines faith as a mere intellectual belief, or assent to revealed truth. According to Roman Catholic teaching, baptism is the essential instrumental cause, as it is only through or by baptism that inherent righteousness is infused or justification is effected. Catholics hold that on account of the work of Christ, God grants, *through baptism*, an infusion of divine grace by which all sin is purged from the soul, all grounds for the infliction of penalty is removed and the sinner is rendered inherently just. In virtue of the new principle of spiritual life thus imparted, the baptised are enabled to perform good works, which are meritorious and

on account of which they have a claim to eternal life. All the benefits of the redemption of Christ are conveyed to the soul by baptism, there is no other divinely appointed channel of their communication.

There is no biblical warrant for substituting *faith* for *baptism* as the instrumental cause for conveying the righteousness of Christ to the sinner. Faith and baptism are not two synonymous means of conveying the justifying righteousness of Christ. The doctrine that the sacraments are the only channels for conveying the benefits of Christ’s redemption to men is clearly contrary to the express teaching of the Bible. The idea that a man’s state before God depends on anything external, on birth, on membership in any visible organisation, or on any outward rite or ceremony, is utterly abhorrent to the spiritual message of the Bible. It is true, on the other hand, that the teaching of Lutherans on baptism is not quite the same as that of the other Protestants. Lutherans do, indeed, teach the necessity of the sacraments, but they also teach that true, living, saving faith is the indispensable condition of their efficacy. Is it the Lutherans, then, who have conceded? Let’s hope not.

Human co-operation and good works

Also, on the matter of “human co-operation” and “good works” the concepts of the Joint Declaration are so ambiguously worded as to discard any real conflict between Catholics and Lutherans. “Human co-operation” appears in Catholicism under the insuperable contradiction of attempting to conciliate human agency, on the one hand, and divine cause on the other. In the gospel of free grace there is no room for the term “co-operation.” No scholastic *disquisitio* will ever be able to incorporate the slightest element of co-operation into the biblical concept of grace. On this point, and in spite of the mild wording of the Declaration, the Lutheran and Catholic positions are totally different. The Declaration reads as follows:

Catholics say that persons “co-operate” in preparing for and accepting justification by consenting to God’s justifying action, they see such personal consent as itself an effect of grace, not as an action arising from innate human abilities. According to Lutheran teaching, human beings are incapable of co-operating in their salvation, because as sinners they actively oppose God and his saving action. Lutherans do not deny that a person can reject the working of grace. When they emphasize that a person can only receive (mere passive) justification, they mean thereby to exclude any possibility of contributing to one’s own justification, but do not deny that believers are fully involved personally in their faith, which is effected by God’s Word. (4.1.19, 20, 21).

To say that the believer is fully involved personally in his faith is more than obvious. We “repent” and we “believe” as well as we engage in other spiritual activities proper of the new life in Christ. By God’s grace and the workings of his Spirit in us we are able to respond as persons in all that which pertains to our salvation, knowing that “it is God who worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” When it is said that according to Catholic teaching this personal involvement implies a sort of “co-operation” in preparing for and accepting justification by consenting to God’s justifying action, Roman Catholicism cannot avoid falling into synergism. Response can not be equated with co-operation. The Roman Catholic teaching of co-operation

implies a personal element of meritorious activity, totally absent in the Protestant idea of personal involvement in salvation. According to Luther, to speak of co-operation to obtain the grace of justification and of man's disposition by a movement of his own will to receive it, would be a "most iniquitous perversion of the Gospel."

Sola-gratia and the meritoriousness of good works

The element of synergism in Catholic teaching is further accentuated in the reference to the meritoriousness of "good works." Once again it must be pointed out that the Catholic position is worded in ambiguous terms:

When Catholics affirm the "meritorious" character of good works, they wish to say that, according to the biblical witness, a reward in heaven is promised to these works. Their intention is to emphasize the responsibility of persons for their actions, not to contest the character of those works as gifts, or far less to deny that justification always remains the unmerited gift of grace. (4.7-38).

The ideas of "co-operation" and "meritoriousness of good works," appear together under the general theme of the doctrine of justification. It is therefore at the light of that doctrine that all the other subordinate subjects must be understood. In the Declaration, what the Catholics state on human "co-operation" and on the "meritoriousness of good works" lacks the clarity of definition of traditional Catholic teaching. For instance, Canon IX of the Council of Trent explicitly states that "whosoever shall say that the wicked is justified by faith alone, in such a sense that nothing else is required in the way of co-operation to obtain the grace of justification, and that it is in no respect necessary that he be prepared and disposed by the movement of his own will, let him be anathema."

The whole Roman Catholic doctrine of merit is based on the assumption that justification removes everything of the nature of sin from the soul; that works performed by the renewed man free from sin are perfect; that a renewed man can not only fulfil all the demands of the law, but also do more than the law requires.² In trying to conciliate the meritoriousness of good works with the absolute grace of God in salvation, Catholics claim that we owe to Christ the grace or spiritual life by which we perform good works. Neither in the Bible nor in the traditional Lutheran confessions do good works performed by the believer merit, in any degree, the righteousness of salvation, which is only to be found in the perfect redemption accomplished by Christ. The Declaration adds:

According to Catholic understanding, good works, made possible by grace and the working of the Holy Spirit, contribute to growth in grace, so that the righteousness that comes from God

2. The Catholic theory of merit reached its culminating point in the doctrine of Indulgences, which is closely related to the doctrine of Purgatory. According to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, in the forgiveness of sins God remits only the penalty of eternal death. There remain temporal pains to be endured in satisfaction of divine justice. If such satisfaction be not made in this world, it must be rendered in the next. The Church has the power of regulating these satisfactions. The infinite merits of Christ and the superabundant merits of all the saints, gained by works of supererogation, form an inexhaustible treasury, from which the Pope may draw for the mitigation, or plenary dispensation, of all the satisfaction due for sin in the way of penance in this life, or the pains of purgatory in the life to come.

is preserved and communion with Christ is deepened. When Catholics affirm the "meritorious" character of good works, they wish to say that, according to the biblical witness, a reward in heaven is promised to these works. Their intention is to emphasize the responsibility of persons for their actions, not to contest the character of those works as gifts, or far less to deny that justification always remains the unmerited gift of grace (4.7-37, 38).

The above affirmation does not reflect correctly the traditional doctrine of the Roman Church. To affirm that "good works" contribute to *growth* in grace, to the *preservation* of divine righteousness, and to achieving a deeper *communion* with Christ is at variance with Trent, which explicitly states that the co-operation implicit in the good works performed by man is in order "to obtain the grace of justification." What the Declaration says about good works is a distortion of the Roman Catholic teaching on the subject. According to the Declaration, the intent of good works is to emphasise the responsibility of persons for their actions. Of course believers have to be responsible and have to grow in grace, but are all these obvious spiritual implications the main purport of the doctrine of good works? To add confusion on the subject, the Declaration also relates good works with *gifts*, as we will see later.

Sola fide and good-works

The Catholic Church was totally mistaken when it took the Reformed doctrine of forensic justification to mean no more than the "external" imputation of the righteousness of Christ, with no sanctifying results for the "inner" man. For Luther and all the Reformers, justification meant much more than an external event with no relevance for the life of the believer. Luther dealt extensively on good works and on Christian liberty, but nowhere does he, on the basis of the *sola fide*, justify libertinism. According to Luther, faith precedes good works and good works follow faith. The *sola fide* is at the heart of justification but no less at the heart of sanctification. True faith is the key to good works. Never in the Reformed teaching are the necessary good works of the believer regarded as being meritorious in any respect. The Declaration's claim that the Roman Catholic view on good works is in basic agreement with the Lutheran position is therefore disconcerting:

When Lutherans view the good works of Christians as the fruits and signs of justification and not as one's own "merits," they also understand eternal life in accord with the New Testament as unmerited "reward" in the sense of the fulfilment of God's promise to the believer (4.7, 39).

As with faith and baptism, Catholics misunderstand the issue when they place the "meritoriousness of good works" on the same level with the doctrine of "rewards." Rewards and *sola fide-sola gratia* go together. It was this work-reward relationship that ruled out any possibility of compromise for the Reformers. In the Roman Catholic position, God becomes indebted to man. In the Protestant position, it is only through God's mercy that rewards are bestowed on the believer. Even with the complete performance of all the biblical obligations, there is no room for self-congratulation. "Even so ye also, when ye shall have done all the things that are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do" (Lk. 17:10).

Justification and Sanctification

Catholic theology has always confused justification with sanctification. This is also the reason why Catholic theology has failed to do justice to the biblical doctrinal of imputation in justification and to the doctrine of sanctification as a process of spiritual renewal in the believer. Both doctrines are inseparable from faith. Justification takes place outside of the sinner in the tribunal of God, and does not change his inner life, though the sentence is brought home to him subjectively. Sanctification, on the other hand, takes place in the inner life of man and gradually affects his whole being. Justification takes place once for all. It is not repeated, neither is it a process; it is complete at once and for all time. There is no more or less in justification; man is either fully justified, or he is not justified at all. In contrast, sanctification is a continuous process which is never completed in this life.

The justified are called to be holy. This is the clear and forceful Scriptural imperative: “For this is the will of God, even your sanctification” (1 Thess. 4:3). The sanctification of the believer here demanded is never an independent area of human activity: it originates in God’s mercy. Justification is by faith alone, *but not by a faith that is alone*. Faith alone justifies but a justified person with faith alone would be—as professor Murray would say—a monstrosity which never exists in the kingdom of grace. Faith works itself out through love (Gal. 5:6); faith without works is dead (Jam. 2:17–20). No one has entrusted himself to Christ for deliverance from the guilt of sin who has not also entrusted himself to him for deliverance from the power of sin. “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” (Rom. 6:1–2).

The problem of sin in the believer

The reality of sin in the justified person is also dealt with in the Joint Declaration:

When Lutherans say that justified persons are also sinners and that their opposition to God is truly sin, they do not deny that, despite this sin, they are not separated from God and that this sin is a “ruled” sin. In these affirmations, they are in agreement with Roman Catholics, despite the differences in understanding sin in the justified. The Catholics hold that the grace of Jesus Christ imparted in baptism takes away all that is sin “in the proper sense” and that is “worthy of damnation” (Rom. 8:1).³ There does, however, remain in the person an inclination (concupiscence) which comes from sin and presses toward sin . . . Catholics do not see this inclination as sin in an authentic sense . . . (4.4.28, 29, 30).

The Roman Catholic affirmation that the sin in the justified person is a mere “inclination” to sin—not sin “in an authentic sense”—has no biblical support. Justification is not the elimination of sin; sin can only be forgiven. Believers are involved in a process of spiritual recovery and hence Luther can speak of being “in part justified, in part sinner.” To pray for the total suspension of sin, says the Reformer, is to ask for the suspension of life. The inclination toward evil remains, but there is a transition nonetheless toward righteousness. The call of the believer is always a psalm *de profundis*. It is a man in touch with grace who cries: “If thou,

Jehovah, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?” (Ps. 130:3). It is the believer who says: “And enter not into judgement with thy servant; for in thy sight shall no man living be righteous” (Ps. 143:2). As Paul writes: “Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect: but I press on, if so be that I may lay hold on that for which also I was laid hold on by Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:12). According to Calvin: “There never was an action performed by a pious man, which, if examined by the scrutinizing eye of Divine justice, would not deserve condemnation” (*Institutes*, 3.14.11).

Rome teaches not only the possibility of moral perfection but also the presence of perfection through the infusion of sanctifying grace in baptism. In the doctrine of infused grace the correlation between faith and divine grace is entirely eclipsed: faith simply had to leave the field to make room for infused sacramental grace. For the Reformers, the doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit is designed precisely to prevent the believer from viewing himself as an independent, dynamistic unit. This doctrine does not make man self-sufficient but rather underlines his perpetual and inherent lack of self-sufficiency. Faith, though not itself creative, preserves us from autonomous self-sanctification and moralism. *Progress in sanctification* means working out one’s own salvation with an increasing sense of dependence on God’s grace. Clearly the message of Scripture is that in sanctification there is never, under any circumstances, any room for self-pride or self-praise. The purpose of preaching the Ten Commandments is that believers may become the more earnest in seeking remission of sins and righteousness in Christ. *Sola fide* banishes all self-praise, not only in the beginning but throughout the life of sanctification.

