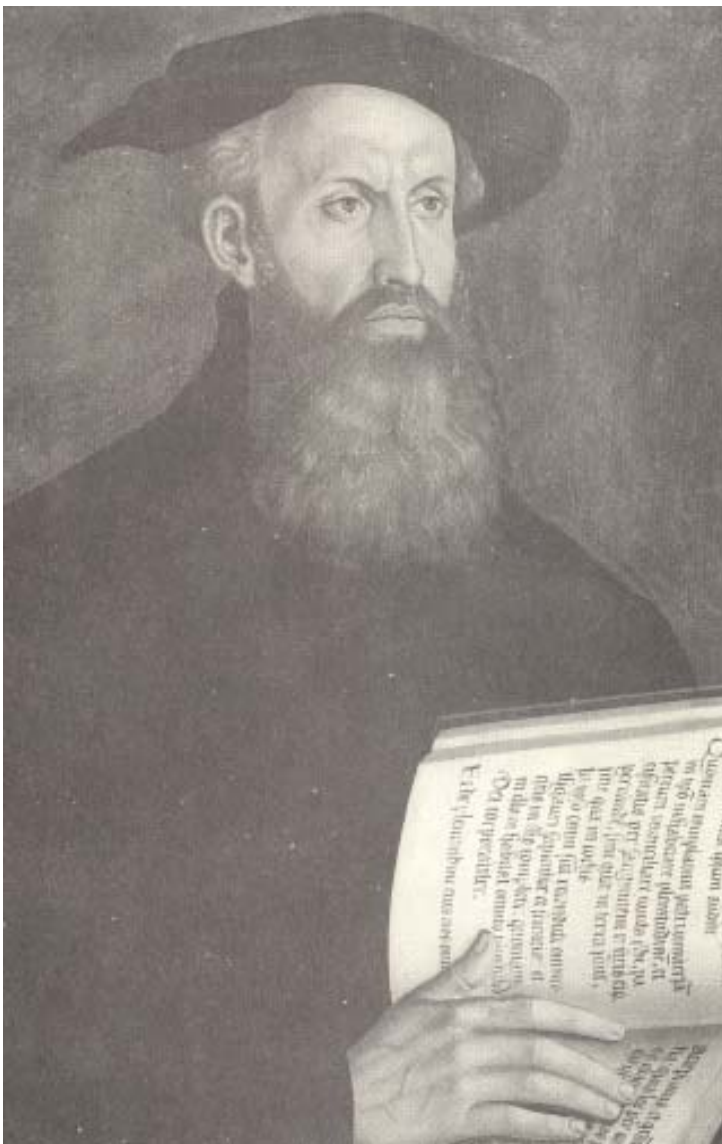


Christianity & Society

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to Contemporary Society*

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Although the majority of the Reformers held the “two extremes,”—Bible teaching and Constantinian principles—in practice not all of them implemented the intolerant views of Constantinianism. And for this “praiseworthy inconsistency” in their Calvinism they deserve recognition and gratitude. This is the case, for instance, of Heinrich Bullinger (1504–1575), the Zurich Reformer. In Bullinger we detect with great clearness and force the irreconcilable antagonism of the “two extremes” of strict Calvinism. We can even establish a remarkable parallel between Samuel Rutherford and the great Swiss Reformer. Like the Scotsman, Bullinger was a man of deep and refined love and sympathy. Besides being a great theologian—as was Rutherford—he was also famous for his letters, and in his immense correspondence Bullinger also reveals a sweet disposition and a most loving spirit. Bullinger agreed with the other Reformers that heretics should be repressed and punished severely. He approved of the execution of Servetus, and in his Second Helvetic Confession he teaches that it is the duty of the magistrate to use the sword against blasphemers; heresy should be punished like murder or treason. Yet, despite these views, he tolerated Bernardino Ochino, who preached for some time to the Italian congregation in that city, but was deposed, without further punishment, for his Anabaptist and Unitarian leanings. He also tolerated Laelio Sozini, who quietly died at Zurich in 1562. Moreover, in a treatise on Roman Catholicism, Bullinger expresses the Christian and humane sentiment that no violence should be done to dissenters, and that faith is a free gift of God, which cannot be commanded or forbidden.

—David Estrada,
“Calvinism v. Constantinianism,” p. 13f.

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CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

POLITICS AND RELIGION

by *Stephen C. Perks*..... 2

FEATURES

CALVINISM VERSUS CONSTANTINIANISM

by *David Estrada* 5

CHRISTIANITY AS A POLITICAL FAITH

by *Stephen C. Perks*..... 16

WISE AS SERPENTS: RAHAB, THE MIDWIVES AND JACOB

by *Derek Carlsen*..... 24

BOOK REVIEWS

Ralph Smith, *Paradox and Truth and Eternal Covenant*

Reviewed by Doug P. Baker 29

Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain:*

Understanding Secularisation 1800–2000

Reviewed by Crawford Gribben..... 30

Alister McGrath, *In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible*

Reviewed by Stephen J. Hayhow..... 32

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EDITORIAL

POLITICS AND RELIGION

By Stephen C. Perks

THIS issue of *Christianity & Society* presents two different ways of looking at the political sphere of life, both of which have had representative positions in the history of Christian thought and practice. Some explanation of the differing approaches of these essays will help to put them into context.

Dr Estrada's essay, "Calvinism versus Constantinianism," is a critique of the religious persecutions that have too often taken place in the name of Christ. I fully endorse his criticism of the many religious persecutions that have taken place in the history of the Church. I agree that Protestants have also persecuted people for "religious" crimes that have no basis in the Bible, that such persecutions have been a tragic mistake and that the justification for such persecutions has been unbiblical. It is important to remember, however, that Dr Estrada is not arguing *for* a secular State. Rather, he is arguing *against* the wrong use of the coercive power of the State to enforce and preserve doctrinal orthodoxy. This argument is important and I fully endorse it.

Nevertheless, I disagree with certain aspects of the philosophy underpinning Dr Estrada's essay, namely those relating to the relationship between Church and State, in that his essay argues not only for a separation of *powers*, but a complete separation of Church and State. The implication of this, if followed through consistently, would be, it seems to me, to make it impossible for the Christian faith to be established as the religion of State, since the establishment of the Christian faith would necessarily involve recognition of the Church as a public legal institution with its own sphere sovereignty forming part of the societal structure of the nation. The denial of or even failure to recognise the public legal character (sphere sovereignty) of the Church would be a denial of the lordship and sovereignty of Christ, and it was the denial of this sovereignty by Rome and the assertion of it by Christians that constituted the dispute between the early Church and Rome and led to the persecution of Christians for treason against Rome. In other words, the implication of a complete separation of Church and State would be that the Christian faith has no *direct* application to the political sphere.

The operative word here is "direct" since I accept that disestablishment of the Christian faith would not necessarily mean that Christians would be unable to exert any influence at all in the political realm. A commitment to the *principle* of disestablishment by Christians would mean, however, that they would be unable to argue consistently that the State is accountable to God and that it must submit to his word and kiss the Son, i.e. do homage to Jesus Christ, as the Bible commands the kings of the earth (Ps. 2). The influence of Christians would be restricted to the effect of their witness generally on the culture of the nation and to requesting the State to do their bidding (lobbying), *possibly* on rational and

moral grounds depending on the general state of the nation and the degree of common grace operative, but only in the same way that any group of citizens, Satanists, homosexuals and paedophiles included, would be able to request special dispensations from the secular authorities. They would not be able, logically, to call the nation back to obedience to God's word as a basic principle of the State's legitimacy and authority since this would imply establishment of the Christian faith. In constitutional terms the State would be to all intents and purposes unaccountable to God (the State would *not* be religiously neutral; rather, the established religion would be secular humanism or some other religion, though this may not be readily perceived or acknowledged, especially in the case of secular humanism). This was the case with ancient Rome.

This principle of complete separation of Church and State underpinned much of the Radical Reformation and is today being revived in the idea of Principled Pluralism. The basic premiss behind Principled Pluralism is the idea that the State should not be a religious institution and therefore should not interfere with religious matters in any way; instead it should respect and preserve people's religious freedom. It is this idea that I wish to take issue with here. In my article on "Christianity as a Political Faith" I argue that the kingdom of God is primarily a political order and that therefore Christianity is primarily a political faith. Religion and politics *cannot* be separated. Politics is inevitably a religious enterprise. This is the case simply because human life is inevitably religious in nature. Consequently politics is as much under the leading of a faith commitment as any other sphere of human activity.

The question we must face therefore is not *whether* the State should be religious or not, but rather *which* religion should be established as the religion of State. The State is inevitably a religious institution because man is by nature a religious being, created by God to serve and glorify his maker. In the state of sin man has turned away from his Creator and Lord and instead of seeking the meaning and purpose of life in God's will for mankind he seeks to find the meaning of life in something or someone else. This the Bible calls idolatry because it places some aspect of the created order, whether ideological or physical, in the place of God, who is alone the one in terms of whom meaning is to be sought. When the State rejects God as the source of its authority and power and the one who alone defines its purpose, it engages in idolatry. Men will either serve the God of the Bible or they will serve some idol of their own making. This is inevitable. Men may be unaware of their idolatry, but that does not mean they are not idolatrous. All of human life is religious, and therefore politics is a religious enterprise.

Thus, a State may not be a Christian State, but it will necessarily be a religious institution. A secular humanist State is a religious State no less than a Christian or Muslim State. It will therefore serve some god of its own making, whether this is the ideals of democracy, socialism, or any aspect of the created order. In other words it will engage in idolatry. The Bible condemns this. The State no less than the Church must honour God and acknowledge his rights by ordering its work in accordance with his will as it has been set down in the Christian Scriptures.

Of course it is not the duty of the State to proclaim the Christian faith and compel people to believe the truth. The State has no authority or power from God to do this. The

power of the State is the sword, coercion, and the use of force to compel belief is ineffective, since “a man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still.” The task of proclaiming the faith, the Great Commission, is given to the Church, and the means to be used is the preaching of the gospel. But this does not mean that the State must not order its work according to the light of God’s word, that it must not bow the knee to Christ and serve him in all that it does (Ps. 2:10–12). How, then, is the State to serve God if it is not called to preach the gospel?

The calling of the State is to administer public justice. If the State, as God’s servant in this matter, is to do this properly, as Paul clearly teaches in the New Testament (Rom. 13:1–6), what constitutes the public justice that the State is called to uphold must be defined by the word of God as this has been given to us in the Christian Scriptures, and it is the duty of the State to uphold the law of God as it relates to the political sphere even where those guilty of acts defined as criminal offences by God’s word believe this to be a violation of their religious and civil liberties (cf. 1 Tim. 1:8–11). In such cases no one is persecuted for their *beliefs*; rather, they are punished for their *crimes*. There is a difference between tolerating the beliefs of non-believers, heretics and those who worship false gods, and tolerating criminal actions that are the fruit of such beliefs. It is the latter only that the State must suppress by the use of the sword, not false beliefs. But what constitutes the crime that the State must suppress must be defined by the word of God, and therefore the State must look to God’s law to guide it in its calling as the servant of God.

This means, for example, that Muslims should not be permitted the religious freedom to establish *sharia* law in the UK, even for their own Islamic communities, since this would be a fundamental denial of the biblical principles that one law should be applicable to the entire nation (Ex. 12:49; Lev. 24:22; Num. 15:15, 16, 29), and that the law of the land should be in accord with the law of God. This is also a fundamental principle of English common law, which stated that “all law is or of right ought to be according to the law of God.”¹ The State must enforce the common law of the land (which should be Christian law) even where Muslims believe this to be a denial of their religious freedom. This is a pertinent example of the problems posed by the doctrine of complete religious tolerance as understood by secular humanists. Both the fatwa condemning the author Salman Rushdie to death, which led to criminal acts being committed in the UK by British Muslims seeking to enforce the fatwa, and the increasingly frequent cases of honour killings in the UK demonstrate the naïvety of the ideal of complete religious toleration. The State may not turn a blind eye to these religious crimes and must use force to bring the perpetrators of such crimes to justice. No doctrine of religious toleration should be permitted to interfere with the State’s duty in this matter. These are crimes and the State is authorised by God’s word to use the sword in dealing with criminals. This is not merely an Old Testament doctrine but a New Testament doctrine also, as Paul teaches in Rom. 13:1–6 and 1 Tim. 1:8–11. The State is called to administer

public justice without regard to the person on religious or any other grounds.

The State, therefore, must pursue public justice as this has been defined by the law of God. The State must go this far but no further. It is my belief that in the past Christian States have often gone far beyond their biblical mandate and engaged in the persecution of heretics, and in this I again fully endorse Dr Estrada’s criticisms. Nonetheless, the State is no less bound to obey the law of God in its definition of crime and its responsibility to uphold public justice as defined by the word of God. Therefore, the State must look to God’s word, to God’s law, as that which defines public justice. It must, in the entirety of its work, seek to conform itself to the dictates of God’s word as it seeks to perform its duty. The State is every bit as much the servant of God as the Church (Rom. 13:1–6), and therefore it is inevitably a religious institution.²

In our criticism of the persecutions that have taken place in the name of Christ we must not lose sight of this fact. It is not the task of the State to persecute people for not believing the truth or for believing error, nor is it the duty of the State to abridge the liberty of non-believers for their non-belief. But it is the duty of the State to punish people for their crimes, and it is the duty of the State to define crime in terms of God’s law. Of course, not all law in the Scriptures is State enforceable law, statute law. Much is given as guidance for the individual, the family and the Church, and we must be ever mindful not to confuse those laws given to the Church with those given to the State. It is my belief that the Reformers, as well as many people before them and many since them, have indeed confused the two and assumed that the State must enforce laws that were given to govern the Church. This is a confusion of the boundaries of these two different spheres.³ It is also my belief that Principled Pluralism confuses these two spheres of the State and the Church, assuming that because the State may not administer Church law therefore the State has no duty to enforce God’s law at all. This is equally mistaken. Where the Bible gives law that relates to the magistrate’s duty to administer public justice the State must take notice and order its work in accordance with Scripture.

We must not forget also that it is not only Christians who have engaged in religious persecutions and murdered men for their beliefs. The record of secular humanist States is worse, not better, than that of Christian States. The campaign of terror unleashed on the world by the French Revolution, i.e. the religion of secular humanism, is a fire that has never ceased to burn in some part of the world since its inception, and has brought, and still brings, untold misery and suffering to countless people. This religion of secular humanism has its own doctrines of orthodoxy—political correctness for example—and secular States have persecuted fiercely those who have refused to submit to their secular belief systems. Our own secular authorities are increasingly anathematising and persecuting those who refuse to kowtow to political correctness and many Christian values

1. Cited in A. K. R. Kiralfy, *Potter’s Historical Introduction to English Law* (London: Sweet and Maxwell Ltd, Fourth Edition, 1958), p. 33. On the influence of Christianity on the development of English law see Stephen C. Perks, *Christianity and Law: An Enquiry into the Influence of Christianity on the Development of English Law* (Whitby: Avant Books, 1993).

2. The issues that concern me here have been dealt with more fully in my book *A Defence of the Christian State: The Case Against Principled Pluralism and the Christian Alternative* (Taunton: The Kuyper Foundation, 1998), available on-line from www.goodtheology.com.

3. On sphere sovereignty see my article on “A Christian View of the State (Civil Government)” in *Christianity & Society*, Vol. XII, No. 4 (October, 2002), pp. 18–24.

and beliefs that conflict with secular ideals have already been subject to such intense criticism that adherence to these values and beliefs is treated as a kind of heresy that must be extirpated from the land by means of laws that criminalise those who refuse to accept the practice of political correctness. The new Gender Recognition Bill that is currently passing through Parliament is a good example of just such intolerance and the willingness on the part of secular humanists to use the coercive power of the State to enforce their belief system on society and punish those who refuse to submit to the new orthodoxy. The abandonment of Christian values in the political sphere is not leading the nation towards more religious freedom at all, but rather towards a vicious type of secular humanist inquisition that has already shown itself to be relentless and utterly brutal in its persecution of heretics.

The record of Christendom has been soiled by the murder of heretics. But the freedoms that modern Westerners rightly enjoy and proclaim so eagerly are not the product of secular humanism and its doctrine of complete religious liberty, i.e. total liberation from the law of God, but rather the fruit produced by the *Christian* cultures of *Protestant* nations that have sought to apply the *biblical* doctrine of man's legitimate and limited freedom under *God's* law. This biblical doctrine of man's freedom under God's law is the source of all our true freedoms (as opposed to the liberty to commit crimes, which is what we increasingly have under the rule of secular humanism) and virtually all the blessings of our civilisation, which secular humanists today wish to attribute to the abandonment of the Christian faith and the triumph of mere human reason. But these freedoms and blessings are the fruit of human reason held captive by the grace of God in Christ and the ordering and development of our civilisation under the influence of the gospel and law of God, not the religion of secular humanism. We have yet to see secular humanism's martyrs die in their thousands that others might be free to worship God according to their consciences. These freedoms are the fruit of Christianity and of the witness of Christian martyrs who have died in their thousands, and not only those of the Radical Reformation but those of all ages of the Christian faith, including those who died for their commitment to the Magisterial Reformation.

While excoriating the unjust and murderous persecution of heretics by Christians we must not lose sight of the benefits that Christendom has brought to mankind. Islam offers no freedom for non-Muslims, Christians included, despite the fact that much more has been made of the status of so-called "people of the book" than can be justified historically,⁴ and it is my belief that secular humanism, once it is revealed in all its vainglory,—something that has not yet happened in the post-Protestant West, but comes closer with every day that passes—will offer no more freedom to Christians than Islam does.

The persecutions were a tragedy. But it will be no less a tragedy if we cast off the countless benefits of the establishment of the Christian faith as the religion of State because of the mistakes of previous generations of Christians by adopting a secular political ideology, since the fruit of the latter, e.g. the secular humanist witch-hunts and persecutions, will prove—and indeed have already proved—to be far worse than the persecutions of heretics in Christendom, and the benefits will be non-existent.

The corrective to abuse is never disuse, but proper use. We are called to confront our generation with the gospel of God. We must also acknowledge the errors of the past. But we must equally lay before men and nations the claims of God as the only hope for a remedy to those mistakes. The Christian faith is a public truth, not a mere cult. It applies to the whole life of man.

The gospel of God, the good news of salvation from sin through the merit of Christ's life, death and resurrection, requires us to call all men everywhere to repent of their sin (Acts 17:30) and turn to Christ in faith and obedience to his law, and this means inevitably also that the State must bow the knee to Christ, submit to his word, and order its work according to his will as revealed in his word (Ps. 2:10–12; Rom. 13:1–6). As with all essays published in this journal, readers are welcome to contribute to and debate any issues raised by means of correspondence. *C&S*

4. On the plight of Christians under the rule of Islam see Bat Ye'or, *The Decline of Eastern Christianity Under Islam: From Jihad to Dhimmitude* (London: Associated University Presses, 1996). For a review of this book see *Christianity & Society*, Vol. x, No. 3 (July, 2000), p. 28ff.

A DEFENCE OF THE CHRISTIAN STATE THE CASE AGAINST PRINCIPLED PLURALISM AND THE CHRISTIAN ALTERNATIVE

by *Stephen C. Perks*

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PRINCIPLED PLURALISM is the belief that the State should be a religiously neutral institution. In this book Stephen Perks provides a detailed critique of the principled pluralist position. He shows that religious neutrality in the political sphere is impossible, that *all* States, including so-called secular States, are religious institutions. The author argues that the case for principled pluralism fundamentally misconceives the proper Christian attitude to the political sphere. He then provides an exposition of the Christian doctrine of the State.

CALVINISM VERSUS CONSTANTINIANISM

by David Estrada

Introduction

As already stated in our last article, the person and writings of Rutherford confront us with several deep and perplexing issues. As a Reformed mystic, his heart is enthralled by the surpassing loveliness of Christ, but as a Calvinist theologian he can sometimes appear as an incorrigible and imperturbable stoic. We often wonder, reading his works, if the man who wrote the *Letters*—which are indeed a Christian monument to love and charity—is the same one who wrote treatises in which the absence of positive feelings seems to dominate the reasoning of an undisturbed cold mind. “I am made of extremes,” he once told a friend.¹ Taylor Innes, one of his biographers, thought that the reality of the “extremes” was the outward sign of an inward schism and that there were, in fact, *two men* in Samuel Rutherford that had never really merged into one strong unit. He held that Rutherford’s life was like a kind of double whirlwind which never reached a unified direction.² In our estimation, the “two extremes” in Rutherford’s personality are the “two extremes” found in all traditional Calvinists. Boldly stated: there are in Calvinism two extremes which cannot possibly mix: one is the extreme of biblical truth and the other is the extreme of Constantinian ideology. There is no possibility of reconciliation between the Bible and Constantinianism. These two extremes create tension in the heart and inconsistency in the mind.

