

# ANTITHESIS

A Review of Contemporary Christian Thought and Culture

**INSIDE:**  
**The Operation Rescue Critique  
and  
Unintelligible Atheism**

"The Christian God may exist; so may the Gods of Olympus, or of ancient Egypt....But no one of these hypotheses is more probable than any other; they lie outside the region of even probable knowledge, and therefore, there is no reason to consider any of them."

**Bertrand Russell**

"Agnosticism is epistemologically self-contradictory on its own assumptions because its claim to make no assertion about ultimate reality rests upon a most comprehensive assertion about ultimate reality."

**Cornelius Van Til**

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ANTITHESIS

# ANTITHESIS

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# Observing the Current...

## The Baltic Constitutional Right to Secede

"Each Union Republic shall retain the right freely to secede from the U.S.S.R." So reads Article 72 of the Soviet Constitution. Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia are three of the fifteen republics explicitly listed as retaining this right of secession. The Soviet constitution does not even require a Republic to seek the consent of the national Union in order to secede. Article 70 specifies that all Soviet Republics have entered the Union, "as a result of free self-determination of nations and the voluntary association of equal Soviet Socialist Republics."

Of course such claims are false and typical of modern mega-States. As we now see, a Soviet Republic may not "freely secede" unless this means free of a really big number of tanks. And we know that the Baltic states did not "voluntarily associate" with the Soviets but were taken in 1940 as a result of the pact between socialists Hitler and Stalin. At first, the Soviets only sought permission to set up military bases in the Baltic states, but once that was successful the camel was in the tent.

So even though the Soviet constitution has an explicit constitu-

tional sanction that would make Alexander Stephens' head spin, Gorbachev has finally attempted to foist the veneer of unconstitutionality onto the Baltic Republics. Yes, everyone wants to take the moral high ground. But the recent Moscow May Day protests are more evidence of Gorbachev's lack of credibility with the Soviet peoples. A Lithuanian joke making the rounds expresses this truth well: "What is the difference between the Soviet Union and the United States?" Answer: "In the U.S., Gorbachev would probably be elected president." **DMJ**

## Obscenity and Absurdity

"The public has been so bullied intellectually by the proponents of contemporary art that it has wearily resigned itself to just about any idiocy that is placed before it." Those are the words of Frederick Hart in last fall's issue of *Arts Quarterly*. And they are on the mark.

But I believe that the idiocy of so many objects of contemporary "art" is far surpassed by that of their proponents who vehemently defend the financial subsidizing of such works by the civil government. The late twentieth century has here seen further confirmation of the words of the Apostle Paul that a culture which has been given over (abandoned) by God to idolatry and homosexuality is likewise a culture given over to absurdity in its reasoning (Romans 1:21-28).

The artistic expressions of modern American culture are, for the most part, not simply indifferent to the Christian outlook on life and values, but positively hostile and hateful toward it. We witness this whether the subject is Martin Scorsese's "The Last Temptation of Christ" or Madonna's rock album "Like a Prayer." One need not be sympathetic to the religious use of the crucifix (I am not) to recognize that submerging it in urine and displaying such as art — as did Andres Serrano — is an attempt to denigrate Christianity publicly.

Doug Bandow reminds us in a syndicated column that "art has been used as an ideological weapon throughout history." Today's art functions as

a powerful tool for the tearing down and wearing down of a Christian view of the world, of man, and of ethics. Chelsea's Kitchen Theatre in New York features pornographic actress Annie Sprinkle masturbating and urinating on stage. The San Francisco art gallery Southern Exposure plays sexually explicit videos. Robert Mapplethorpe gains wealth and notoriety by his exhibits of homosexual and sadomasochistic photographs. Such obscenities as these are clearly an affront — and intended as such — to Christian morality.

What is even more outrageous, however, is that the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) — a government agency financed by the public treasury — is responsible, directly and indirectly, for the partial funding of the obscene exhibits mentioned above and the crucifix dipped in urine. The taunting of Christians is paid for by the taxes of Christians! We are expected to subsidize those who detest our values. It is perfectly understandable that a tremendous public outcry was raised against NEA's audacity.

But it is precisely at this point that the absurd reasoning of an unbelieving culture becomes evident. When certain U.S. senators attempted to restrict the NEA from funding obscene and indecent works and one congressman even suggested dismantling the NEA and removing art from the public tax-trough, the response of America's cultured elite was as though the Nazis had come to arrest the Jews. Their tormented cry was that this amounted

to *censorship*.

We see here how artistic perversion can be matched by intellectual perversion. Censorship attempts to prevent an artist from producing or displaying his artistic efforts. But nobody in the recent controversy came anywhere close to advocating that the government remove or even curtail the freedom of a Serrano or Mapplethorpe from presenting to the public whatever they might deem "art." Critics did not seek to force artists to stop their work. They simply argued that others should not be forced to pay for it. You are not guilty of "censorship" if you choose not to buy the Los Angeles Times. Nor if you protest tax subsidies for sacrilege.

The unspoken but audacious assumption of those who champion the NEA is that artists (or at least some artists, chosen by the irreligious) have a right to be funded by others (even against their wills). Resisting such coercion is confused with censorship because there is no genuine commitment to freedom for all. Defenders of the current obscenities are the first to cry out for freedom, but the last to grant it. Their recent whimpering about censorship is as politically arrogant as it is intellectually absurd.

But let us answer these fools according to their own folly (Proverbs 26:5). We should begin to advocate government tax-subsidies for Christian schools and churches -- then wait around to hear the howls of our opponents. Only now they themselves will have handed us what to call them in return.... **GLB**

## Handmaid Hypocrisy

"We just see it as a thriller.... We never had any thought of baiting anyone or any group." So says the executive vice president of Cinecom Entertainment, describing Cinecom's thriller, "The Handmaid's Tale."

Like most "thrillers," "The Handmaid's Tale" has its villains who, of course, are bent on terrorizing and brutalizing others. These villains, however, aren't part of an inner city gang. Nor are they the dregs of society. And they aren't even foreign terrorists. Rather, these villains are domestic terrorists of sorts, fascists who promulgate an especially pernicious agenda. They also rape, brutalize, and forcibly impregnate women. And by killing nuns who refuse to recant their vows, they perpetrate mass murder (no pun intended).

So exactly who are the despicable villains of this thriller which, mind you, was never intended to bait anyone or any group? Christians. That's right, Christians, and in particular, fundamentalist Christians.

With a straight face, Margaret Atwood claims that she wrote the novel

upon which the screenplay was based to warn America about those who use the Bible as an excuse to suppress the majority (*Between the Lines*, March 12, 1990, p.7). According to Atwood, "The Handmaid's Tale" is about "how religious fanatics would run the world if they got their druthers" (*Ibid.*, March 26, 1990, p.3).

Let's get this straight. From Atwood's perspective, Christians who participate in America's "participatory" democracy by voting according to conscience have tendencies toward racism, misogyny, and murder. Only in Hollywood! And only when Christians serve as Hollywood's convenient whipping-boys.

After all, Hollywood is out of other whipping-boys. Atwood and Cinecom know all too well that they better not "bait" Muslims (just ask Salmon Rushdie!). And they know as well that they better not "bait" the Jewish community (and rightly so). So instead, they "bait" Christians without having the courage to admit it!

The amazing irony, though, is that by baiting Christians, this film

contradicts the very value it feigns to promote: open-minded tolerance. Atwood ends up venting the same hatred, bigotry and intolerance she fabricates and foists on her imaginary villains. Thus, Atwood's mind remains open only until Christians wish to enter the political arena.

But instead of maintaining an open mind and doing battle with Christians on the merits of their claims, Atwood viciously attacks a straw man. Of course, this sort of attack is not new. Not to worry, though. What Atwood's feeble plot loses in originality, it more than gains in absurdity (since only Christianity provides a worldview which can consistently condemn racism, misogyny, and murder).

So while Atwood and Cinecom take their potshots at a caricature of Christianity, they know that such potshots are pure fiction — which is more than anyone can say about the atrocities of non-Christian regimes. But everyone knows that there's no money in documentaries!

DGH

## Creationism to be Outlawed in California's Private Schools?

Teaching science in a Christian context in California's private schools will soon be illegal if disturbing actions taken by California's Department of Education are not overruled. This "Scopes in reverse" is alarming educators in California and throughout the United States who fear that there is little now to stop the state from going into private Christian schools to declare that their science classes, or possibly their degrees, are invalid in California if the schools espouse creation.

The Education Department's first target is the graduate school of the Institute for Creation Research, which had been offering (with state "approval") masters' degrees in four science fields since 1981. On March 16, 1990, the Department of Education denied ICR reapproval of its license to teach, effectively ordering the school to close. Earlier in the year, the Department issued a science framework document that declared evolution to be the only scientific theory to be taught in California's *public* schools. Now, observers see the ICR situation as a test

case in the Department's additional crusade to remove creationism from all *private* schools that teach creation as a valid scientific alternative to evolution.

"The Education Department's actions toward ICR, whose school, by the way, receives no state or federal monies, are outrageous, unconscionable, and unconstitutional in our free society, and we will appeal," declared Dr. Henry Morris, President of ICR. "We are a private school with a quality program and a distinguished science faculty, and we have the right to teach a creation model of origins to students who choose to come here."

A deeply concerned Dr. Paul Kienel, Executive Director of A.C.S.I. (Association of Christian Schools International), related to ICR the following exchange he had with Bill Honig, State Superintendent of Public Instruction: "I asked Mr. Honig if Christian high schools that teach creation could continue to grant science credits that could be transferred to public schools or accepted by state colleges.

All he answered was 'that it hasn't been a problem *yet*.'"

Dr. Morris of ICR challenged the Department's citing of the 1987 Supreme Court decision overturning Louisiana's balanced treatment law — which mandated the teaching of creation in the state's public classrooms — as justification for silencing creationism in California. First, said Dr. Morris, the Court case involved Louisiana's public schools not private; second, the court did not rule on the scientific validity of creationism (as the Department contends) — it merely declared that the state could not mandate that creation be taught; third, the court ruled that "teaching a variety of scientific theories about the origins of humankind...might be validly done."

"The future of academic freedom, religious freedom, and free speech in California's Christians schools is at stake and must be defended," declared Dr. Morris, "and Christian education is in jeopardy *everywhere* if the Department succeeds in its heavy-handed maneuvers."

ICR

## On Predicting Sagan's Orbits

How is it that Carl Sagan, "America's best-known space scientist," is so predictable in his public policy commitments? How is it that a person who claims to be led by "scientific evidence" regularly ends up defending the latest collectivist fad? From the portent of a nuclear winter to myths of environmental disaster, Sagan consistently arrives on the scene like a high-priest of scientism.

The high priest has recently spoken again. This time he has used his authority in astronomy to evaluate the scientific questions surrounding abortion — a nice leap.

In "Is it Possible to be Pro-Life and Pro-Choice?," Sagan and his co-author grieve that "minds are closed" on this issue. He claims to oppose the absolutism of both sides and offer a sane, open-minded, middle ground between all the "partisan flinging of accusations."

Now who could oppose sanity and the middle ground? Sagan and his co-author even confess their own humble open-mindedness on the issue: "We wrote this article to understand better what the contending views are and to see if we ourselves could find a position that would satisfy us both." Persuasive stuff. Oh, despite the breast beating about compromise and open-mindedness, the authors conclude that "we find Roe. v. Wade to be a good and prudent decision." Surprise, Surprise.

Sagan has to devote a few paragraphs to critiquing Pro-abortionists, such as questioning whether they would really support abortion just prior to delivery. Sagan concludes that Pro-

abortionists who would allow such late term abortions are simply dismissing an entire category of human beings, which is a move characteristic of the "injustice" of "sexism, racism, nationalism, and religious fanaticism" — a trendy slander of Christianity for good measure.

Nevertheless, the bulk of the critique is predictably aimed at Pro-life arguments.