Assurance of salvation

The matter of *assurance of salvation* is also dealt with in the Joint Declaration. The affirmations of the Declaration can be considered basically sound, in as much as the whole issue pivots around the decisive importance given to the role of faith. The consensus is stated in the following terms:

We confess together that the faithful can rely on the mercy and promises of God. In spite of their weakness and the manifold threats to their faith, on the strength of Christ’s death and resurrection they can build on the effective promise of God’s grace in Word and Sacrament and so be sure of this grace . . . To have faith is to entrust oneself totally to God, who liberates us from the darkness of sin and death and awakens us to eternal life . . . No one may doubt God’s mercy and Christ’s merit. Every person, however, may be concerned about his salvation when he looks upon his own weaknesses and shortcomings. Recognizing his own failures, however, the believer may yet be certain that God intends his salvation. (4.6.34, 35, 36).

In the matter of assurance, the Roman Catholic position gives an unprecedented significance to faith: “to have faith is to entrust oneself totally to God;” “one cannot believe in God and at the same time consider the divine promise untrustworthy. No one may doubt God’s mercy and Christ’s merit.” From these affirmations, are we to infer that Roman Catholics now believe in the assurance of salvation? In the past Roman Catholicism taught that believers cannot be sure of their salvation, except in those rare cases in which assurance is given by special revelation. It is indeed noteworthy that in the subject of assurance Roman Catholicism

3. To appeal to Rom. 8:1 in support of the Catholic position is indeed an example of distorted biblical exegesis!

bestows on faith a leading role which is denied in the doctrine of justification. On the matter of assurance, and even on the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, the Reformed confessional standards vary somewhat. Lutherans *rejected* the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints but they did not deny the assurance of salvation.⁴

The Joint Declaration ends with words of ecumenical hope and further progress in reaching other doctrinal agreements:

The Lutheran churches and the Roman Catholic Church will continue to strive together to deepen this common understanding of justification and to make it bear fruit in the life and teaching of the churches. We give thanks to the Lord for this decisive step forward on the way to overcoming the division of the church. We ask the Holy Spirit to lead us further toward that visible unity which is Christ's will. (5.43, 44).

The shadow of Ratisbon

After more than four centuries of controversy, debate, condemnations and anathemas, religious wars, persecutions, and burnings at the stake, now Catholics and Lutherans realise that on the key issue of the Reformation—the doctrine of justification,—both parties were defending the same soteriological scheme! Thanks to “new insights” and “new light” Catholics and Lutherans now realise that since the sixteenth century they have been saying basically the same things on the doctrine of justification! Regrettable, indeed!

It is not the first time in history that the differences between Catholics and Protestants have been considered more *semantic* than *real*. In 1530, the Lutherans presented their *Confession* at the Diet of Augsburg. In this creed the method of justification by the free grace of God, through faith alone in the sole merits Christ, as the only Saviour, was stated in the clearest and most concise way; yet the Catholic divines rejected the Protestant doctrine. The chief ground of their opposition was its alleged “novelty” and direct variance with the prevailing teachings of the Church. The *Apology* presented afterwards by the Lutherans in reply to the Roman objections was once again condemned by the Catholic theologians as contrary to the teaching of the Church. It was quite evident that the biblical doctrine of justification was not understood: Catholic theologians were caught up hopelessly in works-righteousness and human meritoriousness.

Between the Diet of Augsburg (1530) and that of Ratisbon (1541), a striking change occurred in the views of the Catholic divines. Instead of denouncing the Protestant doctrine of justification, as they previously had, as a dangerous novelty directly opposed to the traditional teaching of the Church, they were now prepared to regard it as a truth they had always held and taught. Adding, that there was no real, or, at least no radical, difference between the two parties. Among the concessions which were made to the Protestants were these: since the fall of Adam, all men are born enemies

of God and children of wrath by sin, but by Jesus Christ, the only Mediator, their sins are freely forgiven them; faith justifies not, but leads us to mercy and righteousness which is imputed to us through Jesus Christ and His merits, and not by any perfection of righteousness which is inherent in us, but we are reputed just on account of the merits of Jesus Christ only.

Amid all these concessions, one point was carefully reserved, however. This point, expressed in ambiguous terms, was of such fundamental importance that, according to its semantic interpretation, it would determine the whole character of justification. Is the righteousness of justification imputed or infused? By holding a concept of infused righteousness, the Catholic theologians substituted the work of the Spirit *in us*, in the place of the work of Christ *for us*. Thus, by introducing the sanctifying effects of faith, the Catholic divines made provision for falling back on their favourite doctrine of an inherent—as opposed to an imputed—righteousness, thus setting aside all the concessions which they had apparently made.

The concessions made by Catholics at Ratisbon illustrate the possibility of appearing to concede almost everything, while one point is reserved, or wrapped up in ambiguous language, which is found afterwards sufficient to neutralise every concession, and to leave the parties as much at variance as before. It has been justly said that in controversies of faith, the differences between antagonistic systems is often reduced to a line as fine as a razor's edge; on one side of that line is God's truth, on the other a departure from it.

The “agreements” of Ratisbon gave the impression that there was no radical or irreconcilable difference between Catholics and Protestants. Yet, when they came to explain their respective views, it was found that they were contending for two opposite methods of justification: the one by an inherent, the other by an imputed righteousness. There can be no honest compromise between the two methods of justification; one is at direct variance with the other. Any settlement on the basis of mutual concession can only be made via ambiguities and can amount to nothing more than a hollow truce, liable to be broken by either party as soon as the subject is brought up again in serious discussion. This was the abortive result of the apparent agreement at Ratisbon; it settled no question, it satisfied no party, and led afterwards to much misunderstanding and mutual recrimination. “Let them go on,” said Luther, referring to the schemes of those who thought that the differences between Roman Catholics and Protestants might be reconciled by such conferences, “we shall not envy the success of their labours: they will be the first who could ever convert the devil and reconcile him to Christ.”

The doctrine of justification by grace, through faith in Christ, is the old doctrine of the Reformation, and the still older doctrine of the gospel. The Protestant doctrine of justification was not a “novelty” introduced for the first time by Luther and Calvin; it was held and taught by some of the greatest theologians in every successive age and was always held in substance by true believers, though its full development and more precise definition seems to have been reserved till the great controversy that arose between Rome and the Reformed Churches in the sixteenth century. Few things in the history of the Church are more remarkable than the entire unanimity of the Reformers on the subject of a sinner's justification before God. It is to the glory of the

4. Among the Calvinistic confessions, the Canons of Dort take the position that assurance is not the fruit of a special revelation, but springs from God's promises, from the testimony of the Holy Spirit, and from the exercise of a good conscience and the doing of good works, and is enjoyed according to the measure of faith. This certainly implies that it belongs in some measure to the essence of faith. It is explicitly stated, however, that believers frequently have to struggle with carnal doubts, so that they are not always sensible of the assurance of faith.

Lutheran creeds that they never capitulated on this point. Together with the Reformed symbols they have preserved the gospel from the infiltration of supposedly meritorious good works, and they have honored the gospel of grace. According to Calvin, “the doctrine of man’s justification would be easily explained, did not the false opinions by which the minds of men are preoccupied, spread darkness over the clear light. The principal cause of obscurity, however, is, that we are with the greatest difficulty induced to

leave the glory of righteousness entire to God alone. For we always desire to be somewhat, and such is our folly, we even think we are.”⁵

Is the Joint Declaration signed by Catholics and Lutherans at Augsburg a twentieth century version of the agreements of Ratisbon of 1641? *C&S*

5. John Calvin, “Antidote to the Sixth Session of the Council of Trent” in *Tracts and Treatises* (Eerdmans, 1958), p. 108.

THE HISTORICAL CRITICAL METHOD: CAN THINGS EVER BE THE SAME AGAIN?

by Paul Wells

“MODERN theologians are not faithful to the Bible” is what we hear on many sides. For believing Christians, the historical critical method seems to result in making the Bible say what it doesn’t really say, at least on the primary level. In fact it is undeniable that there is a distance between the fruits of critical research and what an immediate reading of the text would seem to indicate. Most critics would concede this point, and one of them, an American scholar, J. Smart, even wrote a book entitled *The strange silence of the Bible in the Church* (1970).

However, for many critical scholars today, the distance between the results of the method in biblical disciplines and what the average Christian believes should not lead to an abandonment of the practice. If the method is questioned, it is not because of its results, but for other reasons which are internal, scientific and often concern what has been called the “crisis in interpretation.”

The impression is often given that the problem of the historical critical method can be resolved by a better use of its methods, by instructing members of the church as to the nature of its results, or by completing it with other forms of readings, such as a literary, sociological, or psychological interpretation of the text.

In this respect, James Barr, in his influential book *The Bible in the modern world* (1973), suggested that interpretation should be considered in triangular fashion with apexes concentrating not only on the historical (referential) level of the text, but also on its literary and intentional aspects in complementary fashion.

So it can be said that the interpretation of evangelicals or of the biblical theology movement, in the second half of the twentieth century, concentrated on the referential aspects of Scripture (the mighty acts of God), whereas the historical critical method was an archaeological approach, from the point of view of the intentionality of the authors. On the literary side, the Bible is considered as any text of literary value, in recent practice often from a structuralist perspec-

tive. The meaning is in the text, not in the author or the event. Often there has been polemic between these approaches which has lead Paul Ricoeur to name one of his works *The conflict of interpretations*.

1. WHAT IS THE HISTORICAL CRITICAL METHOD?

Some theologians say we must speak of method in the plural, because the methods are diverse; however most scholars continue to use the singular.

It is important not to identify the ideology of the method with the different techniques that it uses. One French scholar, P. Guillemette, has identified 50 different techniques for analysing a text. The techniques of interpretation are very diverse and are practised in different ways, in line with the fundamental presuppositions of those using them.

Today, no-one can ignore the importance of presuppositions, considering the work of T. Kuhn, K. Popper, M. Polanyi and on the theological level, C. Van Til.

Legitimate tools, historical and scientific, take on a specific function when they are used in the context of the historical critical method, in an ideological way. This sort of ideology can be resumed by four words: naturalism, rationalism, humanism and evolutionism.

These attitudes came out of the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, were developed in the nineteenth and taken as dogma in the twentieth century. In this perspective the Bible was just a collection of ancient documents to be submitted to the same rules of analysis and investigation as any other literary work, whether religious or theological.

2. THE PROBLEM

The development of the historical critical method over the last two centuries presents us with a double problem:

(a) There is a rupture on the theological level with the faith which our ancestors always believed and confessed.

The content of Christian faith in terms of what God has done to save us is wiped out. G. Ebeling and others have tried to tell us that the less we believe in the sense of objectivity, the more we can believe in the sense of subjectivity. Justification is by faith alone, not by belief in doctrines. This attitude asks us to accept a different relation between faith and the word of God than that of the Reformers, for whom justification was always based on belief in objective truth.

(b) The conviction held is that the discoveries of criticism, considered as being intangible because they are scientifically certain, necessarily imply modernisation of the doctrine of Scripture as the word of God, in order to align the view of Scripture which it is possible to hold with the results of criticism.

It is this second point which will be evoked in the rest of this article.

3. THE RELATION BETWEEN THE STATUTE OF SCRIPTURE AND INTERPRETATION

It is clear today that there is a close relation between the idea we have about the status of Scripture doctrinally and the way we interpret it. The way it is interpreted depends on the character attributed to the texts.

In the case of the Bible, the point at issue is the relationship which we see between the divine and the human word. If, for example, the Bible is thought to be simply a human word then the methods used in its interpretation will be the same as those used for any other text. The result will be that the “truths” of the Bible will simply be considered as human truths, not the eternal truths of revelation.

Nor is it possible to adopt the point of view which supposes that interpretation is objective, because it is “scientific” whereas faith is subjective. Consequently, an understanding of what Scripture *is*, must be held in suspension during the process of interpretation. Too often in the past such an approach has resulted in the elimination of the possibility of anything transcendent being revealed to man.

However, presuppositions which are not rational in nature, but which belong to the realm of belief are always involved in interpretation. In the realm of interpretation there is no neutrality. Any method employed will either be in line with the fundamental nature of the Bible or not.