Rutherford was conditioned by the “Constantinian extreme” when he made statements such as “Presbyterianism represents the Church of God from which there cannot be the slightest deviation.” “There is but one true Church and all who are outside it are heretics who must be destroyed.” “Liberty of conscience and religious tolerance are teachings implicit in a false conception of the Christian Church, and must be regarded as damnable doctrines.” “There is no warrant for religious toleration in the Word.” “Freedom of religion imperils the unity of the Church, fosters heresy, and implies a denial of the coercive power of the magistrate in religion.” A heretic is “technically guilty of *soul murder* and should accordingly be cut down by the civil magistrate under the guidance of the Church.” “The sword is an external

agent which prevents heresy from destroying others and which guards the Law of God and His Church from the impious assaults of error.”³ Are these, and other similar statements, compatible with sound biblical teaching and the sentiments of Christian love infused by the Holy Spirit in the believer? Obviously not. No wonder, then, Rutherford was a “double man,” a man of “two extremes.”

Protestant Intolerance

Of all forms of persecution, religious persecution is the worst because it is enacted in the name of God and contradicts the spirit of humanity and Christianity. It is a well-attested fact that the majority of the evangelical leaders and rulers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were inconsistently intolerant in theory and practice. Under repression and persecution, Protestants vindicated religious and civil liberties, but once in power they themselves resorted to intolerant procedures against dissenters. The Reformers inherited the doctrine of persecution from their mother Church, and practised it as far as they had the power. They differed from Roman Catholics—though not always—in the degree and extent, but not in the principle, of intolerance, approving the traditional doctrine that only death makes heretics harmless. They acted in the conviction that they themselves were orthodox, according to the only true standard of orthodoxy—the Word of God in the Holy Scriptures—and that Roman Catholics and all those dissenting were in error and could not be tolerated. As heirs of the Reformation we cannot acquit our leaders of religious intransigence, nor diminish their responsibility by appealing to the mentality of the times in which they lived. The fact that in the majority of cases the people they persecuted were men and women of exemplary Christian piety and moral conduct aggravates their offence.

Luther, the hero of Worms, the champion of the sacred *rights of conscience*, was nearest to Romanism in the condemnation of heresy, but in his earlier years as a Reformer he gave utterance to some of the noblest sentiments in favour of religious liberty: “Belief is a free thing which cannot be enforced . . . If heretics were to be punished by death, the

1. *Letters*, 310. A letter to his friend David Dickson.

2. A. Taylor Innes, *Samuel Rutherford*, “The Evangelical Succession.” Second Series (1889), pp.137–138.

3. *A Survey of the Spiritual Antichrist*, 4, 6, 7, 8; *A Free Disputation*, 46, 61–63.

hangman would be the most orthodox theologian.” “Heresy is a spiritual thing which no iron can hew down, no fire burn, no water drown . . . To burn heretics is contrary to the will of the Holy Spirit.” “False teachers should not be put to death; it is enough to banish them.” But with advancing years Luther became less liberal and more intolerant. He exhorted the magistrates to forbid all preaching of Anabaptists, and urged their expulsion. He raised no protest when the Diet of Speyer of 1529 passed the cruel decree that Anabaptists be executed by fire and sword without distinction of sex, and even without a previous hearing before the spiritual judges.⁴ Luther’s opinions on the treatment of the Jews also changed for the worse. In 1543 he counselled their expulsion from Christian lands, and the burning of their books and synagogues.

Melanchthon was considered the mildest and gentlest among the Reformers, yet on the matter of persecution he believed that the Mosaic law against idolatry and blasphemy was as binding upon Christian States as the Decalogue, and was applicable to heresies as well. He therefore fully and repeatedly justified the course of Calvin and the council of Geneva in condemning Servetus, and regarded the death sentence as “a *pious* and memorable example to all posterity.” Martin Bucer, who stands third among the Reformers in Germany and knew Servetus personally, treated him at first with kindness but after the publication of his work on the *Trinity*, declared that Servetus deserved to be “disembowelled and torn to pieces.” From this we may infer how fully Bucer would have approved his execution, had he lived till 1553.

Zwingli approved the persecution of Anabaptists in Zurich. His example was followed by other Swiss cantons. In Geneva Calvin carried out more fully Zwingli’s ideas of religious intolerance. The death of Servetus stands as an eloquent example of his views on persecution. Beza was also a firm defender of the death penalty for heretics. In 1554 he published a treatise defending Calvin and the Genevan magistrates for the execution of Servetus. His views on persecution were accepted for a long time in the Reformed Churches with few dissenting voices. Both Oecolampadius and Peter Martyr at Zurich were in favour of the death penalty for heretics. In the Netherlands, the Synod of Dort deposed and expatriated all Arminian ministers and school-teachers. In Sweden, Norway, and Denmark no religion and public worship was allowed but the Lutheran. The Protestant governments in Germany and Switzerland excluded, within the limits of their jurisdiction, Roman Catholics from all religious and civil rights, and took exclusive possession of their Churches, convents, and other property. This spirit of intolerance was also carried across the seas, and was as strong in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the American colonies, with some exceptions, as it was in Europe.

The English Reformers were not far behind those of the Continent in the matter of intolerance. The penal code of Queen Elizabeth, and the successive acts of *Uniformity*, aimed at the complete extermination of all dissent, whether papal or Protestant, and made it a crime for an Englishman to be anything but Episcopalian. Several years before the execu-

tion of Servetus, Archbishop Cranmer persuaded King Edward VI to sign the death-warrant of two Anabaptists.⁵ On their part, the Puritans, when in power, ejected two thousand ministers from their benefices for non-conformity, and the Episcopalians paid them back in the same way when they returned to power. Constantinian religious persecution fills many pages of the history of Protestantism. Samuel Rutherford himself was a witness of the sad spectacle of Protestants oppressing and persecuting other Protestants. One of Rutherford’s letters is addressed to Dr. Alexander Leighton, whom he calls “Christ’s prisoner in bonds at London.” Leighton, a famous physician and Puritan divine, had written a book against prelacy and in defence of Presbyterianism, and on this account he was arrested in 1629, and thrown into a cell in Newgate. He was condemned to have one of his ears cut off, and one side of his nose slit, to be branded on the face, to stand in the pillory, to be whipped at a post, to pay a fine of £1000, and to suffer imprisonment till the fine was paid. When this inhuman sentence was pronounced, William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury, took off his hat, and holding up his hands, gave thanks to God, who had given the Church victory over her enemies! The sentence was executed without mercy. When Rutherford wrote his letter in November 1639, Leighton had already languished many years in prison. When he was liberated, he could hardly walk, see or hear.⁶ Another of Rutherford’s letters was addressed to James Guthrie, minister of the Gospel at Stirling, who was hanged at the cross of Edinburgh in June 1661. Several of Rutherford’s letters were addressed to Lady Jane Campbell, Viscountess of Kenmure, whose brother, Archibald Campbell, Marquis of Argyle, one of Scotland’s greatest patriots, was beheaded in 1661.

The persecution of Anabaptists is the darkest page of the Reformation. In this religious repression Protestants and Catholics were united. The Reformers made themselves guilty of unfairness—times without number—when judging the Stepchildren and their beliefs. Besides accusing them of divers doctrinal errors, they regarded them as political anarchists, “seeking to overthrow the magistracy”—as the Belgian Confession affirms. During the past few decades a vast array of historical material on the Anabaptist and other dissenting groups has come to public light, and make untenable past accusations and distorted views on their lives and creeds. The whole history of the Anabaptist movement in the sixteenth century, writes Leonard Verduin, has to be rewritten and disentangled from the *odium theologicum*. The excesses of Münster in 1535 became the pretext for punishing innocent men and women. By making Münster typical of the movement, men were likewise able to blame Anabaptism for the Peasant Revolt.⁷

5. One was a woman called Joan Bocher of Kent, and the other a foreigner from Holland, George von Pare. Joan Bocher was burnt in May 1550 on charges of doctrinal deviation and for distributing among ladies of the court Tyndale’s translation of the New Testament.

6. *Letters*, 393. Leighton died in 1649. He was the father of the celebrated Robert Leighton, Archbishop of Glasgow. When in 1637 Charles I and William Laud, the Archbishop of Canterbury, attempted to impose Anglican forms of worship in Scotland, the Scots countered by pledging themselves in the National Covenant to restore Presbyterianism and abolishing episcopacy. This was the cause of the so called Bishops’ Wars. Laud’s persecution of Puritans and other religious dissidents resulted in his trial and execution by the House of Commons.

7. L. Verduin, *The Reformers and their Stepchildren* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1964) p. 237.

4. At the Diet of Speyer of 1529, Lutherans *protested* against the imperial and Catholic decision to rescind the concessions made to the evangelicals in 1526. The word *Protestant* originated from this incident.

Zwingli applied to the Anabaptists the words of 1 John 2:19: “They went out from us, but they were not of us.” At an early stage Anabaptists and other dissenting groups of the sixteenth century made common cause with the Reformation movement; but their origins go back to a more remote past. They represented a resurgence of evangelical tendencies, which had survived centuries of persecution under the Roman Church. They were faithful testimonies of the so-called “medieval religious underground.” Historians refer to them as the “Second Front” or “Left Wing” of the Reformation, and also as the “Stepchildren” of the Reformation. These dissenters, however, wished to be known as Evangelicals, as Brethren, or simply as Christians. The Reformers referred to them all as “Anabaptist.”⁸ The Anabaptist motto was “Restitution.” They searched the Scriptures in order to recover the pattern of the Early Church. What struck them was that the Primitive Church had been composed only of heartfelt believers and so far from being united with the State, was instead persecuted, despised and rejected, a Church of martyrs. They were as cruelly persecuted in Protestant countries as in Roman Catholic countries. The Anabaptists produced some of the earliest of Protestant hymns. Throughout, these hymns breathe a spirit of piety, devotion, and cheerful resignation under suffering, and readiness for martyrdom. They dwell on the inner life of the Christian, the mysteries of regeneration, sanctification, and personal union with Christ.

Sheep without shepherd running blind are scattered into flight.
Our house and home are left behind. Like birds we fly by night.
They hunt us with the bloodhound, and hold us roped and strong-bound.

As sheep for slaughter looked upon, as heretics bespoken.
Fearlessly the truth they spoke, and were not ashamed.
Christ is the way and Christ the life was the word proclaimed.
Precious in Thy sight, O God, the dying of a saint.⁹

Some of these hymns were collected in *The Ausbund*—a Swiss Anabaptist hymnal of the sixteenth century, which is still in use by the Amish of today. This hymnal was considered as forbidden religious literature up until the eighteenth century, and would be confiscated if discovered. Often after the names of the hymn writer we find the notation: “drowned 1525,” “burned 1526,” “beheaded 1527,” “hanged 1528,” and so on.

Many of us who share and hold as biblical the main articles of the Reformed faith, judge the views of the Reformers on the issue of religious intolerance as incomprehensible, embarrassing and painful. This, writes Roland Bainton, “is one of the greatest tragedies of Protestant history.”¹⁰ We may find an explanation for their views and actions, but from a biblical and humane perspective we certainly cannot find a valid justification for their position and conduct. How could men so enlightened in the *liberating* doctrines of the *Sola scriptura, sola gratia, sola fide* of the gospel message be at the

same time so *enslaved* to a theory of intolerance which, in the last analysis, rests solely on the heathen principles of Constantinianism? In this our analysis of the Reformers’ stand on religious intolerance we shall endeavour to find a plausible explanation for their thought and conduct, but an *explanation* is not a *justification*. The more we study the history of the Anabaptists and the intolerant measures taken by the Churches of the Reformation against all types of dissidence, the more clearly we see that the real cause of Protestant religious intransigence is to be found in the Constantinian principles of their creeds inherited from the Roman Church.

THE BASIC TENETS OF CONSTANTINIANISM

Sacralism

In a sacral society, all its members form a bond of cohesion by virtue of a shared common religion. All pre-Christian societies were sacral and completely undivided in their sole allegiance to the State religion. Sacralism was a guarantee of political and social unity and national identity. In Old Testament times Israel was also a sacral nation—all its members were socially and politically united under the common bonds of a theocratic religion. Ancient Rome was also sacral: the national gods and the worship of the emperor gave its citizens all the privileges of a shared social identity.

Sacralism in Christianity originated with the “conversion” of Constantine to the Apostolic Faith, and the promulgation of his *Tolerance Edict* in 313. The religious toleration of this Edict was a purely transitory step to the elevation of Catholic hierarchical Christianity as the only official religion of the State. Constantine succeeded in preserving the philosophy of Roman *cohesion* and *uniformity* under the garb of Christianity. The unity of the Church was the keystone of the unity of the empire and of society. Under the new order of things all citizens became members of the Church. This idea was to be fully developed by his successors, and to become a ruling principle in the Roman Catholic Church, and, in a lesser degree, also in the Churches of the Reformation.

The *unity* of Church and State was also linked to a geographical territory. All those living within the borders of the Empire were, at the same time, citizens of the same State and members of the same community. On similar grounds the Churches which sprang up from the Reformation expelled from their borders the Catholics and the Anabaptists. In Geneva only the Calvinists could be permanent residents. The proposed articles of faith of the Westminster divines were intended to be binding on all the people living in England, Scotland, and Ireland. In like manner, Rutherford, and the majority of the religious leaders of Scotland, believed that only Presbyterianism could exist as the official national religion. The sacralist mind cannot tolerate other allegiances.

The New Testament teaching that State and Church demand different forms of loyalty is foreign to sacralism. According to the New Testament, the Church demands a loyalty which only he can give who believes in Christ. The allegiance to the civil authorities—which all citizens must assume since all power comes from God—is of a different nature and aims at other goals, distinct from the spiritual concerns of the Church. These two allegiances imply the separation of two powers: the temporal and the spiritual—that is to say, the separation of Church and State.

8. In Roland Bainton’s estimation, “to call these people Anabaptists, that is, re-baptisers, was to malign them, because they denied that baptism was repeated, inasmuch as infant baptism is no baptism at all. They called themselves simply Baptists, not re-Baptists. The offensive name was fastened on them in order to bring them under the penalty of the Justinian Code against the Donatists” (R. H. Bainton, *The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* [The Beacon Press, 1956], p. 99).

9. Excerpts from an Anabaptist hymn.

10. R. H. Bainton, *op. cit.*, p. 95–108.

Constantinianism and the relationship between Church and State

The words attributed to Tertullian: “What does the emperor have to do with the Church?” (*Quid est imperatori cum ecclesia?*)¹¹ lost their excluding meaning under Constantine. The elevation of Christianity as the religion of the State had negative effects for the Church and resulted in a general secularisation. The combination of the Cross and the military ensign chosen by Constantine was a very unfortunate omen, portending an unhappy mixture of the temporal and the spiritual powers. “The mass of the Roman Empire” writes Schaff “was baptized only with water, not with the Spirit and fire of the Gospel, and it smuggled heathen manners and practices into the sanctuary under a new name. The temporal gain of Christianity was in many respects cancelled by spiritual loss.”¹¹ There is *no* trace of a union with the State, either in the way of hierarchical supremacy or of Erastian subordination during the first three centuries. The believers of the Apostolic Church strictly observed the separation of Church and State implicit in the words of their Master: “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s” (Mt. 22:21), and honoured the civil authority as a divine institution for the protection of life and property, for the reward of the good and the punishment of the evildoer. But in their spiritual calling they allowed nothing to be prescribed or forbidden to them by the authorities of the State. Their principle was to “obey God rather than men.” For this principle, for their allegiance to the King of Kings, they were always ready to suffer imprisonment, persecution, and death.

The civil and the ecclesiastical relations of the Middle Ages are so closely intertwined that it is impossible to study or understand the one without the other. The history of the Roman Catholic Church registers an unceasing escalation of *religious* and *temporal* power. Pope Gregory VIII (1187) compared the Church to the sun, the State to the moon, which borrows her light from the sun, and claimed and exercised the right of deposing kings and absolving subjects from their oaths of allegiance. An eloquent example of how far the papal assertion of temporal authority can go is found in the *Treaty of Tordesillas* (1494) in which Pope Alexander VI divided the newly discovered lands of America between Spain and Portugal. Alexander claimed this right as Peter’s successor, and by reason of the vicarship of Jesus Christ, which he administered on earth.

Among the Reformers, Zwingli held a strict sacralist view of the Church. He wanted to make of Zurich a theocratic community resembling that of ancient Israel. Just as circumcision and the observance of the Passovers made the Jew a member of a national community, so baptism and the Lord’s Supper marked the Christian as a member of a religious society. The Church, then, could properly be described as the new Israel of God. Calvin had a much higher view of the State than did the Roman Catholic Church. He considered it equally divine in origin and fully independent in all temporal matters; yet he did not go so far as to separate the two powers; on the contrary, he united them as closely as their different functions would permit. In practice, the two powers were not as clearly distinct at Geneva as in theory. Discipline was a common territory for both, and the Consistory was a mixed body of clergymen and

laymen. The government fixed and paid the salaries of the pastors, and approved their nomination and transfer from one parish to another. None could even absent himself for a length of time without leave of the Council. The Large Council voted on the Confession of Faith and Discipline, and gave them the power of law. The congregations in most Lutheran countries of Europe have no voice in the election of their own pastors. In England the governorship of the Church was usurped and exercised by Henry VIII and, in a milder form, by Queen Elizabeth and her successors, and this was acquiesced in by the bishops. The Presbyterian Church of Scotland has laboured and suffered more than any Protestant Church for the principle of the sole headship of Christ; first against popery, then against prelacy, and last against patronage. Nevertheless the Scottish Kirk, in the words of Rutherford, must resort to the civil magistrate to prevent heresy and impious assaults of error.

Constantinianism and the nature of the Church

The Donatist controversy of the fourth century revolved around the doctrine of the essence of the Church. For the Donatists the Church was an exclusive community of regenerate saints, which in a sinful world could only be imperfectly realised. The State, as a civil entity, had no right to interfere in Church affairs. Contrary to this *spiritualistic* conception, Augustine defended a *realistic* theory of the Church. He distinguished between a *true*, or godly body of Christ, and an *apparent*, or ungodly body of Christ; but both—the godly and the ungodly—are integrated in the same Church. A perfect separation of sinners from saints cannot take place before the final judgement.

To support this, Augustine appealed to the Lord’s parables of the tares among the wheat and of the net which gathered of every kind, (Mt. 13). These parables were the chief exegetical battleground of the parties. The Donatists understood by the field, not the Church, but the world; for Augustine the field was the kingdom of heaven—identified with the Church—and the separation between the tares and the wheat had to wait until the final harvest. The Donatists, moreover, made a distinction between unknown offenders, to whom alone the parable of the net referred, and notorious sinners. For further “biblical support,” Augustine appealed to the case of Abraham’s two wives Sarah and Agar: one a free-woman and the other a bondservant; the former lived her life in the climate of voluntarism and the latter lived hers in that of coerciveness. In accordance with this allegorical interpretation, Sarah stands for the Church as the *true* body of Christ, and Agar symbolises those who are in the Church in an outward or external profession. In the words of Verduin, “this bit of sophism also became a part of the panoply of the medieval exponent of ‘Christian sacralism,’ and was repeated in Reformation times.”¹²

On the Augustinian interpretation of the wheat and the tares rests the subsequent Protestant distinction between the *visible* and the *invisible* Church, which regards the invisible Church, not as another Church, but as the smaller community of true believers, and thus as the true substance of the visible Church—the *ecclesiola in ecclesia* of Luther. Zwingli introduced these terms. He meant by the “visible Church” the community of all who bear the Christian name; by the

11. P. Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1955), Vol. II, pp. 93, 125.

12. L. Verduin, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

“invisible Church” the totality of true believers of all ages. The invisible Church is in the visible Church, as the soul is in the body, or the kernel in the shell, but only God knows with certainty those who belong to the invisible Church and will ultimately be saved.

According to Calvin, the Church is a body which includes “all in a given locality.” He includes “all the elect who have lived from the beginning of the world” in the invisible Church. He clarifies this by saying that we must acknowledge as members of the Church “all those who, by a confession of faith, an exemplary life, and a participation in the sacraments, profess the same God and Christ with ourselves.” In this Church are included many hypocrites, who have nothing of Christ but the name and appearance; many persons, ambitious, avaricious, envious, slanderous, and dissolute in their lives, who are tolerated for a time, either because they cannot be convicted by a legitimate process, or because discipline is not always maintained with sufficient vigour. Calvin urges us to “think so highly of the Word and of the Sacraments that wherever we see them we are to conclude, without a doubt, that the Church is there, regardless of how much vice and evil there may be in the corporate life of men.” His views on the visible and invisible aspects of the Church, passed into the Second Helvetic Confession, the Scotch Confession, the Westminster Confession, and other Reformed Confessions. Calvin ignored the insistence of the early Donatists that, according to Jesus’ own explanation of the parable, the terrain on which the two kinds of plants are growing side by side is the *world*, not the Church.