First, Sagan suggests that no major group truly holds to a "right to life" since most people kill animals and plants daily. Pro-life advocates are primarily concerned with protecting human life. We are supposed to feel guilty for this, though, in fact, it is a Sagan-style collectivism which is responsible for most environmental damage.

Second, Sagan informs us that life does not begin at conception since it is an "unbroken chain dating back" long ago. This would be a beautiful smokescreen if it didn't impose his own religious outlook and equivocate between classes and individuals — minor difficulties for the open-minded.

Third, Sagan enlightens us with the fact that sperm, eggs, and fertilized eggs are each "alive." And since fertilized eggs require "certain circumstances" and often perish naturally, then "neither a sperm and egg separately, nor a fertile egg, is more than a *potential* baby." So if we don't grant special protection to sperm and eggs, then we shouldn't grant special protection to fertilized eggs. But the ridiculous premise is that an individual sperm is a potential baby. Did Sagan

miss health class? If an individual sperm is a potential adult, then is a hub cap a potential Porsche? No, of course not, and Sagan himself later concedes the difference between "genetic halves" and wholes.

Sagan even takes time to dance around Old and New Testaments (tripping over a mistranslation of Ex. 21:22 in the process).

The high priest continues his "open minded" case against the Pro-life position by labeling it an "outrageous posture." He describes the unborn child at points as "a parasite" that "sucks blood," a "worm," a "tadpole," as having a "reptilian face," a "piglike" face, and a "primate." Who else but someone drenched in the cultural myths of modern scientism could impose such a caricature?

These sorts of religious outbursts in the midst of a supposedly dispassionate analysis at least provide an answer to my original question. Why is Sagan so predictable? He, like us all, has basic commitments which dictate his conclusions.

The high priest of scientism is driven by a religious commitment, but he maintains the charade of "open-mindedness" since such an approach is much more culturally acceptable.

The important question is: which religious commitments are defensible and true? The important lesson is that the abortion debate, like so many others, is not ultimately fought in the field of science but in the field of ethics. And this is where Sagan will fail so miserably and predictably.

DMJ

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## Second Opinions

Dear Editors,

I'm so glad to receive *Antithesis*. It is one of the few publications that I try to read through and through. The articles are both thought provoking and enlightening. Thanks for the hard work. God bless you.  
Joe Richiusa  
Brooklyn, NY

Dear Editors,

I am very impressed with the scholarship shown throughout all the articles. The Church needs this kind of Biblical instruction and admonition. Thank you for the efforts put forth in this much needed ministry.

Chris Clark  
Montgomery, AL

Dear Editors,

Thank you for the sample copy of your debut issue of *Antithesis*. This is the magazine that I and many other Reformed pastors have been waiting for — one that specializes in the Van Til perspective. This promises to be a very fine publication and is sorely needed.

Rev. John Heaton  
Maitland, FL

Dear Editors,

Great publication! It reaffirms my position that our side is doing the serious thinking!

J. Robert Brame III  
Richmond, VA

Dear Editors,

Thank you for the complimentary first issue of *Antithesis*. Some of the articles have been of value to me in my attempts to provide a defense of the faith in a secular academic environment. I am pleased with what I have seen.

Daniel J. de Vries  
Worcester, MA

Dear Editors,

With respect to Mr. Greg Bahnsen's article in your first issue ("Church Government Briefly Considered" Vol. 1, No. 1), I must reply to his description of the Episcopal form of government.

First, he describes Episcopalianism as "the rule of the church by monarchical bishops." The word "monarchical" is less than accurate. At least in the American Episcopal church, local congregations exercise a degree of autonomy. While the priest is answerable to the Bishop, the congregation is not bound to obey directions from the Bishop. The local vestry, or

church board, makes most of the decisions for the congregation.

Next, he says the Bishop "need not be chosen by the people to be their leader, but can be appointed by a higher agency." This is entirely incorrect. When a bishop is to be chosen, a meeting composed of priests and laypeople, representing the parishes in their diocese, meet and elect a new Bishop. As for the "higher agency," there is no agency higher than the Bishop (except, of course, God, but I know that's not what he meant).

He then says that "authority thus rests in the one human priest at the top (a pope or archbishop)." Wrong again. In the American Episcopal church, there is neither pope nor archbishop. There is, however, a Presiding Bishop. But his role is mainly pastoral. He can neither appoint nor dismiss bishops or priests.

Bishops can be removed, but only by other Bishops meeting as the House of Bishops. And this removal process involves laypeople.

Normally, Mr. Bahnsen is very careful in his research. He really blew it in this article. May I suggest he contact an Episcopalian next time he feels moved to make such comments.

Jeffrey Needle  
Chula Vista, CA

## Cross-Ex

In your first issue of *Antithesis*, Dr. Greg Bahnsen states: "It is in the essentials of presbyterian government, found today in various Reformed churches, that we find the above Biblical points coming to their best expression." (*For the Record*, p. 58). I agree with this statement wholeheartedly, especially in its caution, i.e., "the essentials" of presbyterian government are praised, not their every codicil. Leaving aside the traditional wisdom to "leave well-enough alone," and with the highest regard for "the essentials" of the Reformed position, I would like to point out an area of presbyterian government, which, though minor, does not have the sanction of Scripture. The Presbyterian position holds that elders must be elected by the congregation. While I believe that this is a permissible method under certain circumstances, it is not required by Scripture, and in many cases may not be desirable.

### Election of Elders

The Presbyterian view that elders are elected by the congregation is

largely based upon Acts 6, where the "seven" were appointed to distribute food to widows, and Acts 14:23, where Paul and Barnabas elected elders ("by show of hands," as the case is made) for the churches of Lycaonia and Pisidia. In studying these and related passages, I come to a different conclusion, which is summarized below. (This is my personal view, and is not representative of the position of my denomination or my local church.)

### Acts 6

In this passage we are told that the apostles asked the church to "select from among [them] men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom," whom they could place in charge of the distribution of food to the Hellenistic widows. It is generally assumed that the seven were deacons, although the text does not specify that office or any other. All we know for certain is that the men were placed in charge of the distribution of material goods.

The fact that Philip and Stephen later performed other functions (baptizing in the one case and generally fulfilling the office of a preacher, or perhaps a prophet, in the other) may indicate that

these men had other gifts and/or offices, but does not in any way indicate that their appointment to "office" is recorded in Acts 6. On the contrary, we cannot argue that their preaching and baptizing is the proper fulfillment of their appointment to wait tables!

It is important to note what we cannot deduce from this passage. (1) We cannot deduce that church officers are appointed with the will of the congregation because we do not know if the seven were appointed to any church "office" in Acts 6.<sup>1</sup> They were appointed to wait tables, and no office is specified. While the traditional wisdom is that they were appointed deacons, the text does not specify, and the Scriptures nowhere limit

It is interesting to note that most Presbyterians would say that the seven were deacons and yet deny deacons the right to do the works recorded of Philip and Stephen. In any event, the seven are an unknown commodity. We do not know what offices they held, if any. All we can say for sure is that they were appointed to serve the church by means of the distribution of material goods, and to this service they were appointed by the will of the people. It is merely speculation that they were deacons.

the office of deacon to the ministry of material goods, or specify such a function. (2) Even if we assume these men were appointed to the office of deacon, we cannot transfer a protocol from this passage, on the alleged appointment of deacons, to the appointment of elders. The apostles made a clear distinction in kind between the ministry of food and the ministry of the word (Acts 6:2). Given this distinction, where do we get the right to use Acts 6 as a model for the election of an entirely different form of ministry? It would be a very dangerous form of interpretation to assume that these men were appointed deacons, to which the text gives no testimony, and then assume that the same procedure applies to elders, who minister to spiritual rather than to material needs.

#### *I Corinthians 16*

Yet Acts 6 is not the only passage that relates to the ministry of material goods. We have another example of the selection of men for such ministry in I Corinthians 16:3. There Paul tells the church that he intends to carry the Corinthian church's gift for the relief of the poor in Jerusalem with "whomever you may approve." Acts 6 and I Corinthians 16 show a pattern: the distribution of material goods is to be managed by representatives of those who give. This only makes sense, since it is consistent with a belief in private property and voluntary giving. If I wish to give over and above my tithe (which belongs to God and is to be managed by His officers), it is my prerogative to administrate those monies, *i.e.*, my gifts of charity, as I see fit, and to place whomever I wish in charge of them. (*See, e.g.*, Acts 5.) This is the message of Acts 6 and I Corinthians 16. It also conforms with reason.

#### *Acts 14:23*

This passage is often cited in defense of the election of elders. The English Bible tells us that "they," presumably Paul and Barnabas, "had appointed elders for them in every city." It is claimed that the word translated "appoint" implies "by show of hands," *i.e.*, by election. Thus says Calvin. *Institutes*, Book IV, Chapter 3, §15. So, it is presumed, that the appointment of elders follows the same lines as the appointment of the seven.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Here we must pause to consider the two this conclusion is based upon: first, that the seven were appointed church officers in Acts 6, which is entirely speculation; and second, that the appointment of one type of church officer, namely deacons, is applicable to the appointment of another type of church officer, namely elders. This too is entirely speculation.

There are several problems with Calvin's interpretation of Acts 14:23. First, it is not so clear that the word actually means "appoint by election." Bauer's *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* specifically disclaims this meaning in Acts 14:23. "[T]he presbyters in Lycaonia and Pisidia were not chosen by the congregations.... This does not involve a choice by the group; here the word means *appoint, install*." This is a lexical question that far surpasses my knowledge of Greek, but it ought to be noted that competent scholars disagree on the meaning of the word in this verse. We should be careful not to build a doctrine on a questionable reading of one verse.

Second, even if the word does mean appoint by election we cannot, on that basis alone, infer a congregational vote. The phrase "appoint by election" does not specify who is voting. It could easily be the apostles, or in the context of our local churches, the Session that votes. The text, even given Calvin's reading of "appoint," does not specify *who* votes. On the contrary, I think that reason argues against a congregational vote. It seems incredible to believe that the apostles would entrust to brand new converts, many of whom were just recently snatched from paganism, the awesome responsibility of electing their own spiritual leaders.

Third, Acts 14:23 is not the only verse on the appointment of elders. If we wish to decide who does the voting in Acts 14:23, assuming Calvin's reading for the sake of argument, we need to consult a passage that forces one interpretation or another. For instance, if the "appointing body" were composed of only one man and there was still an indication of a vote, we could be relatively certain that it was the congregation who voted.<sup>3</sup> However, in Titus 1:5 we read Paul's command to Titus to "appoint elders in every city, as I directed you." The word translated "appoint" here is an entirely different word and carries no connotation of election whatsoever. If the congregation were, as Calvin would say, the "voting body," we would expect to see the same word in Titus as we see in Acts 14:23. Its absence here pokes a big hole in the traditional Presbyterian interpretation. It seems clear to me that if "appoint" in Acts 14:23 does in fact mean "by election," it means "by the election of the apostles," and not "by the election of the congregation." This reading accords with the Titus 1:5 passage.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Certainly there need be no vote when only one ballot is to be cast.

<sup>4</sup>It is also consistent with the appointment of Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13.

Fourth, allowing the congregation a vote in appointing officers does not take into account the difference in kind between the ministry of what belongs to men, *i.e.*, material goods above and beyond the tithe, and the ministry of what belongs to God, *i.e.*, His word. Men have every right to manage the disbursement of their own funds. Men have no right to tell God how to manage His church.