4. THE AUTONOMY OF REASON

The classical notion of *Sola Scriptura* and the analogy of faith underwent a formidable assault during the Enlightenment and the nineteenth century. Whereas in scholasticism knowledge of God had been thought of in terms of nature and grace, a view rejected by the Reformers in their understanding of revelation, in the Enlightenment the category of nature was replaced by that of freedom. As free and autonomous, man was taken to have the capacity, in theory, to scrutinise everything and decide on its truth. This freedom applies in the realm of nature and history, but in so far as metaphysical truths are concerned, reason is limited. Judgments about invisible things lie outside the realm of reason, and belief in God does not lie in the realm of knowledge, but in that of ethics and personal conviction.

Throughout the nineteenth century the current grew in Biblical interpretation that man is capable, because of the autonomy of reason, of evaluating the nature of biblical

truth, particularly in the historical sense. Scripture is no longer considered a revelation, an intervention of the divine in the realm of the world. The world is an entity closed off from revelation in which man ultimately decides what is true and what is not. This fundamental approach is at the root of all modern distinctions between the divine and human aspects of Scripture.

Such an attitude is not always devoid of a certain cultural superiority with regard to the texts and authors of Scripture. In an article on the biblical history of origins Rolf Rendtorff affirms that among some who practise the historical critical method there is:

a sort of disdain and superiority with regard to those who composed the biblical texts in their final form, which is a characteristic of the conception of science in the 19th century and which, in my opinion, is today an anachronism without pertinence. I would argue, on the contrary, for a return to the respect of those who transmitted the biblical texts in their present form. I hold that if anyone should consider this point of view to be “against science” he would do well to examine his presuppositions of what science is.¹

In so far as history and faith are concerned, the consequence of autonomy is that history is no longer considered to be the domain of direct divine intervention and because it is thought to be relative and totally contingent, no absolute basis for faith can be found in its facts. This point has influenced the subsequent development of the historical critical method.

5. PRINCIPLES OF THE HISTORICAL CRITICAL METHOD

In considering the question of the relation between the status of Scripture and its interpretation, three aspects, at least, are at issue:

(a) The presupposition of autonomy is an obstacle to considering Scripture itself as being the word of God and influences the evaluation of the nature of the facts of the Bible;

(b) The status of the Bible itself is altered;

(c) This modification leads to a reinterpretation of all the biblical materials in a modified perspective.

There is a tacit agreement among theologians today that it would be impossible to go back on the progress the historical critical method represents. Its methods are still a subject of general consensus in theological studies. However it is not easy to say what is meant by “the critical method” or by “critical history.” It is doubtful whether, scientifically speaking, there is a *method* involved at all. The expression “historical critical method” seems rather to refer to a loose collection of techniques applied in a certain perspective to the study of the text. This is partially the reason why the diversity of results is so great.

(1) *Axioms of the Historical Critical method*

Theology today is still haunted by the spectre of Ernst Troeltsch and his essay “Concerning the historical and the dogmatic method in theology” (1898). Three principles are proposed:

1. R. Rendtorff, “L’histoire biblique des origines” in A. de Pury, ed., *Le Pentateuque en question* (Genève: Labor et Fides, 1989), pp. 83–94.

(a) *Methodological doubt.* The reconstruction of an historical event is not in the realm of certainty, but in that of probability. This principle applies not only to religious traditions, but to all texts;

(b) *Analogy.* All past events must be interpreted in the light of analogy of present observation. Analogy provides the criteria upon which a past event is deemed to be possible. It also implies that all past events retain a certain actuality.

(c) *Correlation.* Events of history are linked to each other by a relation of cause and effect. History is made up of a succession of such moments in a closed continuum.

These three principles have been applied in the historical critical method with certain modifications which take into account their positivistic origins. Generally, while admitting that a truth or knowledge is historically conditioned, historical examination proceeds to a verification or a correction of the facts, according to the evidence available. The coherence of the narration of a series of events is obtained by an appreciation of the likelihood of the material in the sources.

(2) *Theological consequences*

Troeltsch himself indicated two consequence of these axioms. Criticism renders all isolated events uncertain. Events gain their certainty from their effects in the present and from their relation to other events. Also, Christianity and its truths are not considered to be unique, and its claims are only understandable in the context of history as a whole.

The results are plain to see. Criticism relativises all dogmatic pronouncements. The resurrection, for example, must be submitted to the test of comparison with other historical events. Revelation itself, the intervention of God in history, loses its unique character.

Why did *Christian* theologians, to a greater or lesser extent, accept this methodology? By and large, the psychological motor of the critical method has been academic credibility.

Some adopted this approach almost totally and reformulated the content of the Christian faith accordingly. Such was the case of Bultmann. Others have tried to provide a theological justification for the critical approach. The Bible is considered as an ancient book and criticism permits a reconstruction of the situation in life in which the religious tradition gained form. Moreover, it has been widely claimed that since the truths of Christianity claim to be historical in nature, a rejection of criticism would be a form of obscurantism tantamount to denying the nature of the Christian revelation itself.

(3) *How far can one go?*

In the context of the Christian notion of God and revelation, the historical method involves its practitioners in several difficulties:

(i) *Methodological doubt.* Is this attitude compatible with Scripture? How is it epistemologically possible to doubt what one believes about texts which themselves create belief? Can faith live off *probabilities*? If the Christian believer insists on the importance of the historical nature of faith, can the critical be joined to the historical, without asking, at the same time, questions about the nature of biblical history and the character of man who is interpreter?

(ii) *Analogy.* If events in the past are known because of the present, the present itself becomes the criterion of truth. Creation, exodus, incarnation, resurrection do not enter the realm of our experience. The notion of an act of God becomes an impossibility, because God does not act today. Again the question may be asked whether the abolition of the possibility of the extraordinary has not also removed from history the sense of what is normal and regular.

(iii) *Correlation.* The cause and effect link implies that miracle is impossible, and therefore all biblical history must have a natural explanation.

(iv) The main problem seems to me, however, to lie in the fact that the method implies a hidden antinomy. By relativising all human knowledge, the historical critical approach exempts itself from the criticism it applies to all else, and its axioms in fact become dogmas. In some sense man himself becomes the arbiter of truth and exempts his thought processes from scrutiny.

This points to the fact that the historical critical method rests on presuppositions which themselves are of the order of faith, a kind of faith which is as real as that which accepts the biblical facts as being true. When it is affirmed today that historical criticism goes without saying, that it is established beyond all questioning, or the battle of criticism has been won, it is supposed that the axioms of criticism have been scientifically demonstrated as being applicable to Christian revelation, which is far from being the case, not only from the point of view of simple objectivity, but above all from that of a Christian world view.

6 PROBLEMS OF THE HISTORICAL CRITICAL METHOD

It would be unjust to say that all the results of the historical critical method are negative. Its studies have made us more aware of the origin, the transmission, of the literary forms, of the background history and more recently of the canonical form of the texts. Thanks to this progress, the cultural world of the Bible, its literary forms, the dangers of imposing preconceived dogmatic ideas on the text have all been put in clearer light. Most of all, tools and practices have been developed, which themselves can be used in common recognition and do not rely on the acceptance of the presuppositions of the method to be used correctly.

All these advantages are well known and it is superfluous to insist on them. However there is a downside to the method.

(1) *Dogmatism*

The biggest weakness of the historical method is the dogmatism of many of its practitioners. This dogmatism becomes a form of historicism with the allure of an ideology. It has been remarked that Darwinism itself has contributed nothing to the great scientific discoveries of our century and even seems to be in conflict with some of them. However it is a well known fact that Darwinist ideology dominates school manuals as being the only position possible. It has even had a profound effect on theology, particularly in the case of T. de Chardin, whose theology was called gnosticism by Karl Barth!

Similarly, in the biblical sciences, it can be observed that those who claim to be objective are also often the most resistant to change. Even after the discovery of Ancient near-

eastern treaty forms, dating from the second millennium before Christ, or of the fragment p46, there are still those who defend the documentary hypothesis, or a late dating of John's gospel. J. A. T. Robinson's book on *Redating the New Testament* has not had the hearing it deserved, and some French Catholic theologians even tried to censure it by blocking its publication in French. The historical method has become, in some cases, a form of conservatism, and it is not an exaggeration to speak in this respect about "critical orthodoxy." The recent reaction in favour of narrative interpretation and structuralism, has been a way of avoiding the method simply by bypassing it.

(2) *Lack of edification*

More serious has been the negative effect of criticism on the message of the Church. It is not by chance that F. C. Baur's arguments about miracles were incorporated into Stalin's *Soviet Encyclopaedia*, or that gospel criticism is used by Islamic fundamentalists in favour of the inerrancy of the Koran. It is impossible to preach positively using this method. Why is this the case? This is related to the fact that the historical critical method does not deal, in many cases, with the present state of the text. It is archaeological and seeks to reconstruct the sources and origins of the texts by reference to the intentions of the authors. Working *behind* the text itself, it creates, via a consideration of intentionality, another meaning than the one evident on the surface of the text. But Christian preachers have to preach the text, and not the intentions of the authors which are unknown to us. In fact many a preacher with the Bible in one hand and a scholarly commentary in the other, marvels at how the critics know with certainty the mind-set and motivations of anonymous redactors who lived hundreds of years ago, about whom we know nothing. We are still waiting for the historical Q to stand up, even though whole tomes have been written about his theology!

For this reason, the reactions of structuralism and narrative criticism have been, relatively speaking, a move in the direction of sanity. In these newer approaches what is essential is in the text itself, and not what lies behind it. The fault of the historical method was to have neglected the text in many cases, and consequently to have neglected its meaning. That is why commentaries written in the sixteenth or seventeenth century are often more useful for the preacher than the *International Critical Commentary*. In some cases the result of the historical method has been to impoverish theological reflection about the meaning of the text.

(3) *Theological impoverishment*

The problem of theological impoverishment of the method has been well summarised by the Scottish theologian, T. F. Torrance, who has spoken about the dualistic nature of the historical critical method.

By beginning with a critical analysis of particular details, the method dissociates these details from the dynamic structure of the text, which alone constitutes its meaning and coherence. With the critical method, it is difficult to go far on the theological level, because the method as such lacks a means of *integration*, a global theological perspective. This also explains the low results of this method for the message of the Church.

This fundamental disorientation can be attributed to the refusal of historical critical methodology, on the level of presuppositions, to consider Scripture as being both divine and human in origin, and its unilateral concentration on the human aspects of Scripture.

(4) *The separation of faith and reason*

When the unity of the divine and human factors of Scripture is dissolved, they stand in opposition one to another. The human character of the text excludes its divine aspects, which by their very nature cannot be not encapsulated in the text. To say that the Bible contains the word of God or to say that through the Bible we have an experience of the divine word adds up to a dissociation of the dual aspects of the Bible and its message. This leads the interpreter to make selections in Scripture.

But one thing must be clear. To say that the Bible describes, in an exemplary way, man's religious search or exemplifies the development of a traditional religious model in the "context of divine actions," albeit that of the work of the Holy Spirit, is just a polite way of saying that the Absolute cannot be captured in human formulations, because the Absolute is wholly other.

From this or similar starting points, defenders of the critical method seek to unite what they have curiously separated in their presuppositions, that is, faith or spirituality and reason or intelligence. In these attempts, spirituality or faith is obliged to exist within the limits which reason dictates to it. It is in fact impossible to believe, by subjective faith, what the intellect, by objective and autonomous reason indicates as being impossible.

The consequence of a radical application of the historical critical method is that both piety and intellect have lost, over the course of the last century, their mooring in biblical revelation. Reason remains distinct from faith and is not subjected to any critical evaluation from the point of view of the transcendent biblical message. It becomes a point of honour, in theology, for reason to maintain its independence from the view of faith. This has been the trend.

At present we are at the start of the post-modernistic backlash. In this context it is claimed that religious faith is the domain of free individual choice, what I can believe, today. So spirituality itself is no longer subjected to the scrutiny of revelation, but is considered as being a human sentiment which transcends reason or any external authority. Piety becomes what man can feel and experience in his solitude, defined as being an absence of transcendence. Postmodernism however, as H. Carson points out in his recent work *The Gaggling of God* (1996), has in common with modernism, whatever their differences, the presupposition of naturalism.

These commentaries seem to bring us to the heart of the matter. What is the value of piety if it is not grounded in biblical revelation? If biblical religion is basically the same as any other religious experience, then the uniqueness of Christianity disappears, and with it also the incarnation as the only way to truly know God. As E. Brunner maintained in his classic *The Mediator*, Christianity is unique and a different form of religion from all others. As such it requires a special attitude in approaching its phenomena.