According to R. B. Kuiper, the “distinction is both valid and valuable, but it must not be supposed that there are two Christian churches . . . The visible church consists of all those who are enrolled as church members . . . Hence it may be said to comprise both believers and unbelievers, such as are truly Christians and such as are merely professed or nominal Christians . . . We cannot tell with certainty who have been regenerate and who are in an unregenerate state. Only God omniscient is able to do that . . . Consisting as it does of believers and non-believers, the visible church must of necessity be far less glorious than is the invisible church. That is a sad fact.”¹³

It is indeed a sad fact, especially when our Lord said that his people would be known by their works! The whole concept of visible and invisible, observes Verduin, is foreign to the New Testament; it was fashioned in order to provide a formula whereby men could escape from the Stepchildren’s clamour for a Church of believers. Calvin’s visible Church is the Church of Constantinianism; his invisible Church is the Church of the New Testament. In spite of the Augustinian arguments, the Donatists continued to think of the Church of Christ as a “small body of the saved surrounded by an unregenerate mass of unbelievers.” And on the same grounds the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century defended a believers’ Church of regenerate men and women. No wonder the Reformers referred to them as Neo-Donatists.¹⁴

13. R. B. Kuiper, *The Glorious Body of Christ—A Scriptural Appreciation of the One Holy Church* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), pp. 26, 27, 28.

14. L. Verduin, *op. Cit.*, p. 82f.

Constantinianism and religious persecution

An inevitable consequence of the union of Church and State was restriction of religious freedom in faith and worship, and the civil punishment of departure from the doctrine and discipline of the established Church. The founding of private assemblies—as took place in the Apostolic age—was regarded by the Romans as sheer sedition. And the same thing occurred after Christianity became the official religion of the State. As I stated earlier, the era of persecution within the Church began with the first Ecumenical Council, called by Constantine. This Council presents the first instance of a subscription to a creed, and the first instance of banishment for refusing to subscribe.¹⁵ The *penal legislation* against heresy was inaugurated by Theodosius the Great after the final triumph of the Nicene Creed in the second Ecumenical Council. He promulgated during his reign (379–395) no less than fifteen severe edicts against heretics. Heretics were excluded from public worship, public offices, and exposed, in some cases, to capital punishment. The Justinian Code provided for capital punishment for anyone who established a clandestine assembly. The fact is that in a sacral conception of the Church there is no room for independent congregations.

From the latter part of the twelfth century, councils advocated the death penalty for heretics, popes insisted upon it, and Thomas Aquinas elaborately defended it. Leaning back on Augustine and his interpretation of “*Compel them to come in*,” Thomas Aquinas declared, in very clear terms, that heretics deserved, not only to be separated from the Church, but also to be excluded from the earth by judicial death.¹⁶ The form of death by burning was officially introduced in 1231. By the famous bull *ad extirpanda*, of 1252, Pope Innocent IV authorised torture as a measure for extorting confessions. The *Directorium Inquisitorum* of the Dominican priest Nicolas Eymeric (Rome, 1375) gives a detailed account of the horrendous methods to be employed against heretics. As “Grand Inquisitor” of Aragon, Eymeric acquired great experience in the malefic art of eliciting confessions from those accused of heresy. His work was reissued many times.

On this legal and theological foundation the medieval and modern Church has soiled her annals with the blood of innumerable religious dissidents. We need only refer to the early crusades against the Albigenses and Waldenses sanctioned by Innocent III; the *autos-de-fé* of the Spanish and Italian Inquisition; the thousands of Protestants executed during the rule of the Duke of Alba in the Netherlands (1567–1573); the several hundred martyrs who were burned in Smithfield under the reign of bloody Mary; and the repeated persecutions of the Waldenses in France and Piedmont. It must be observed that one of the commonest of persecution, under both Catholics and Protestants, was the baptism of adults. Already under the Theodosian Code (438) capital punishment was prescribed for anyone who was convicted of having “re-baptised” an adult. The first Anabaptist martyrs

15. Arius and two Egyptian bishops were banished to Illyria. During the violent Arian controversies, which shook the empire between the first and second Oecumenical Councils (325–381), both parties when in power freely exercised persecution by imprisonment, deposition, and exile. The Arians were as intolerant as the orthodox. The practice furnished the basis for a theory of public law.

16. *Meruerunt non solum ab ecclesia per excommunicationem separated sed etiam per mortem a mundo excludi.* (*Summa*, II. PT. II. 11; Migne’s ed., III. 109)

in Zurich were put to death under the terms of this ancient Code. More than the theological issue, what was at stake was Constantianism itself. Adult baptism introduced a seed of division within the official Church. Zwingli, who for a time was “almost an Anabaptist,” later opposed believers’ baptism mainly on the grounds that such baptism would tend to divide society. The Geneva of Calvin, which according to John Knox “was the most perfect school of Christ that was to be found on earth,” was also an example of Constantian intolerance. Besides the death of Servetus, condemned for heresy and blasphemy, and the beheading of Jacques Gruet under charges of sedition and atheism, the official acts of the Council of Geneva from 1541 to 1559 exhibit a dark chapter of censures, fines, imprisonments, and executions. From 1542 to 1546 fifty-eight judgements of death and seventy-six decrees of banishment were passed.¹⁷

The corollary of Church Discipline

The union of the Church with the State had an injurious influence upon the discipline of the Church. The State gave her help to the Church, lent the power of law to acts of suspension and excommunication, and accompanied those acts with civil penalties.

There was no thought of a separation in membership of Church and citizenry. The Christian community envisaged by all parties was composed of the same people as the civil community. In the Early Church, previous to Constantine the Great, discipline rested on purely moral sanctions, and had nothing to do with civil constraints and punishments. Spiritual offences against the Church were spiritually judged, and punished by admonition, deposition, or excommunication, with a view to the reformation and restoration of the offender. This is the pattern of conduct the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century tried to follow. This was an uncomfortable fact for the Reformers, who judged very uncharitably the holy living of the Stepchildren. According to Bucer, it had always been Satan’s nature and practice to introduce false religion with strictness as to conduct. It is a fact that Church discipline raises a serious problem for all those that hold a Constantian bond of union between Church and State. What measures are to be taken against those who are guilty of gross moral offences? If the offender is to be put out of the Church, he will also have to be put out of society. Church discipline as set forth in the New Testament is impossible in “Christian sacramentalism.”

The “two extremes”—the Constantian and the Christian—are clearly discernible in Calvin’s views on Church discipline. On the one hand, he constantly kept in view the ideal of “a Church without spot or wrinkle or blemish,” as described in Eph. 5:27. He wanted every Christian to be consistent with his profession, to show his faith by good works, and to strive to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect. In this, Calvin was biblically correct. On the other hand, the assumption that all citizens are members of the Church and subject to discipline introduced a Constantian element into his whole concept of Church polity. In this, Calvin was not correct. Discipline became a common territory for both Church and State. The civil Genevan authori-

ties became subservient to the disciplinary measures imposed by the Genevan Church and carried out its decisions with minute fidelity. The all-embracing disciplinarian system implanted in Geneva under Calvin included the death penalty for heresy, idolatry, and blasphemy. Adultery, upon a second offence, was likewise punished by death. To vindicate the dignity of the fifth commandment a girl was beheaded for striking her parents. Attendance at public worship was compulsory on pain of fines. Watchmen were appointed to see that people went to church. Dancing, drunkenness, ostentation and immodesty in dress were punishable by censure, fine or imprisonment. Habitual gamblers were exposed in the pillory with cords around their neck. Every unseemly word and act on the street was reported, and the offenders were cited before the Consistory to be either censured and warned, or handed over to the Council for severer punishment. Reading of bad books and immoral novels was also prohibited, and the popular *Amadis de Gaul* was ordered to be burned. Parents were warned against naming their children after Roman Catholic saints who nourished certain superstitions; instead of them the names of Abraham, Moses, David, Daniel, Zechariah, Jeremiah, Nehemiah became common. Even the number of dishes at meals was regulated.¹⁸

The rights of conscience

Tertullian’s *Apologeticus* (composed between 197 and 200) can be considered the first plea for religious liberty as an *inalienable right* which God has given to every man, and which the civil government in its own interest should not only tolerate, but respect and protect. All compulsion in matters of conscience is contrary to the very nature of religion, and no form of worship has any value except so far as it is a voluntary homage of the heart. Tertullian repels the attacks of the heathens against Christianity, and demands for it legal *toleration* and equal rights with the other sects of the Roman Empire. The cause of religious freedom and tolerance never found a more eloquent and fearless defender in the very face of despotic power, and the blazing fires of persecution, than Tertullian. Similar views in favour of religious liberty were expressed by Justin Martyr, and by Lactantius, who wrote: “Religion cannot be imposed by force; the matter must be carried on by words rather than by blows, that the will may be affected. Torture and piety are widely different; nor is it possible for truth to be united with violence, or justice with cruelty. Nothing is so much a matter of free will as religion.”¹⁹

The arguments of these apologists against the persecution of Christians by the heathen applies in full to the persecution of heretics by the Church after Constantine. The Church, after its triumph over paganism, forgot this lesson and for many centuries treated all Christian heretics just as the old Romans had treated the Christians, without distinction of creed or sect. Religious intolerance became an

17. During the pestilence that ravished Switzerland in 1545, more than twenty men and women were burnt alive for witchcraft and “a wicked conspiracy to spread the horrible disease.”

18. Three men who had laughed during the sermon were imprisoned for three days. Three children were punished because they remained outside the church during the sermon to eat cakes. A man was banished from the city for three months because, on hearing an ass bray, he said jestingly: “He brays a beautiful psalm.” A young man was punished because he gave his bride a book on housekeeping with the remark: “This is the best Psalter.” (P. Schaff, *op. cit.*, 1953. Vol. VIII, p. 484ff.)
19. *Inst. Div.*, V, 20.

integral tenet of Catholicism: Pope Clement VIII denounced the Toleration Edict of Nantes as “the most accursed that can be imagined, whereby liberty of conscience is granted to everybody; which is the worst thing in the world”; Pope Innocent X “condemned, rejected, and annulled” the toleration articles of the Westphalian Treaty of 1648; Pius VIII began his brief pontificate by denouncing liberty of conscience; Gregory XVI considered the Belgian declaration in favour of religious liberty a folly (*deliratio*); Pope Pius IX, in the Syllabus of 1864, expressly condemned, among the errors of that age, the doctrine of religious toleration and liberty.

The Reformers, who were familiar with the writings of Tertullian and the other Christian apologists of the early Church, totally ignored their teaching on liberty of conscience and religious tolerance. According to Beza, “freedom of conscience is worse than the tyranny of the pope—as much worse as anarchy is worse than tyranny.” The prevailing sentiment in the Westminster Assembly was decidedly opposed to toleration. Even Bailie, the most moderate of the Scottish delegates, regarded religious toleration as “the mother and nurse of all sorts of heresies and blasphemies threatening the overthrow of religion and society.”²⁰ As a result, the Westminster Confession of Faith fully endorsed this position. The already quoted words of Rutherford on this matter clearly summarise the Reformed position: “Liberty of conscience and religious tolerance are teachings implicit in a false conception of the Christian Church, and must be regarded as damnable doctrines.” In contrast to this position, as Roland H. Bainton points out, “religious liberty was a tenet of the Anabaptists, and they were the first church to make it a cardinal point of their creed.”²¹

More on the alleged biblical grounds for religious persecution

As repeatedly stated in our line of argumentation: Christianity and Constantinianism do not mix. This the Reformers did not seem to realise as they sought to harmonise two incompatible principles: the one biblical, and the other pagan. This was their tragedy and the cause of permanent incongruities and tensions within Protestantism. They sought biblical support for their views, but they failed: their exegesis was conditioned by Constantinian prejudice. They failed to see that some aspects of the Old Testament order had been superseded and fulfilled by the new reality ushered in by the coming of the Christ, and that in the plenitude of the times of God’s revelation some of the Levitical dispositions of the old Israelite dispensation had ceased in their preparatory function. The Mosaic theocracy was superseded in its national and temporal provisions by the kingdom of Christ, which is “not of this world.” They tried to equate Roman Constantinianism with some of the norms and precepts of the temporary shadows of Jewish sacralism. They quoted Mosaic dispositions in order to justify their views on persecution, which punished idolatry and blasphemy by death: “He that sacrificeth unto any god, save unto Jehovah only, shall be utterly destroyed” (Ex. 22:20; Dt. 13:5–15; 17:2–5, etc.). “He that blasphemeth the name of Jehovah, he shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall certainly stone him” (Lev. 24:16; 1 Kings 21:10, 13).

The New Testament furnishes no support for the doctrine of persecution. The entire teaching and example of Christ and the Apostles are directly opposed to it. They suffered persecution, but they persecuted no one. Their weapons were spiritual, not carnal. They rendered to God the things that are God’s, and to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s. The Reformers found in Augustine a great teacher to follow in the doctrines of grace and salvation. Of all the Church Fathers, the bishop of Hippo is the author most quoted by Calvin and the other Reformers. But in some other theological issues Augustine was not right and therefore, could not be followed. He was not correct in the interpretation he gives of the “Parable of the great supper” in order to justify the use of coercion and force by the Church. And to the degree the Reformers followed Augustine in that interpretation, they were also mistaken. In Luke 14:23, we read that the man that made the great supper commanded his servant to go “into the highways and hedges to *compel people to come in (compelle intrare)*.” As has often been remarked, Augustine’s interpretation contains the germ of the whole system of spiritual despotism, intolerance, and persecution, even to the court of the Inquisition. Much of this can also be said of Calvin, who agreed with the Augustinian interpretation of the *compelle intrare*.

Among the cruel and bloody instances in which the *compelle intrare* was invoked, the massacre of Huguenots in sixteenth century France stands out as one of the most terrible examples of religious persecution. It is at the same time an example of Constantinian intolerance. The Constantinian character of religious persecution, under the pretext of defending the truths of Christianity, has been openly admitted by Roman Catholics at all times. Pope Gregory XIII commemorated the massacre of St. Bartholomew not only by a *Te Deum* in the churches of Rome, but more deliberately and permanently by a medal which represents “The Slaughter of the Huguenots” by an angel of wrath. When in 1685 Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes, which had guaranteed freedom of worship to the Huguenots, the French bishops, under the lead of the great J. B. Bossuet, lauded the Monarch as “a new Constantine, a new Theodosius . . . a new exterminator of heretics.”

On sound exegesis the *compulsion* of the parable in Luke 14 does not entail the use of force or violence. All the best commentators are agreed that the *compelle intrare* can only denote the moral compulsion of earnest persuasion. In the words of N. Geldenhuys, “because such persons consider themselves unworthy and unprepared to go to the feast, they must be ‘compelled’ to go—not by outward violence but by the urgency of the invitation.”²² According to F. Godet, “The phrase, *compel them to come in*, applies to the people who would like to enter, but are yet kept back by a false timidity. The servant is to push them, in a manner, into the house *in spite of their scruples*. The object, therefore, is not to extinguish their liberty, but rather to restore them to it. For they would but dare not.”²³

Closely linked with the *compelle intrare* in support of coercion and persecution, are the words of Peter to Jesus “Lord, here are two swords,”—*duo gladii*, of Lk. 22:38. The

22. N. Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, Ltd., 1956, *ad loc.*

23. F. Godet, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1952), *ad loc.*

20. R. Bailey, *Dissuasive from the Errors of the Time* (1645).

21. R. H. Bainton, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

erroneous interpretation of these words has been decisive in the framing of hierarchical theories of power and in the defence of all types of measures against heretics. The Catholic theory of the *duo gladii* is clearly seen in the bull *Unam Sanctam* issued by Boniface in 1302. It begins with the assertion that there is only one true Church, outside of which there is no salvation. The Pope is the vicar of Christ, and whoever refuses to be ruled by Peter belongs not to the fold of Christ. Two swords have been given to the Pope by Christ: one spiritual, and the other temporal. The temporal sword is to be wielded *for* the Church, the spiritual *by* it. The secular State may be judged by the spiritual State, but the spiritual State by no human tribunal. The document closes with the declaration that for every human being the condition of salvation is obedience to the Roman pontiff.

Although Calvin denies the supreme and absolute power claimed by the pope in the theory of the “two swords,” nevertheless he defends the right of the Church to resort to the sword of the magistrate to punish heretics. This view is in consonance with the teaching of all the Reformers and appears in several of the Reformed Confessions. By affirming that the magistrate, under the guidance of the Church, must punish heresy, Samuel Rutherford also followed Calvinistic teaching on the issue. The Reformed interpretation of the *duo gladii* does not reflect the whole tenor of New Testament teaching. Let us recall, in this connection, Christ’s rebuke to John and James for wishing to call down fire from heaven (Lk. 9:54), and to Peter for drawing the sword (Mt. 26:52), and the Saviour’s explicit declaration that his kingdom is not of this world (Jn 18:36). In total disagreement with the Reformers, the Anabaptists always rejected the sword of steel from the affairs of the Church, and wished to restore the sword of the magistrate to its proper place.

On the passage of “the two swords,” N. Geldenhuys makes the following comment: “The disciples are still blind to the spiritual nature of the Lord’s work and kingdom. They are still hoping that He will establish an earthly Messianic kingdom with physical force. So they take the Saviour’s words regarding the buying of a sword in a literal sense and do not understand their real meaning. In the light of the Saviour’s other teachings (e.g. in the sermon on the mount) and of his perfect example, the disciples should never have taken those words literally . . . Later on during the night He forbade his disciples to use the sword, and by healing the wounded servant He taught them plainly and visibly that the use of the sword is not lawful in the defence of his cause.”²⁴ The New Testament furnishes not a shadow of support for the doctrine of persecution. The whole teaching and example of Christ and the Apostles are directly opposed to it. They suffered persecution, but they persecuted no one. Their weapons were spiritual, not carnal. They rendered to God the things that are God’s, and to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s.

The Protestant principle of interpreting the difficult passages of the Bible in the light of those which are clear and pristine cannot be implemented unless there is a previous abandonment of certain traditional ideas which, acting as a colour filter, may distort the objectivity of the exegetical task. And precisely this has been the error of our Reformers: they interpreted certain biblical passages through the filters of Constantinianism. Undoubtedly, Calvin is the father of

sound biblical exegesis. He departed from the traditional view that the Scripture rests on the authority of the Church. He based it on the authority of God, inherently contained in the *internal* evidence of the biblical text. In the application of a sound exegetical method he admirably succeeded, except in a few cases where his judgement was biased by the prejudices of Constantinian ideas. The Reformers’ appeals to New Testament passages in support of religious persecution lack that rigour which they so meritoriously earned as faithful exegetes of the word in their doctrinal debates with Rome.

“Children of their time”?

In an attempt to mitigate the severe censures levelled by many critics against the Reformers for their intolerant religious views, some historians have resorted to the “argument” that, after all, the Reformers were “children of their time,” and shared with their contemporaries similar ideas and attitudes against all types of dissidence. Taking the case of Servetus as an example of religious intolerance prevalent in the sixteenth century, Philip Schaff writes: “From the standpoint of modern Christianity and civilisation, the burning of Servetus admits of no justification. Even the most admiring biographers of Calvin lament and disapprove his conduct in this tragedy, which has spotted his fame and given to Servetus the glory of martyrdom . . . But if we consider Calvin’s course in the light of the sixteenth century, we must come to the conclusion that he acted his part from a strict sense of duty and in harmony with the public law and dominant sentiment of his age, which justified the death penalty for heresy and blasphemy, and abhorred toleration as involving indifference to truth.”²⁵

To appeal to the times in which the Reformers lived is not a valid nor a convincing exculpatory reason. The Reformers, in so far as they had rediscovered the message of God’s Revelation, were *above* their own time; and on this account they were called to be *spiritual judges* of their time, and agents of God in the glorious goal of changing their age through the preaching of the Word and the use of the arms of the Spirit. It is indeed regrettable that the Reformers’ knowledge of the Bible did not lead to a total liberation from Constantinianism. Already in John Wyclif (1324–1384), the first translator of the Scriptures into English and “the Morning Star of the Reformation,” knowledge of the Bible issued in liberating religious views. Thanks to his knowledge of Scripture, he was above his own time, and judged the age in the light of God’s revelation. In the *Trialogus*, his most important theological treatise, Wycliff defends the rights of conscience and condemns the intolerant views of the Roman Church.