Fifth, election by the congregation has severe practical problems. Unlike virtually any decision of the Session, there is no appeal from a congregational vote. If the congregation votes down a candidate for unscriptural reasons, shouldn't there at least be an appeal process? (Rather, I say, have the elders appoint the men, and the congregation can appeal their decision to Presbytery if they see fit.) Further, the congregation of your average Presbyterian church is a hodgepodge of doctrinal persuasions. How are we to entrust the discernment of qualities such as "holding fast the faithful word that is in accordance with the teaching that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict" to such (Titus 1:9)? I say it is unreasonable to do so, and God never intended it so. The elders are to judge the qualification of candidates and, with a majority vote of the Session, appoint them.<sup>5</sup>

#### **Appointment by the Session**

The Session is best qualified to appoint elders because they are: (1) presumably, the most spiritually mature; (2) the most in-tune with the needs and vision of the congregation as a whole; and (3) those whom God has given the responsibility, and therefore a degree of grace, to manage the affairs of the church. It is the Session's responsibility to select and train men for church leadership. It is also their responsibility to do this in a way that edifies and nurtures the church. If a Session determines that the best way, given their particular circumstances, is to have a vote, there is no Scriptural proscription. On the other hand, if the Session does not feel that a congregational vote is the best for their church, they may appoint the men in some other way. The Scriptures do not require them to have a vote. However, *where the Scriptures give this decision to the elders,*

<sup>5</sup>This does not preclude consulting the congregation's opinion, and possibly, *in the judgement of the Session*, deferring to it. There may be a place for that. On the other hand there may be a place for overriding the opinion of the congregation. These considerations are best left in the hands of those whom God has entrusted with the spiritual welfare of the church, *i.e.*, the elders, and not required by denominational standards.



*the denomination ought not to take it from them by legislating one method or the other.*

It seems clear to me that the biblical record supports the installment of elders by the judgment of the Session and the selection of men to administer material goods in whatever way the people desire. This accords with Scripture and with reason.

Greg Krembiel  
Laurel, MD

### ***Bahnsen Responds:***

Mr. Krembiel and I agree that the Biblically sanctioned form of church government is presbyterian — the point of my original article. Pushing the discussion a bit further now, however, Mr. Krembiel questions whether Scripture requires that the congregation take part in the process of choosing its elders. He believes this is permissible, but not usually preferable. I appreciate the spirit and thoughtfulness of his discussion.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Krembiel feels that in most cases, the Session is best qualified to make appointment of new elders for the congregation.<sup>2</sup> My article spoke of a two-step procedure in the selection of elders: certification of candidates by the governing board of elders<sup>3</sup> and selection by the congregation of those men to whom they are willing to submit. How does Scrip-

<sup>1</sup>His appeal to "reason" (e.g., the last sentence) as an authority in addition to Scripture is troublesome, though. "Reason" means many things both inside and outside of philosophical circles — from Aristotle's laws of logic, to the Goddess of the French Revolution, to what is alleged as "common sense." The Roman Catholic magisterium always felt "reason" was on its side. The Reformers found that unreasonable.

<sup>2</sup>This does raise the interesting question of how the original elders were to be chosen, if not by the congregation. Having the Presbytery unilaterally imposing officers on a congregation is episcopalian in nature.

<sup>3</sup>This answers Mr. Krembiel's concern that members of the church, holding a hodgepodge of doctrinal views, are not qualified to discern a candidate's doctrinal soundness or lack thereof. This is the very reason why within the presbyterian system a man who does not also pass the scrutiny of the elders may not serve. Mr. Krembiel's objection at this point seems to have confused presbyterianism (two-step procedure) with congregationalism (where the congregation does indeed have the unilateral authority to appoint elders).

ture direct us in the selection of congregational officers? The only passage which seems to answer that question in any detail is Acts 6 (the selection of original deacons), and accordingly, it is taken as the divinely approved paradigm for all church officers, despite Mr. Krembiel's resistance to that idea.<sup>4</sup>

Mr. Krembiel first denies that Acts 6 deals with the office of deacon because the passage does not "specify" (explicitly mention?) that office as such. This is a weak argument. What the passage describes certainly has the characteristics of an office (e.g., election, approval, authority), and the function of this corresponds to what Scripture teaches to be a main function of deacons. Indeed, the very word (in verb form) is found in verse 2. If something waddles like a duck and quacks like a duck, we should take it to be a duck; so it is with identifying deacons in Acts 6.

Mr. Krembiel secondly denies that the appointment of deacons in Acts 6 can be transferred as a protocol to the appointment of elders. His reasons are dubious, if not also theologically suspect. He resists applying the procedure for deacons to elders because his method of distinguishing between the offices of elder and deacon is to draw a hard and fast dichotomy between the realms dealt with by the two offices — a categorical contrast between the essential *kind* of things that pertain to the two offices. They are so different, according to him, that a procedure for selecting the one kind of officer would not at all be appropriate for the other. In particular, he divides the work of the elders and deacons sharply into "spiritual" and "material" needs — between what "belongs to God" and what "belongs to men"<sup>5</sup> —

<sup>4</sup>In Titus 1:5 Paul instructs Titus to appoint elders "in the manner" that Paul had "directed" him to follow, but the text does not inform us what that method was. The word for "appoint" is the very same as that used in Acts 6:3, from which I infer that the method was not unlike what we find in the Acts 6 (more detailed) passage. (And as Mr. Krembiel recognizes, the different verb used in Acts 14:23 can and usually does take the meaning of "elect.")

<sup>5</sup>There is a curious line of reasoning here, which seems to go like this: (1) Electing someone to office renders the offices representative in nature, but (2) representation is only appropriate in the realm of private property. Now since (3) the material goods and money given to the deacons are over and above the tithe (which is controlled by the elders), (4) they may be governed by principles pertaining to private property. Thus (5)

within the work of the church. This dichotomy is not supported by Scripture and is artificial. The offerings given to the church and used by the deacons — whether from tithes or not — just as much "belong to God" as the word of God handled by the elders. Ministering to the "material" needs of hurting brethren is just as surely a "spiritual" duty and benefit as is sharing Scripture with them.

If the false antithesis set up by Mr. Krembiel between the offices of elder and deacon is corrected, he loses his rationale for refusing to apply the procedure for selecting deacons to the selection of elders. I would argue that they both belong to the class of continuing church offices and, therefore, should have the one text which specifies a selection procedure applied to them both (in the absence of any Biblically based reason to the contrary). The authority exercised by the elders under Christ is very weighty indeed: the "power of the keys of the kingdom." Placing oneself under such authority by joining a church is a serious matter, one that is done voluntarily and can no more be compelled than can a profession of faith. Mr. Krembiel's preferred method of appointing elders (by those who are already elders) is well intentioned, but allows for the abusive possibility that the congregation will be ruled by some men against its will (involuntarily). Presbyterians have always opposed such potential tyranny — as well as the actual tyranny experienced under Rome — within the church of Christ.

election to office is appropriate only for deacons. The first two premises are critically vague or arbitrary — and not argued from Scripture anyway. Electing leaders indicates submission to them, but not necessarily the way in which they are to function or make their decisions (e.g. representatively). But even if deacons are representatives of contributors, is there absolutely no representative element in the work of the elders? Why is representation restricted to matters of private property? Are not the elders representatives of my spiritual interests and well-being (cf. Heb. 13:17)? The third and fourth premises are even weaker. It is unwarranted to think that diaconal distributions could not (or do not) come from the tithe. Moreover, offerings given to the church — whether tithes or free-will gifts — are no longer the contributor's private property or any longer controlled by him (even through a representative) anyway. Δ

# Forgive Us Our Trespases?

## A Biblical View of Civil Disobedience and Operation Rescue

**Operation Rescue advocates attempt to claim the moral high ground, but their arguments clearly fail to meet Biblical requirements**

**David G. Hagopian**

The drums beat on and on. As the fire is stoked and the metal turns to a scalding hue, parents lay their first born child in the fire-ridden arms of this god and then stand by stoically without so much as a grimace. Trum — trum — trum. No matter how loudly the drums beat, however, they cannot completely drown the cries for help which echo throughout the valley of Hinnom. And the drums beat on and on until the next parents come to offer their precious little sacrifice. And the drums beat on and on.

While modern Americans often scoff at the "barbarity" and "ignorance" of ancient peoples — like the Ammonites who sacrificed their firstborn to Molech — they too sacrifice their children to a Molech of sorts, a Molech of convenience. Even as Ammonite parents stoically watched their precious sacrifice cremated alive, so in our eminently humane country, parents burn their children, albeit with a saline solution. Instead of the valley of Hinnom, though, these modern sacrifices take place in the comfortable and sterile environs of a physician's office.

Whether with fire or saline solution, whether in the valley of Hinnom or a physician's office, the net result is the same: children are murdered. And the death toll continues to rise. Americans offered nearly one and a half million sacrifices just last year alone and nearly twenty-five million since Molech worship became legal in this country in 1973. In fact, before this day elapses, over four thousand such sacrifices will be made on the altar of modern convenience. And the drums beat on and on.

In an effort to halt this genocide, a group of deeply sincere individuals has arisen, laying claim to the name Operation Rescue.<sup>1</sup> Comprised of conservative Protestants, Roman Catholics, Mormons, and a modicum of Orthodox

<sup>1</sup> Since the dispute over "Operation Rescue" boils down to whether Scripture commands believers to "rescue" the unborn in the way Operation Rescue seeks to do so (i.e., "rescue missions"), "Operation Rescue" gets quite a bit of mileage from its name, thus sweetening the wells in its favor at the outset of any inquiry. Primarily for that reason and secondarily for the sake of brevity, we will hereafter abbreviate "Operation Rescue" as "O.R."

Jews, O.R. is an ecumenical pro-life movement which employs both legal and illegal means of attempting to save the life of the unborn. Such illegal means include violations of court-ordered injunctions and violations of trespass, loitering, assembly, and public access laws. O.R. also makes no qualms about resorting to physical intrusion, obstruction, and coercion prior to being arrested, passive resistance while being arrested, and dilatory tactics after being arrested.<sup>2</sup>

While many critics rightly question the legitimacy of O.R.'s illegal and physically coercive tactics, they should nonetheless recognize that O.R. has made valuable contributions to the American social landscape in the past few years. O.R., for example, has utterly exposed the fundamental hypocrisy of the American press and public<sup>3</sup> as well as law enforcement officers.<sup>4</sup> O.R. has also stripped the veneer off of organizations like Planned Parenthood which, for years, attempted to maintain a facade of neutrality, a facade of presenting "all of the options" to pregnant women. In addition to exposing individual and institutional hypocrisy, O.R. has also invigorated public debate on abortion and has added to the rolls of many traditional pro-life organizations. Even more importantly, O.R., along with sidewalk counsellors, has convinced a handful of women to bring their children to term.<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, O.R., to the shame of many Christians, has shown that while Christ is Lord of the believer's heart, His Lordship by no means ends there. Rather, Christ is Lord over all areas of life; and as Lord over all areas of life, Christ has given us directives in His Word which apply to all areas of life. Christianity, therefore, is a world-and-life-view which touches upon all of life, including legal, moral, social, and political issues like abortion. In short, it's time for the Christian community to commend O.R. for putting feet to the Christian faith.

But are those feet headed in the right direction? Are they marching the way King Jesus has commanded them to march in Scripture? Make no mistake about it: we should laud O.R.'s commitment to save the life of the un-

<sup>2</sup> For a general description of the tactics employed by O.R., see Terry, Randall A., *Operation Rescue*. (Pittsburgh, PA: Whitaker House, 1985), pp. 18, 124, 236-37; see also Belz, Mark, *Suffer the Little Children: Christians, Abortion and Civil Disobedience*, (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1989), pp. xi-xiv.

<sup>3</sup> The American press and public, for example, hail Nelson Mandela and the ANC (an individual and organization which accept the use of extreme violence to defy unjust laws) while the same press and public condemn Randall Terry and O.R. (an individual and organization which employ resistance methods to prevent extreme violence). See Hagopian, "Hailing Mandela," *Antithesis*, Vol. 1, No. 2, p.2.

Incidentally, Randall Terry no longer appears to be the leader of O.R. While Keith Tucci, a Pittsburgh minister, has reportedly succeeded Terry as the organizational director of O.R. (the de jure leader of O.R.), Joseph Forman (formerly second-in-command as the National Field Director of O.R.) appears to have become a de facto leader of sorts. Thus, it appears that some of O.R.'s "most prominent spokesmen are...heading down slightly separate roads." — "Decentralized Rescue Group Now Stressing Tow Facets," *World*, Vol. 5, No.4, pp.5-6, April 21, 1990.