When the divine and human in the Bible are separated, the ultimate result is that man is left to himself to formulate what is of religious value. And in this case, it will always be

difficult to find a place for the specific work of Christ and the offence of the cross.

7. THE END OF THE HISTORICAL CRITICAL METHOD?

Many years ago, evangelical scholars in the Anglo-Saxon world analysed and pointed out the weakness of this method. R. D. Wilson, O. T. Allis and others such as G. C. Berkouwer, in Holland, produced largely under-read books on the subject. Over twenty years ago the German theologian G. Meier wrote a book entitled *The End of the Historical Critical Method*. These works pointed out the fragility of linguistic and exegetical arguments, selectiveness in the use of evidence, the numerous divergences of the practitioners, all who claim to be working scientifically with the same method, the illegitimacy of non-biblical presuppositions and the sterility of the method.

Recently an important work entitled *The Pentateuch in Question* was edited in French by A. de Pury. In his article, de Pury asked:

Today are we not confronted by a revolution in researches on the Pentateuch? This question was already asked by Eckart Otto in 1977, following the publication of important books by H. H. Schmid and R. Rendtorff. Ten years later, we must reply to this question in the affirmative. For sure, no new consensus has arisen to replace the contested system, but we must understand that the questions raised by recent research are so fundamental that in Pentateuchal research, things will never be the same again.

And de Pury added a warning against the temptation to: “replace the straight jacket of former theories by the dictates of a new order, even by those of a new critical order.”²

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 9, 80.

APPENDIX

what they are looking for . . .

The critical method

1. INSISTS ON PRESENT
NEGLECTS REVELATION
2. FAITH IS SUBJECTIVE
THE GOSPEL IS A PROJECTION OF FAITH
3. FAITH NEEDS NO FOUNDATION IN FACTS
4. JESUS = A MODEL OF A SPECIAL HUMAN RELATION
WITH GOD
5. SCIENCE DEFINES WHAT IS POSSIBLE
6. BIBLICAL TEXTS ARE ALLEGORICAL (MYTH)
7. THE SUPERNATURAL IS LESS IMPORTANT THAN THE
HORIZONTAL (PROCESS)
8. SUPERNATURAL NARRATIVES IN THE BIBLE ARE POETICAL
(MYTH, SAGA, LEGEND, PARABLE ETC.)
9. AUTHORITY = REASON AND SENTIMENTS
(CULTURAL RELATIVITY)
10. SCRIPTURE GIVES ETHICAL LESSONS/CONCERNS THE
HERE AND NOW NOT THE ABOVE

The analogy of Scripture

1. REVELATION IS PERMANENT AND THE ULTIMATE CRITERION
2. FAITH IS OBJECTIVE
FOUNDED ON THE TRUTH OF SCRIPTURE
3. FAITH IS FOUNDED ON HISTORICAL FACTS
4. THE JESUS OF HISTORY AND THE CHRIST OF FAITH
ARE THE SAME
5. PRESUPPOSITIONS OF FAITH HAVE THE FINAL WORD
6. CONTINUITY OF FACTS/AUTHORS' INTENTION/TEXTS
7. REALITY, VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE IS ONE UNDER GOD
8. SUPERNATURAL NARRATIVES ARE HISTORICAL
(MIRACLES DID HAPPEN)
9. LISTEN TO THE WORD: GOD IS THE FINAL AUTHORITY
10. SCRIPTURE GIVES TRUTH ABOUT LIFE, SALVATION,
AND DEATH

KARL POPPER'S SCIENTIFIC ENTERPRISE

by Colin Wright

PART I: THE PROBLEM OF DEMARCATION

INTRODUCTION

In this series of articles we intend to survey the philosophy of science of one of the twentieth century's great thinkers, Sir Karl Raimund Popper, and to conclude our examination with a critique from a Christian-theistic standpoint.

Natural science was a hallmark of the twentieth century. Many people were prepared, and still are, to believe that science hardly existed before that time, and that it had certainly not existed above five decades before that at most.¹ The scientific community was, of course, aware for most of that time that the truth was far from the picture painted for vulgar consumption. In particular the massive scholarship of Pierre Duhem (1861–1916) had exposed the myth of the medieval era as the Dark Ages, a myth perpetrated by positivistic atheists from Comte onwards to denigrate a period of intense intellectual and scientific activity that was, much to their chagrin, also an age of Christian faith. Duhem's monumental ten-volume *Le Système du monde* is still untranslated from the French except for an all too brief epitome of its analysis of medieval cosmology.²

This science became the touchstone of truth about the universe. Compared with its pronouncements all else was mere myth and dreams, old wives tales, fairy stories. This science, too, has become the new religion of Western man. Its aims are projected to the furthest reaches so that by its means we shall be able to discover, in the words of Stephen Hawking, “why it is that we and the universe exist.” Man will develop his science to the point of the “ultimate triumph of human reason” in that he will then “know the mind of God.”³

1. Most science is not science at all but technology. The BBC's science program, *Tomorrow's World*, deals with advances in technology and rarely with changes in scientific knowledge itself.

2. *Medieval Cosmology: Theories of Infinity, Place, Void, and the Plurality of Worlds* (University of Chicago Press). See the excellent biography of Duhem by the distinguished philosopher of science Stanley L. Jaki, *Uneasy Genius: The Life and Work of Pierre Duhem* (Dordrecht, Martinus Nijhoff, 1984).

3. Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time* (London, Bantam Press, 1988), p. 175. For a damning exposé of Hawking and his fellow

One of the profoundest expressions of this humanistic striving for autonomy and self-divinisation, first promulgated in the *Oration on the Dignity of Man* by Pico della Mirandola⁴ in 1436, can be found in the science fiction novel *The Necromancer*.⁵

Karl Popper has never shared these pretensions. His aims are much more limited and realistic. However, precisely because of this his work must be treated with all the more caution: it is inimical to biblical Christianity in its humanistic root and religious starting point. I must confess to having been under his spell for some time in the 70s and early 80s as a result of reading most of his published work. I was introduced to him through favourable comments in the *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, in particular John Robbin's book review in Vol. III, No. 1, 1976. Indeed, I now find Robbin's espousal of Popper and the conclusions he draws from Popper's *falsificationism* even more destructive of a Christian-theistic view of natural science than Popper's own standpoint.

This change of perspective on my part was a significant factor in my decision to write this series of articles. In a very real sense it will be an attempt to systematise and articulate the musings of the past decade. But even more, I want to draw the Christian public's attention to the very real need on their part to come to terms with modern natural science. All

dreamers the reader cannot do better than consult Mary Midgley's very readable and fascinating *Science as Salvation: A Modern Myth and its Meaning* (London: Routledge, 1992).

4. Burckhardt described this *Oration* as one of the most noble bequests of the culture of the Renaissance—*Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy*, (London, Allen & Unwin, 1921), p. 354f. Ernst Cassirer's comment also is telling: “It summarises with grand simplicity and in pregnant form the whole intent of the Renaissance and its entire concept of knowledge. . . . What is required of man's will and knowledge is that they be completely turned towards the world and yet completely distinguish themselves from it.”—*Individual and Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, (Oxford, Blackwell, 1963) p. 86.

5. Gordon R. Dickson, *The Necromancer* (London: Sphere Books, 1979). This is a key volume in Dickson's *Childe Cycle*, and well explains the meaning behind the fascinating series of philosophical novels that, at first glance, appear to be just good fiction. They would make a good subject for a Master's dissertation.

too often it is regarded as a no-go area by them. The humanities have seemingly provided a much more congenial sphere within which to work out Christian ideas of life. Look at any movement within even the thinking sections of the Christian church and you will find this to be so. Politics, literature, economics, law, philosophy, history, theology—these are the areas that Christians, when they are prepared to consider anything, are apt to favour. Sure, Christians will latch on to isolated scientific ideas when they appear to conflict with their pet theological doctrines. So they study a bit about geology, the physics of carbon-14 dating, and the laws of thermodynamics to fight the evolutionary hypothesis. But even then they rarely do other than use humanistic weapons to fight humanism. They begin from the very same presuppositions as the humanist about the nature and purpose of natural science. And when they do attempt to look a little deeper into the meaning of things, they often—as I did—get hypnotised by the paradigm's of Kuhn⁶ and the falsificationism of Popper.

But both Kuhn's and Popper's presuppositions were entirely humanistic; Popper was an inveterate opponent of any Christian life- and world-view. His book *The Poverty of Historicism* was written against Christianity as much as against Marxism. He saw Christianity as inimical to the true spirit of a rational and disinterested pursuit of truth. "Science," he claimed, "was invented once. It was suppressed by Christianity, and it was only reinvented or, rather, recovered, with the rebirth of Platonism in the Renaissance."⁷ Popper's falsificationism and his denial of inductive logic may well have appealing features for the Christian, beset on every side as he is by a science that denies his faith. It certainly strikes at the root of many of the pretensions of the humanistic scientific community. However, its aim is not to overthrow that community of thought but to replace its methods with even more humanistic and godless ones. Thus this series will be, among other things, a warning against the siren call of false ideologies.

Natural science, as we have already said, is a major factor in our culture. It cannot be ignored with impunity. It is our duty to subject it to the most rigorous examination, both in its results and in its foundations. In the first instance, this task must be vigorously pursued by academics. They must contend at the highest level for a truly Scriptural philosophy of science. For what are today the silent musings of an elite few, tomorrow will be the way of thought of a whole society. Bad ideas must be excised at the root. But the layman too has his calling from God in this respect.⁸ An awareness of the antithesis between all non-Christian ways of thinking and a genuinely biblical-Christian way of thinking—about *any* subject let alone natural science—must always govern his outlook. Humanistic natural science is as

6. Thomas Kuhn (1922–1996), formerly Professor of Philosophy at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and author of the famous *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, which has sold over one million copies worldwide.

7. Quoted in Stanley L. Jaki, *The Origin of Science and the Science of its Origin* (Edinburgh, Scottish Academic Press, 1978) p. 152. It also appears in slightly different words in Karl Popper, *The Myth of the Framework* (London, Routledge, 1994) p. 42, where he refers to an intolerant Christianity.

8. In his *Against Method*, Paul Feyerabend argues throughout with passion and clarity for the involvement of the non-expert and society in general in what scientists get up to. They should not be left to themselves.

religious as any Christian natural science. Again, an appreciation of the *issues*, even where the more arcane features of a subject are not understood, will go a long way toward protecting him against "the wiles of the devil. (Eph. 6:11)"

THE EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF POPPER'S THOUGHT

Popper's first inkling that all was not well with the state of science seems to have been the result of his confrontation with psychology and psychologists in Vienna in the 1920s.⁹ For some time he worked as an assistant to the celebrated Alfred Adler in Vienna, doing social work among the working-class youth in Adler's social guidance clinics. He recounts that once, in 1919, he reported the case of a needy child to Adler. Adler, he says, "found no difficulty in analysing [the child] in terms of his theory of inferiority feelings, although he had not even seen the child." He added:

Slightly shocked, I asked him how he could be so sure. Because of my thousandfold experience, he replied; whereupon I could not help saying: And with this new case, I suppose, your experience has become thousand-and-one-fold.

What I had in mind was that his previous observations may not have been much sounder than this new one; that each in its turn had been interpreted in the light of previous experience, and at the same time counted as additional confirmation. What, I asked myself, did it confirm? No more than that a case could be interpreted in the light of the theory. But this meant very little, I reflected, since every conceivable case could be interpreted in the light of Adler's theory, or even of Freud's.¹⁰

Popper had also been engaged in Marxist activity and had studied the work of Freud. What struck him about each of these seemingly scientific approaches was the way in which they could explain anything and everything. Throw any facts at these theories and the theories could explain them, i.e. explain them away. It was just too good to be true:

The study of any of them seemed to have the effect of an intellectual conversion or revelation, opening your eyes to a new truth hidden from those not yet initiated. Once your eyes were thus opened you saw confirming instances everywhere: the world was full of verifications of the theory. Whatever happened confirmed it. Thus its truth appeared manifest; and unbelievers were clearly people who did not want to see the manifest truth; who refused to see it, either because it was against their class interest, or because of their repressions which were still un-analysed and crying aloud for treatment.¹¹

All of these supposedly scientific theories stood in stark contrast to another theory then engaging Popper's attention: Albert Einstein's theory of relativity. Einstein had conjectured in his new theory that light is as subject to the gravitational field effect as physical matter. This should mean that light passing a large object would be deflected from its straight path.¹² Einstein predicted that the light from

9. A full and authoritative account of Popper's intellectual pilgrimage may be found in his autobiographical *Unended Quest: An Intellectual Autobiography* (Glasgow, Fontana, 1976).