Instead of saying that the Reformers were children of their time, it would be more appropriate to say that they *succumbed* to their age. They were not faithful in applying the light of Scriptures on important issues of their time. They failed, not in knowledge, but in practice—that is, they did not act in the light of their knowledge. Here lies their fault. We are in total agreement with Verduin when he estates that “it is apparent that the Reformers knew the principles that lead to religious freedom; they knew what was meant by separation of Church and State. It is also apparent that they

24. N. Geldenhuys, *op. cit.*, *ad loc.*

25. P. Schaff, *op. cit.*, Vol. VIII, p. 992.

rejected this line of thought. And they did so because it was an axiom with them that the State must have a religious confession, must be a 'republica Christiana.' It was this conviction—a conviction that leads straight to 'Christian sacralism'—that made them what they were."²⁶

Neither is it historically correct to affirm that the Reformers were children of their times. There were many Christians—and non-Christians—in that age who vigorously withstood religious intolerance. No one can be so naïve as to think that the Reformers were not aware of the biblical reasons on which the Anabaptists based their claims for religious tolerance. And while they rejected these pious believers, they held in high esteem the heathen of the past and showed toward them even a "redemptive sympathetic attitude." Indeed, Zwingli included in the invisible Church all the pious heathen, and all infants dying in infancy, whether baptised or not. He admired the wisdom and the virtue of the Greeks and Romans, and expected to meet in heaven not only the saints of the Old Testament from Adam down to John the Baptist but also such men as Socrates, Plato, Pindar, Aristides, Numa, Cato, Scipio, Seneca; indeed, even such mythical characters as Hercules and Theseus. Bullinger and other Reformers held similar views.

Against a treatise which Calvin had written in 1554 in defence of the death sentence imposed on Servetus, there appeared a month later a book under the title *Whether Heretics Ought to be Persecuted*, in which the views of the Reformer on persecution were questioned and refuted. The author of the greater part of the work was Sebastian Castellio, an Italian humanist turned Protestant and teacher of Greek at the university of Basel. He examines the different biblical and patristic passages quoted for and against intolerance, and justly charges Augustine with inconsistency in his treatment of the Donatists. The treatise also contains extracts promoting toleration taken from the writings of some twenty-five Christian writers, ancient and modern, including Luther and Calvin himself. For this book Castellio became the most distinguished sixteenth-century exponent of religious toleration. "To burn a heretic" said Castellio "is not to defend a doctrine, but to kill a man." According to his own testimony, he wrote the treatise in the name of the gospel and the Reformation. Calvin, Beza, and other Reformers read the book, but reacted negatively to its contents. In the advocacy of religious freedom they could only see a most dangerous heresy, which would open the door to all kinds of errors and throw the Church of Christ into inextricable confusion. The views of Castellio on this topic, writes McNeill, "have now long prevailed among the followers of Calvin. In 1903, a group of loyal 'sons of Calvin,' acting on a proposal of the historian Emile Doumergue, erected on the scene of Servetus' martyrdom an 'expiatory monument.' The example is to be commended to other branches of the Church of Christ. If it were followed, Europe would bristle with expiatory monuments; but after all it is permitted to ask whether monuments can expiate. The deed was done. When all is understood, admirers of Calvin must still look upon it with shame."²⁷

The Spanish Reformers—Casiodoro de Reina, Antonio del Corro, and Cipriano de Valera—strongly opposed religious intolerance and the death penalty for heretics. They

showed remarkable respect for the rights of conscience and the principles of religious liberty. When Servetus was condemned and burned at the stake, Casiodoro de Reina, the translator of the Bible into Spanish (1569), expressed his strong disagreement with the capital sentence.²⁸ We are told that whenever he passed near the place where Servetus had been put to death, "tears flowed from his eyes." It greatly upset Beza that the Spanish Reformers should express disagreement with the execution of Servetus.²⁹ We are also told that Cipriano de Valera, the staunchest Calvinist of the Spanish Reformation, translator of Calvin's *Institutes* into Castilian and the reviser of Reina's translation of the Bible (1602), had in Jacob Arminius one of his closest friends.

Although the majority of the Reformers held both the "two extremes,"—Bible teaching and Constantinian principles—in practice not all of them implemented the intolerant views of Constantinianism. And for this "praiseworthy inconsistency" in their Calvinism they deserve recognition and gratitude. This is the case, for instance, of Heinrich Bullinger (1504–1575), the Zurich Reformer. In Bullinger we detect with great clarity and force the irreconcilable antagonism of the "two extremes" of strict Calvinism. We can even establish a remarkable parallel between Samuel Rutherford and the great Swiss Reformer. Like the Scotsman, Bullinger was a man of deep and refined love and sympathy. Besides being a great theologian—as was Rutherford—he was also famous for his *letters*, and in his immense correspondence Bullinger also reveals a sweet disposition and a most loving spirit.³⁰ Bullinger agreed with the other Reformers that heretics should be repressed and punished severely. He approved of the execution of Servetus, and in his Second Helvetic Confession he teaches that it is the duty of the magistrate to use the sword against blasphemers; heresy should be punished like murder or treason (ch. XXX). Yet, despite these views, he tolerated Bernardino Ochino, who preached for some time to the Italian congregation in that city, but was deposed, without further punishment, for his Anabaptist and Unitarian leanings. He also tolerated Laelio Sozini, who quietly died at Zurich in 1562.³¹ Moreover, in a

28. The event caused such a commotion in the Italian church in the Grisons that several members left. (see T. McCrie, *History of the Reformation in Italy* [Edinburgh, 1856]).

29. Regarding Casiodoro de Reina, A. G. Kinder writes: "Reina did himself no good by befriending people whose doctrines were regarded with suspicion. The practice has, of course, plenty of precedent in the Gospels, and Reina was doubtless able to distinguish between a man and his beliefs." (A. G. Kinder, *Casiodoro de Reina, Spanish Reformer of the Sixteenth Century* [London: Tames Books Ltd, 1975], pp. 19, 23).

30. The extent of Bullinger's correspondence is astonishing. It includes letters to and from all the distinguished Protestant divines of his age, such as Calvin, Melancthon, Bucer, Beza, Laski, Cranmer, Hooper, Jewel, and crowned heads who consulted him, such as Henry VIII, Edward VI of England, Queen Elizabeth, Henry II of France, King Christian of Denmark, Philip of Hesse, and the Elector Frederick of the Palatinate. Bullinger was a devoted pastor, dispensing counsel and comfort in every direction, and exposing even his life during the pestilence, which several times visited Zurich. He liked to play with his numerous children and grandchildren, and to write little verses for them at Christmas, like Luther. His house was open from morning till night to all who desired his help. He freely dispensed food, clothing, and money from his scanty income and contributions of friends, to widows and orphans, to strangers and exiles, not excluding persons of other creeds. He secured a pension for Zwingli's widow and educated two of his children.

31. Sozini's anti-Trinitarian views were developed later in Poland into the doctrine of Socinianism by his nephew Faustus Socinus.

26. L. Verduin, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

27. J. T. McNeill, *The History and Character of Calvinism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), pp. 176, 177.

treatise on Roman Catholicism, Bullinger expresses the Christian and humane sentiment that no violence should be done to dissenters, and that faith is a free gift of God, which cannot be commanded or forbidden.

The same year Bullinger died (1575), Johann Jakob Breitinger was born. Breitinger was one of the most eminent Reformed divines of his age and exhibited many of the personal and spiritual traits of Bullinger. He was in every way a model pastor, model churchman, and model statesman. He combined with strict orthodoxy a cheerful temper and a loving attitude. As one of the Swiss delegates, he attended the Synod of Dort (1618–1619), and fully agreed with its unjust and intolerant treatment of the Arminians. Nevertheless, in his later life his intolerant attitudes softened and he came to recognise and respect the good traits in other Churches and sects. He even showed a loving spirit of tolerance towards the Jesuits! Both Bullinger and Breitinger were Calvinists of the “two extremes” type, but in practice and in conduct they were inconsistent with the “Constantinian extreme” and, therefore, did not follow the rigid views of intolerant Calvinism.

Neither in the case of Samuel Rutherford can we say that he was a child of the times in his religious intolerance. Much of what has been said above applies to this great Scottish divine. He upheld Constantinianism in spite of his great biblical knowledge and the weighty arguments of the “The Five Dissenting Brethren”—Thomas Goodwin, Philip Nye, Jeremiah Burroughs, William Bridge, and Sidrach Simpson, his companions at the Westminster Assembly, and defenders of the Independent, or Congregationalist, principles of Church government, religious tolerance and liberty of conscience. Although sixteen years older, he must also have been acquainted with the basic views of John Owen. As a Congregationalist, Owen stood firm in his belief that each Church must be composed only of true believers and not be subject to any external control save that of Jesus Christ. In his famous tract *Of Toleration and the Duty of the Magistrate about Religion*, Owen argued that it was the duty of individuals, magistrates and Churches to maintain truth and oppose error by the sword of Church discipline and the hammer of the word of God, that is by *spiritual weapons*. He was familiar with Rutherford’s writings and always refers to him as “that learned man.”³² Owen’s heart was always with those that suffered on account of their religious non-conformity. And in many instances he succeeded in securing their liberty. This was the case, for instance, with John Bunyan who for several years had been lingering in prison for his non-conformity. It was thanks to Owen’s intercession that Bishop Barlow of Lincoln, in 1675, decided to intervene, and the author of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* was released from prison.³³

Evidently Rutherford was not persuaded of Owen’s theological and political views, and he might also have been resentful of Owen’s affinities with Oliver Cromwell on matters of religious toleration, and for having accompanied him on his military ventures to Scotland (1649–50). Although Cromwell showed great respect and high esteem for Owen,

and appointed him vice chancellor of Oxford, Owen was always reserved in his support of Cromwell, and opposed plans to offer the English crown to him and avoided participation in his installation in the office of Lord Protector in 1653. Nevertheless Owen was in much agreement with Cromwell’s commitment to a policy of religious liberties. It should be said in this connection that in the main Cromwell recognised the right of every man to enjoy religious freedom, so long as his belief did not lead to anti-social conduct. He loathed the necessity of persecution. His generous encouragement of the Quakers, in some ways the most extreme of the sectaries of the day, was much to his credit. Interesting too at this time was his encouragement of a project for giving a national home to the Jews in England. He readmitted the Jews after more than three centuries of exclusion and gave them the right of residence and of worship, which were subsequently confirmed by Charles II.³⁴

In spite of the above considerations, Rutherford remained unmoved in his intolerant Presbyterianism. As a *true believer* and participant of the overflowing love of Christ, Rutherford experienced the glorious liberty of the children of God; but on the other hand, as a *traditionalist Calvinist*, he shared the enslaving influences of a theology tinged with the old principles of Constantinianism. Had the historical circumstances been appropriate, and had Rutherford found himself in a position of authority to implement and put into practice his intolerant views on heretics, would he have imposed—through the civil magistrate—the death penalty on anyone charged with gross heresy as Calvin did with Servetus in Geneva? We recoil at the very thought of a positive answer, and judge it improbable. We sincerely believe that in such a plight, the loving “extreme” of his Christian soul would have prevailed and annulled the consistent and well-structured Constantinian “extreme” of his theological mind.

Concluding remarks

The reconciling of Constantinianism with the New Testament was very much like the squaring of the circle for the Reformers. They tried all sorts of theological, social, political, and historical subterfuges to solve the riddle, but as was to be expected, the attempts became as imaginative as unconvincing. Their reasoning is often consistent, but the grounds on which they built their structures of thought are sandy. Constantinianism and the New Testament are two opposite and irreconcilable extremes. This impossible intellectual adventure has left a trail of deep but often concealed sentiments and spiritual tensions in the hearts and minds of many lovable Calvinist brethren. Constantinianism constitutes the black spot of Calvinism. According to Schaff, it is the great merit of Calvin to have brought out this doctrine of salvation by free grace more forcefully and clearly than any divine since the days of Augustine. It has been the effective theme of the great Calvinistic preachers and writers in Europe and America to this day. Howe, Owen, Baxter, Bunyan, South, Whitfield, Jonathan Edwards, Robert Hall, Chalmers, Spurgeon, were Calvinists in their creed, though belonging to different denominations,—Congregational, Presbyterian, Episcopal, Baptist—and had no superiors in

32. See *The Works of John Owen* [London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967], Vol. X, 663ff.

33. During Bunyan’s ministry in London as preacher in several Non-conformist congregations, John Owen took every opportunity to hear him preach and told Charles II that he would gladly give all his learning in exchange for the tinker’s skill in touching the heart. (J. Brown, *John Bunyan: His Life, Times and Work*, [1885], p. 386.)

34. C. V. Wedgwood, *Oliver Cromwell* (London: Duckworth, 1973), p. 111.

pulpit power and influence. Spurgeon was the most popular and effective preacher of the nineteenth century, who addressed from week to week five thousand hearers in his Tabernacle, and millions of readers through his printed sermons in many tongues.³⁵

Yet the Constantinian elements of Calvin's thought and conduct tinged his personality with a note of discredit. According to John Tulloch (1823–1886), Scottish professor of St Andrews and moderator of the General Assembly: "An impression of majesty and yet of sadness must ever linger around the name of Calvin. He was great and we admire him. The world needed him and we honour him; but we cannot love him. He repels our affections while he extorts our admiration; and while we recognise the worth, and the divine necessity, of his life and work, we are thankful to survey them at a distance, and to believe that there are also other modes of divinely governing the world, and advancing the kingdom of righteousness and truth."³⁶

John Owen's theology and political thought proves that a thorough and consistent Calvinism can be developed without the alien presuppositions of Constantinianism. Owen

is justly regarded as one of the greatest Protestant theologians that England has ever produced. According to F. F. Bruce, Owen was "a theologian of portentous stature."³⁷ It has also been said that his mastery of Calvinism was complete. As a professor at Oxford, and for his views on religious tolerance and the rights of conscience, he made a lasting and decisive impression on such students as John Locke and William Penn. The democratic developments which in the last centuries have taken place in the Western nations in favour of the rights of conscience and against religious intolerance, have relegated the repressive spirit of Constantinianism to the annals of the past. The burden of an oppressive religious and political "extreme" has been removed from the Calvinistic conscience, and has ceased to cause conflict and division in the inner self. After all, fidelity to the motto of total surrender to the supreme authority and sovereignty of God—a most biblical and Calvinistic principle, must necessarily lead to the sphere of genuine freedom and liberty ushered in by Christ's redemptive work of salvation. Consistent Calvinism has no other goal than true liberty under the impulses of the Holy Spirit. *C&S*

35. P. Schaff, *op. cit.*, Vol. VIII, 571.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 292.

37. F. F. Bruce, *Tradition: Old and New*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970, p.156.

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CHRISTIANITY AS A POLITICAL FAITH¹

by Stephen C. Perks

THE word *politics* comes from the Greek word *polis*, meaning *city*. It originally referred to a fortified place of refuge, but came to mean “the ruling political centre of a given district, or the territory ruled therefrom.”² The Greek States were small city States. When the State grew to embrace a larger area than the city the term *polis* also embraced this wider area. Hence the term had primarily a political sense. The *polis* is the political centre, as opposed to the town in a geographical sense. Towns that were subordinate to the *polis* were not cities in this political sense.³ *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* (Eighth Edition) defines *politics* as “the art and science of government” and the term *political* as “concerning the State or its government.” Politics, therefore, refers to the State, the civil government. It is not “the art of the possible,” or pragmatism, as is often claimed. Politics is about civil government, how a society is ruled.

What, then, is the relationship between politics and Christianity? Does Christianity have anything to do with politics? My answer to this question is that Christianity has a great deal to do with politics, indeed that the Christian religion is, by its very nature, a political faith. In relation to the Christian religion the term *politics* can be used in two senses—in a general sense and in a more specific sense. Christianity is inevitably political in both these senses. We shall look first at politics as a general category for understanding the Christian faith.

1. *Politics as a general category for understanding the Christian faith*

Most of the Greek city States of classical antiquity aspired to and at various times established some form of democratic rule, i.e. government of the State by the “people,” the free citizens or commons.⁴ The Greek word for

people in this sense was *demos*,⁵ from which we derive the word democracy. In classical Greek the term *demos* “denotes the people as organized into a body politic” as opposed to the *laos*, which refers to the unorganised people at large.⁶ *Demos* is a political term. The assembly of the *demos* for political purposes was called the *ekklesia*. For example, in Athens the *ekklesia* was the assembly of the *demos* at which all the officers of State not chosen by lot were elected.⁷ The *ekklesia*, therefore, was from the fifth century B.C. onwards in Athens and most Greek city States the assembly of the *demos*,⁸ the people constituted as a *political* body.

It is the Greek word *ekklesia* that the New Testament uses to refer to the assembly or congregation of believers and therefore that the Holy Spirit has chosen to delineate the nature of the body of Christ, and which has usually but quite erroneously been translated in most English versions of the Bible as *church*.⁹ It is imperative, especially in the modern world, which is so much under the mesmerising sway of the post-Enlightenment secular humanist idolatry of political power, that Christians recognise the significance of this fact. In using the term *ekklesia* to denote the body of Christ, the company of the faithful, the Holy Spirit has given us an intensely *political* term. The body of Christ is a political body. She is the *ekklesia*, the congregation or assembly of the freemen of the New Jerusalem.

aspired to it; and we may say that the chief feature of the domestic history of most Greek cities, from the end of the seventh century forward, is an endeavour, here successful, there frustrated, to establish or maintain popular government.” (J. B. Bury and R. Meiggs, *A History of Greece to the Death of Alexander the Great* [London: Macmillan Press, (1900) 1981], p. 104b)

5. H. D. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1901), p. 339b.

6. J. H. Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1901), p. 132a; Liddell and Scott, *op. cit.*, p. 876b.

7. Liddell and Scott, *op. cit.*, p. 435a.

8. K. L. Schmidt, “ἐκκλησία” in Kittell and Friedrich, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 513.

9. Tyndale’s translation is the exception to this erroneous tradition. He never translates *ekklesia* as *church* but more correctly as *congregation*. The use of the term *church* to translate *ekklesia* has caused and continues to be the source of many problems. On the etymology of the English term *church* and the problems relating to its use as a translation of *ekklesia* see Stephen C. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church: A Reassessment* (Taunton: Kuyper Foundation, 1997), pp. 9–19.

1. This essay is substantially the text of a lecture given at the Kuyper Foundation Fellowship Weekend at Brunel Manor, South Devon, England on Saturday 4th October 2003.

2. Hermann Strathmann, “πῶλις” in Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1968, trans. G. W. Bromiley), Vol. VI, p. 517.

3. *Ibid.*

4. “[T]hough democracy was not everywhere victorious—though even the states in which it was most firmly established were exposed to the dangers of oligarchical conspiracies—yet everywhere the people

For those with ears to hear, this fact thunders out from the pages of Scripture, only to be smothered and buried by centuries of mistranslation and the irrelevant spiritualising of God's word, which has rendered the modern Church's mission in this vital sphere of life virtually useless. The result has been that instead of disciplining the nations to Christ, as he commanded (Mt. 28:18–20), the Church has been reduced to cleaning up secular humanism, accepting and compromising with its principles and practices, conforming to its institutional norms and way of life, content only with cleaning its collars and cuffs and presenting it as something it is not. But the Lord Jesus Christ did not come into this world to provide secular humanism with a laundry service. He came to claim the kingdoms of this world for himself as his rightful inheritance (Ps. 2:7–9), and he commissioned his Church to disciple the nations. The Church will not have fulfilled her mission, nor will she enter her rest, and therefore will not see the end of her tribulation (Acts 14:22), until it can be said that the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ (Rev. 11:15).

The word *ekklesia* is not a cultic term, i.e. a term denoting the meeting of a group of people united by their devotion to a particular deity and the maintenance and promotion of his cultus. *Ekklesia* is a thoroughly political term, denoting those who are members of a body politic. There were many words to denote such cultic groups, which the Holy Spirit could have used to identify the Church primarily as a cultic group devoted to maintaining the cult of Jesus, and indeed pagan writers did use such words to describe the Church. Even Eusebius refers to Christians as *thiasotai*, i.e. members of a *thiasos*, a pagan religious term.¹⁰ But the Bible does not use such words of the Church. It does not identify the Church primarily as a cult. Furthermore, in the context of the Graeco-Roman world in which the Christian gospel was first proclaimed outside Israel, the worship of Christ as the object of personal devotion was not prohibited. Devotion to Christ and the maintenance of his cultus was not in itself prohibited in ancient Rome. All the gods found their place in Roman culture. Jesus was not an exception. At one point the Emperor Tiberius had even proposed to the Senate that Jesus be consecrated as a Roman god.¹¹ Hadrian is said to have built temples in Christ's honour and Alexander Severus had in his private chapel statues of Christ and Abraham.¹² The worship of Jesus as the deity of a devotional cult posed no threat to Rome. But this is not how the Bible proclaims Christ, nor was it how the early Church proclaimed Christ. Rome rejected Christianity not because it rejected the worship of Christ as a god, but rather because Christianity represented a rival *political* order to the Roman Empire. The Romans perceived the Christian faith as a political threat to Rome, and the proclamation of Christ as Lord as a *political* offence, not a religious offence in the narrow sense.