<sup>4</sup> For an insightful analysis of the hypocrisy of law enforcement officials (and the media) see, William Allen (former chairman of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights), "Why No Outrage This Time?" *Citizen*, Vol.4, No. 3, March 1990.

<sup>5</sup> As of May 1989, Joseph Foreman claimed that O.R. had saved 250 lives. Foreman, Joseph, debate with David Hagopian, "Is Operation Rescue Biblically Justifiable?" (May 13, 1989). See the advertisement on p. 5 of this issue.

born. Yet, does the end of saving life justify any and all means of saving life? Specifically, does Scripture endorse the illegal and physically coercive tactics O.R. employs in order to save life?

In order to see that the illegal and physically coercive tactics O.R. employs are unbiblical, we must not turn to the emotionality, sincerity, or popularity of a particular position since emotionality, sincerity and popularity are fallible. Rather, we must turn to the infallible and supreme standard of Scripture, which is the believer's standard for all of faith and practice, for all that he believes and does. Scripture and Scripture alone is the standard of truth, a standard which provides us with clear guidelines for dealing with multi-faceted issues like civil disobedience and O.R.

While many O.R. proponents appeal to the "higher law," of Scripture to justify their illegality and physical coercion, their reasoning is superficial and fallacious. Sadly, it is also downright unscriptural. What does the "higher law" of Scripture say about our duty to obey human law? When, if ever, must Christians disobey the State?<sup>6</sup> And if Christians, under some circumstances, must disobey the state, does Scripture ever allow or require them, as private citizens, to coerce others in society physically to conform to a Christian ethic?

In the following study, we will answer those all-important questions by examining what the "higher law" of Scripture says about our obedience to the state. Thereafter, we will apply those principles to O.R. and analyze the arguments O.R. supporters proffer to support their cause, a task to which, Lord willing, we will return in the July/August issue of *Antithesis*.<sup>7</sup>

## I. A Biblical View of "Higher Law"

### A. An Overview: Two Errors Refuted

As we begin to examine the relevant Biblical principles regarding civil disobedience and O.R., we must answer the following question: when, if ever, must Christians disobey the state? The history of Christian thought reveals a whole host of answers to that question, two of which are mutually exclusive but equally erroneous.

#### 1. The Anabaptist Error

At one extreme is the view that Christians are never in principle to obey the state since the state itself is evil. This view was prevalent among the Anabaptists of the Reformation era. The sixth of the seven Anabaptist articles of Schleithem in 1527, for example, states that the magistrate's office is "carnal" and that Christians are to reject the sword

<sup>6</sup> This article will use the following terms interchangeably: "state", "(civil) government", "(civil) magistrate", "(civil) ruler", "(civil) authority".

<sup>7</sup> This article focuses on the main argument O.R. advocates proffer to support their cause, that they are forbidden to do what God commands and have no legal means by which they can obey God. Lord willing, the July/August issue of *Antithesis* will give us the opportunity to examine many of the subsidiary arguments O.R. supporters advance.

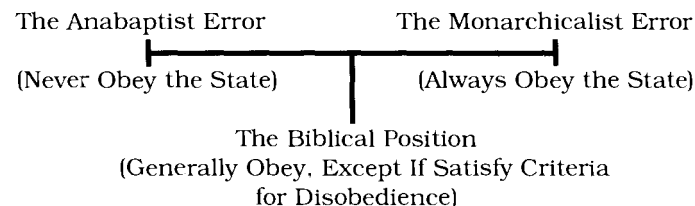
of the magistrate.<sup>8</sup> Thus, because the Anabaptists adhered to a radical sacred/secular distinction, they believed that the state was of the world. And because the state was of the world, the state was evil and was never, in principle, to be obeyed.

Over and against the Anabaptist error, Scripture teaches us that God establishes civil authority, vests it with legitimate albeit derivative authority, and generally commands Christians to obey that authority. Scripture, then, refutes the Anabaptist view that it is always wrong to obey the state.

#### 2. The Monarchalist Error

Just as some Christians have erroneously taught that it is always wrong to obey the state (i.e., that obedience is never justified), so other Christians have erroneously taught that it is always right to obey the state (i.e., that disobedience is never justified). This latter view was prevalent among those who attempted to defend the divine right of royalty, sometimes known as Monarchalists or Legitimatists.<sup>9</sup> While Scripture, to be sure, teaches that generally Christians are obligated to obey those in authority over them, Scripture also teaches that under certain narrowly prescribed circumstances, Christians are obligated to disobey the state and to obey God. That is, Christians are generally to obey the state except if they satisfy the Biblical criteria for disobeying the state.<sup>10</sup>

### Christian Views Regarding Obedience to the State



### B. A Detailed Study: Five Principles

Having refuted the Anabaptist and Monarchalist errors with a broad brush, we will now examine in detail what Scripture says about the Christian's obligation to obey the state. Obedience to the state can be summarized by means of five basic principles which, if properly understood, will guide Christians through the matrix of argu-

<sup>8</sup> Calvin, John, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1960 [1559]), Book IV, Ch. XX, pp. 1486-1487. See also the editorial comments of John T. McNeil, editor, at those pages.

<sup>9</sup> Dabney, R. L., *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, (Edinburgh, Scotland: The Banner of Truth Press, 1985 [1871]), p. 864. Dabney uses the name "Legitimatists" to describe those who advocated the divine right of royalty and taught, *inter alia*, "passive submission" to civil authority.

<sup>10</sup> Obedience to the state, as this article will make abundantly clear, is a general duty subject to exception. Thus, the presumption of Scripture is that believers are to obey the state unless they satisfy the Biblical criteria for disobeying the state (commandment to sin and exhaustion of legal alternatives). Generally speaking, then, Christians obey God by obeying the state.

ments for and against O.R. or any other “Christian” civil disobedience movement.

### 1. All Authority Belongs to God

Scripture unequivocally teaches that absolute authority belongs to God alone. According to the Christian worldview, God is the sovereign Creator and sustainer of all life, the one who possesses “all authority . . . in heaven and on earth” (Matt. 28:20).<sup>11</sup>

### 2. God Has Established Civil Authorities

But just as Scripture teaches that God alone has absolute authority, so it also teaches that God has established authorities on earth. This, of course, is just another way of saying that all human authority in every sphere of life ultimately comes from God: (1) at the individual level, each man is to exercise authority over his own life (self government, Gal. 5:23); (2) at the familial level, the husband is to exercise authority over his wife and parents over their children (family government, Eph. 5:22-6:4; Col. 4:18-21); (3) at the ecclesiastical level, elders are to exercise authority over their congregations and presbyteries (or their equivalents) over elders (church government, Acts 20:28; I Pet. 5:1-3; I Tim. 5:12; Heb. 13:17; Acts 15); (4) at the occupational level, employers are to exercise authority over their employees (occupational government, Eph. 6:5-9; Col. 4:22-5:1); and (5) at the civil level, magistrates are to exercise authority over their citizens (civil government, Prov. 24:21; Rom. 13:1-7; Tit. 3:1-2; I Pet. 2:13-17).

In addition to teaching us that God created different spheres of government in general, Scripture also teaches us that God created civil government in particular. In his epistle to the church in Rome, for example, Paul declared that “there is no authority except from God and those which exist are established by God” (Rom. 13:1). Wisdom personified continues much in the same vein when, in Proverbs, she opines, “[b]y me kings reign, and rulers decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles, all who judge rightly” (Prov. 8:15-16). In fact, God vests human rulers with legitimate authority such that elsewhere in Scripture they are called “gods” (Ex. 21:6, 22:8, Ps. 82:6), “ministers” (Rom. 13:4) and “servants” (Jer. 27:6, Rom. 13:6). These laudatory appellations signify that rulers have a mandate from God. They are vested with divine authority from God and serve as God’s representatives, acting in a representative capacity for Him. According to Scripture, then, rulers do not rule by chance, fortune or happenstance; they rule because God has ordained and established their rule by His sovereignty and upholds their rule by His providence.

### 3. Generally, God Commands Christians to Obey Civil Authorities

Because God has established civil authorities and vested them with legitimate, albeit derivative authority, Christians are generally commanded to obey those who are in authority over them. Proverbs 24:21, commands such obedience: “My son, fear the Lord and the king. Do not associate with those who are given to change.”<sup>12</sup> In Titus

<sup>11</sup> All Scripture references are to the NASB, The Lockman Foundation, (NY, NY: Collins Publishers, 1973 [1960]).

<sup>12</sup> It is amazing how Proverbs 24:21 appears only ten verses after Proverbs 24:11, the alleged proof text par excellence in favor of O.R. For more on the proper interpretation of Proverbs 24:10-11, see II, A, 1, e below.

3:1-2, Paul commands Christians to “be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be uncontentious, gentle, showing every consideration for all men.” Along the same lines, Peter commands the readers of his first epistle:

Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men....Honor all men; love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king (I Pet. 2:13-17).

Finally, with utmost clarity, Paul informs believers that their operating presumption — what they are generally to do — is to obey those in authority over them in the civil realm. In the first seven verses of the thirteenth chapter of Romans, he writes:

Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore, he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil. Wherefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience’s sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

Scripture not only informs us that we are generally to obey those in authority over us; it also tells us why we are to do so. First, Christians are generally to obey civil rulers because God commands them to do so. Thus, to obey such rulers is to obey God, and conversely, to disobey such rulers is to disobey God. That is why the apostle writes that “he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God” (Rom. 13:2). Second, God commands Christians to obey civil rulers because God will punish those who disobey (1) by often allowing the disobedient to suffer the penal consequences of their disobedience (i.e., suffer the sword of the state — Rom. 13:4), and (2) by ultimately subjecting the disobedient to divine punishment (i.e., they will receive condemnation upon themselves — Rom. 13:2). Third, God commands Christians to obey civil rulers because their obedience generally provides a sound Christian testimony. In the words of Peter, when Christians obey rulers, they silence the ignorance of foolish men (I Pet. 2:15).

### 4. Scripture Neither Permits Nor Requires Christians to Disobey Unjust Civil Authorities Who Merely Permit Evil

According to Scripture the Christian has a prima

facie obligation to submit to civil authorities, even when those civil authorities are evil and may even permit evil.<sup>13</sup> To be sure, Scripture admonishes rulers to rule righteously. Toward that end, rulers are commanded, among other things, to do justice and righteousness (Jer. 22:3), to deliver the oppressed and those led away to death (Ps. 82:1-4, Prov. 24:11-12), to rescue the needy and the destitute (Deut. 1:16,17), to judge impartially and turn their faces from bribes (Deut. 16:19).

Even though Scripture admonishes rulers to rule righteously, the fact remains that no human ruler ever perfectly accords with God's perfect standards of holiness, justice, and righteousness. Often, in fact, rulers are unjust and permit injustice to reign supreme. Sometimes God even raises a wicked ruler as a judgment on His people (Job 34:30; Hos. 13:11; Is. 3:4, 10:5; Deut. 28:29).

When Christians claim that they may disobey rulers because those rulers permit evil, they bespeak a profound ignorance of Scripture. Nowhere does Scripture permit or require Christians to disobey civil authorities merely because such authorities permit evil. Quite the opposite is true. When the state permits instead of commands evil, Christians can avail themselves of all legal means of effecting a godly end and/or of protesting or reforming an evil law. In other words, God clearly commands Christians to submit to rulers who permit instead of command evil. Several Biblical exemplars, recorded in Scripture for our instruction (Rom. 15:4), hollow out that claim.