10. "Science: Conjectures and Refutations," in Karl Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), p. 35.

11. *Ibid.*

12. But not necessarily in Newton's terms. The gravitational effect on an object moving faster than 60 per cent of the speed of light is reversed, i.e. it is repelled rather than attracted.

distant stars would be deflected by the sun before it reached earth. Stars when they appear close to the sun will have a slightly different orientation to one another than they will when not passing close to it, i.e. the configuration of these stars will be different at night from what they are in the day. By making this prediction Einstein had left himself vulnerable. If observations did not match his theory then that theory would be discredited; it would be falsified. As it happened Eddington had conducted a test in 1919 that had shown the predictions of Einstein's theory to be true. The deflection had been witnessed.¹³ But what had struck Popper as most significant was the fact that this theory came with a feature that the others did not possess: it was possible to state, in advance of any available facts, precise conditions under which it could be refuted.

Popper saw this as a breakthrough in his quest for an answer to the question that had troubled him for some time: *When should a theory be ranked as scientific? Is there a criterion for the scientific character or status of a theory?*¹⁴

This, as Popper has since time and again pointed out, is totally unconnected with the questions, *When is a theory true?* or *When is a theory acceptable?* The correctness or acceptability of a theory is not under discussion. Popper's concern is solely to distinguish between theories that are genuinely scientific and theories that are only pseudo-scientific. Einstein's theory of relativity is genuinely scientific, Adler's individual psychology is pseudo-science. Astronomy is genuine science, astrology is pseudo-science, even though there is a limitless amount of factual evidence to confirm the latter.

THE VIENNA CIRCLE AND THE IDEA OF MEANINGFULNESS

Early in his career Popper also came into contact with the Vienna Circle. This was to provide the catalyst for further development and clarification of his ideas.

The Circle began life as a more or less informal gathering of like-minded scientists, philosophers, mathematicians and logicians to discuss problems of common concern. It was inaugurated by Moritz Schlick who became professor of philosophy in Vienna around 1920.¹⁵ Although there were numerous points of departure among those who met in these discussions, nevertheless a great deal of unanimity existed.

Two principles in particular focussed their unanimity. The first was an opposition to any form of metaphysics; the second was a commitment to natural scientific language and knowledge as the only meaningful forms of language and knowledge.¹⁶ This program of opposition to metaphysics and its concomitant gospel of modern science became

known as *Logical Positivism*. The anti-metaphysical strain was not a new one; indeed, they consciously drew upon earlier exponents right back to Greek thought. Worthy of particular mention was David Hume's now famous dictum:

If we take in our hand any volume; of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask, *Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number?* No. *Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence?* No. Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.¹⁷

Logical positivism regards metaphysics as not merely wrong in its conclusions but more significantly as totally meaningless in its method. For logical positivism, the utter *meaninglessness of metaphysics* is an a priori principle. Hume's antipathy was re-echoed in the words of one of the Circle's leading figures—Ludwig Wittgenstein—in his famous but weirdly-titled¹⁸ *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*:

The correct method in philosophy would really be the following: to say nothing except what can be said, i.e. propositions of natural science—i.e. something that has nothing to do with philosophy—and then, whenever someone else wanted to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he had failed to give a meaning to certain signs in his propositions.¹⁹

What did logical positivists mean by *metaphysics*? Virtually any proposition that they regarded as unscientific. This included all religion,²⁰ most traditional philosophy, and also the humanities—such as history and ethics. Indeed, everything that Dooyeweerd refers to as the normative spheres was excluded from meaningfulness. The logical positivists do not simply bifurcate the world into *facts* and *values*—the usual terminology of humanistic philosophy—they positively deny the reality of values altogether:

Another man may disagree with me about the wrongness of stealing, in the sense that he may not have the same feelings about stealing as I have, and he may quarrel with me on account of my moral sentiments. But he cannot, strictly speaking, contradict me. For in saying that a certain type of action is right or wrong, I am not making any factual statement, not even a statement about my own state of mind. I am merely expressing certain moral sentiments. And the man who is ostensibly contradicting me is merely expressing his moral sentiments. So that there is plainly no sense in asking which of us is in the right. For neither of us is asserting a genuine proposition . . . in every case in which one would commonly be said to be making an ethical judgement, the function of the relevant ethical word is purely emotive. It is used to express feeling about certain objects, but not to make any assertion about them.²¹

same name, there was nothing to distinguish them! *Dupont* (French) and *Van Til* (Dutch) both mean *from the bridge*.

17. David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1998) Section xii, part III. Ayer maintained that this was "an excellent statement of the positivists' position," *Logical Positivism*, p. 10.

18. This was the title given to the English translation. The German original was entitled *Logisch-Philosophische Abhandlung*—"Logical-Philosophical Treatise." What possessed the translators to come up with such a Latin title I have been unable to discover, though it was also used for the second German edition.

19. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961) section 6.53.

20. The philosopher Franz Brentano was also a member though "in spite of his theological interests," as Ayer remarks, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

21. A.J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin

13. Well, at least so the story goes. What the Eddington team failed to inform people was that though some of the observations confirmed Einstein's prediction, the majority did not. Even where there was a deflection it was often wildly wide of the mark of Einstein's prediction.

14. *Conjectures and Refutations*, p. 33.

15. For a fuller account of the history, without technical details, see the *Editor's Introduction* in A. J. Ayer (ed.) *Logical Positivism* (London; George Allen & Unwin, 1959) pp. 3–28. There are interesting insights too throughout Popper's autobiography: *Unended Quest* (Glasgow; Fontana, 1986). I have not been able to discover the exact date Schlick came to Vienna.

16. This commitment to extreme univocalism in language led Cornelius Van Til to suggest that he should have a joint cheque (US: check) book with the mighty Dupont Corporation. Since they had the

Popper was able to criticise logical positivism from a number of angles.

In the first instance, he was highly critical of its *Theory of Verification*. According to this theory—accepted dogmatically and quite uncritically by the positivists—scientific theories were established by verification, that is, by proving their truthfulness. All that one had to do was look disinterestedly at the facts.²² In the end all scientific statements and theories were “nothing more than shorthand descriptions of observable events.”²³ But, as Popper demonstrated, no amount of facts could establish a general, or universal, statement. One cannot make even such a simple statement as “All ravens are black” without examining *every* raven. Yet scientists do this all the time.²⁴ Theories are not based on a knowledge of all the facts; they are, says Popper—with some justification—merely *guesses* or *conjectures* based on a few instances. The great plan of Bacon whereby scientists would sit down before the facts like humble children and draw the scientific conclusions from them by induction was a pipe-dream. From his early experience in Vienna Popper was able to show that scientific theories such as Marx’s theory of history, Adler’s psychological theories, and especially astrology, were seemingly verified by whatever fact one threw at them.

Popper was also aware of a more disturbing fact. If the positivists were correct in their view of the nature of scientific knowledge, if they were correct in their negative estimate of metaphysics, then they would destroy scientific activity altogether. In his own words, “This criterion [of verifiability and the exclusion of metaphysics] . . . excludes from science practically everything that is, in fact, characteristic of it (while failing in effect to exclude astrology). No scientific theory can ever be deduced from observation statements, or be described as a truth function of observation statements.”²⁵ There was one scientific theory in particular which Popper knew was wholly metaphysical: that of biological evolution. But many genuinely scientific theories—accepted by the positivists as such—were highly speculative and abstract. Amongst these Popper noted Einstein’s theory of physics, and indeed even Newton’s. It is possible to show quite convincingly that these were never based on observations. They were highly speculative mental constructs. It was some years before the predictions of Einstein’s gravitational theory could be tested. But the predictions came *before* the facts and

Books, 1983), p. 145. A neat and clear-cut philosophy, but one that could never work. Ayer, an ardent logical positivist from his early years, admitted in the end that “the most important of the defects [of logical positivism] was that nearly all of it was false.” Quoted in Stanley L. Jaki, *Means to Message: A Treatise on Truth* (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 1999) p. 17.

22. Only *empirical* facts of course! Positivists seem totally unaware that before they question the facts, they sift them out by means of a masked but no less real and effective presupposition about what constitutes a fact. Their facts are, as Popper would claim, theory-laden.

23. A. J. Ayer, Editor’s Introduction in *Logical Positivism*, p. 13.

24. The Pythagoreans for a long time believed that the facts supported their theory that everything could be explained in terms of whole numbers. When eventually it was discovered that the length of the diagonal of a square could not be explained this way, there was consternation in the camp and everyone was sworn to secrecy. Someone squealed, however, and promptly paid for his intellectual honesty with drowning. *Plus ça change, plus ça la même chose*.

25. *Conjectures and Refutations*, p. 40. See also in this volume the essay “The Demarcation between Science and Metaphysics,” Chapter 11, pp. 253–292.

prophesied of them (as it were). Einstein’s theory did not set out to account for empirical observations. This speculative nature of theories was also a leading reason for Bacon’s earlier rejection of Copernicus’ heliocentric solar system: it needlessly did violence to our senses.²⁶ And as Galileo himself expressed it quite forcefully:

I shall never be able to express strongly enough my admiration for the greatness of mind of these men who conceived this [heliocentric] hypothesis and held it to be true. In violent opposition to the evidence of their own senses and by sheer force of intellect, they preferred what reason told them to that which sense experience plainly showed them . . . I repeat, there is no limit to my astonishment when I reflect how Aristarchus and Copernicus were able to let reason conquer sense, and in defiance of sense make reason the mistress of their belief.²⁷

Nothing does more violence to our senses, to use Bacon’s phrase, than the Einsteinian theory of relativity: the speed of light is the same for an observer whatever the observer’s (or light source’s) motion. If I travel at increasing speed towards a source of light its speed will not appear to increase. And if I travel at an increasing speed away from a source of light, neither will its speed appear to diminish. Neither can modern theories of light come to terms with their logical conclusion that a photon (particle of light) can—and logically *must*—pass through two distinct holes in a screen at the same time!

Thus for Popper, there is a marked difference between what he was proposing as a criterion for scientific acceptability and what the logical positivists were proposing. Yet it is remarkable how little either they or countless commentators have been able to detect this, despite the repeated asseverations of Popper. His criterion has generally, and quite wrongly, been seen as a variation of the logical positive argument, namely, that genuine science is distinguished by the meaningfulness of its assertions, whereas everything else is meaningless. Popper denied this; some science is meaningless, some metaphysics is meaningful. What distinguishes scientific statements from non-scientific statements is the ability to predict possible conditions under which they would be falsified.

CONCLUSION

Popper’s falsificationism is, at first glance, very attractive. It has a ring of sincerity about it; it grants that scientific assertions are open to question, open to critical enquiry. Here there is no intention to impose as truth that which cannot be demonstrated to be truth. It claims that no scientific statement can be proved; it can only be falsified. We shall have to confront this issue head-on in the third part of this series.

Furthermore, Popper has been a severe critic of both positivism and its major weapons—the principle of induc-

26. One of the best accounts of the Galileo story regarding the movement of the earth can be found in Paul Feyerabend’s highly readable *Against Method* (London: Verso, 1993, third ed.). Feyerabend argues the sheer philosophical absurdity of Galileo’s claim.

27. Galileo Galilei, *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*, Popper’s trans. On the contrary, the logical positivist A. J. Ayer asserted that “the philosopher has no right to despise the beliefs of common sense . . . he must not attempt to formulate speculative truths, or to look for first principles.” *Language, Truth and Logic*, p. 68.

tion and the principle of meaningfulness; i.e. he has made the claim that we can never argue logically from particulars to universals. We simply do not have all the facts. This too appears a very modest approach for science to take, and one which has greatly appealed to Christians in recent years.