10. K. L. Schmidt, "ἐκκλησία" in Kittell and Friedrich, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 517. A *θίασος* was "a band or company, that marches through the streets dancing and singing, esp. in honour of Bacchus . . . it seems sometimes to have been a sort of *religious brotherhood*" (Liddell and Scott, *op. cit.*, p. 677b).

11. Tertullian, *The Apology*, chapt. 5, in *The Anti-Nicene Fathers* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark), Vol. III, p. 21bf. According to Tertullian the Senate rejected the proposal because it had not given the approval itself.

12. John C. Lawson, *Modern Greek Folklore and Ancient Greek Religion: A Study in Survivals* ([1910] 1964), p. 41, cited in R. J. Rushdoony, *The Politics of Guilt and Pity* (Fairfax, Virginia: Thoburn Press [1970] 1978), p. 305.

Had Christianity been merely one more cult among the many cults that existed in Rome there would have been no problem. But Christianity is not a cult.¹³ The Christian Church, i.e. the body of Christ, is an *ekklesia*, a political body that acknowledges one King as Lord over all, whose law is to be obeyed by all, and who tolerates no rivals. To worship Christ merely as the object of some devotional cult is a denial of his Lordship. The point for Rome was simply this: either Caesar is Lord or Christ is Lord. As long as Caesar was acknowledged as Lord, Christians were permitted to worship Jesus as the object of their personal devotion, i.e. as their personal worship hobby. But their politics had to be the politics of Rome. "The officials of the Roman Empire in time of persecution sought to force the Christians to sacrifice, not to any of the heathen gods, but to the Genius of the Emperor and the Fortune of the city of Rome; and at all times the Christians' refusal was looked upon not as a religious but as a political offence."¹⁴ Their refusal to do this said everything: "Caesar is not Lord; Jesus Christ is Lord. No sphere of life is beyond his jurisdiction and no area of life is religiously neutral." The problem with the Christians from the perspective of Rome was not that they worshipped the wrong deity, but that they were traitors to Rome;¹⁵ i.e. they espoused a rival political order to that of Rome. In this the Romans were entirely correct, and nothing demonstrates this fact better than the use of the term *ekklesia* as the proper designation for the members of Christ's congregation.

This concept of the body of Christ as a political body is confirmed by Scripture in other ways. The Church is described in Scripture as a nation: "ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy *nation*, a peculiar people . . ." (1 Pet. 2:9). It would be easy to pass by this language without reading anything of significance into it. And indeed this has usually been the case. But we must remember that this is a quotation from the Old Testament in which the people of Israel are described in the very same terms. Moses was commanded to speak these words to the children of Israel: "Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel" (Ex. 19:5–6). Moreover, Jesus came preaching the *kingdom* of God (Mt. 4:23; Mk 1:14) and as believers we are heirs of this kingdom, indeed joint-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17). The long-established traditions of mysticism, pietism, and other-worldliness among Christians have exercised an almost blinding influence upon the Church's reading of Scripture at many points, and this has made it all too easy to forget that a kingdom is a *political* concept, not a cultic concept. To speak of the kingdom of God is to speak of a divine political order that stands in contrast to the politics of men. Christians throughout the world are not merely members of the various nations who worship the same God in their personal devotions. They constitute a nation in their own right, a distinct-

13. On the relation of Christianity to the devotional cultus and the nature of Christianity as a religion see Stephen C. Perks, "Christianity as a Cult" in *Christianity & Society*, Vol. IX, No. 4 (October 1997), p. 2ff.

14. Frances Legg, *Forerunners and Rivals of Christianity, From 330 B.C. to 330 A.D.* (New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, [1915] 1964), Vol. I, p. xxiv, cited in R. J. Rushdoony, *op. cit.*, p. 304.

15. Ethelbert Stauffer, *Christ and the Caesars* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1955), p. 164.

tive people, called out and separated from the kingdoms of the world, and reborn through baptism into Christ into another kingdom with its own political order.

The form of this political order is absolute monarchy. Regardless of the particular forms of administration under which the Monarch's sovereignty is delegated to his ministers in the different spheres of life (i.e. family, Church, State), the Christian nation is governed by an absolute Monarch whose law is unchangeable, whose jurisdiction is unlimited, and whose will is final. His ministers, or vicegerents, who govern under his law in the various institutional aspects of the life of the nation, may or may not be chosen by means of elections, depending on the nature of the institution (e.g. elections may be used in choosing ministers of the gospel and elders, but such elections have no place in the family). Nevertheless, those chosen by whatever means are bound absolutely to govern these institutions under the will of God as revealed in his law. This applies not only to the government of the religious cultus—the local Church—but in the family and the State also. No Christian politician, chosen by whatever means, or belonging to any particular political party, has any dispensation to serve any other Lord. In his work as a politician he owes an absolute and unswerving loyalty and obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Rome recognised the inevitable conflict between Christ and Caesar that this fact created. So did the early Church. It is the modern Church's failure to recognise the inevitable and exhaustive nature of this antithesis that in large measure has made the Church so irrelevant and powerless in the modern world. We can put this another way by saying that the modern Church has failed to recognise that all political thought and action is inevitably religious, and that since Christianity is a religion it must of necessity have a distinctive view of political order.¹⁶ Had the early Church been prepared to do what the modern Church on the whole seems prepared to do, namely to restrict its worship of Christ to a personal devotional hobby, there would have been no conflict with Rome. But they were not prepared to do this. The conflict was a political conflict *because* it was a religious conflict. The early Christians proclaimed Christ as Lord not only with their words, but with their lives also in the way they lived and organised themselves as a community, an *ekklesia*, and in doing this they constituted a distinctive political order that was in direct and open conflict with the political order of Rome.¹⁷

We must recognise, therefore, *first*, that the kingdom of

16. On the religious nature of politics see Stephen C. Perks, *A Defence of the Christian State: The Case Against Principled Pluralism and the Christian Alternative* (Taunton: Kuyper Foundation, 1998), *passim*.

17. It has been observed that "The function of Roman religion was pragmatic, to serve as social cement and to buttress the state. . . . The framework for the religious and familial acts of piety was Rome itself, the central and most sacred community. Rome strictly controlled all rights of corporation, assembly, religious meetings, clubs, and street gatherings, and it brooked no possible rival to its centrality. One of the reasons for the later supremacy of the military bodies over Rome was the lack of any organized bodies within the state to provide a counterbalance to the two swollen bodies which became the rulers of the Empire: the army and the abiding and growing civil service. The state alone could organize; short of conspiracy, the citizen could not. On this ground alone, the highly organized Christian Church was an offense and an affront to the state, and an illegal organization readily suspected of conspiracy." (R. J. Rushdoony, *The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy* [Fairfax, Virginia: Thoburn Press, (1971) 1978], p. 92f.)

God and the body of Christ, the Church (the *ekklesia*), are *political* concepts, and *second*, that the realisation of these concepts in human life and society constitutes a distinctive form of *political* action. There is a sense, therefore, in which we can say that the kingdom of God is primarily a *political* order and that the Christian faith is primarily a *political* faith. Politics for the Christian is not merely one aspect of life among others, but the whole of it. Christianity is about politics.

Not only is it the case that for the Christian politics, in this general sense, is the primary context of life; it is the case also for the non-believer. Life is primarily political because politics is inevitably religious and has as its *raison d'être*, its entire rationale, the administration of the law of an ultimate authority, i.e. a god, in the totality of life.¹⁸ In this sense, therefore, we can say that Christianity is the only *true* politics. All other political ideologies are false, i.e. idolatrous. There is only either obedient or disobedient politics in God's sight. The body of Christ, as the *polis* (the city) of God, whose *demoi* (people) constitute the *ekklesia* (the body politic), is a political organism, and all other political organisms are apostate and in rebellion against God, their only rightful King, to whom the nations of the earth have been given as his rightful inheritance. Christianity is the true politics, the *only* true politics. Christianity is primarily a political order because it concerns the kingdom of God, which is the heart of the Christian gospel, and which we are commanded to put *first* above all else (Mt. 6:33).

It is important at this point that we understand precisely what is being claimed here and what is not being claimed. First, it must be remembered that I am using the term *politics* here in a wide sense as a general category for understanding the Christian faith. I am not, at least at this point, referring to a particular form of civil government or to a particular form for the administration of public justice.

Second, it has been claimed that Christianity is primarily a political faith because it concerns the kingdom of God, which is a political order because a kingdom is a political concept. However, it is clear from Scripture that the kingdom of God is not of this world (Jn 18:36). There is, therefore, a radical break, a discontinuity, an antithesis, between the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of the world. Christ's authority and power are not of this world—in other words he does not derive his authority and power from the political orders and empires of men. His authority comes from God. But this does not mean that his authority has no relation to the world of politics and the empires of men, that it does not address the political life of men and nations. It does. We are commanded to pray "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, in *earth*, as it is in heaven" (Mt. 6:10). The *source* of Christ's authority and power is not in this world; but its object is the transformation of the kingdoms of *this* world into the kingdom of Christ (Ps. 2; Rev. 11:15). The Christian nation or kingdom is not just another political order among the many political orders of the world. It stands out over against these and is completely different in origin and nature. There is a complete antithesis between the two. Nevertheless, the theatre in which Christ's kingdom is to be manifested is the world of men and *nations*, not some vague otherworldly spiritual

18. See the interesting article by Thomas Schirrmacher, "Lex' (Law) as Another Word for Religion: A Lesson from the Middle Ages" in *Calvinism Today*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (April 1992), p. 5.

realm. It is the *nations* that are to be brought under the discipline of Christ by the preaching of the gospel (Mt. 28:18–20).

Third, there is a fundamental principle of secular humanist politics that demonstrates very clearly the nature of the antithesis that exists between the kingdoms of the world, or the politics of man, and the kingdom of Christ, i.e. the politics of God. In the politics of man human government takes priority over all else. Man becomes the measure of all things. Man is supreme. This supremacy must manifest itself in the form of human government over all spheres of life. This inevitably leads to totalitarianism and the denial of human freedom in the name of man, indeed even in the name of the rights of man. Well did Jesus say “If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” (Jn 8:36). There is no real freedom outside of Christ, only idolatry, and all idols are tyrants that enslave men and crush their spirits. This is no less the case with the modern idolatry of “democratic” political power in which man rules himself according to his own law in the name of human rights. This kind of human autonomy from God, i.e. the proclamation of the rights of man, can only be achieved by denying the rights of God over all spheres of life. Such a proclamation of the rights of man, because it is a denial of the rights of God, is necessarily in *principle* also a denial of all the freedoms that God has given to men, and will inevitably produce a society that in *practice* denies these freedoms in the name of man as the captain of his own fate. This is a serious problem that we are having to face here in the UK at the moment of course. Modern politics in the UK seems to be a relentless campaign to strip men of their legitimate freedom under God and replace it with State control of the whole of life in the name of human rights that are superficial and ineffective and virtually meaningless to the individual. The antithesis here reaches its zenith in the idolatry of secular humanism, which offers real men, or rather forces upon men, a new kind of salvation, a salvation in which the State, as the embodiment of man’s own idea of himself, rules over every facet of human life and provides men with their “rights” and the solutions to all their problems. This is the State as God, the new Rome.

This is the religion by which our Western societies live today. And yet the body of Christ, the nation or kingdom of God, those who belong to a different political order that claims their absolute loyalty, must also live amongst this apostate and rebellious political order in which man usurps the place of God and whose chief idol, the secular State, is accorded the attributes of divinity, albeit it in a secularised form.¹⁹ How are we to do this? How are we, the members of the *ekklesia* of God, a rival political order, to live among the political orders of men that now dominate our society? How are we to live in the antithesis while both maintaining that antithesis and at the same time supplanting the political order of man with the political order of God’s kingdom so that the latter triumphs over and vanquishes the former? (1 Jn. 5:4)

This is an enormously difficult question that each generation must deal with. It is not an easy question to answer even when we understand the issues. How are we to practise

19. On the ascription of the attributes of God, particularly the attribute of sovereignty, to the modern State in a secularised form see Stephen C. Perks, “Baal Worship Ancient and Modern” in *Christianity & Society*, Vol. XI, No. 4 (October 2001), pp. 12–21.

the politics of God amongst the political orders of men? The correct response to this question will involve us in a great deal of sacrifice. It cost many of the early Christians their lives. Unfortunately, the way that the Church has dealt with this question today on the whole has been either to deny the validity of the question and embrace pietistic withdrawal, or, as with liberalism, to deny the antithesis.

Neither approach is correct. If we deny the antithesis or the validity of the question, the result will be that we shall engage in the politics of man instead of the politics of God. This may be self-conscious or unselfconscious. But it will be inevitable. There is no third way politics for the Christian. There is only the politics of God and the politics of man. Either we engage in the politics of God or we succumb to the politics of man.

What is the difference? In what does the antithesis consist? Simply in this, that in the politics of man the State, as the ultimate embodiment of human Will, governs the life of the individual and the society to which he belongs in terms of fallen man’s own definition of right and wrong, good and evil, a definition that rejects God’s word, God’s law, as the touchstone of all truth at the outset and replaces it with the pretended autonomy of human reason. In the politics of God man looks to God as the source of all good and seeks to live in conformity with his will as revealed in his infallible word. In the politics of man, the individual and society look to the State as the source of all good. The State provides for man’s education, health care and welfare; it provides work, pensions, runs the economy, controls the raising of children in the home as well as outside the home; it is that in which man lives and moves and has his being. The State is Lord, “the Divine Idea as it exists on Earth” to use Hegel’s phrase²⁰ — in other words the State is the incarnation of divinity, man’s true god. The politics of God claims that Jesus Christ is Lord, God incarnate, and that we are to look to him for all these things and govern our lives and society according to his word. God is the one in whom we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28), the source of all good (Mt. 19:17).

Well, what are the consequences? The triumph of secular humanism has led to a complete shift in the way people in our society think, speak and live. Under secular humanism the control and regulation of life by the State will continue relentlessly. It has to because this is the logic of the idolatry of man as his own god. This is why individual freedom is ultimately an obsolete concept for secular humanism. Even the terminology has now shifted decisively away from freedom to rights. This means there has been a shift from the real, the tangible, the individual, to the abstract and the ideal, which must be embodied in some institution that has absolute control and authority. This move to the abstract is inevitable because individual men disagree and dispute and their rights cannot be harmonised on an individual basis. Therefore the many (individuals) must always give way to the one, the abstract idea of human Will, which is embodied in the State. The one and the many cannot be reconciled on the basis of man as his own ultimate principle, man as god.²¹ The

20. “It must further be understood that all the worth which the human being possesses—all spiritual reality, he possesses only through the State . . . For Truth is the Unity of the universal and subjective Will; and the Universal is to be found in the State, its laws, its universal and rational arrangements. The State is the Divine Idea as it exists on Earth” (G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*).

21. On the philosophical question of the equal ultimacy of the one

question therefore is this: can the abstract, the ideal, as embodied in the State, guarantee the freedom of the individual? The answer is that it cannot. In enforcing the rights of one it must negate the freedom of another. The State must rule as an absolute authority and suspend the liberty of the individual in *principle*. This is the only alternative to total anarchy for secular humanism. Ultimate authority has to reside somewhere, and if there is no God then ultimate authority must belong to man. But such authority cannot belong to each man. Ultimate authority is therefore embodied in the State as the realisation of the abstract idea of human Will,²² and the one (the State) takes precedence over the many (individuals), thereby abridging the God-given liberty of the individual. This is where we are heading in this country. The increasing control and regulation of life is all part of the religious apostasy of our age, all part of the politics of man. Slavery is the end product of the politics of man. It always has been, and it will be no different in the societies of the Western nations as they increasingly reject the Christian faith. The thin veneer of liberty that we presently have in our society is being relentlessly stripped away by the modern secular State.

From the Christian perspective things are very different. The God we serve is both one and many. There is no contradiction between the one and the many in God. He is a triunity. The one and the many are equally ultimate in the being of God. The one does not take precedence over the many and vice versa. Only in the triune nature of God's being can man find the answer to the conflict between liberty and authority that has plagued the politics of man throughout history. Without God the politics of man is doomed to a never ending conflict between the one and the many, authority and liberty. Only in Christ can man find true freedom, individual liberty, and at the same time the necessary legitimate authority to guarantee political order in society. Only in the politics of God is there an answer to this age-old conflict between political authority (the one) and individual liberty (the many). All other attempts to solve this conflict have failed or are failing, with untold human suffering as a consequence.

As the one in whom all authority and power in the created order is concentrated Jesus Christ delegates his authority in a *limited* way to subordinate institutions that have specific functions in his kingdom (Church, State and family). No one other than Christ himself, and no subordinate institution, possesses ultimate authority and power. Christ alone has all power and authority. Only the politics of God recognises the rights of God and the responsibilities of man towards God and his fellow creatures, while at the same time guaranteeing the individual's true liberty under God and the necessary political authority to maintain order in society. Only by practising the politics of God can man reconcile individual freedom with political authority and thereby establish peace. Liberty and peace are the product of the politics of God.

and many and the irreconcilable nature of these concepts outside of Christian thought see R. J. Rushdoony, *The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy*.

22. According to Hegel "The State is the embodiment of rational freedom, realizing and recognizing itself in an objective form. . . . The State is the Idea of Spirit in the external manifestation of human Will and its Freedom" (cited in Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* [London: George Allen and Unwin, 1946], p. 767).

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgement and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this. (Is. 9:6–7)

We have become so familiar with these words in one way or another that we miss their meaning. The government of the nations rests on Christ's shoulder and all nations are under obligation to recognise this fact and bow the knee to Christ (Ps. 2). Those who refuse to do this and reject Christ's government have perished and will continue to perish. Our society will be no different. The writing is already on the wall.

2. *Politics as a specific form of social action*

We come now to the second sense in which I am using the term politics. In what has been said above I have been referring to politics as a general—i.e. all-embracing—category for understanding human life. Politics in the specific sense refers to a particular form of social action in which men seek to establish and control the machinery of State as a means of ruling and influencing society. We have seen that in the politics of man the State becomes the object of man's apostate desire to control his own life independently of God. The State is made to function as an unlimited authority that replaces God and his providential government of the world. In other words man idolises the State. Without God man seeks to control his own destiny. The means he uses to do this is the State. The State itself is not an illegitimate institution. It is a God-ordained institution with a specific and limited role in society.²³ But under the apostate political order of man it takes on a greater meaning. That is to say, its role is expanded beyond its God-given function as a servant of God in the administration of public justice (Rom. 13:1–6) and it is made to function as the central institution by means of which man establishes his own kingdoms. It becomes, as we have already seen, an idol, a god, to which men look for their salvation. This is not a new development in human history. What is new in our age is the secularised form in which this development is taking place.

But of course the Christian, as he engages in political action, may never look to the State in this way. Regardless of whether he belongs to a particular political party he is under an absolute obligation to honour Christ first in all things, and therefore he may not idolise the State in the way that the non-believer does nor engage in the politics of idolatry by compromising with the politics of man. In his politics the Christian politician must manifest the absolute antithesis that exists between the politics of God and the politics of man, and his mission must always be to bring the political life of the nation into conformity with the politics of God as revealed in God's word. The Christian politician must acknowledge the ultimate political authority of Jesus Christ and his own duty as a servant of Christ in the political sphere. And he must acknowledge that only in Christ and the practice of the politics of God can man find peace. This

23. For more on this see Stephen C. Perks, "A Christian View of the State (Civil Government)" in *Christianity & Society*, Vol. XII, No. 4 (October 2002), pp. 18–24.

means that he may not adopt the idolatrous political idea of the State that governs the politics of man. The answer to society's problems is not intervention by the State. It is always obedience to God, which will sometimes mean that the State must take action, and at least as often it will mean that the State should do nothing. For the Christian the goal of specific political action must always be to bring the politics of man into conformity with the politics of God.

Politics in this sense is, of course, a legitimate vocation governed by God's word. Therefore there are some social problems that are rightfully solved by being referred to the civil government, the State. But the civil government must function within its own proper boundaries as established by God's word if it is to practise the politics of God. This needs to be borne in mind because the politics of man dominates our society. Christians can and do fall victim to the temptation to legitimise government action even when this action falls outside the God-given boundaries of State competence. This error is the source of "Christian" socialism, which is a syncretistic religion, an accommodation to the politics of man by Christians that must be resisted and denounced by all who practise the politics of God.

3. *Practising the politics of God*

What is the consequence of all this for national politics? How does being a Christian make a difference? What does it mean to practise the politics of God?