To begin with, Scripture introduces us to the not-so-venerable King Saul, the first king of Israel. Toward the end of his reign, Saul was bent on wickedness. Even though David had already been anointed as the king-elect, even though Saul pursued David's very life, even though David could have ostensibly claimed the privilege of self-defense, David declared "...who can stretch out his hand against the Lord's anointed and be without guilt?...As the Lord lives, surely the Lord will strike him, or his day will come that he dies.... The Lord forbid that I should stretch out my hand against the Lord's anointed" (1 Sam. 16:9-13). Hence, even though Saul was wicked and abused his God-given authority, David refused to lift his hand against the Lord and against His anointed. David submitted to Saul's authority.

In addition to teaching us about Saul, Scripture also contains the example of Nebuchadnezzar who was the same wicked ruler who oppressed God's people by taking them into captivity in Babylon, a wicked ruler who performed wicked deeds and permitted evil of all kinds. Despite the fact that Nebuchadnezzar permitted such wickedness, Scripture declares in Daniel 2:21, 37-38:

[I]t is He [God] who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings....You, O King [Nebuchadnezzar], are the king

<sup>13</sup> To say that Christians have a prima facie obligation to obey the state is to say that the believer's general duty is to obey the state. Of course, this prima facie obligation is rebuttable: Christians must obey the state unless they satisfy the Biblical criteria for disobeying the state (commandment to sin and exhaustion of legal alternatives). Although Christians must submit to rulers who permit (instead of command) evil, Christians can still avail themselves of all legal means (1) of effecting a godly end or (2) of protesting and reforming an evil law. Nonetheless, state-permitted evil does not justify disobedience to the state.

of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, the strength and the glory; and wherever the sons of men dwell, or the beasts of the field, or the birds of the sky, He has given them into your hand and has caused you to rule over them all.

Through the prophet, God told Nebuchadnezzar that he was God's "servant," that all nations would serve him, and that God would curse any nation that refused to serve him (Jer. 27:5-8, 17). Not only was Nebuchadnezzar raised by God and called God's "servant;" he was also to be supported by the prayers of the very people he conquered. After being taken captive into Babylon, the people of God were commanded to pray for their conqueror: "And seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare" (Jer. 29:7).

Then there is the example of Nero, perhaps one of the most wicked tyrants the world has ever known. As the fifth Roman emperor after Julius Caesar, Nero died in A.D. 68. As such, he was the emperor who was most likely on the throne when Paul wrote Romans and Titus and when Peter wrote his first epistle. Yet in Romans, Titus, and First Peter, Paul and Peter commanded Christians to obey civil government. In fact, Paul and Peter wrote to quell any insurrectionism or revolutionary ambition on the part of the early church.

Some may protest at this juncture that the epistle to the Romans was written around A.D. 55 to 59, while Nero was still a "model ruler."<sup>14</sup> Yet, even were one to assume for argument's sake the veracity of this early dating theory, he still would be unable to prove that his conclusion follows on the basis of his premise. While it may be true that Nero's infamous blood bath of A.D. 64 was still a few years away, it is a mistake to think that the Roman Empire was "model" or that the Roman Emperor was a "model ruler." Make no mistake about it. Rome was no heaven on earth. The Roman Empire permitted all sorts of evil, including abortion. In fact, Rome specifically permitted abortion to such an extent that abortion was widely practiced and legally protected throughout the Roman Empire. So rampant was abortion in ancient Rome, that Michael Gorman notes in his historical study, *Abortion and the Early Church*:

Although the explicit references to abortion are rare in the Greek period and in Rome before the Empire, both pagan and Christian writers attest to its universality during the Empire. Rich and poor, slave and free, young and old aborted themselves and were given abortions. Various efforts, pagan and Christian, were made to limit abortion, although no legislation making abortion itself a crime in the Roman Empire was enacted until the third century.<sup>15</sup>

So even assuming an early dating of Romans, abortion was rampant in the Roman Empire precisely because the state permitted it even as in our present era.

<sup>14</sup> No O.R. advocate has articulated this objection. In order to construct and refute the strongest possible arguments in favor of O.R., however, this argument will be addressed.

<sup>15</sup> Gorman, Michael J., *Abortion & the Early Church: Christian, Jewish, & Pagan Attitudes in the Greco-Roman World*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1982), p. 27.

Yet even though civil authorities permitted abortion to such an extent that it was universally practiced throughout the Roman Empire, New Testament writers did not issue a call to civil disobedience; rather, they explicitly commanded Christians to obey the very civil authorities who permitted abortion and who promulgated and enforced other evil statutes and decrees! Scripture, then, takes great pains to teach us that we must obey civil rulers who may even permit abortion.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, Scripture provides no safe harbor for those who, contrary to Scripture, teach that Christians may disobey rulers who merely permit evil. On this score, Calvin rightly observes that the propensity of rulers to sin and to allow others to sin is no reason for Christians to fail to submit to them. Because God has appointed rulers, however much they may fall short of their divine appointment, the Christian must not on that account cease to cherish what belongs to God.<sup>17</sup>

Those who claim that Christians may disobey rulers who fall short of their divine appointment by merely permitting evil have also not thought through the logical implications of their position. Were state-permitted evil to justify disobedience, Christians could constantly disobey civil rulers, since fallible human rulers, in one way or another, will usually (if not always) fall short of God's perfect justice by permitting evil in one sphere or another. Followed to its logical conclusion, therefore, the notion that state-permitted evil justifies disobedience leads down the slippery slope to continual rebellion. Scripture endorses no such absurdity. And praise God for that.

### **5. Christians Are Required to Disobey Man Only When They Are Commanded to Sin and Only When They Have No Legal Means by Which to Obey God**

If Scripture neither permits nor requires Christians to disobey civil authorities who merely permit evil, may Christians ever justifiably disobey authorities? An accurate view of God's higher law, unlike the distorted view echoing in some corners, reveals that Christians must disobey civil authorities only when such authorities command Christians to sin and only when Christians cannot legally obey God.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> At this juncture, some O.R. advocates may be tempted to respond by erroneously accusing their theological opponents of fallaciously appealing to silence when they argue that Romans 13, Titus 3, and 1 Peter 2 do not issue a call to civil disobedience. O.R. advocates who argue in this way need to understand two important points. First, an appeal to silence is fallacious only when the party articulating it bears the burden of proof and seeks to subvert that burden by appealing to silence. This article, however, has explicitly argued that Christians are subject to a general duty, operating presumption, or prima facie obligation to obey the state. In other words, properly understood, Scripture places the burden of proof on those who disobey the state to prove that they meet the Biblical criteria for disobeying. Thus, even assuming this argument is an appeal to silence, it is not a fallacious appeal to silence since O.R. advocates themselves and not their opponents bear the burden of proof. Second, due to the explicit discussion of the historical context of these passages and the explicit injunction to obey civil authorities these passages teach, the argument articulated in the article is not an appeal to silence in the first place. Thus, the argument given in the article is neither fallacious nor an appeal to silence.

<sup>17</sup> Calvin, John, *New Testament Commentaries*, trans. by T. A. Smalls (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972 [1555]), Vol. 10, p. 206 (commentary on 1 Tim. 2:2).

<sup>18</sup> The two criteria mentioned in this article (commandment to sin and exhaustion of legal alternatives) are really two perspectives of

### **a. Rulers Must Command Christians to Sin**

Christians are obligated to disobey rulers when those rulers command them to sin. Since we can sin by doing that which God has commanded us not to do (sin by commission) or by failing to do that which God commands us to do (sin by omission), Christians must disobey rulers only (1) when they are commanded to do what God forbids (i.e., commanded to sin by commission), and/or (2) when they are forbidden to do what God commands (i.e., commanded to sin by omission).

#### *Commanded to Do What God Forbids*

As demonstrated above, Christians are not permitted or required to disobey human authorities when those authorities merely permit or tolerate evil. If Christians, however, are commanded to do what God forbids, then they must obey God rather than man. Several Biblical exemplars substantiate this principle.

First, Pharaoh commanded the Hebrew midwives and Moses' parents to kill Hebrew male children (Ex. 1:15-22), a command that contradicted the law of God (Gen. 9:6). Exodus 1:22 says that, "...Pharaoh commanded all his people saying, 'Every son who is born you are to cast into the Nile, and every daughter you are to keep alive.'" Because Scripture forbade unjustified killing, the Hebrew midwives and Moses' parents were commanded to do what God forbade. As such, they were obligated to obey God rather than man.

Second, we learn the same Biblical truth from the fire-tested faith of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego who were commanded to bow their knees to a false god (Dan. 3:1-30), a command which contradicted the law of God (Ex. 20:3-6). In Daniel 3:4, for example, we clearly see that the three Hebrew youths were commanded to violate Scripture: "Then the herald loudly proclaimed: 'To you the command is given, O peoples, nations and men of every language, that at the moment you hear the sound of the horn...you are to fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar has set up.'" Because God forbade idolatry, and because Nebuchadnezzar commanded the Hebrew youths to commit idolatry, the Hebrew youths were obligated to obey God rather than man.

Third, the king of Jericho commanded Rahab to turn over the Hebrew spies she was harboring (Josh. 2:3), a command that contradicted God's demand of her in the situation since it would have made her an accomplice to murder. The text explicitly states that "...the king of Jericho sent word to Rahab, saying, 'Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered your house....'" Because she was commanded to sin, she was obligated to obey God rather than man.

Fourth, Herod commanded the magi to report the whereabouts of the Christ child (Matt. 2:1-12) so that Herod could ostensibly worship the Christ child (although Herod really wanted to kill the child). Note that God, by special revelation, commanded the magi not to return to Herod: "And having been warned by God in a dream not to return

a single criterion. Properly understood, the command to sin must place the believer in the situation (dilemma) of choosing between God or man. Thus, those who cede the first criterion (commandment to sin) and not the second (exhaustion of legal alternatives), as Foreman did during our debate, fatally misunderstand Scripture at this juncture. The "criteria" are separated in this article only for the sake of pedagogical clarity.

to Herod, they departed for their own country by another way" (Matt. 2:12). Since Herod commanded the magi to do that which God forbade, the magi were obligated to obey God rather than man.

The Biblical narrative, then, is exceptionally clear: the Hebrew midwives/Moses' parents, the Hebrew youths, Rahab, and the magi were all commanded by force of law to do what God clearly forbade. As such, they were obligated to obey God and not man.

#### *Forbidden to Do What God Commands*

Just as Christians are obligated to disobey man when they are commanded to do what God forbids, so they are obligated to disobey man when they are forbidden to do what God commands. At least two Biblical exemplars corroborate this point.

First, the satraps of King Darius cajoled him to enact a binding law which forbade others, including Daniel, to pray to anyone other than the king (Dan. 6:1-30). Because we are commanded to worship God alone, Daniel was forbidden to do what God commanded. As such, he was obligated to obey God rather than man.

Second, the Sanhedrin forbade the apostles to evangelize in Jerusalem (Acts 4-5), even though Christ commanded the apostles to do so in Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8. In Acts 5:28, the Sanhedrin proclaim: "...We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name [Jesus]..." At this juncture, Peter and the apostles uttered one of the most frequently misquoted verses in all of Scripture: "We must obey God rather than man" (Acts 5:29).

Those who appeal to Acts 5:29 to support their civil disobedience often fail to exert exegetical sensitivity when they ignorantly rationalize their disobedience by reading into this text that which it does not teach. As we have already seen, Scripture does not endorse the notion that Christians may disobey rulers who merely permit evil. Many who advocate Christian disobedience interpret this verse to mean that any time man's law falls short of God's law, we may disobey man and obey God. But is that what Acts 5:29, understood in context, really teaches?

Read in light of the general context of Scripture as a whole (see the preceding analysis), and in light of the particular context of Acts 4 and 5, Acts 5:29 teaches that when one is put in a position where he must either choose between obedience to God or obedience to man, he must then obey God rather than man. In other words, in order to disobey man, the Christian must face a genuine dilemma. Hence, Acts 5:29, rightly understood, teaches us that the believer is obligated<sup>19</sup> to disobey man's law only when man's law contradicts God's law, that is, only when the Christian is put in a position of choosing between man's law or God's law. Of course, this is just to say that before the Christian Biblically disobeys the state, he must have no legal means by which he can obey God. And this brings us to the second Biblical criterion Christians must satisfy before they dis-

obey the state: the duty to exhaust all available means of legal recourse.