In the second part of our enquiry we shall examine what Popper saw as the proper role of science. We shall investigate his distinctive theory of knowledge, his theory of truth, and his view of the role of rational criticism in the growth of knowledge. *C&S*

Book Reviews

UNCOMMON SENSE: GOD'S WISDOM FOR OUR
COMPLEX AND CHANGING WORLD
BY JOHN PECK AND CHARLES STROHMER

The Wise Press, Savierville/Master Press, Knoxville,
Tennessee, 2000, paperback, xvii + 364, including appendi-
ces and index, £12.99, ISBN 0-9646543-4-2

REVIEWED BY SUSAN PERKS

THIS is a book which, from the start, challenges the reader. The back cover calls it "A book that will move things around inside of you." The title itself provokes us to consider our own assumptions about what makes sense and in the section entitled "Getting the most from this book" we are told that this is not a text which can be read passively but rather "a context in which to play around with ideas." The authors (readers of *Christianity & Society* will recognise the name of John Peck, who has been a regular contributor of thought provoking essays and reviews in these pages) do not set out to provide easy, clear-cut answers in any of the areas dealt with. Instead they take us on a journey through "the process of wisdom development," suggesting ways in which we might gain a better understanding of Scripture and how we might relate that to the understanding we acquire through our interaction with the natural world and with our culture.

Despite the complexity and breadth of the task the authors have set for themselves, they have managed to produce something which is at once readable, provocative, entertaining and inspiring. Ideas are conveyed effectively and brought to life in the reader's imagination through well chosen analogy and illustration. A good example of this is the introduction to Chapter 4, which uses the metaphor of a superhighway as a way of introducing modal theory:

"With apologies to Forrest Gump, life is not so much like a box of chocolates as it is like those superhighways that roam our major cities. Some are eight or ten lanes wide running in one direction. The lanes of life, too are headed somewhere. Each lane serves a different function, or purpose, and we are all on the road, traveling in those different functions at different times."

Abstract ideas are made accessible to the reader by the creation of such mental pictures and, while those who are experienced in reading about ideas in the abstract will not feel patronised by this book, many more people (myself included) will be enabled to join the journey of thought which it invites us to take. As a book which aims to equip Christians to live more

effectively in the real world, it stays grounded in reality and is never tempted to disappear into the realms of pure philosophy.

There is a suggestion at the beginning of the book that the reader might like to have a pen and paper handy to jot ideas down as he goes along. I certainly found that this was essential as there were numerous sections which I wanted to be able to find again quickly. The book is packed with one-liners which contain wit and wisdom, many of which produce that sense of recognition which has you nodding vigorously in agreement or even punching the air and shouting "Yes!" For example: "History repeats itself because no one's listening." "People who never make mistakes never make anything," and "the person most unaware of his or her assumptions is the one most bound to them." Humour also features in the illustrations chosen, such as the story about the Christian who returned his television to the store after reading the caption on the box, "Bringing the World into Your Home." I also needed paper and pen to make a note of portions of Scripture referred to in the book which the authors suggested might be re-read in the light of a certain perspective or use of language. I look forward to returning to these in the light of insights gained from this book.

The tone of the book impressed me greatly. It is all too easy to become self-righteous and superior when pointing out the shortcomings of *other* Christians. No sooner had I given assent to a weakness identified in modern Christian thought and practice than a warning would accompany it and the temptation to feel slightly smug because *we* have thought about these things already was put into check. I was particularly affected by the warning about wine skins: "We see old wineskins bursting under the pressure of new wine in ferment, with threats of bitter crippling conflicts within christian communities. We forget that there is old wine still left in the bottles, and that the old wine is notoriously worth prizing." The authors have written this book with a wisdom and authority which is enhanced by their humility. While showing the limitations of a viewpoint, such as the pietism of much modern evangelicalism, they are also at pains to point out the strengths of that viewpoint and to caution us against throwing the baby out with the bath water.

The only area where I detected a sense of discomfort and possible fudging of the issues was in the references to evolution as science rather than as philosophy. I may have misunderstood their argument here, but having re-read the relevant sections several times I still got the impression that they were suggesting that evolutionary theory is valid as a "provisional framework of thought" on a biological level. I could not agree that we might have done better as Christians to critique evolution as a philosophy rather than as a science. It seems to me that if non-Christian scientists are beginning to stand up and admit that

there is no compelling evidence for macro-evolution then we need not feel sheepish about doing so too.

The section which deals with art is one of the real gems in this book and is all the more valuable for shedding light on a subject which has been so rarely tackled from a Christian perspective. By showing the limitations of approaching art merely in terms of the religious and the moral, possibilities for using various media in a God-honouring way are opened up and the redemptive aspects of work which is not overtly Christian can be recognised. It is suggested that we need to develop an instinctive approach to art as we learn a “godly artistic wisdom.” For this area, as for others in the book, the bibliography at the back provides a diverse reading list for those keen to pursue their thinking in a particular field.

Uncommon Sense is a book for Christians, for *all* Christians. There is something here to challenge each one of us and spur us on to further exploration and to action. The usual problem is that most Christians believe themselves unable to read anything other than lightweight material, at least when it comes to thinking about their faith. This book is certainly not lightweight. The authors recognise this problem and do not pull their punches when spelling out how hard we will need to think in getting to grips with God’s wisdom for our world. But because they have written such a well structured, clearly explained, exciting and thoroughly human book, most people we know should be able to benefit from it. Those with interests in particular areas might follow the authors’ suggestion of starting, not at the beginning, but with the subject and name index, using it topically like a concordance. However, I am sure that the majority of people who pick up this book will want to follow it through, chapter by chapter and then return to those sections which challenged them most. Even better would be to read it in a group study situation.

My recommendation is that you buy it, read it, then start making a list of everyone you’d love to share it with. *C&S*

Editor’s note: This book is only available through a few outlets. See the display advertisement on page 11 for a list of suppliers.

THE STORY OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

BY ROGER OLSON

Apollos, 1999, 652 pages, ISBN 0-85111-773-2

REVIEWED BY NICK NEEDHAM

SOME books should never have been written. This is one of them.

Roger Olson is Professor of Theology at Bethel College, Minnesota, and is well known as a proponent of a revisionist evangelicalism which is chiefly marked by its hostility to the Reformed faith. However, this neo-Arminian agenda is not the primary reason why I was so disappointed by Olson’s book. My main cause of grief is the book’s inaccuracy. Time and again Olson misleads the unwary reader by getting his facts wrong and making tendentious and even bizarre judgments. Let us take his account of the Christological controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries as an example (chapters 9–15).

He begins badly by telling us that the great persecution instigated by Diocletian ended in 301 (p. 137), whereas it didn’t even begin until 303. Constantine is depicted as wanting to use Christianity as the glue to reunify the empire. In order to do this he had to stamp out schism, heresy and dissent wherever he found it (p. 138)—statements not borne out by Constantine’s

conduct. (It is difficult to use Christianity to unify an empire when only a tiny minority of imperial citizens are Christians! And Constantine made no attempt to stamp out paganism.) On p. 152 we are informed that no other ecumenical council would be as important as Nicaea in 325. Not even Constantinople (381) or Chalcedon (451)? Then we learn that the three major branches of Christendom one hundred, two hundred and thirteen hundred years after Nicaea all recognised its importance (p. 157). Perhaps Olson will enlighten us regarding what happened in 425, 525, and 1625, and what on earth these dates have to do with the three major branches of Christendom? On p. 159 he calls Constantine the pagan emperor—factually untrue, of course, and rather out of place if it is a value judgment.

Next Olson goes on a veritable anti-Athanasius rampage, doing his best to paint the bishop of Alexandria as an Origenist, an Apollinarian, and generally not very clear in his Christology (despite having told us on p. 17 that he looks on and treats Athanasius as a great hero! Heaven help Olson’s villains). Manifestly Olson doesn’t like emperors; Theodosius the Great is scorned on p. 177 as no paragon of Christian virtue, despite the uniform testimony of his contemporaries (including Ambrose of Milan, who famously disciplined him) to the opposite effect. On p. 185 Olson more or less dismisses the trinitarianism of the Cappadocian fathers, specifically their distinction between *ousia* and *hypostasis*, by asserting that it makes sense only on the basis of Platonic idealism, in which essence is higher and more real than person. I’m sure Eastern Orthodox theologians will have serious trouble recognising themselves in this account; Eastern theology, if anything, gives a certain priority to person over essence. Olson then defines the Cappadocian concept of person as relations within the one Godhead (p. 186), which is very far removed from what the Cappadocians taught, and much closer to the anti-Platonic Aristotelian theology of Thomas Aquinas. He compounds the error on p. 187 by having Gregory of Nazianzus define person as relationship, and affirming that this became part of the common stock of ideas within the Eastern Church’s theology of the Trinity and appeared occasionally in the Latin West as well—an exact reversal of the truth.

The Creed or Definition of Chalcedon comes in for woeful criticism because it allegedly does not permit us to say that God suffered or died (pp. 234–5). So how come the defenders of Chalcedon, in the Councils aftermath, championed the formula that One of the holy Trinity suffered in the flesh, a formula sanctioned by the fifth ecumenical council? But Olson then expresses great scepticism about the doctrinal worth of the fifth and sixth ecumenical Councils, for no apparent reason except that he finds their theology complicated and abstract from the loving Jesus of the New Testament (p. 248). This sounds more like the outburst of an anti-intellectual pietist than the judgment of a responsible theologian or church historian. Is Olson suggesting that the Monophysite and Monothelete positions are doctrinally valid? Neither the Fathers nor the Reformers thought so.

And so it goes. I have given merely a brief sample of the kind of errors and misjudgments that disfigure Olson’s book from beginning to end. Frankly, if a student of mine turned in an essay with such mistakes, he would get it back covered in red ink and with a low grade.

As for Olson’s relentless neo-Arminian agenda, one has only to read his jaundiced accounts of Augustine, Aquinas, and Calvin to see where he is coming from. He betrays a consistent misunderstanding of Augustinian soteriology as teaching an Islamic view of God’s sovereignty, with God as sole cause and sole agent—a kind of pantheism. Compare this with the way Olson bends over backwards to be nice to Pelagius on pp. 267ff. In the Reformation era, his heroes are the Anabaptists, not so

much on account of the baptism issue, but because of their humanistic semi-Pelagian views of free will.

In short, Olson has written bad history, and has made it even worse by spraying it with a consistently neo-Arminian gloss. The only authentic value Olson's book has is the incontrovertible proof it supplies that Olson is no friend to the theology of Augustine or the Reformers. The fact that the book comes with glowing recommendations from leading American evangelicals, and is published in the UK by IVP (Apollos is IVPs academic imprint), is a sad and alarming symptom of the aberrant trajectory that American evangelicalism is taking—and that UK evangelicalism is not far behind.

Lovers of Reformational doctrine and accurate history, look elsewhere. *C&S*

GODLY CLERGY IN EARLY STUART ENGLAND:
THE CAROLINE PURITAN MOVEMENT 1620–1643

BY TOM WEBSTER

Cambridge University Press (Cambridge Studies in Early
Modern British History), 1997, 369 pages, £40.00
ISBN 052146170

REVIEWED BY SIMON PICKHAVER

HALF way through reading this interesting and useful book, I found myself increasingly asking myself, Why has Mr Webster written this work, and who will be its readers? By completion the answers were no clearer, but the need to ask it had all but disappeared. A book of two halves indeed, which the author unconsciously acknowledges in his introduction. “To a large degree, the first half of this study can be seen as an extended meditation on the familiar theme from Durkheim that it is through common action that society becomes conscious of and affirms itself; society is above all an active co-operation. Even collective ideas and feelings are possible only through the overt movements that symbolise them. Thus it is action that dominates religious life, for the very reason that society is its source” (p. 2).

Perhaps here too is part of the answer: Mr Webster is, above all else, interested in things sociological, in this instance within a historical and religious context. Indeed, much of what he goes on to discuss finds itself enmeshed in the current jargon of that discipline. Thus we find an interesting discussion on the social position of Reformation clergymen slanted to include thoughts on cross-gender issues which the men themselves would not have recognised. “It may not be excessive to argue that clerical piety drew upon, was perhaps even structured through, a series of male/female oppositions which the clergy were able to negotiate through the ambivalence of their gender identity” (p. 105).

But Mr Webster is scrupulously fair from the beginning, and the reader should attempt to put aside any prejudices he may find from the way this wonderful material is handled. True, the first part of the book occasionally reads as a homage from one academic to many others (the footnotes are extensive—e.g. 37 references in the first seven pages!).