Before answering this question we must deal with what it does not mean. It does not mean that our duty as Christians who must engage in the politics of God is a matter of government lobbying. Christianity is *not* a political faith in the sense that it sees the answer to man's problems as action by the State. To understand the Christian faith as being political in this sense would be to adopt the secular humanist agenda for politics. It is the politics of man that insists that the answer to the problems besetting society is government action, i.e. control and regulation of society by the State. The Christian faith teaches that Christ is man's Saviour, and he has given only a limited role to the State as a ministry of public justice. In our political action we must acknowledge this by denying the idolatry of the State that constitutes the politics of man. Government intervention as an answer for the ills that blight our society has no place in the politics of God. Why? Because God has ordained other institutions to govern society as well as the State, namely the institutional Church (the public religious cultus), which has cultic, pastoral and secondary welfare responsibilities, and the family, which has primary welfare, economic and educational responsibilities. Ultimate and absolute power is in the hands of Christ alone. He delegates his sovereignty in a limited and specific form to each of these institutions. No one sphere or institution has total authority. The role of the State is the administration of public justice (Rom. 13:1–6). It may not encroach on the legitimate sphere of authority of the other institutions without overturning God's revealed political order for society.

The answer to man's social problems, therefore, can never be totalitarianism—i.e. government of all spheres of life by the State. Obedience to Christ in the political realm means that we must observe the boundaries, functions and authority of each of the institutions that God has ordained for the government of human society. Whilst the politics of

man is essentially monist in this sense, i.e. it absolutises the State, the politics of God (i.e. the Christian social order) is essentially pluralist²⁴ in the sense that there is in society a plurality of institutions that govern different spheres of life, all of which hold their authority in a delegated form from Christ, their head. No one of these institutions takes precedence over the others. Each has a legitimate delegated sovereignty that the others may not usurp.

I am not suggesting, therefore, that all Christians need to do to practise the politics of God is to set up a Christian political party or organise Christian lobbying groups. The politics of God requires us to reject the politics of man, which sees State intervention as the answer to society's problems. Such an attitude leads to the absolutising of the State, which is a form of idolatry. On the contrary the politics of God, the true politics, requires us to adhere to God's social order, a social order in which Church and family have roles that are equally as important as that of the State and which may not be usurped by the State. Only as society adheres to this social order will individuals be free to pursue their calling in life under God. The idea that society's problems can be solved by means of State intervention is a denial of the true politics, the politics of God, in which Christ, as Lord over all, governs all aspects of human life by delegating specific functions to a plurality of social institutions that are not reducible to each other (sphere sovereignty).

So much for what it does not mean to practise the politics of God. What *does* it mean to practise the politics of God? I shall try to answer this question first in a general sense and then in a specific sense, corresponding to the two senses in which I am using the term political.

(1) First, what does it mean for the Christian to practise the politics of God, i.e. to live out the political implications of the Christian faith, in a general sense as a member of the *ekklesia* of God?

To practise the politics of God in a general sense means that we acknowledge Jesus Christ as our sovereign Lord, our King, and his law as absolute and final. There is no court of appeal beyond God's word, God's law, to which men can turn, however such a court of appeal might be conceived, e.g. as natural law, the law of reason, the common good, or any other notion in which sinful men may think they can take refuge from the will of God as this has been expressed in his law. The Church has often resorted to such sophistry in an attempt to mitigate what sinful men have sought to construe as the harsh and unrealistic law of God for themselves and their societies. But the real world is the world that God created, the world that fell into sin, and that Jesus Christ came to redeem. All views of reality that deny the Creation, Fall and Redemption are the fantasies of sinners, and those who rely on such fantasies will be shipwrecked on the shores of the reality that is God's creation, which manifests not only his divine glory and wisdom, but the moral order of his law

24. I am using the term "pluralist" here in the sense that this term is used of Abraham Kuyper's concept of sphere sovereignty. This usage has nothing in common with the more recent concept of principled pluralism, which holds that the State must be religiously neutral (which is in any case an impossibility) and that all religions should enjoy civil liberty and equality. The claim made by some that this latter concept is derived from Kuyper's political thought is groundless. On sphere sovereignty see Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, [1931] 1976). For a critique of principled pluralism see Stephen C. Perks, *A Defence of the Christian State*.

as well (Rom 1:18–32). As Christians we are to live in the constant awareness of this fact. As we do this, and as we seek to conform our lives, families and societies to God's will, the kingdom of God is realised in our midst and exercises a transforming influence on the world. As we pray and live out the plea to God that his kingdom would come and his will be done on earth as it is in heaven, the kingdoms of this world begin to be transformed by the gospel.

In this sense Christianity as a political religion is all-embracing, all-encompassing—i.e. it embraces all of life. We serve a King who claims the whole of our lives. The absolute nature of Christ's kingship means that all aspects and spheres of life are to be subject to his sovereign will, that in the whole of our lives and every facet of our being, as individuals, families, Churches, as a community, a society, a nation, we are to glorify God by living in obedience to his will. He claims our marriage, our families, our children, our work life,—which is to be pursued for his glory no matter who our employer is—our economic life, our art, our music, our culture, our civil governments, and he demands that in all these things we are to put his kingdom first, which is a political order, an absolute sovereignty that recognises no area of religious or political neutrality and requires all other religious and political communities to surrender unconditionally to his rule.

The ancient Roman State, for all its evil, recognised this fact, which so many Christians today deny, and that is why it persecuted the early Christians. The Church was primarily a political threat to the political religion of Rome. All of life is political in this sense, i.e. not in the sense that Westminster or Brussels should control our lives—that is the politics of man, the religion of modern secular humanism—but in the sense that Jesus Christ is Lord of all and demands that Westminster and Brussels bow the knee to him and acknowledge his political sovereignty over them. Christ did not merely demand that the Christians in Rome cease from worshipping Caesar; he demanded that Caesar should worship him. Nor does he today merely demand of us that we should cease from worshipping the political idols of Westminster and Brussels; he demands that Westminster and Brussels worship him also. We have not preached the gospel properly until we have made this fact clear to Westminster and Brussels. Politicians have no special dispensation. Either Caesar, or Westminster, or Brussels is Lord, or Jesus Christ is Lord. And there can be no peace between Christ and Westminster until Westminster bows the knee to Christ. If it refuses Christ will break it with his rod of iron (Ps. 2:9). And it would seem that this is precisely what is happening. Westminster is a spent force. It has been weighed and found wanting, and Brussels is taking over just as the Persians conquered Babylon. And Brussels will go the same way unless it bows the knee to Christ. We have only one political Lord, Jesus Christ. All others are pretenders, usurpers.

To be political is to be religious, i.e. to acknowledge a god as the source of ultimate authority over the nation. For Rome that god was Caesar. For Christians it is Christ, and he commands his people to engage in the ultimate political war, the conquest of the whole earth and its subjugation to his sovereignty. But the means we are to use in this process are not the means that the world uses in its political conquests. The world seeks to conquer new territory by means of physical and military coercion. The kingdom of God grows by means of the preaching of the gospel. Nonetheless,

the object of this war is the conquest of *nations*, as Christ made clear in his Great Commission.

In each sphere of life then the implications of Christ's political sovereignty must be worked out. One of these areas of life is civil government, what I have called politics in the specific sense. Therefore we must now ask a second question.

(2) What does it mean to practise the politics of God specifically? How can Christians work out the political implications of Christ's Lordship in a society that does not acknowledge Jesus as Lord, indeed that emphatically denies his Lordship over the civil government, the State? How do Christians practise the politics of God in a society ruled by the politics of men?

First, we must seek to understand what God's word has to say about this important sphere of life—and it has much to say. We must seek to understand what biblical principles are relevant and how these principles apply to human action in the political sphere. If the Church is to speak prophetically to the modern world and call it to repentance and obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ she must understand what is going on at the heart of modern man's insane rebellion against God; only then will she be able to address the apostasy that has overtaken the Western world and with God's help overthrow modern man's chief idol, the godless secular State, which has exalted itself above God and now usurps his authority in virtually every sphere of life. We can be of little use in bringing the influence of the Christian gospel to bear upon the political life of the nation if we do not understand in the first place how the gospel applies to the political sphere. The Holy Spirit does not use ignorance as a means of enabling us to bear effective witness to the gospel. It is the duty of Christians to understand God's word so that they can give a credible defence of the faith to those who ask, thereby challenging the disobedience and apostasy of our society (1 Pet. 3:15). We may not be able to achieve in a few decades or even in a lifetime the transformation of society by means of the gospel. But we are able to make a start that future generations can build upon. This is impossible, however, if we have never come to a proper understanding of the Christian principles that apply to our lives and society. The Church, therefore, must address the political questions that dominate our society and develop a biblical understanding, a biblical world-view, on these issues. The Holy Spirit works through the renewing of the *mind*, not through ignorance (Rom. 12:2).

Second, we must start applying biblical principles and living in terms of a Christian world-view in those areas of life in which we do have the freedom and authority to apply biblical norms and standards. And there is a great deal of opportunity for this. Biblical principles of justice may at present be difficult to apply in the secular courts, but they can be applied in our personal relationships, in our family lives, in our Church organisations and in our communities. They can also be applied where Churches and Christians are prepared to accept Christian arbitration services that use biblical principles of justice for solving disputes. This was a practice of the early Church that has the specific sanction of Scripture. The apostle Paul rebuked the Corinthians for going before the pagan courts and for failing to establish competent law courts for settling disputes between Christians (1 Cor. 6:1–8). It is necessary for the Church to re-establish such courts today since the secular courts of the land are now subject to ungodly legislation and justice

cannot be expected from them. The functioning of such Church courts would also be likely to have an influence beyond the Church, as indeed was the case with the courts of the early Church. Those with a vocation in the legal and political spheres of life should take this task seriously, since it will provide a valuable service to the Church and a powerful witness to the world. It would also enable the Church to start working out the practical details of how biblical principles of justice should apply in the modern world. This in itself is an important aspect of practising the politics of God.

Christian political principles must also be taught to future generations, which will, if we act now by providing our children with a Christian education, be in a position in the future to apply these principles more effectively to a wider sphere of life than we can. Provision of a sound education in terms of a Christian world-view is a fundamental responsibility of the family and essential to our Great Commission to disciple the nations. Education is the high ground in our battle with secular humanism. It is through the education system that secular humanists have been able to take control of our once Christian society. We must now wake up to this fact and act appropriately. We must establish a counter-revolution in education that does not rely on the secular State education system.

It will also be necessary to create an alternative Christian welfare system that can operate according to biblical work ethics. Strengthening the family so that it can fulfil its biblical role in society is an important part of this, but not the whole of it. An alternative medical system will have to be created eventually. The modern healthcare system in Britain is not Christian. It is part of the apostate politics of man. The Church is commanded not only to preach the gospel but to heal the sick as well.²⁵

By pursuing all these things we shall create an alternative religious and political community, a Christian counter-revolutionary culture, which with God's help will gradually grow and supplant the godless culture of secular humanism that now dominates our lives and society.

Third, we must, wherever possible, seek to influence the political process by means of the consistent application of Christian political norms. It would seem that there is little scope for this at the moment. Nevertheless, we must not shrink back from the attempt to influence the political process. Constitutionally, if not in practice, Britain is still a Christian nation, and Christian principles can be invoked. However, we must be careful here. What we must not do, under any circumstances, is to fall into the error of thinking that political action, i.e. government action, on its own, will create a Christian society. It will not.²⁶ As we have seen, the attempt to solve all of man's social problems by means of government intervention is the definitive feature of the politics of man in the modern age of secular humanism. The politics of God is based on a completely different set of assumptions. In the politics of man society looks to the State as a political idol, as the source of the good. In the politics of God society is to look to Jesus Christ as the source of the

good, and the answer to man's social problems is to be sought in obedience to the social order that he has instituted in his word. This means that the State must observe its God-ordained boundaries and that the other institutions that God has established for the government and well-being of the individual and society (Church and family) must fulfil their God-given roles in accordance with his word. This is the only way to achieve social harmony, justice and peace.

It will not be possible for the Church to exert the kind of influence necessary to capture the political institutions of the nation for Christ without first creating a counter-revolutionary Christian social order with its own education, welfare, healthcare, and justice (arbitration) systems that has already begun to supplant significantly the godless culture of secular humanism that now dominates society. A Christian agenda for political action must, therefore, recognise the importance of the other institutions that God has established for the godly government of society (Church and family) and it must aim at empowering these institutions so that they can function according to their God-given roles. The good ordering of society, the *Christian* ordering of society, requires this. When these institutions once again begin to function properly according to their divinely appointed roles much of the current burden of the State will be transferred to them, thereby enabling the State to pursue its God-given role as a ministry of public justice more obediently.

Conclusion

Christianity is a political faith, both in a general sense, in that it recognises that Jesus Christ is Lord and teaches that all power and authority in heaven and on earth, and therefore all government of men and *nations*, is given to him alone, and in a specific sense, in that it teaches that the civil government or State is commanded to recognise the rights of God and order its work according to the light of his word as his servant (Rom. 13:1–6). Apostate politics, the politics of man, is a form of idolatry. As Christians we must face this idolatry head on and oppose on every level and in every detail the politics of man with the politics of God. We cannot avoid the inevitable conflict that exists between the politics of God and the politics of man without abandoning our Great Commission to disciple the nations. It is time the Church stopped running away from Goliath and took the political nature of the Christian faith seriously, as did the early Church. If the Church does not pose a political threat to the secular humanistic State it is because she has already bowed the knee to Caesar. Unfortunately this is the situation today in Britain.

The modern secular State is the chief idol of our age. If we fail to challenge this idolatry we fail in our Great Commission to bring the nations under the discipline of Jesus Christ. The only way to challenge the politics of man, the politics of apostasy and sin, is with the politics of God. In order to do this we need, first, to develop a comprehensive political theology that recognises the rights of God as sovereign Lord over the whole spectrum of our human existence. Second, we must create and maintain a counter-revolutionary social order based on this political theology. While we are not at the moment able to control Westminster and Brussels, we are able, if we are prepared to make the necessary sacrifices, to begin creating an alternative social order with its own education system, its own welfare system, its own

25. On the need for a Christian medical system see Stephen C. Perks, "Challenging Goliath" in *Christianity & Society* Vol. XIII, No. 1 (January 2003), p. 2f.; see also "Preach the Gospel and Heal the Sick" in *Christianity & Society* Vol. x, No. 4 (October 2000), pp. 2–6.

26. For more on this see Stephen C. Perks, "The Church as a Community of Faith" in *Christianity & Society*, Vol. XIII, No. 1 (January 2003), pp. 10–15).

health system and its own justice system. The influence of such a Christian social order would extend far wider than the Christian Church. Being dependent upon the godless secular State for these things is not an obedient alternative, and is a servile condition that the Bible rebukes. Third, we must seek to conquer the political institutions of the nation for Christ by the influence we exert upon society. Only where the first two of these goals have significantly been achieved shall we be able to accomplish the third.

None of what has been suggested here is unrealistic or fanciful. It is what actually happened historically. This is how the Church exerted her influence upon and began converting the nations. It is our calling to continue that mission in our own lifetime and prepare our children to continue the

mission in their lifetimes. Success will not come instantly, and it will not come at all without a great deal of sacrifice and tribulation. But this is the mission to which we are called. We must pick up our cross and follow Christ.

The time is ripe for a change of politics in Britain. The question is simply this: is the Church, the *ekklesia* of God, prepared to make the sacrifices necessary to challenge the politics of man and replace it with the politics of God? God does not grant religious neutrality to the State. The State must kiss the Son or perish by the way. Christianity is the true politics. The Church must start living out this truth with every breath that she takes. Only when she does will the world be delivered from the tyranny and idolatry of the politics of man. *C&S*

WISE AS SERPENTS: RAHAB, THE MIDWIVES AND JACOB

by *Derek Carlsen*

To be deceived about the truth is certainly a great problem, though what I want to look at here is the righteous use of deception as we find it in the lives of many biblical characters. We need to know the truth about the biblical *use* of deception if we are going to have a complete biblical worldview. I am sure, to many, this sounds like a contradiction and they will respond by saying, “Isn’t the Bible truth and isn’t the devil the father of lies, therefore, how can anyone talk about the biblical use of deception? How can deception in any sense of the word bring glory to the God of truth?” Can deception bring glory to God? For example, can a prosecutor deceive someone who is on trial so as to get him to reveal the truth? Can we smuggle bibles into a country that says it is illegal to own a Bible? Can we hide innocents from tyrants and lie to their pursuers? Can we tell half a story in order to hide what we are doing from someone who is at war with God and thus accomplish what God would have us do? Is it moral to deceive one’s enemy in warfare? Are we not at war against the devil? It is my contention that a biblical world- and life-view is incomplete unless one has carefully looked at the pile of instruction given to us on this matter. I believe that these examples show us a very real application of Christ’s words about being as wise as serpents and harmless as doves in the midst of wolves (Mt. 10:16). I also contend that the amount of revelation on this subject shows how vital a clear understanding about this is if we are going to succeed in our labour for the Lord in a world that is often very hostile to him and the advancing of his kingdom. His inescapable command is to reach the whole world with his whole word (Mt. 28:18–20).

At the outset, let me say that it is easy to abuse these principles that I am about to teach; however, if we only teach

what cannot be misrepresented and abused, we will have very few pillars of the Christian faith to teach. Far easier than abusing this teaching about legitimate deception is abusing the teaching of salvation by grace through faith alone (Eph. 2:8). Should we stop teaching that for fear people will abuse it? God forbid! (cf. Rom. 3:8; 5:20, 21; 6:1, 15; Gal. 5:13; Jude 4).

Rahab is a disturbing character in Scripture to many because she is mentioned in the genealogy of Christ (Mt. 1:5), despite the fact that her background is one of prostitution and lying to the king of Jericho’s men about the spies sent from Joshua (Joshua 2:1–6). It is her lie, however, that I want to investigate further. The New Testament twice praises Rahab and exalts her as an example of faith (Heb. 11:31; James 2:14ff). Commentators are quick to point out that in no way are these New Testament writers including her lying to the authorities when they praise her. What is often not pointed out by these commentators is that Rahab was also committing treason. Somehow treason in such a context is fine, but lying in this context is a gross failure of moral responsibility. However, those who say this are actually turning the book of James on its head by trying to emphasise Rahab’s faith, which they somehow try to separate from her works. The whole argument of James is that it is the very works themselves that prove the faith of the people James is holding up as examples of faith.

Another way commentators try to escape from the plain meaning of the text is to say Rahab’s faith was commendable because she believed in the true God and identified herself with his cause. However, they divide the details of what she did into parts and insist that the part of the work when she lied was wrong, though understandable due to her immature

faith. It seems very strange that James would choose Rahab, out of the host of other possible examples in the Scriptures, specifically to demonstrate how necessary works are to true faith, if Rahab's works were a confused mixture of good and bad. How can unrighteous works demonstrate true saving faith? James, on the other hand, chooses a specific incident without dividing it up or even implying that there were some aspects that were unrighteous. Rahab is praised because she preserved the lives of the spies by getting the soldiers off their tracks. James doesn't say, "Rahab believed God and hung a red cord out of her window when Jericho was attacked," which was also a sign of faith (Josh. 2:14, 18). Rather, the *work* he highlights includes the deception. Joshua, instructing his forces as they were about to destroy Jericho, said Rahab's life was to be spared, *because she hid the spies* (Joshua 6:17, 25). How is it possible to separate the hiding of the spies from the whole deception that took place, namely, putting them under the flax, lying to the soldiers and sending them in the opposite direction and then the letting the spies out of the city illegally? (Josh. 2:15). If you want to be a purist, then everything she did was scandalous: the city of Jericho was in a state of high preparation for war (red alert) and yet Rahab received the spies with peace (Heb. 11:31) and risked her life for the purposes of the true God; she betrayed her whole nation, yet God highly exalted her for defending and protecting the men who would bring about the utter destruction of every person in her city (other than her family, Josh. 6:23).

There are many other incidents of deceiving the unrighteous recorded in the Scriptures. David's wife helped him escape from king Saul by lying to the king's messengers (1 Sam. 19:12–17). When Saul was wanting to kill David on another occasion, Jonathan lied to the king about David's whereabouts (1 Sam. 20:6, 28, 29). The prophet Jeremiah lied to the city's princes in accordance with the king's instructions (Jer. 38:24–28). David, when he was fleeing from Absalom, told Hushai, his friend, to go and defeat the council of Ahithophel (2 Sam. 15:31–34). Hushai did this by lying to Absalom about his intentions (2 Sam. 16:16–19) and then about what would be the best course of action for Absalom to take (2 Sam. 17:7), yet we are told that this was the Lord's doing (2 Sam. 17:14). We see too when Hushai sent word via the priests' sons to warn and inform David about Absalom's intentions, their lives were spared by a woman hiding them and lying to their pursuers (2 Sam. 17:15–21).