#### **b. Christians Must Exhaust All Available Means of Legal Recourse**

Just as Scripture teaches that Christians who disobey rulers must be commanded to sin, so it also teaches us that those who disobey must have no other legal means by which they can obey God. As we saw above with Acts 5:29, the Christian is obligated to disobey the state only when he faces a situation where he must choose between obeying God or man, when there is no tertium quid, no third way out. Remember that in Acts 1:8, Christ commanded the apostles to evangelize in Jerusalem, then in Samaria, and then in the remotest parts of the earth. In Acts 4-5, the Sanhedrin forbade the apostles to evangelize in Jerusalem as Christ had specifically commanded. They had no alternative but to disobey man and to obey God.

We have already seen that God established civil rulers and commands us to obey such rulers, even when they permit evil. If Scripture really teaches us that our operating presumption is to obey those in authority over us, then Christians must try to work within the system before they resort to rebelling against the system. If, for example, saving the life of the unborn is your goal, and if you can save life legally, then as a Christian you must forego illegality and save life legally. This, of course, is just another way of saying that disobedience, for the Christian, is always a last resort.

This important truth, though, not only follows from an accurate interpretation of Acts 5:29 and by good and necessary consequence from the presumption of obedience to the state outlined above; it is also taught by means of several Biblical exemplars. One need only think of Daniel's diplomatic request (Dan. 1:8-16), Paul's judicial appeal (Acts 25:1-27), Moses' confrontation with Pharaoh (Ex. 5:1-21), Obadiah's legislative reform (1 Kg. 18:3-16), Ezekiel's legal public protest (Ezek. 4:1-5:17), and Esther's self-humiliation (Esth. 5:1-2). While it is true that many of the individuals named above eventually turned to disobedience, they first tried to work within the system before they rebelled against the system.

Against the backdrop of these Biblical exemplars, even one O.R. supporter admitted earlier in his career that a "veritable arsenal of Scriptural tactics has been supplied to the believer in order to stay him from the last resort of rebellious confrontation."<sup>20</sup> With poetic prose, this O.R. supporter continues by asserting:

Though tyranny may incline zealous disciples toward libertarian activism, though godlessness may provoke grief in their bowels of compassion, though the barbarism of inhuman humanism may rankle their wrathful ire, believers have a Scriptural man-

**...Continued on page 33**

<sup>19</sup> At the outset of his opening statement, Foreman claimed that he was "ambivalent" and "torn" as to whether the command to disobey was required (obligatory) or permitted (optional). In light of the fact that Acts 5:29, understood in context, is rather clear ("must"), Foreman's ambivalence was inexcusable. Also as one who chose to defend O.R. in a public debate, Foreman should have thought through this foundational issue ahead of time.

<sup>20</sup> Grant, George, *The Changing of the Guard: Biblical Principles for Political Action*, (Ft. Worth, TX: Dominion Press, 1987), p. 159. Of course, Grant may very well respond that there are no legal alternatives for the particular baby about to be killed. For an analysis of this response, see II, B, below.

# John Knox: Watchman of Scotland

## An Overview of Scottish Presbyterian History — Part Three

**Knox finally  
returned to  
Scotland only  
to battle  
compromise and  
Queen Mary in  
an effort to ex-  
tend Biblical ref-  
ormation among  
his people.**

L. Anthony Curto

### Establishing A Protestant Nation

John Knox returned to Scotland on May 2, 1559, when the political and religious climate was stormy. War clouds were on the brink of bursting. The town of Perth had become Protestant, and this provoked Mary the Queen Regent (Mary of Guise) to take some ill-advised actions. Mary summoned all the Protestant preachers to appear before her in Sterling on May 10, 1559. The Protestant Lords

responded to her demand by assembling an unarmed army of nobles and gentry who marched from Perth to Sterling in support of their preachers. The Protestant Lords also sent Erskine of Dun ahead to Sterling to speak with the Queen Regent about the matter and to assure her that they did not intend any evil.

The Queen Regent, wanting to accomplish her own end, persuaded Erskine to have the Protestant army remain in Perth while she reconsidered the matter. Erskine sent word back to Perth informing the Lords of the Queen's stated intention. The Protestants were divided as to what to do. Some believed the Queen was lying. Others believed that they could not doubt the Queen's promises or show contempt for the Laird of Dun by not following such instructions. The Lords decided to wait to see what further action the Queen would take.

On his arrival in Scotland, Knox heard about the state of affairs in Perth, after just two nights in Edinburgh, travelled to Dundee where he requested of the Lords, "that he might be permitted to assist his brethren, and to give confession of his faith with them."<sup>1</sup> Permission was granted to him, and he then set out for Perth. In a letter written May

2, 1559 to a Mrs. Anna Locke, Knox writes, "I see the battle shall be great; and I am come, I praise my God, even in the brunt of the battle. My fellow-preachers have a day appointed to answer before the Queen Regent, the 10th of this instant, when I intend, if God impede not, also to be present; by life, by death, or else by both, to glorify His Holy Name, who thus mercifully hath heard my long cries. Assist me, sister with your prayers, that now I shrink not when the battle approacheth."<sup>2</sup> When Knox arrived in Perth, Sir James Croft reports that he became the center of the movement,<sup>3</sup> even though he was still not sure what lay ahead; at this time, he was "uncertain as yet what God shall further work in this country, except that I see the battle shall be great, for Satan rageth even to the uttermost."<sup>4</sup>

Knox, then, did not hesitate to jump right into the thick of controversy. Within two days of Knox's arrival, the Queen Regent, hearing that Knox had returned to Scotland, put him to the horn (declared him a rebel).<sup>5</sup>

When the 10th of May finally arrived, Knox reached Perth. The Queen Regent, realizing that the Protestant preachers did not arrive, as she had demanded, declared them all rebels and under the pain of rebellion, prohibited any man to assist, comfort, receive, or maintain them in any way.<sup>6</sup> Erskine quickly left Sterling and returned to Perth to warn his brethren. The Protestants of Perth were enraged, many felt they had been betrayed and deceived.

The next day Knox preached concerning the idolatry of the Mass. In this sermon, Knox spoke of the odiousness of idolatry to God, of God's commandment to destroy all idols, and of the Mass as an abomination to God. Shortly after Knox finished the sermon, a foolish priest attempted to serve a Mass in Perth, erecting an altar with an image upon it. A young boy, so taken back by the scene, cried, "This is intolerable! When God by His Word hath plainly damned idolatry, shall we stand and see it used in despite?"<sup>7</sup> At this, the priest struck the young boy, who retaliated by throwing a stone and breaking the idol. Thereafter, the enraged crowd began breaking all that had to do with idolatry in the town.

The multitude became so inflamed that the preachers, magistrates, and nobles could not contain them.<sup>8</sup> Knox refers to this mob that destroyed not only the altar but also three Catholic monasteries in Perth as "the Rascal Multitude"<sup>9</sup> Neither Knox nor the leaders in Perth incited the destruction of churches or monasteries. They believed these remnants of idolatries should be peacefully converted and their churches used for the true and proper worship of God.

A few days later on May 31, 1559, the Protestant Lords also entered into a new covenant known as the Perth Covenant. The Lords reaction to the covenant reads: "The whole congregation shall consider, assist, and convene

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* note on p. 163

<sup>3</sup> Reid, W. Stanford. *The Trumpeter of God*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982) p. 169

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Knox, *The Reformation*, p. 163

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* p.164

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* p.163-164

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* p.164

<sup>1</sup> Knox, J., *The Reformation in Scotland* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982) p. 163



together to the defense of the said congregation or person troubled, or shall not spare labor, goods, substance, bodies, and lives in maintaining the liberties of the whole congregation...."<sup>10</sup>

The Queen Regent was infuriated by the action of the multitude in Perth. She vowed to destroy the city and all who lived in it. Then she burned and salted the city as a reminder to all what would happen to those who resisted her authority.

Once again the Protestants sent Erskine to speak with the Queen. He requested that the preachers be allowed to debate with the Catholic clergy on the points of dispute. The Queen's response was to summon all of the Scottish nobility to assist her in putting down such a noxious rebellion. Knox then addressed a letter to the Queen which began, "to the generation of Antichrist, the Restilent Prelates, and their Shavelings within Scotland."<sup>11</sup> In this letter he warned that such continued action would bring only further fighting and destruction of the realm.

In the days which ensued, many nobles began to join the Protestant cause under the leadership of the Earl of Glendairn. Realizing the growing Protestant threat, the Queen sent Lord James Stewart (a Protestant) to try and persuade his brethren to return home. Stewart succeeded in bringing a settlement to the turmoil and secured from the Queen Regent a promise not to garrison French troops in Perth in exchange for the Protestants promise to disband peacefully.

Even after this settlement, Knox sought the freedom "to blow the Master's trumpet."<sup>12</sup> He knew that if God's people had the opportunity to proclaim His Word freely that God would further reform of all of Scotland.

Despite the settlement Stewart received, the Queen Regent very quickly broke her part of the bargain. She claimed she was not bound to keep promises made to heretics. Accordingly, she sent French troops to occupy Perth causing the Lords of the congregation to flee. At this, Lord James Stewart threw in his full support to the Protestants and became their most ardent leader.

After occupying Perth, the Queen turned her attention to St. Andrews. She believed that if she could take this Protestant stronghold, then she would break the backbone of the Protestant rebellion. The Protestants, however, were able to muster enough support to hold the Queen at bay.

During this time Knox continued to preach with vigor. In another letter to Mr. Locke he writes "the long thirst of my wretched heart is satisfied in abundance, that is above my expectation for now forty days and more, hath my God used my tongue in my native countrie, to manifest His glorie...."<sup>13</sup>

For some time the fighting continued between Mary of Guise, with her French mercenaries, and the Lords of the Congregation. Knox and others had sought the help of the English, which finally came in January of 1560. A treaty was signed in February 1560 between England and the Lords, in which the English swore to help their neighbors rid themselves of the French. The result was the treaty of Edinburgh in which Mary the Queen Regent agreed to

evacuate the French troops from Scotland.

Not too long after this time, the Queen Regent died and final preparations were pursued to evacuate Scotland of French troops. The Estates of Scotland appointed a delegation to settle the question of religion in Scotland. Knox returned to St. Giles Cathedral and began preaching a series of sermons on the book of Haggai. He called for a complete rebuilding of the church in Scotland patterned after the clear direction of the Word of God. Knox had led the church to a great victory, and Scotland could now officially become Protestant and possibly even establish a Reformed church. Yet the war was far from over. Like the children of Israel, the people had crossed the Jordan River but now came the difficult task of uprooting the inhabitants of the land. The treaty of Edinburgh left room for division. Mary, Queen of Scotland (the daughter of Mary of Guise) and her husband, Francis of France, along with several Scottish nobles, did not see the treaty as giving authority to the Scottish Parliament to establish a national religion, but Knox and others did.

## Establishing a Confession and Book of Discipline

The battle for Reformation in Scotland arose on many fronts and was motivated in a variety of ways. Some participants were motivated by a conviction that all things must be measured by the Word of God. Others fought simply for money and fame. Because of this, the victory obtained by the Scottish Lords brought division in the Protestant ranks. Knox had come from common-folk stock, and most of his followers were from the same "middling sort."<sup>14</sup> The upper nobility, though, saw Knox as an extremist, not willing to adopt a more irenic course of change.