It also becomes apparent early on that although Mr Webster is so obviously well-read in his field (the references to writers of the period are equally impressive), a lack of knowledge of Scripture (not interpretation, merely knowledge) hinders his appreciation and awareness of some the issues confronting these men. Again, there is occasionally an over-reliance on one

particular strand of thought or one author taken as representing all Puritan thought on the subject. “Herein lies the key to understanding the daily discipline described above. In the course of the conversion experience, widely regarded as a vital part of the life of a member of the elect, the saint was systematically to remove all vestiges of carnal identity, seen as stumbling blocks on the path to sanctification” (p. 124).

But this apparent preparationism is not a universal theme among all Puritan preachers—indeed, not even a consistent position within the writings of such a one as John Preston. What precedes and succeeds conversion—or sanctification—has long been debated. Surely, though, any devotional reading of a Watson, a Charnock, a Sibbes would prevent such a statement being so lightly offered.

Perhaps it is the mark of a true historian that we do not see where their own allegiances lie. Despite this, again and again Mr Webster seems to display some sympathy for the plight of the godly, although this may be for other reasons than mine would be!

How the book will be received by those who know their *Durkheim*, I cannot say. But to any lover of the godly writings of this era, this book is a valuable resource in assessing many of the trends in thinking and practical action undertaken by such heroes in the face of an increasingly hostile religious environment. “Religion had a primary meaning of attitude of worship or way of being pious with an emergent abstract sense of a religion, of religions of differential veracity in a new condition of pluralism . . . The period in question was exactly that moment when, in both cases, the second sense was rising but the first still primary. In the strain between these two meanings, particular and general, I would suggest, lies the problem of Puritanism, both for contemporaries and for historians” (p. 2).

The tension which existed in the Anglican church at this period—only some twenty or thirty years since Hooker had defined the path to be taken right up to the present day by its leaders—still affords lessons which we can learn from the examples of these men, as they struggled to resolve Scripture with conscience, duty, freedom, church hierarchy, and even the civil magistrate.

I greatly preferred the second half of the book, which for me is where Mr Webster shows his true historical talent: doing the research, elucidating the facts, and letting them speak for themselves. So we have the headings “Thomas Hooker and the conformity debate”; “Trajectories of response to Laudianism”; “The diocese of Peterborough: a see of conflict”; “Choices of suffering and flight.” All practical stuff, all well documented and clearly laid out, all challenging to those who might lay claim to be modern successors of these spiritual giants. The circumstances might be different, but the theology behind the individual issues remain focal today. “These ministers might administer the sacrament to those who knelt . . . use the sign of the cross in baptism . . . wear the surplice . . . seeing them as a necessary price to be paid for the liberty to preach . . . It is perhaps more accurate to call such ministers conformable, that is, capable of conforming, without being committed to a defence of the ceremonies in any positive sense” (p. 167).

Whether you worship in an Anglican setting or not, the whole issue of conformity to an established norm—as opposed to searching the Scripture for the rule of holy living and worship—remains at the heart of a godly religion. “Non-conformity is not the definition of a Puritan, merely the symptom of an unwillingness to compromise what is seen as a scripturally given form” (p. 3).

As a source of further reading around this ever-growing subject matter, Mr Webster's book is worth getting. As a spur to encouraging the discussion on what part believers should take within organised religion it is of great value. *C&S*

ETERNAL GOD:
A STUDY OF GOD WITHOUT TIME

BY PAUL HELM

Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1997, 217 pages + bibliography
and indices, paperback, ISBN 0-19-823725-1

REVIEWED BY COLIN WRIGHT

THIS volume is apologetical in nature rather than theological. The reader who comes to it expecting a set of proof texts will be sorely disappointed. Helm clearly accepts the view that God is a timelessly eternal being. His aim in this study is to defend this view against certain criticisms that come from the quarter known as the analytical philosophy of religion. In particular, he argues that their claim—that the idea of a timeless God is incoherent—is invalid. Since these critics begin and end not with the authoritative Holy Scriptures but with their own powers of reasoning, Helm attempts to answer them in their own terms. He fights fire with fire.

This immediately raises two questions: *How well does he succeed in his reply?* and *Is this a valid form of apologetics?* The former, of course, largely depends on the latter. An invalid form of argumentation is not generally a successful ploy. There are exceptions though: Remember Bunyan was converted as a result of hearing what he *thought* was a verse of Holy Scripture. In fact the text was from the Apocrypha. It is possible to be convinced by a bad argument. The American infatuation with the IRA is a prime example of how a bad argument can convince millions. So it is justifiable to consider the quality of Helms argument as well as its suitability as apologetics.

Then again, whether one regards a particular procedure as good or bad apologetics will depend on what one considers the task of apologetics to be. Greg Bahnsen used to say that that task was not to convert the opponent but to silence him. Helm's approach is somewhat akin to Bahnsen's.

How good, then, is his argument? It is most certainly not bedtime reading. Helm recognises, in fact, that his approach could be construed as scholastic. It is far from being so however, though no doubt many will find it heavy going. The author has divided his task of rebutting his opponents into two stages. First, he sets out to show that their arguments against God's timelessness are themselves not so coherent as they might think; that in fact they are seriously flawed. In this I believe he makes an exceptionally good case. Second, he turns from negative criticism to the more positive development of an argument in favour of divine timelessness. He argues that it alone can truly account for divine omniscience and for a satisfying relationship between divine control and human freedom.

But if the argument is abstruse it is nevertheless well-presented. Helm develops his ideas in an exceptionally lucid manner and, more importantly for most prospective readers, without the arcane language of symbolic logic—he writes in English. Although the standard of argumentation is quite sophisticated, he has managed to present his case with consummate clarity and readability. There is a signal absence of technical philosophical jargon. Any reasonably educated layman would be able to follow his argument, even if in some cases at a rather slow pace.

A significant feature of the subject of this volume is the way in which the argument has turned around. Whereas modern philosophers—at least those who accept some sort of divinity—are attempting to deny divine timelessness in order to account for and safeguard human freedom, the older (Christian) philosophers insisted on the reality of God's timelessness to defend that freedom. Notable among the latter school were greats such

as Augustine, Boethius, Aquinas and Calvin. Why do moderns object to the older view? At root it is because their idea of human freedom is *radically different* to that of Augustine, Boethius, Aquinas and Calvin. Helm draws attention to this and, as he clearly demonstrates, the older Christian idea of the existence of an omniscient, timelessly eternal God is logically inconsistent with the libertarian freedom in any of his creatures (p. 144). This is the crux of the argument against God's timelessness. It is the need to maintain the *libertarian* freedom of man, that is, a freedom which requires the absence of causally sufficient conditions for any intentional action (p.144). This is it. Modern man wants to be free in every respect, but most importantly free of God. Sometimes he does this by outright rejection of the notion of God; where he cannot do this he reduces God to one like unto himself. What is more sickening in this respect than the concept of God put forward by Jurgen Moltmann—a theologian all too readily consulted by latter-day evangelicals—quoted by Helm: “God demonstrates his eternal freedom through his suffering and his sacrifice, through his self-giving and his patience. Through his freedom he keeps man, his image, and his world, creation, free—keeps them free and pays the price of their freedom. Through his freedom he waits for man's love, for his compassion, for his own deliverance to his glory through man” (p. xi).

The question still remains as to whether Helms methodology is valid. How well does it sit with a truly biblical presuppositionalist approach? Helm brings little Scripture into his argument; indeed, he admits that direct evidence for God's timelessness is not readily available from the Bible. Clearly, if his purpose was to set out a proof then, as he would be the first to admit, it would fail miserably. Philosophers arguing against God's atemporality do so not because there is a good rational argument for doing so but because of religious presuppositions or commitments that drive them to produce the rational arguments to defend those commitments. Nevertheless, Helm's methodology is useful in more than one respect. Not least among these is that it fulfils Bahnsen's criterion: it exposes the fallacies of the detractor's argument; it demonstrates that their much vaunted human reasoning is not so reasonable after all. *C&S*

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AND
THE DECLINE OF THE WEST

BY ROB WARNER

Kingsway, 1997, 223 pages, £7.99, ISBN 0-85476-677-4

REVIEWED BY STEPHEN GREEN

ANY new book setting the decline of the Western world, and that of our nation in particular, in the context of national disobedience to the Ten Commandments provides an opportunity to set free the word of God to convict of sin. This book is an appeal to take the Ten Commandments seriously again and the author has sought to explore a reasoned apologetic for each commandment.

According to the back cover, Rob Warner travels widely as a Bible teacher and conference speaker from Queen's Road Church, Wimbledon, which was one of the centres of the “Toronto Experience.” He is on the Executive Council of the Evangelical Alliance. Spring Harvest put up the money to send a copy of the book to every MP for study during the recess. Given all this, Warner's book should reflect the thinking of what we might term the “Evangelical Establishment,” and should

make emphatic appeal to Scripture. Disappointingly, apart from the Ten Commandments themselves, which he quotes from the New International Version, the author includes only four passages of Scripture, all to do with idolatry, and refers to a mere 31 others.

This is in contrast to his “selected bibliography” exploring the “moral implications of the Ten Commandments” for “further study and illumination.” Space is found here to list 151 secular books. They include works by Samuel Beckett, Thomas Hardy, Lord Clark, Conrad, T. S. Eliot, Dostoyevsky, William Golding, D. H. Lawrence, Kafka, Zola and Graham Greene. Some are undoubtedly a good read, but how can Darwin’s “Origin of Species” illuminate us? And why include John Updike, Martin Amis, David Lodge and J. P. Sartre? Two at least of the books listed are frankly pornographic. It would have been better to direct the reader to seek the mind of God in the Holy Bible.

His consideration of the first two Commandments correctly concludes that there is only one God, but then contradicts that position with a nod to “pluralism.” Certainly, “the logic of relativism is fatally flawed,” but the author shies away from the logical conclusion, which is that God is the source of all authority and that only God makes the Law.

His chapter on the Third Commandment reads like a Guardian editorial. Our law which prohibits blasphemy in print has “in the eyes of many, fallen into disrepute.” “Some ask whether this law has become unworkable,” he continues. “Others ask whether a specifically Christian blasphemy law is fair and reasonable in a modern, pluralistic society.” Who are these “many,” “some” and “others” and do they have the mind of God? With no further reference to Scripture, the reader is left at a loss to know. Nationalism, however, emerges as a villain, and the author declares himself “personally unable to comprehend how any Christian leader could with integrity take part in the Orange marches . . .”

“Keeping the Sabbath” is the subtitle of the chapter on the Fourth Commandment, and two words are mentioned, Ex. 20:10, and Mk. 2:27. From the latter, a liberal view of Sunday trading is taken, qualified only by dismay at the imposition of Sunday working on a reluctant work-force. There is no mention of the Sunday Trading Act 1993, just a vague reference to “a battle to get the legislation through parliament,” whatever it was. A suspicion begins to develop that the whole approach in the book is somewhat lightweight and under-researched.

Certainly, Warner makes good use of various statistics of social trends to show what happens when a nation forgets the commandments of God, but there is no indication of their source. Indeed there is hardly a supporting reference in the whole book, which becomes, in consequence, less than scholarly. On a related topic, never once does the author acknowledge the existence of a contrary view to his own, nor does he confront Scriptures which contradict his own thinking. As the work progresses, there turn out to be many of these. The reader is unsure whether this neglect arises from ignorance or insecurity.

The Fifth Commandment, for example, is not “a charter for neither patriarchy or matriarchy,” as the author claims, unless one is in complete ignorance of the design of Almighty God for male headship in the rest of Scripture. He is right, however, that the Fifth Commandment includes respect for authority, (we could have done with a reference to Lev. 19:32, Eccl. 10:20, 1 Tim. 5:1 or 2 Pet. 2:10) and that radio and television interviewers should subject cabinet ministers “to rigorous live examination while still showing respect for their office.” Why, then, does Warner refer to members of the Royal Family by their first names, as, for example, “Diana, Sarah and Andrew,” or by nicknames (“Fergie”). After writing that “it

would be gratuitous to take sides or trade in gossip” on the subject of the marriage of the Prince and the late Princess of Wales, why does he write that “Charles is rumoured to be determined both to be king and to marry her [Camilla Parker-Bowles].”

During consideration of the Sixth Commandment, biblical references dry up completely, and we are left from here on with the author’s own opinions. Cast adrift from the rock of Scripture, these become at best confused. “The great and irrefutable criticism of the death penalty is that no court is infallible,” he writes. But God instituted the death penalty in perpetuity for mankind in his covenant with Noah, and corruption in our criminal justice system is something which the author fails to confront under the Ninth Commandment or at all.