There are other incidents like this, though someone might argue that it would be dangerous to take such incidents as examples of how we ought to live because we don't have a clear interpretation of these from the Lord. I use these, however, as illustrations of principles clearly proven elsewhere and I interpret these incidents in the light of other clear passages, such as the case of Rahab and others to which I will now point.

When Pharaoh instructed the Jewish midwives to kill all the Israelite baby boys, they refused, because they feared God, and then lied to Pharaoh as to why they were not killing the babies (Ex. 1:15–19). And what did God think of the midwives' behaviour? "Therefore God dealt well with the midwives . . . And so it was, because the midwives feared God, that he provided households for them" (Ex. 1:20, 21). Once again, commentators want to divide the midwives' good work into pieces so they can separate the lie from it and thus denounce the lie. However, this fails to realise how inseparable the lie was from God's work of making his people

multiply greatly (Ex. 1:20). God could have preserved and increased his people in a different way, but he did not, and then he blessed his faithful servants (the midwives), for their part in his plan. To say that any kind of deception is wrong, therefore, wherever we come across deception, no matter who did it or why they did it, it is wrong, is not a biblical position and will give us a deformed world- and life-view. The great danger of having a deformed world-view is that it hinders our effectiveness in serving God's kingdom. Everything that God has revealed to us has been given so that we might be "thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

What about the way Solomon dealt with the difficult case when two ladies both claimed to be the mother of the same child? (1 Kings 3:16–23). Solomon's solution was to convince both ladies, through his words and actions, that he intended to cut the child in half and give them each a half (1 Kings 3:24, 25). It was through this that the real mother was revealed. However, we have to ask ourselves whether Solomon was really intending to murder the baby? Never, yet he convinced both ladies and probably everyone else in the room at the time, that that is exactly what he was intending to do. The people all marvelled at the wisdom of the king for the way he discovered the real mother. The Scriptures, however, tell us that this was the wisdom of God (1 Kings 3:28). I don't know of any commentators who separate Rahab's lie from the rest of her work, who also separate Solomon's deception from God's wisdom in the matter—they see the deception as a part of the whole, and rightly so. Nevertheless, their inconsistency must be noted.

How did Jael, that brave and upright woman in Israel, deal with the Lord's enemy, Sisera? When Sisera's army was put to flight, he ran to a place that he strongly believed would offer him safe refuge (Judges 4:17). Jael met him and said, "Turn aside, my lord, turn aside to me; do not fear." And when he had turned aside with her into the tent, she covered him with a blanket (Judges 4:18). She gave him some milk to drink and then hammered a tent peg through his head. We might have tried to tarnish Jael's name, along with Rahab and others if it wasn't for the prophetess Deborah, who under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, praises Jael's actions and calls her, because of them, most blessed among women (Judges 5:24–27). And the Psalmist prayed that God would deal with all his enemies as he dealt with Sisera (Ps. 83:9, 10). If you can divide Jael's actions into parts and thereby say Deborah's praises were only for some but not all of her actions, then you can divide up anything in the Bible and make it say whatever you want. There are other similar incidents in Judges where God's deliverers used deception to destroy God's enemies. However, I have just highlighted the one that inescapably shows God's positive evaluation of this kind of behaviour.

What about the actions of the prophet Elisha when the Syrians were warring against Israel? Elisha kept telling the Israelites the Syrians' secret plans, until the Syrians sent an army to capture the prophet (2 Kings 6:8–14). Elisha was found, but when the Syrians tried to arrest him, he prayed that God would blind them and he did (2 Kings 6:18). The prophet then told this army they were at the wrong city and that he would lead them to the man they were looking for. He then led them to Samaria (2 Kings 6:19). The truth of the matter was that they had found the right city and the right man, but Elisha's words led them to believe otherwise. The

excellent commentator and theologian, John Murray, in his generally excellent book, *Principles of Conduct*,¹ says some very strange things while trying to “prove” that Elisha didn’t lie to or use deception with the Syrians. Even though the prophet knew exactly who the army was looking for, Murray argues that by using clever linguistic manoeuvres, what the prophet said was technically true, despite the fact that his intention was clearly to deceive the Syrians. Murray’s position leaves us in a hopeless mess, for by denying that there is a legitimate use of deception and insisting that we must only tell the truth no matter what, he ends up, in the face of such examples, destroying the biblical definition of truth and truthful communication. It is certainly not “telling the truth” when your intention is to get someone to arrive at a wrong conclusion by the “clever” words you string together, but you clearly know that the truth is something else. Murray, by refusing to accept the clear biblical teaching on the legitimate use of deception, has to resort to strange and inconsistent reasoning in order to manoeuvre his way around such passages, claiming “it is difficult to find untruth in what Elisha said.”² It is like the child’s game that claims it is fine if your words portray the opposite of what is true, as long as you remembered to cross your fingers when saying it. Christ condemned the religious leaders of his day for operating in this way (Mt. 23:16–22). Truth is truth and deception is deception and we must not blur the two. That is why I am arguing that there are legitimate times when it is right to use deception to deceive God’s enemies, but I in no way try to imply that this deception is actually “telling the truth.”

Murray continues to flounder when he looks at the way Joshua defeated Ai (Josh. 8:3–29). Actually, “embarrassing,” is the kindest thing one can say about his explanation of this passage. God was clearly involved in Joshua’s plan and the timing of its execution (Josh. 8:2, 18), something Murray acknowledges.³ Joshua clearly intended and succeeded in getting the men of Ai to believe that Israel was once again being defeated. The reason Joshua and his men fled from the soldiers of Ai was to draw them away from the city so that Joshua’s other men, lying in ambush, could take the city without a fight. Murray argued that there was no deception or untruth in Joshua’s actions and it was Ai’s own fault for interpreting Israel’s actions contrary to fact. He said Joshua intended to retreat and then retreated, thus he acted in truth. What confidence trickster wouldn’t whole-heartedly agree with Murray’s position? According to Murray, if a person deceives someone else by certain actions, it is not deception but the truth, as long as the “deceiver” planned his actions beforehand and then stuck to those plans (I obviously don’t believe this is what Murray is trying to teach; however, this is certainly the door that he opens by the position he adopts).

Moreover, Murray adds that the person who failed to perceive the deception has only himself to blame. There is no escaping from the fact, however, that Israel, by their actions, *intended* to make Ai think they were defeating Joshua’s men *again*, when in reality they were not. Murray’s argument leads one to think you can use actions or body language to deceive someone, but if you use words, then it is wrong. Joshua’s deception of the men of Ai was no different from Rahab’s lying to the king’s messengers in Jericho—although one used actions and the other used words. Murray’s inter-

pretation of the Ai battle does not protect the sanctity of truth (which is what he is wanting to do), but destroys it. If we are going to be consistent with the purist idea that never under any circumstances should we communicate an untruth, then we will have to condemn camouflage in warfare. When you camouflage yourself you are wanting others to think you are a bush or a tree. Along this line, Joshua’s spies would have dressed and acted in a way that made people think they were locals from Jericho. Must we condemn them along with Rahab? If your body language is allowed to mislead people, but not your words (which is where Murray’s interpretation leads), then can I shake my head from side to side (which usually indicates “no”), when I really mean “yes”? Would I then have kept the golden rule of never having let an untruth pass my lips?

To reject God’s revealed will with respect to the legitimate use of deception leaves us in a mess—in legalistic, Pharisaic hypocrisy and confusion. Must you tell a thief where all your money is hidden on your person if after taking some of it he asks you if he has taken all your money? Are you allowed to leave a light or radio on in your house when you are out, in order to give the impression that someone is at home? Or is this lying to a would-be burglar? When we think we are holier or wiser than God, we become fools and fools are ineffective in God’s Kingdom. God has not only called us into his kingdom, but told us how we ought to live in it. To ignore what God has clearly revealed as a legitimate and necessary aspect of living in this world is not only foolishness, it is rebellion. We might wish we were living in paradise but we are not and our Commander has instructed us how we ought to live in this fallen world.

Many people believe Rahab had a moral obligation to hide the two spies that came to her. Nevertheless, they insist that she should not have lied. When you ask them what she should have said to the king’s messengers, the response is that if she could not have told the truth, she should have said nothing. These people hold to the same position when you ask them about hiding Jews from the Nazis. They say, if you were hiding Jews and a Nazi search party came to your house and asked whether you were hiding some Jews, then you should say nothing and leave it in God’s hands. To refuse to answer, however, is to invite the Nazis to make an absolutely thorough search of your house—ripping up floor boards etc., which in reality is to surrender those you are trying to protect. If the Lord reveals how we ought to act in such situations and we refuse because we are holier than that, we are no different to Ahaz who rebelled against God’s clear command, which told him what he ought to do in a situation that was not ordinary (Is. 7:11, 12).

Samuel was caught in a difficult situation when God told him to anoint David as king while Saul was still alive (1 Sam. 16:2). God could easily have kept the knowledge of Samuel’s visit to Bethlehem away from Saul, but he didn’t and through this has shown us what we ought to do in similar situations—merely saying nothing to a direct question is sometimes not possible and therefore very unwise. John Murray argues that there was no untruth in what Samuel said, because although he concealed some information from Saul, this was not lying—he told the truth.⁴ But how is it possible to call what Samuel did truthful? The one funda-

1. John Murray, *Principles of Conduct* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1971). 2. *Ibid.*, p. 142. 3. *Ibid.*, p. 144.

4. John Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans, 1971) p.140.

mental thing Saul was concerned about was a rival king. The only thing he wanted to know with respect to Samuel's actions was whether he was about to anoint the next king. Samuel was very aware of this fact and pointed it out to God. Thus when Samuel, in accordance with God's instructions, answered the elders (and indirectly Saul himself), he was basically assuring Saul that there was no need to fear, for the purpose of his visit had nothing to do with Saul's concern about a rival king. Samuel knew how concerned Saul was and yet proceeded to give the impression that there was only *one* reason for his coming to Bethlehem (to make a sacrifice).

To argue, as Murray does, that Samuel's actions were strictly in accord with the facts is to undermine the very idea of truth and there is nothing to stop us ending up in the Pharisaic camp (Mt. 23:16–22), where if someone does not phrase his question perfectly, then, even if we know what he really wants to know, we can answer him in a way that makes him think we have answered his query, yet we know that we have only answered the grammatical construction of his question, but not his actual question or concern (which crooked second-hand car dealer wouldn't see this as paradise?).

Returning to the dilemma of hiding Jews from the Nazis we can imagine a similar situation: Let's say that someone who was hiding Jews also believed he shouldn't lie to the Nazis if they came to search his house. Let's say the Nazis come to this person's house where he has Jews hidden in a secret room under the kitchen floor and in the middle of the kitchen is a table. If when he is asked whether he is hiding any Jews, he says, "Yes, they are under the table" and then laughs and the Nazis think he's making fun of them and leave, can this person think that he has told the truth and not lied? According to Murray's interpretation of Samuel's words to the elders of Bethlehem, this man had said what was strictly in accord with the facts—the Jews were under the kitchen table. But this is *not* telling the truth and to think otherwise is to be deceived.

We are told that Jacob should not have deceived his father Isaac, but rather he and his mother should have trusted in the Lord and let him work out his own purposes. Most commentators are appalled by Jacob's behaviour and most modern Bibles, with their chapter titles and subheadings, force the unsuspecting reader to see Jacob in a very bad light. Jacob has been so slandered by commentators and translators alike that we are only able to think of him as a sly, deceiving scoundrel. My contention is that Jacob was a very wise, single-minded servant of the Lord, who at all times demonstrated godly character—from the beginning to the end of his days. I believe this is the necessary conclusion to arrive at when we allow the testimony of Scripture, rather than prejudice and preconceived ideas, to form our views about Jacob's character.

Let's consider the biblical data on Jacob. Isaac had one wife, not many to distract him and dilute his relationship with Rebekah. Isaac wanted children as much as Rebekah and pleaded with the Lord to end her barenness (which had been for about 20 years, cf. Gen. 25:20 with 25:26). In the light of this, certainly Isaac would have been a concerned husband when his now pregnant wife started to have great difficulties with her pregnancy. Furthermore, wouldn't his precious wife have told him what the Lord had revealed to her about why she was having such problems? (Gen. 25:23)—it is impossible to think she wouldn't have. Thus, both

parents would have known how significant these two babies were, before they were born and that the younger was God's specially chosen one to continue the covenant line.

Isaac was no stranger to God's dealings in this area of the covenant line, for he and Ishmael were two nations ordained to follow paths hostile to each other and thus had to be separated (Gen. 21:11–14). When the children were born, Jacob took hold of Esau's foot, but what did this mean? We have been led to believe that this was clear proof that Jacob was a sly, deceptive operator—tricking and tripping innocent people for most of his life. Westerman has said, however, that this incident is open to a *variety* of explanations.⁵ For example, it could just as easily be argued that the taking of the heel was a character trait of clinging on until receiving the full promise of God, as Jacob did when he wrestled with God at Peniel (Gen. 32:30); or it could point to Jacob's tenacity of sticking through bitter times, as with Laban, or showing that he would trip up/supplant God's enemies. Gordon Wenham and Von Rad say "Jacob" probably means, "may God protect, or reward."⁶ This appears very appropriate since Isaac and Rebekah both knew what God had promised about the younger son.

The prejudice against Jacob, unfortunately, knows no bounds. For example, translators and commentators will not allow the Scriptures to describe Jacob's character for us. In Genesis 25:27 we are told that Jacob was a "plain man" or a "quiet man" or a "peaceful man." The Hebrew word that is being translated by these options is *tam*. Not a complex word at all. In fact, so straightforward is its meaning that every other time it is translated in the Bible it has one basic meaning—perfect, upright etc. (e.g. Gen. 6:9; 17:1; Job 1:1, 8; 2:3). Parkhurst in his Hebrew lexicon says the word means completeness, perfection, complete soundness (he is one of the few honest scholars who allows Gen. 25:27 to be translated in this way⁷). Gesenius, in his lexicon, says the word means *perfect* etc., but then says there is a peculiar use of this word in Gen. 25:27.⁸ Gordon Wenham in his commentary on Genesis says "tam" is a term signifying the highest moral approval, however, such a moral sense is inappropriate in Gen. 25:27.⁹ Calvin argues from this verse that Jacob was lazy or indolent.¹⁰ Is this shaping our understanding by the Scriptures or conforming the Scriptures to our understanding?

The "staying in tents" (Gen. 25:27) can also be translated as "staying at home,"¹¹ thus the picture *Scripture* gives us of Jacob is that he was an upright man (perfect, like Moses, Abraham and Job) who was living at home; that is, his righteous behaviour was evident to his parents and everyone around him, all the time (unlike Esau who was always off

5. C. Westerman, *Genesis*, Translated by D. E. Green, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans, 1986) p.183. Von Rad has said that the incident at the birth of Jacob is "scarcely more, to begin with, than a touch of popular joking" (*Genesis* [London, SCM Press, 1966, translated by John Marks] p. 260).

6. Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 16–50, Word Biblical Commentaries* (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1994) p. 176; Von Rad, *Genesis*, p.260

7. John Parkhurst, *An Hebrew and English Lexicon* (London: Thomas Davison, Whitefriars, 1823) p. 746.

8. William Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1979, 1981) p. 865.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 177.

10. John Calvin, *The First Book of Moses, Genesis* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker Book House, 1979, translated by John King) Vol.2, p.

49. 11. Gesenius, *Ibid.*, p. 372.

doing his own thing in the wilderness away from observation). Despite Jacob's godly character, Isaac loved Esau more than him. Was this love based upon godliness? No. Esau's life clearly revealed his rebellion against God's will—he treated his birthright as something cheap and irrelevant and deeply hurt his parents by marrying strange women (Gen. 26:35). Jacob didn't cheat Esau out of his birthright, Esau sold it to him (Gen. 25:33)—that's what the Scriptures say, specifically laying the fault with Esau, not Jacob (Heb. 12:16), stating that Esau despised his birthright (Gen. 25:34).

Isaac not only loved this profane, ill-disciplined son more than his godly son, but decided that the profane child was to inherit everything. Calvin says that although Isaac was “admonished by the same oracle [as Rebekah] concerning the honour transferred to his younger son, he still did not cease to be inclined to . . . Esau.”¹² How old was Jacob when he deceived his father? He was 77¹³ (so how old was Esau?).

The fruit of Jacob's life had been beyond reproach for 77 years, yet Isaac despised his righteous life and in blatant rebellion against God's clear revelation, insisted on making Esau the inheritor of all the covenant blessings. Thus, one day out of the blue, he decided that it was time to pass on the inheritance—in secret (Rebekah happened to overhear this, but otherwise no one else would have known until it had been done). Being secretive was an integral part of Isaac's plan, because he knew that what he wanted to do, couldn't be done in the light. He said he needed to do this thing quickly because he didn't know when he was going to die (Gen. 27:2), though he lived for another 43 years afterwards (Gen. 25:26; 35:28). The reason God had told Rebekah about the elder serving the younger so many years before was so that she would realise that what Isaac was about to do was a serious crisis. We are told by most commentators, however, that Rebekah and Jacob demonstrated a lack of faith and moral character when they deceived Isaac. Rather they should have waited for the Lord to work out his purposes.

The covenant line, from whom the Messiah was to be born, was about to be disinherited. We are not talking about Isaac leaving all his *money* in his will to Esau, but of something much more serious (though it is also immoral to give the Lord's money to a godless seed). This was possibly one of the

12. John Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960, translated by Ford Lewis Battles) 3:2:31, p. 578.

13. Jacob was 130 years when he stood before Pharaoh in Egypt (Gen. 47:9). Just before Jacob came to Egypt Joseph had told his brothers that the famine had only been for two years and another five years still lay ahead (Gen. 45:6). We know that prior to the beginning of the famine there had been seven years of plenty, according to Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dream (Gen. 41:29, 53). Joseph was 30 years old when Pharaoh exalted him to rule Egypt (Gen. 41:46). Jacob came into Egypt after the 7 years of plenty and 2 years into the famine, thus making Joseph 39. This means when Jacob was 130 years old and stood before Pharaoh, Joseph was 39 years old, making Jacob 91 when Joseph was born (this was while Jacob was working for Laban). Jacob worked for Laban for 20 years (Gen. 31:38) and it appears that Joseph was born 6 years before the end of this time (compare Gen. 30:25, 27, 28, 32 with Gen. 31:41). Jacob served Laban for 7 years before he was married and then another 7 years after he was married (the first 7 years for Leah and the second 7 years for Rachel, Gen. 29:18–28)—it was at the end of this 14 year period that Joseph was born. This means Jacob was married when he was 84 years old. Jacob fled to Laban shortly after receiving the blessing from Isaac (Gen. 27:41, 45), which means Jacob deceived Isaac when he was 77 years old and then began to work for Laban that same year.

biggest crises in the whole history of God's people: one of the patriarchs, who knew that his authority to pass on God's blessing was irreversible (Gen. 27:33; Heb. 11:20) was in rebellion against the covenant. God had revealed to Rebekah, long before, that such a conflict would happen and its intensity was indicated by how violent the struggle had been within her womb.¹⁴ Unfortunately many people don't realise it, but this was one of the most crucial battles in the history of mankind and one of Satan's most subtle and ingenious attempts at seizing power. I am grateful to the Lord that Rebekah had a far greater perception of what was going on than most Christians and commentators have had and continue to have. God had given divine revelation about the respective futures of Esau and Jacob and acting in accordance with God's divine revelation is an absolute responsibility binding every person—Rebekah faithfully obeyed this revelation.

Isaac was not about to listen to reason. He was in such rebellion he had decided to reverse the Lord's prophecy that the elder shall serve the younger, ostensibly making Esau the master (Gen. 27:37) and leaving nothing of significance to Jacob. Despite the fact that God clearly hated Esau and loved Jacob, Isaac wanted to disinherit Jacob. It is noteworthy that out of the three patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, it is only Isaac to whom God never appeared. Isaac was trying to give eternal dominion to the pagans over God's chosen covenant line—dominion for the pagans over the children of God on the earth! God's faithful servants had to act and act quickly. Only good resulted from the actions of Rebekah and Jacob. Not once do the Scriptures speak against what they did, and this together with all the other examples mentioned should at least prevent us from denouncing their actions (i.e. the deception) so quickly. The father's authority in a family is *under* God, which means that when he determines to act in contradiction to God's revealed truth, then those under his authority can and should resist him (this is true with respect to the realm of the State also).