Within just a few months of the Queen Regent's death, Knox and a few collaborators drew up a Confession of Faith to present to Parliament for ratification. Calvin's catechism and the Geneva English congregation's confession clearly formed the Foundation for this Scottish Confession. Moreover, though the final form of the Confession was presented to Parliament on August 17th 1560, the first draft was ready as early as four days after the Queen Regent's death on June 10th, 1560. The real significance of the Confession was its regard for the Scottish Church, especially as the Scottish church sets itself over against the teaching and church of Rome. According to the Confession, the Scottish church was the most reformed church in existence.<sup>15</sup>

The opponents of the Confession tried to stop its ratification by suggesting that, according to the term of the treaty of Edinburgh, Parliament had no right to adopt such a document without consulting with Queen Mary in France. Knox and others, on the other, hand argued that Confession was legitimately adopted because the Parliament which had been duly called was the most representative Parliament ever held in Scotland. This Parliament, more than any other, genuinely spoke for the people. In the end, Knox's

<sup>10</sup> Lunsden, p. 37

<sup>11</sup> Reid, *Trumpeter* p. 170

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* p.171

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* p.174

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* p.191

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* p.193

group prevailed, and the confession of Faith was ratified.

When Mary and Francis were informed of Parliament's affirmation of the Confession, they predictably rejected Knox's understanding of the treaty of Edinburgh. In fact, Francis sent a letter back to the Parliament in Scotland to the effect that he was disappointed by their actions and would be sending delegates from France to assemble a true Parliament with the view of setting matters straight. Needless to say, this caused much consternation among the Protestants for they knew that Francis was a sworn enemy of the Protestant cause.

The ratification of the Book of discipline faced a more difficult road than the Confession had. Whereas, the Lords really did not have much to lose as a result of the Confession, they did have much to lose if the Book of Discipline were ratified. The Book of Discipline itself was a plan for church organization and government. The battle over ratification came as a result of the Book's proposal for financing the church. It proposed that all lands which belonged to the Catholic church should be turned over to the Reformed church for its use. This move would devastate the aristocracy, and so most of them resisted the Book's ratification for three particular reasons. First, if the Reformed church controlled the finances, this would give more power to the Burgesses and Lairds of Scotland (middle class). Second, if the land were confiscated this would mean that the aristocratically controlled government would lose monies. Thirdly, if the Book were adopted, it meant the virtual end to Roman Catholicism in Scotland.

Unlike the Confession, Parliament did not adopt the Book of Discipline, and this was a serious blow for Knox. Yet God, in His providence, had led the Lords of the Congregation to form a General Assembly of the Church which did adopt the form of Government and other provisions of the Book of Discipline. Knox exhorted the assembly "that we should constantly proceed to reform all abuses, and to plant the ministry of the church, as by God's Word we might justify it, and then commit the success of all to our God in whose power the disposition of the true kingdom stands."<sup>16</sup>

Another blow came to Knox in the latter part of December 1560. His wife, Marjory, died. This was tremendous heartbreak to Knox, for he had greatly depended upon her in all of his work.

## The Day Of Thy Watchman Cometh

Mary's husband, Francis, died in the late 1560's. This meant that in all probability Mary would soon be returning to Scotland. Knox was greatly concerned, since he knew the potential danger that Mary's return signified. For that reason, he turned down a request to be a superintendent in the church of Scotland.<sup>17</sup> As the Pastor of the largest church in the capital city of the land, he was close

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* p. 207

<sup>17</sup> The Book of Discipline had provided for a temporary administrative office of superintendent. Some have construed this a quasi-episcopalianism. Knox and others appeared to accept this office on a temporary basis due to the fact that there was a dearth of Reformed ministers. The circumstances necessitated some form of supervision. The superintendents were not specially ordained to this task; they were under the oversight of the General Assembly.

to the government, and believed that he would be in a better position to influence the direction of affairs by his preaching, if he stayed there. Knox believed that God had called him to his post, and he strove to be faithful to that calling. Also this position brought great comfort to others in the Protestant cause. The watchman was at his post, and who better than Knox could discern the impending danger?

When news of Mary's return reached Scotland, about 20,000 of her supporters wanted to meet her at Aberdeen. From there they hoped to take Edinburgh by storm. Parliament was scheduled to convene on May 20, 1561; Mary's supporters believed that with the Queen by their side, they could retake control of the government.<sup>18</sup> When the Protestants got word of this, they gathered and drew up a petition to present to the Lords of the Privy Council. They requested "That God's Evangel may be publicly within this realm preached; the true ministers thereof reasonably sustained; Idolatry suppressed, and the committers thereof punished, according to the Laws of God and Man."<sup>19</sup> The Privy Council passed the Petition and reaffirmed its commitment to Protestantism. Knox saw this as Satan's second falling in Scotland.

Mary did not want to return to Scotland, and most of the Scottish people did not want her to come. August 19, 1561 was a sad day for both Mary and the people. Mary landed in Leith with a consort of French counselors to help her whip the Scots back into line. Since Mary was now unmarried, some of the Protestant nobility thought that a marriage with one of them might solve all their problems. Knox was appalled by such compromise and spoke against it. This once again divided the Protestants. Mary was able to further divide the Protestants when she made plans to celebrate the Mass in her private chapel. Knox once again sounded a word of warning that such actions would not be tolerated. Many nobles could not see how private Masses might be harmful, but Knox's keen eyes and wisdom saw the coming danger. He continued to sound the alarm about the dangers of compromise, and this stand finally brought him face to face with Mary.

After his first interview with Mary, Knox was discouraged about the future of the Reformation. He was not discouraged because he saw Mary as such a strong adversary but because of the compromises which were developing. In a letter to Mrs. Locke on October 2, 1651, He writes "that he wished he could die, since there was no hope of stopping this unless we would arme the hands of the people in whome abideth yitt some sparks of God's feare."<sup>20</sup> He also stated, in a letter to Calvin, "not the vehemence of the preachers, but the faint heartedness of the nobles, would destroy the Reformation.... I never felt before how weighty and difficult a matter it is to contend against hypocrisy under the guise of piety."<sup>21</sup> Knox did not realize how mightily the Lord was using him as the Watchman of the nation. A noble named Randolph, writing to a friend just a short time earlier, states, "I assure you the voyce of one man is able in one hower to put more lyf in us than 500 trumpettes contynually blustering our eares."<sup>22</sup> Reid summarizes this period well when he writes that even

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* p. 209

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* p. 216

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

"Among the middle classes, Knox's constant 'Blowing of the Master's Trumpet' had had its effect in bringing into existence a reformed church despite aristocratic lukewarmness and opposition."<sup>23</sup> He had armed the people who still feared the Lord. Now his job would be to maintain and extend this great blessing of God.

## Blasts from the Master's Trumpet

Although, Queen Mary had denied more than once that she intended to suppress Protestantism and revive Roman Catholicism in Scotland, history reveals that these denials proved false. Mary had grown up in Catholic France under the tutelage of the Catholic Guise family. She continually withheld financial support from the Protestant ministers; she continually encouraged the celebration of the Mass not only in her own private chapel but also in other public locations, in violation of the law; she persuaded the Pope to appoint a new Bishop of Dunblane; she continually appointed Catholics to positions on her council. There is also evidence that she secretly corresponded with Philip II of Spain and the Pope in order to plot the overthrow of Protestantism in Scotland. The major difficulty in all of this was that most of the Lords and nobles either did not believe this to be the case or knew it to be true but nonetheless sided with the Queen. John Knox was aware of what was transpiring and remained undaunted, even in the face of much criticism.

Knox had the support of the Burgesses and Lairds of Scotland. He also had the support of the Burgh council in Edinburgh. More than once the Burgh council came to Knox's aid by running interference between him and the Queen. The General Assembly showed its support of Knox by appointing a colleague, John Craig, to work with him in his reform work in Edinburgh. Moreover, John Cairns had been appointed as reader in St. Giles, thus making a team of three fully committed men working for the common cause of Christ and the Reformation.

The situation with the Lords and nobles was different. Those who had joined the cause out of conviction were generally on Knox's side, but often stood back because they feared retaliation. Knox's willingness to push forward regardless of consequences intimidated many of the Protestant Lords. In all fairness, some simply disagreed with Knox. This disagreement was probably due to the fact that they did not see the danger as clearly as Knox had. Others, who had joined the cause for selfish gain, would side with the group who promised them the most reward. Queen Mary was able to use this to her advantage. Two notable examples of this situation among the Lords are seen in Lord James of Moray and Lord Maitland of Lethington. Lord James was especially blind to Mary's craftiness. This blindness resulted in his being driven out of Scotland just prior to Mary's abdication. Lord Maitland, on the other hand, was a constant thorn in Knox's side. He fought constantly against the Book of Discipline for financial reasons.

Mary repeatedly used these differences to further her ends. Her true obstacle was John Knox. On a number of occasions, Mary ordered Knox before her for statements he made in sermons. Each time God gave Knox wisdom to answer these accusations, and Mary was left frustrated.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* p. 221

She finally prohibited Knox from preaching altogether after he preached a sermon on Isaiah 26: 13-21, in which he demonstrated that all political authority was derived from God and warned that those who persecuted the church of Christ misused that authority. Mary and her new husband (Lord Darnley) were angered by those statements and called Knox before them. When Knox refused to rescind his statements, the Queen forbade him from preaching. At this point the Edinburgh Burgh council stepped in and issued a statement in behalf of Knox; it reads that "they will no manner of way consent or grant that his mouth be closet, or he discharged of preaching the true Word, and therefore will it him at his pleasour, as God should move his heart, to proceed forward in the trew doctrine as he has bene of befor, which doctrine they would all approve and abide at their lifis end."<sup>24</sup>

Mary had lost again. Her true defeat came when her husband, Lord Darnley, was murdered, and Mary ran away with the suspected killer, the Earl of Bothwell. Neither Protestants nor Catholics could approve of this. Bothwell was able to escape to the North, but Mary was forced to surrender and was imprisoned at Lockleven Castle. She was forced to sign a letter of abdication on July 24, 1567. She turned the crown over to her young son James and appointed James Stewart, Earl of Moray, as regent until James was old enough to rule.

Under the Earl of Moray, Parliament was called once again. This time, the Reformed Presbyterian church of Scotland was finally established by law. Knox played a significant role in this and was able to see some fruit of his arduous labors.<sup>25</sup>

Knox's remaining years were not quiet. Many Protestants were committed to maintaining political ascendancy in order for their advances to continue including the Earl of Moray who had many enemies, some of whom finally succeeded in assassinating him in 1570. In addition to such threats, Queen Mary was eventually able to escape to England, and even though she was a prisoner under Queen Elizabeth, she was a constant threat to the stability of Scotland. The fight had taken its toll on John Knox. Nearing his end, he wrote in 1570:

And so I end; rendering my troubled and sorrowful spirit in the hands of eternall God, earnestlie trusting at his good pleasure; to be freed from the cares of this miserabill lyfe, and to rest with Christ Jesus, my only hope and lyfe.<sup>26</sup>

Knox was granted his desire on November 24, 1572. To the day of his passing, he was a man of one heart. God was his only Glory, and God's Kingdom his only home.     Δ

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* p. 238

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* p. 239

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* p. 254

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# False Antithesis:

## A Critique of the Notion of Antithesis in Francis Schaeffer's Apologetic

Greg L. Bahnsen

### Some conceptions of antithesis can unwittingly work to undermine the very antithesis which is essential to the Biblical viewpoint

The very idea of apologetics (defending the Christian faith against its cultured despisers) calls for a healthy and sound notion of antithesis, or else apologetics makes no sense. Since belief and unbelief ultimately stand over against each other, they need to challenge each other or call each other to account, as though the stakes in their dispute were eternal.

Indeed, *any* genuinely faithful and effective work of Christian scholarship, preaching, missions, or apologetics requires the believer to be aware of, and to work in the guiding

light of, the pervasive Biblical message of antithesis. And this summons to proclaim and apply this antithesis in the pursuit of our ministries is especially urgent in our modern day of intellectual relativism, antipathy to distinctively Christian methods and conclusions, and theological compromise regarding the doctrine, discipline and worship of Christ's church.