Abortion is permissible, according to Rob Warner, not only when the mother’s life is in peril, for example from ectopic pregnancy, but also in the case of rape and “when the baby is suffering from severe and life-threatening disability.” Again, this is not what the word of God says. Furthermore, in his enthusiasm for artificial contraception, and his belief in “the population explosion,” the author accepts too readily the Malthusian agenda of the promoters of population control.

It is surprising not to see any reference to the subject of homosexuality under the heading of the Seventh Commandment, and, in the light of recent events, to read that “Britain has been getting tougher on adulterers in politics.” That being said, perhaps the best part of the book is a page and a half recording the interview which John Humphreys of Radio Four’s “Today” programme conducted with the Archbishop of Canterbury on the subject of adultery in July 1996. Humphreys: “Should not the Archbishop be a little more forthright and say adultery is wrong?” Carey: “I don’t really want to get into that.”

The Chapter on the Eighth Commandment is subtitled, for some reason, “plundering the planet.” The author considers “Rising crime, “Drug abuse,” “Thieving fathers,” “Software theft,” “Ecological theft,” “Stealing from refugees,” “Rich and poor,” “A world of extremes” and “Stealing from the state.” This last is an indication that, for Rob Warner, the state is more than a mere “ministry of God” (Rom. 13:4). People can and do steal money from the State, but there should be some recognition that through inflation, or unjust taxation, the State can steal too.

This chapter too has its good points. The author rightly sees the international aid programme as a vehicle whereby the bankers behind the World Bank and the IMF can subjugate poor nations. But he lets himself down in his consideration of refugees and asylum in Britain. He hopes that “the Asylum Bill will be repealed by the next government.” Firstly, he fails to date it, and secondly, it will be an Act, not a Bill, if it is on the statute book. Any Christian accepting Warner’s argument and writing to an MP on the strength of the information he has gleaned from this book will appear ill-informed.

On the subject of the Ninth Commandment, we must agree with the author that there is “a culture of duplicity” in Britain today, but the arrows he fires fail to find any target amongst all the general hand-wringing. It is easy enough to say that the military practise disinformation, that our MPs are on the fiddle, and that much of business, sport and the media is corrupt. But what about us, and what are we to do about them? It is far too easy, from what has been written, to pray, with the Pharisee, “God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are.” To the unspoken question there is no answer, except that “Britain needs a Freedom of Information Act and a written constitution.” How will that help? What is the mind of God? We are not told.

When we come to the Tenth Commandment, on acquisi-

tiveness and “excesses of consumerism,” the cat is finally let out of the bag and it is Old Labour. “In an age of covetousness, it has become impossible [for Messrs Tony Blair and Gordon Brown] to sell the old socialist ideal of choosing [*sic*] to pay more tax for the sake of the poor.” In a section on “sexual coveting,” the author unnecessarily describes Nicu Ceaucescu’s rape and humiliation of a Romanian gymnast. The point could and should have been made in some other way.

In five succinct pages, the author demolishes the national lottery so comprehensively that a call from him for its abolition becomes the logical conclusion. But no. Christians should not buy tickets, and “the lottery needs to be regulated more strictly.” That is a pietistic response, typical, unfortunately, of Rob Warner’s whole approach. Even then, he fails to raise at all the associated dilemma of whether Christian groups and churches should accept lottery grant money.

Finally, Rob Warner considers what he describes as “Jesus’ approach to the Ten Commandments.” He does not understand that the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity wrote them, and does not remember that he said “And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail.” (Luke 16:17) Instead he concentrates on the “heart” application of the Commandments in the Sermon on the Mount. But at the same time, he writes, “The Ten Commandments provide the necessary framework for a decent and civilised society.”

They do, but this woolly, liberal interpretation does not begin to describe that framework. The opportunity to allow the word of God to convict unbelievers of sins of commission and believers of sins of omission (failure to stand up for Christ) has been lost. As for the money put up by Spring Harvest, MPs should rather have been sent a simple letter with one verse of scripture:

“Go, enquire of the LORD for me, and for them that are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that is found: for great is the wrath of the LORD that is poured out upon us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the LORD, to do after all that is written in this book.” 2 Chr. 34:21 C&S

A RETURN TO MODESTY:
DISCOVERING THE LOST VIRTUE
BY WENDY SHALIT

New York: The Free Press (Simon and Schuster Inc.), 1999,
280 pages, \$16.99, ISBN 0-684-84316-1

REVIEWED BY JOHN PECK

HERE’S a book that has touched a nerve. It is an intensely personal appeal by a young Jewish writer for a return to social mores in which women are shy, demure, hard-to-get, intending to be virgins when they marry, and in which men are courteous, gallant, considerate and self-controlled. It is of course not the first book to do this; but it is by far the most engaging, and, to the feminist fundamentalist, the most threatening. There’s no questioning its impact.

Miss Shalit starts from her own educational experience, of opting out of the State school’s sex education programme, and of college life with co-ed bedrooms and bathrooms. Some of what she describes would I think be unheard of in this country—yet. But that doesn’t undermine the relevance of the book for us at all.

The earlier chapters of the book are a devastating critique of a social lifestyle which is, as the first chapter title describes it,

“a war on embarrassment.” The point is well made that if freedom is a matter of choice, then women are far less free now to be what they might want to be than ever. Not only among their peers, but also in the eyes of their mentors, being shy, withdrawn, quiet, are pathological—something has to be done to “help” such people. She describes the sexual mores in her American experience as ordered by rules and expectations which, she argues, are false and destructively unrealistic. They try to express respect between the sexes, but fail because the practice of indiscriminate sex destroys all sense of meaning and value in it. There is one delicious chapter in which she exposes with scathing irony the etiquette to be followed when a girl or fellow is dumped. She goes on to argue that it is this kind of attitude which has led to an increase in rape, harassment, and stalking. In particular she studies the phenomenon of date-rape, and argues that it is prevalent because there are now no guidelines within which a woman’s serious refusal can be believed, perhaps even recognised. As a result women feel deeply insecure, especially as casual sex does not offer a relationship of ongoing love and trust; and marriage, which ought to provide that, is sidelined and weakened. The modern desire to see woman as equal to men includes the assumption that their sex-drive is equally single-minded, no matter what they say. In a chapter called “Perverted Shame” she argues that the attack on feminine embarrassment is at the root of eating disorders and self-mutilation. Such behaviour is a woman’s attempt to regain control of her body.

The book goes on to explore other aspects of our *zeitgeist*. One chapter documents a school of thought that wants to insist that there is essentially no difference whatever (beyond a few insignificant physical details) between men and women, and that women must be free to behave like men—sexually aggressive, and as detached from any ongoing implications to sexual behaviour as, more often than not, men appear to be. Miss Shalit rebuts this as a ridiculous illusion, and later in the book pursues the task of establishing some of the differences between the sexes. In particular she points out that modesty in women, the desire for a certain reticence about their bodies, appears to be built in to their nature, even though different cultures may have different expressions of it. There is a further chapter on the baleful effects of a society which apparently does not care what happens to its womenfolk—assuming it seems, that they must make their decisions by and for themselves, and implement them in isolation without any help or support from the community, or often, even the family. There follows some examination of what would be required of men in the face of modest behaviour by women, drawing on literature of past ages. Male modesty involves a kind of self-control involving considerateness and, especially, *honour*.

Honour, it is argued, respects modesty in a woman; and sees it for what it is, a woman’s defence against unwanted sex—and by that the writer now makes it clear she means sex outside marriage. In a surprising, but completely sound turn of argument, she insists that being dressed modestly is actually more erotically stimulating; and that beginning sexual behaviour within marriage gives the marriage relationship a special excitement. She suggests that often marriages fail because there is nothing new to enjoy! This idea is pursued in offering the suggestion that the Orthodox Jewish practice of monthly abstinence would actually tend to preserve the freshness of the experience.

The last part of the book is an attempt to look forward to renewing in our society the practice of modesty in men and women. It is, I think the weakest part of the book, for several reasons. For one thing, a nostalgia for the past isn’t sufficient as a motivation; we are too conscious of living in a different cultural world now, and the old models won’t fit any longer.

The Moslem dress code is held up as a liberation, and for some it certainly has been: the trouble is it carries with it a lot of oppressive baggage, like polygamy, clitoral circumcision, social exclusion, which is a distinct turn-off for some who still feel the force of extreme feminist arguments. An appeal to former ages in the West suffers from a similar weakness—it is too easy to idealise them without answering the question, “if it was so good, then why was there such a violent reaction?” It could be argued, too, that the older ideals were only operative for the privileged classes—one only has to think of parlour-maids pregnant by the heir to the mansion. At the same time, it was a social ideal, and even if it was more honoured in the breach than the observance, it was honoured, and there is one thing worse than hypocrisy: it is shamelessness (especially when it masquerades as honesty). At least she is confident that nature and commonsense are on the side of virtue, and that the tide is already beginning to turn. And if she says that women have got to lead the change, it shouldn’t mean that men have no responsibility in all this.

There is a cheerful directness of appeal in the book, combined with evidence of a massive amount of research, statistical, anecdotal, literary, legal (did you know that in some US states a man may claim alimony from his ex-wife?), from agony columns, and newspapers, you name it. It probably attracts a criticism that it is tendentious in its choice; but she is making a case against the tide of opinion—there is plenty of material against her thesis elsewhere. There are times when the logic could be challenged, too. The author argues that concealing dress can be overwhelmingly erotic, and cites some dramatic examples of men being driven wild by it. Trouble is that she has been arguing earlier that this was the problem with revealing dress, that it is the cause of so much rape and harassment. There is an answer to this, but it’s not clear in the book. Nor is there any response to the common assertion that such evils have not in fact increased; only the reporting of them has in this new atmosphere of freedom to speak without social ostracism.

But there is no questioning the sincerity of the writer, or the seriousness of her thesis. She writes with all the energy, enthusiasm, and idealism of her years, and this makes the book wonderfully readable. The book has had an immensely liberating effect for many young women: she has given voice to many who are suffering under the present orthodoxy of humanistic liberalism and its attendant promiscuity, and it is her success in this which has infuriated many who are committed to the status quo. One of the beauties of this book is that it’s stealing the liberal’s weapons: it’s arguing for *freedom*. It doesn’t say, “girls, you’ve got to be modest,” it says, “A lot of you want to be modest, but you’re afraid to be: come on, break the mould, be what you really want to be.” She wants women to be real women, men to be real men.

Although for most of the argument the religious issues are not referred to, there is an appeal to the Judaeo-Christian tradition of modesty and chastity when it is felt that the case is proved from reason and evidence. There is an interesting reference to a connexion between modesty and holiness, which I think is a pointer to something more profound, namely that for beings made in the image of God, the body is symbolic of spiritual realities and privacy is in human life the equivalent of holiness in the being of God. Miss Shalit also shows a valuable ability to make significant distinctions in the language of her discourse. She distinguishes usefully, for instance between modesty as *pudor*, the desire to protect one’s physical privacy, with modesty as a kind of humility. She powerfully distinguishes modesty from prudery, undercutting a favourite attack from the libertines. Prudery is seen as of the same category as promiscuity, since both types of people cut themselves off from sexual behaviour as carrying valid meaning and value.

The dust cover of the book is dubiously modest, but that might be a good selling point! The text is well set out with an attractive, open, typeface. There is a substantial name and subject index. Citations are carefully referenced in notes at the back, and there is a charming appendix of ancient and modern advice on modest behaviour, from Shakespeare to Helena Rosenberg, though for many young readers much of it is unlikely to have more than entertainment value.

Undoubtedly the virtues of chastity and modesty have become embarrassingly outmoded for many in the gradual slippage away from a cultural world-view directed by the Judaeo-Christian faiths. Really whether the old days when they were honoured were any better is ultimately irrelevant: the fact is what the author is saying is *true*: these things are part of a woman’s armoury against sexual aggression, and sex without commitment becomes a boring addiction. It is enormously refreshing to find a case made for chastity without appeals to a religious authoritarianism, with incisive good humour, penetrating analysis, and a cheerful readability. If you have a teenage daughter (or even son), get this book, and albeit grudgingly perhaps, leave it around for them to read it. *C&S*

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