Deception is clearly one of the means God uses to fulfil his purposes in this world. He makes false prophets speak nonsense and makes his enemies believe their lies and thus destroy themselves (1 Kings 22:19–23; Ezk. 14:9; 2 Thes. 2:11). King David pretended to be a madman in order to escape from Achish, king of Gath (1 Sam. 21:12–15). The disturbing thing for the purists is that Psalm 34¹⁵ includes this incident as a demonstration of God's protection and deliverance, where, though David didn't say anything, he still deceived his enemies. Nevertheless, we are told that if we can't tell the truth then we should say nothing and if the only way to escape is to deceive, then we should do nothing. This is not only simplistic, it is also unbiblical. There are definitely situations in life when a “no comment” answer is impossible, e.g. as we saw in the example of Samuel above.

How does all of this fit into our biblical ethic? What is vital to realise is that the Scriptures never suggest that we are ever meant to make a choice between the lesser of two evils. We are never justified in doing something that is evil and God never expects us to sin. We are to always act in a righteous way and if we think the only way out of a dilemma

14. Wenham, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

15. Joyce Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel* (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1989) p. 139; Keil and Delitzsch, *Books of Samuel*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1880, translated by James Martin) p. 221.

is to choose between the lesser of two sins, then we haven't understood the Scriptures or our situation correctly (1 Cor. 10:13). There is no getting away from the fact that there are priorities within God's law and in difficult situations it is the Bible that must show us what has priority. We don't only have to know the commandments, but must rely upon the Bible to interpret and apply these commandments.

For example, the sixth commandment is not violated when the murderer is executed. In the same way, the examples we have looked at show that it is legitimate to lie to God's enemies in order to protect innocent life and further God's purposes. There are biblical exceptions built into the Ninth Commandment and we had best let God's revelation show us the full intent of that commandment, lest we sin against him. When we, for example, refuse to lie in order to protect an innocent life and choose instead (according to our own "moral" standard), the path of remaining silent, we will be guilty of complicity in the death of the innocent life. To insist that God should act when he has clearly shown *us* our responsibility is rebellion and the despising of his wisdom. Solomon's deception to determine the right mother of the infant shows that lying is not only to be restricted to life and death situations or times of war, but can be used to attain justice in the social realm.

I believe that the mountain of evidence in the Scriptures on this subject teaches that God has ordained the use of deception in order to preserve innocent human life, attain justice and advance his purposes, whenever other means are not available. If we are going to live by every word that proceeds from God's mouth and not put God to the test (by demanding that he intervene so that innocents are not hurt), then we need to be aware of the legitimate use of biblical deception. If we are not going to cheapen the value of human life and justice or water down the great commission, then we will need to be aware of the legitimate option of lying that God has given to us as we function for his glory in a fallen, hostile world. We are definitely not expected to give God-hating, God-rejecting pagans information by which they can war against God's revealed will, and when they are standing against God's purposes they ought to be deceived—even the patriarch, Isaac, wasn't exempted from this rule.

There are times when we have no route open to us other than deception; thus we need to be aware of its legitimacy and be wise stewards of the wisdom God has entrusted to us. This teaching can be abused, but so can justification through faith alone and eternal security. But who will suggest that we should stop teaching such doctrines because people might abuse them? *C&S*

Book Reviews

PARADOX AND TRUTH

BY RALPH SMITH

Canon Press, Moscow, Idaho, 2002, 129 pages, \$12.00

ETERNAL COVENANT

BY RALPH SMITH

Canon Press, Moscow, Idaho, 2003, 102 pages \$10.00

REVIEWED BY DOUG P. BAKER

WHEN Cornelius Van Til insisted that in the doctrine of the Trinity we as Christians "do assert that God, that is, the whole Godhead, is one person," he upset more than a couple of theological apple carts. For more than a century academics had been united in asserting just the opposite, that the Trinity could be explained and envisioned as a unity of essence and a diversity of persons. In this way theologians sought to escape the difficulty of saying simultaneously that God is one, and that God is three. The bulk of theologians, then and now, "claim that we have not asserted the unity and trinity of exactly the same thing."

These are the theologians who model the Trinity for us as being like the relationships of water, which whether it is ice, liquid, or steam, remains water. Just so, they say, whether God is the Father, the Son, or the Spirit, he is still

God. Or they model the Trinity after a man, who could be a father to his children, a husband to his wife, and a son to his parents, but is still the same man in all of these relationships. Such analogies are offensive to our sense of proportion, and downright blasphemous as attempts to cram the King of the Universe into the tiny bottle of our understandings. Such a manageable definition of God yields him up to us without the need of fear, trembling, awe, or wonder. Most such analogies depict a modal understanding of the Trinity, and so some wise theologians refused to use them, maintaining rather that while our analogies would not work to represent the Trinity, nevertheless, the oneness and the threeness were obviously used in reference to different referents. Thus they escaped the danger that they imagined lay in such a contradiction.

Van Til refused to jump on board with these Houdinis, and boldly asserted that not only was God one person simultaneously with being three persons, but that these two must be held with equal ultimacy. Neither the fact of God being one person, nor the fact that Jesus is one person and the Father is one person and the Spirit is one person, which makes three persons, could be allowed to take precedence in our minds or our theology. God is one person absolutely. God is three persons absolutely. Neither absolute may become subservient to the other.

In this way, Cornelius Van Til undid the work of many

who had sought ways to bring God down to our level, and so earned the label of “heretic” for expounding this understanding that had been common throughout the Church for centuries. The mystery had been restored to the internal dwelling of God, but how then were we to think of the three persons and of their relationships with each other? True, it is a mystery, but is it a mystery into which we can peer through the light of those writings that are “profitable for faith, doctrine, and conduct”? How do the Scriptures enlighten our understanding of this great mystery of the Godhead?

Aligning himself with Van Til’s understanding of the equal ultimacy of the unity and diversity of the Godhead, Ralph Smith turns to the trinitarian framework in which Abraham Kuyper had expounded the concept of the Trinity.

We then confess that in the one personality of the divine Essence there consists a three-personal distinction, which has in the covenant relation its unity and an inseparable tie. God Himself is, according to this conception, not only of every covenant, but of the covenant idea as such the living and eternal foundation; and the essential unity [of the Godhead] has in the covenant relation its conscious expression.

In the covenant relation Father, Son, and Holy Spirit aim together and each for Himself at the triumph over sin, that is, at the triumph over all that which places itself over against God as anti-God. The ground of this will in God is found in the original covenant relation in the divine Essence.

As Smith develops Kuyper’s doctrine, this covenant relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is seen as far more than a mere agreement between equals. It is not simply the division of labor in which one decrees and another effects that decree. Preceding, at least logically, the covenant of salvation in which the three persons undertook the salvation of sinful humanity, this intra-trinitarian covenant is essentially a covenant of love, and that is the name applied to it by Smith. In both Kuyper and Smith covenant is seen as the defining characteristic of the Godhead.

At this point Ralph Smith proceeds to combine Van Til’s and Kuyper’s contributions, and the doctrine of the Trinity really becomes breathtaking. Being essential to the character of the Godhead, covenant is essential to each of the persons, for each is co-terminous with the whole Godhead. Therefore, it is meaningless to conceive of the Father existing without the Son and the Spirit, for the Father’s covenant relationship with the Son and the Spirit is essential to who the Father is. The Godhead as individuals require the intra-trinitarian covenant in order to be who they are, just as much as the Godhead as a unity requires that covenant. Here again we see Van Til’s equal ultimacy of the unity and the trinity popping up. While we can conceive of the Father without conceiving of the Son, we can not conceive of the Father without the Son.

This covenant is conceived mainly as consisting in the mutual loving indwelling each of the others, such that Jesus could say without blushing, “If you have seen me, you have seen the Father.” In this indwelling, they love and probe each other, knowing one another to the superlative degree. And yet they are individuals, each loving the others before himself, and living in a family communion. While the Holy Spirit is not less than the whole Godhead, neither does he

dwell apart from the whole Godhead but is perfectly and unchangingly indwelt by the whole Godhead.

R. C. Sproul has said, “We can distinguish between the body and the soul, but we can not separate them, for once we separate them we have killed the person.” In the same way, we can distinguish between the three persons, but we cannot separate them, for they dwell necessarily together and are covenantally wrapped up in each other’s existence.

This intra-trinitarian covenant is the root from which all of the God/human covenants grow. God makes covenants with us because he is a covenant God internally and ontologically.

Covenant expresses the goal of all creation because man, God’s representative and image, is destined to become covenantally one with God, sharing in the fellowship of love that is the life of the Trinity from all eternity. That final covenant conclusion is the realization of the goal of creation. The means to bring about covenantal union between God and man were also of necessity covenantal.

Therefore, this internal covenant of love clarifies the motive of why a God who dwelt in eternal felicity would desire to create humanity at all, especially such humanity as we have proved to be. We are an opportunity for each person to fulfill his deepest longing, which is to see the others exalted more than they already are. They work and strain to set each other higher and to show forth and draw praise to all that they have loved in each other from eternity past. Thus Smith’s conception of the covenant of love is able to touch on every aspect of history, and to cast light on every doctrine of theology. In these two small books he has effected a true advance for both Reformed Theology and its natural partner, Covenant Theology.

One caveat, however: Smith’s exposition of Cornelius Van Til’s doctrine of the Trinity is necessarily short and sketchy, a fact which he freely admits in a footnote. At points the reader would be well served to have handy copies of Van Til’s *Introduction to Systematic Theology* and his *Survey of Christian Epistemology* to help fill out Van Til’s reasoning in a few of the passages that rely heavily on Van Til. Both of these are available from Covenant Media Foundation on the Internet. C&S

THE DEATH OF CHRISTIAN BRITAIN:
UNDERSTANDING SECULARISATION 1800–2000
BY CALLUM G. BROWN

London: Routledge, 2001, paperback, £12.99,
ISBN 0-415-24184-7

REVIEWED BY CRAWFORD GRIBBEN

CALLUM BROWN has written a defining text in the debate about secularisation, and a text that every Christian leader should read, then read again. When “all the figures for Christian affiliation are at their lowest point in recorded history” (p. 4), the contents of this book are certainly timely. *The Death of Christian Britain* should sober anyone adopting the upbeat mood of a great deal of contemporary evangelical discourse. Its conclusions are compelling and disturbing. “Christian Britain” is dead, and its death anticipates the effects of the rapid secularisation that is sweeping across the Western world.

Today, many Church leaders are admitting the desperation of their situation. In 1997 the Church of Scotland dated its own extinction if its existing membership decline were to continue—the Church, it concluded, would cease to exist around 2033 (p. 4–5). But if “Christian Britain” is dead, what did it look like before its decease? Brown’s central assumption is that “what made Britain a Christian nation before 1950 was not the minority with a strong faith, but the majority with some faith” (p. 142). Rejecting a statistical analysis, which obscures the extent to which the non-church attending still adopt Christian ways of looking at themselves, Brown advances the idea of a “discursive Christianity,” a kind of Christian adherence that shapes the way people think about themselves and their environment but may not actually drive them to worship. “What emerges is a story not merely of church decline, but of the end of Christianity as a means by which men and women, as individuals, construct their identities and their sense of self” (p. 2). This is the death of Christianity as a meta-narrative.

Interestingly, though, despite the broad range of its title, *The Death of Christian Britain* is almost entirely focused on the collapse of what it presents as a nineteenth- and early twentieth-century evangelical social consensus. Catholicism, for example, is given a fairly subservient place in his analysis. What has died, if we are to accept his argument, has been the social consensus by which evangelicalism of one sort or another shaped the nation’s life.

The death of this Britain can be quite clearly dated—and it seems your parents were right. Really, Brown argues, it all happened in 1963, when “something very profound ruptured the character of the nation and its people, sending organised Christianity on a downward spiral to the margins of social significance” (p. 1). Brown illustrates his thesis by drawing on the long history of concern about secularisation. Brown begins his discussion with the standard conclusions, noting the importance of Thomas Chalmers in the stereotyping of the sinful city. The nineteenth-century city certainly was hellish for many of its inhabitants. Chambers’ *Journal* in 1853 compared the number of “drunk and disorderlies” with the population of the cities in which they were picked up. In London, in 1851, the ratio was 1:106, while in Glasgow it was 1:22 (p. 25). Cities—particularly London—were represented as “the ultimate test of evangelicalism.” The unholy city was a clerical myth that entered the popular imagination through William Cowper: “God made the country, and man made the town.” The city had become “heathen.”

Interestingly, Brown argues that modern scholarship has continued to measure secularisation according to nineteenth-century definitions of what “religious” and “irreligious” meant. These supposedly objective tests of religiosity—“bums on seats”—took little account of the manner in which Christian discourse was more widely internalised into the individual’s sense of self. Indeed, concern about secularisation drove the British churches to proselytise. “From 1796 to 1914, Britain was immersed in the greatest exercise in Christian proselytism this country has ever seen” (p. 39). Far from demonstrating the increasing distance between the church and the working world, the nineteenth century illuminates their close connections. Brown suggests that it is “almost inappropriate” to suggest any distinction between secular and religious popular magazines before the end of the nineteenth century. Indeed, he argues, “the best estimates indicate that the peak year of church adherence per head of population came in 1904 for England and Wales and 1905 for Scotland” (p. 7). Churches were in fact growing during the rapid industrialisation that is often thought of as undermining their success. Even in the twentieth century, church-going declined even while church affiliation continued

strong. The strongest church growth since the mid-nineteenth century occurred in the 1940s and 1950s, when attendances at Billy Graham’s Glasgow rallies in 1954 represented some 73.7% of the city’s population. Brown therefore “re-brands” Britain between 1800 and 1963 as a “highly religious nation” (p. 9).

But something happened quite suddenly in 1963. A new discourse of identity was being forged as the social changes of the 1960s were both the cause and consequence of a moral revolution. Brown notes that during 1963–64, the lyrics of each of the 49 songs copyrighted by the Beatles discussed romantic love. By 1967, a mere 5% of their new songs discussed it. Romantic love had been replaced by themes addressing drugs, nihilism, peace, nostalgia and mysticism. These social changes meant that “the generation that grew up in the sixties was more dissimilar to the generation of its parents than any in the previous century” (p. 190). Generations had been prised apart, and a new world had arrived.

After 1963, British religiosity entered free fall. In the 1990s only 17% of persons baptised in the Church of Scotland were recruited into membership, and 20% into the Church of England. Brown argues that the changing role of women is central to secularisation. He notes that, in the early nineteenth century, “one of the great mythic transformations was the feminisation of angels” (p. 58); simultaneously, females became angelic and identified with man’s highest good. Women became a “religious solution” to the “religious problem” of unfettered masculinity (p. 73), as traditional male pastimes, such as drinking alcohol, were increasingly identified as ungodly. This represented an inversion of early modern assumptions: “the route to family harmony no longer lay in the taming of the Elizabethan shrew but in the bridling of the Victorian rake” (p. 88); “the problem for religion after 1800 was the need to corral masculinity within the newly constructed and feminine-prioritised piety” (p. 89).

This rewriting of Christian sexuality drove men from active roles in the Church, Brown argues. In the 1840s, over 80% of Sunday School teachers were male; by the 1870s, this had dropped to under 30%. Evangelists noted the change, and Moody, in his English campaigns, notably targeted his appeal to young men. Nevertheless, advertisers knew best: adverts in evangelical magazines clearly presupposed an overwhelmingly female readership. This trend reached its climax in the temperance movement, which overtly identified piety as feminine: “Evangelical religion became an enforcer of domestic ideology for an evolving, though troubled, masculinity of the artisan church-goer, and a community venue for the exploration of women’s roles, ideals and protests.” Thus, Brown concludes, it is the absence of young women from modern Churches that marks the death of Christian Britain.

It is possible that Brown’s narrative is too focused on feminisation, but his comments must resonate among those Christians concerned by the eclipse of masculinity. It is unfortunate that his analysis is not extended to Ireland, north and south, where the implications of secularisation are very different. It is certainly the case that his discussion frequently equates evangelicalism with a wider Christianity. And it is also significant that Brown’s discussion steers clear of the impact of theological change.

The book seems to imply that the churches’ messages have stayed the same, while only their presentation has changed. Brown is one of the foremost historians of religious experience working in British academia. He is a brilliant lecturer—he was the reviewer’s tutor in Scottish history—and his book reflects the pace and detail of his oral delivery. This book will be controversial but is profoundly thought-provoking, and it ought to be very widely read. *C&S*

IN THE BEGINNING:
THE STORY OF THE KING JAMES BIBLE
BY ALISTER McGRATH

Hodder & Stoughton, 2002, paperback,
340 pages, £7.99, ISBN 0340785853

REVIEWED BY STEPHEN J. HAYHOW

“THE two greatest influences on the shaping of the English language are the works of William Shakespeare and the English translation of the Bible that appeared in 1611”—so McGrath opens this wonderful story of how the King James Bible came into being. McGrath’s compelling account starts out with the story of how the new technology, the printing press, revolutionised learning and communication in Europe. McGrath takes us through the story of how the presses, the printing materials and the whole printing process developed. Johannes Gutenberg “made the breakthrough that finally established printing as the communication technology of the future” (p. 9). And here we are today surrounded by thousands and thousands of books.

Next we look at how the English language was developing in that period. The sense of national identity became strong in the fifteenth century “and was linked to growing regard for (and use of) the national language” (p. 28). Then we are led through the appearances of the early English translations: Tyndale’s, Miles Coverdale’s (the first complete Bible in English), the Great Bible of 1539, the Geneva Bible of 1560, the “most widely read Bible of the Elizabethan, and subsequently Jacobean, era.” McGrath explains how each became a precursor of the KJB. Interesting points are made about the Geneva Bible. King James of course hated this Bible version. Why? McGrath points to the way in which the annotations brought out the Calvinistic view of the limited power of the king under God. For example the annotation on Daniel 6:22 said: “(i) for he disobeyed the king’s wicked commandment in order to obey God, and so he did no injury to the king, who ought to command nothing by which God could be dishonoured” (p. 143). McGrath shows (pp. 141–148) that this was one of many annotations that undermined, in James’s eyes, the power of the King. The Geneva Bible was therefore a revolutionary document—in the political realm as well as in any other. The political and social implications of the Bible and the faith was obvious and blatant during this period. The partitioned view that overhangs the modern Christian mind was alien to the men of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. James had to get rid of this translation and its annotations. In the end a new translation was decided upon by royal authority.

McGrath describes in fascinating detail the process of translation, who the translators were, and the printings. All the way along McGrath provides the broad historical context of events: Reformation and Puritan history, key players and events. This is truly a story and is re-told by an excellent narrator.

Then for nearly three hundred years generations of Christians all read, memorised and were instructed in the same translation across the English speaking world. Generation after generation drank from the same well. The well educated and less well educated seemed to be able to comprehend its style and fashion. This unparalleled translation survived, generation after generation and its language, symbols and phrasing became part of the English language itself.

And what do we have now? We have a myriad of temporary translations, each with its niche market. There are Bibles for everyone. There are youth bibles, family bibles, every kind of modern translation you could imagine and more than you

could want. There are politically correct translations, inclusive language versions and so on. Moreover, Churches that went for the NIV ten to fifteen years ago are now finding themselves re-considering their choice having realised the weaknesses and inadequacies of that newer version. Bible translations are a big market, there is money to be made, copyrights to be secured and held and so on. And what have we gained in the process? As many Bibles as denominations! The AV was never perfect, but through careful and steady revision and necessary modernisation through gradual change, could the centre have not held?
C&S

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WHAT is the nature of Christianity? Is it a religion or a cult, i.e. a personal worship hobby? This question goes to the heart of the modern Church's failure to exercise a world-transforming faith. The Church's abandonment of Christianity as a religion, i.e. as a world-view that structures every sphere of human life and society, has exposed the Western world to the religious influences of secular humanism, New Age-ism, the Green and ecology movements, which are all really modern variations of pagan religion, and which have now begun to transform Western society in a direction diametrically opposed to the principles and practice of Christianity. The result has been that while Christians have maintained their faith as a cult, a system of belief that is little more than a personal worship hobby, when it comes to the question of how Christians should affect the world in which they live they have largely fallen back on trying to clean up secular humanism. In this process the Church has become increasingly irrelevant and powerless as society has been first secularised and then repaganised.

The antidote to this failure on the part of the Church to affect the world, which is her mission field, and the present condition of Western society to which this failure has led, is the rediscovery of Christianity as the true religion, i.e. as an overarching structure to human life that anchors both the individual and the society of which he is a part in God's will for man in Christ. This religious structure the Bible calls the covenant, and it embraces the whole of human life, including politics, education, science, art, welfare, health care, marriage, family life, Church, business, economy. Until the Church rediscovers this religious structure for life the Christian faith will continue to decline amidst the rise of other faiths that do provide the individual and society with a religious structure for life, and Christians will continue to have saved souls but live their daily lives as secular humanists without answers for the desperate problems that face the modern world.

These are some of the main issues addressed in this collection of essays, most of which were originally published in *Christianity & Society*.

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