One might think then that we would welcome any Christian scholar or writer who makes the summons back to antithesis central to his encounter with modern culture. But this is not entirely the case. In a rather odd way, some conceptions of the antithesis can unwittingly, but nevertheless truly, work to undermine the very antithesis which is presented in, and essential to, the Biblical viewpoint. That is, a false or misconstrued *conception* of the necessary antithesis could actually have the effect of hampering Christian apologetics by denying *the true* antithesis which sorely needs recognition in our day.

I believe that this is what we find in the case of Francis Schaeffer's apologetical work and writings. Those familiar with the popular and prolific publications which came from the pen of our dear brother, Dr. Schaeffer, cannot easily forget his polemic in favor of antithetical thinking. At the back of *The God Who is There*<sup>1</sup> Schaeffer defined the word "antithesis" very simply as "direct opposition or contrast between two things."<sup>2</sup> We also find him using the word loosely for a movement from one condition to its opposite, as when he calls, "the point of conversion, when the individual passes from death to life...the point of personal antithesis."<sup>3</sup> However Schaeffer's more char-

acteristic and basic use of the concept of "antithesis" is associated with themes which are pivotal in his defense of the faith, themes like:

(1) the claim that knowledge precedes faith thus opening the door to a "pre-evangelism" based, not on Scriptural truth or authority, but on the unbeliever's awareness of the form of the external universe and the mannishness of man,<sup>4</sup>

(2) the requirement that any proof — whether in science, philosophy, or religion — show that a theory is non-contradictory, that it explains the phenomena in question, and that it can be lived consistently,<sup>5</sup>

(3) the treatment of Christian and non-Christian presuppositions simply as hypotheses which are judged by the test of which set "fits the facts,"<sup>6</sup>

(4) a commendable emphasis on the non-Christian's inability to live logically with his presuppositions,<sup>7</sup> especially

(5) the notion of a cultural crisis whereby modern man has been forced to pass "below the line of despair."<sup>8</sup>

Schaeffer became famous (and I think infamous in some circles) for his sweeping surveys and evaluations of the history of philosophy and of the arts, the gist of which was definitively set down in his book, *How Should We Then Live?*, subtitled "The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture."<sup>9</sup>

### The Alleged Hegelian Turning Point

According to Schaeffer's various books, the major turning point for modern man — the philosophical development which left him under "the line of despair" without hope for rationality or a unified field of knowledge — was the advent of Hegelian philosophy: "It was the German philosopher Hegel who became the first man to open the door into the line of despair."<sup>10</sup> Schaeffer explains that, "Before this, in epistemology, man always thought in terms of antithesis.... That is the first step in classical logic. In antithesis, if this is true, then its opposite is not true."<sup>11</sup> Listen to Schaeffer's various statements regarding the destructive error in Hegel's thinking, the error which is at the heart of modern man's philosophical and cultural crisis:

Before his [Hegel's] time truth was conceived on the basis of antithesis.... Truth, in the sense of antithesis, is related to the idea of cause and effect. Cause and effect produces a chain reaction which goes on in a horizontal line. With the coming of Hegel, all this changed.... [Hegel proposed] from now on let us think in this way: instead of thinking in terms of cause and effect, what we really have is a thesis, and opposite is an antithesis, and the answer to their relationship is not in the horizontal movement of cause and effect, but the answer is always synthesis.... [Thus] instead of antithesis we have, as modern man's approach to truth, synthesis.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.* pp. 111, 121, 129, 142, 143

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.* p. 109

<sup>6</sup>*He is There and He is Not Silent*, (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1972), pp. 65, 66, 81.

<sup>7</sup>*God Who is There*, pp. 121-127

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, *passim*; and *Escape From Reason* (Chicago: Intervarsity, 1968).

<sup>9</sup>(New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell, 1976).

<sup>10</sup>*God Who is There*, p. 20

<sup>11</sup>*He is There*, p. 45

<sup>12</sup>*God Who is There*, p. 20

<sup>1</sup>(Chicago: Intervarsity Press, 1968).

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.* p. 177

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.* p. 130

Hegel argued that antithesis has never turned out well on a rationalistic basis, so he proposed to change the methodology of epistemology. Instead of dealing with antithesis, let us deal with synthesis. So he set up his famous triangle — everything is a thesis, it sets up an antithesis, and the answer is always a synthesis....He [thus] changed the whole theory of how we know.<sup>13</sup>

What did Hegel say? He argued that attempts had been made for thousands of years to find an answer on the basis of antithesis and they had not come to anything. Philosophic humanistic thought had tried to hang on to rationalism, rationality, and a unified field [of knowledge], and it had not succeeded. Thus, he said, we must try a new suggestion....He changed the rules of the game in two areas: *epistemology*, the theory of knowledge and the limits and validity of knowledge; and *methodology*, the method by which we approach the question of truth and knowing.

What he said was this. Let us no longer think in terms of antithesis. Let us rather think in terms of thesis-antithesis, with the answer always being synthesis....[Schaeffer comments that] a choice was made, and the choice consisted in holding on to rationalism at the expense of rationality.<sup>14</sup>

In *How Should We Then Live*, Schaeffer contends that "non-Christian philosophers from the time of the Greeks until just before our modern period" took reason seriously. They accepted the validity of reason, that the mind thinks in terms of antithesis. The first lessons in classical logic were: A is A, and A is not not-A.<sup>15</sup> But then, according to Schaeffer, there came a "shift" in philosophy,<sup>16</sup> a shift toward romanticism and with it a pessimism regarding rationality. This shift was the responsibility, he says, of Rousseau, Kant, Hegel and Kierkegaard.<sup>17</sup> And it created, he thinks, the characteristic "mark of modern man," namely that the lower realm of reason is taken to lead inevitably to despair and is totally separated from the upper realm of values, meaning, and optimism.<sup>18</sup>

When Schaeffer addresses Hegel's role in this development, he mentions the dialectical unfolding of history whereby successively new syntheses are formed through the perception that "there is truth in both thesis and antithesis."<sup>19</sup> Schaeffer concludes that although it is "an over-simplification of Hegel's complete position, the result is that all possible particular positions are indeed relativized....This has led to the idea that truth is to be sought in synthesis rather than antithesis."<sup>20</sup>

What we find in the major works of Francis Schaeffer, then, is a conspicuous insistence upon, and call for thinking in terms of "antithesis." The Christian's witness to his modern culture and the apologetical solution that Schaeffer offers to our culture's philosophical despair involves the proclamation of "antithesis" over against the relativizing tendency of synthesis-thinking in Hegel and the post-Hegelian philosophers. Given our earlier discussion of the Biblical view of antithesis (*Antithesis* Vol. 1, No. 1, 1990) between believer and unbeliever, as well as the disastrous consequences of modern culture's suppression of that antithesis, can we now welcome and endorse the position of Schaeffer on the subject of antithe-

sis? Can we eagerly list the works of Schaeffer in our project of restoring a consciousness of "the antithesis" to contemporary Christian scholarship? Sadly, we cannot do so at all.

### Misconstruing the Antithesis

*Schaeffer's view of the needed antithesis is in fact a further evidence of disregard for the antithesis which the Bible teaches.* The reason for saying this is that Schaeffer's understanding of antithesis does not call for or demand a distinctively Christian (or Biblical) — over against a non-Christian — conception of rationality and logic. I refer to his *theory* (or his philosophy) of logic — *not* about the particular laws or details of logical application which any freshman studies in college. The latter is not that about which we are calling for a distinctively Christian difference. The theory of logic that leads to the recognition and application of those laws should be, but is not, distinctively different for Schaeffer. Schaeffer does not press a choice between apostate and regenerate philosophy, but *rather* a choice *between Hegel and the Greeks* — despite the fact, that the Greeks were just as unregenerate in their theorizing and worldviews as any philosophers who have gained attention in Western history. Schaeffer's desired antithesis *draws no antithesis*, then, between Christianity and the world. The antithesis he wants would be acceptable to *both* and understood in a common fashion.

Schaeffer's desired antithesis simply substitutes an *older* version of humanistic thought for a *newer* one. In so doing, it is not true to the Biblical antithesis itself. Paul could challenge the philosophical Greeks of his day — the day of Schaeffer's desired antithetical reasoning — saying, "Where is the wise, where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?" (1 Cor. 1:20). The development and demonstration of the foolishness of apostate thought did not await the advent of Hegel. The despair of unbelieving philosophy was just as clear in the days of ancient Greek speculation.

### Misconstruing Hegel

Moreover, we cannot endorse Schaeffer's adamant aversion to Hegelian synthesis in favor of Schaeffer's own conception of antithesis because Schaeffer has misconstrued the philosophy of Hegel on a massive scale, presenting a view of him which Hegel would never have recognized or condoned. The reader is alerted to the strong likelihood that something has gone amiss in Schaeffer's discussion of antithesis and synthesis, as well as in his representation of Hegel's views, when we see Schaeffer somehow confusing *logical* and *causal* analyses of the concept of antithesis and running the paradigmatic rationalist philosopher, Hegel, in with philosophical streams of romanticism and relativism. Similarly, Schaeffer misses the mark widely in portraying Hegel as choosing to think in terms of synthesis "instead of" antithesis, when Hegel saw the latter as a necessary step in the inevitable achieving of the former. But the largest mistake of all in Schaeffer's discussion is his suggestion that the Hegelian synthesis somehow meant the sacrifice of rationality, the validity of reason, and the logical law of non-contradiction.

Hegel's proposals were not on this order whatsoever. Hegel did not berate logical consistency; indeed, he forcefully advocated a *coherence* view of truth! What Hegel deemed inadequate was finite man's *conceptualizing* of reality and giving it rational expression. In the preface to *Phenomenology of Mind*, Hegel said that "the truth is the whole." Therefore, any set of propositions which falls short of being a complete system covering the whole of reality will, due to its incompleteness, generate its own inadequacies or contradictions. The categories we use in our logical thinking are not definitive according

<sup>13</sup>*He is There*, pp. 45-46

<sup>14</sup>*Escape From Reason*, pp. 40-41

<sup>15</sup>pp. 145, 146

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.* p. 151

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.* pp. 152-163

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.* p. 164

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.* p. 162—according to Schaeffer's citation of James

Sire's summary of Copleston's summary of Hegel!

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.* p. 163

to Hegel, but rather tentative and provisional. Between a thesis and its antithesis there will be a *dynamic tension* because both positions contain something which is rational in them, yet both prove to be inadequate in themselves. The whole point of coming to a synthetic resolution of that tension is not to renounce logical consistency, but precisely to *preserve* what is *rational* in both positions and cancel out what is not rational! All contradictions will be reconciled and all falsity removed in the dialectical unfolding of our thinking only when our system of *thought* is complete — at which point it will have developed into a complete unity with the *object* or reality which is the content of our thought.

Hegel's dialectical method does not view the world as a collection of externally related, discrete things; it rather encourages us to understand reality as an evolving process. As such, Hegel's philosophy warns us against taking any given stage of the developmental process (in thought or in history) as fully adequate. Such a stage is not wholly mistaken, but it is nevertheless only a misleading representation of what shall ultimately develop from it (as a tadpole stands to the frog). This philosophical perspective may or may not be radically muddled-headed, and it may or may not be overly humble about finite man's ability to conceptualize ultimate truth; but it is still miles from being the *renunciation of logical validity* and rational thinking which Schaeffer paints it to be.

Our bottom line assessment of Schaeffer's plea for renewal of antithesis over against the synthesis of modern thought is that he misconstrued the Hegelian thought which he heatedly opposed and, at the same time, overlooked the true nature of that antithetical thinking to which God's word calls us as Christians.

Our challenge should be for Greeks and Hegelians *alike* to make sense of their use of logical laws, given their presuppositions about reality, man and knowledge. We should show them that given their perspectives on life and thought, the existence and the normativity of abstract logical principles is just unintelligible. Their rationalism in philosophical speculation does not conform to their presupposed irrationalism about the world.

Given their worldview, then, unbelievers cannot justify the most elementary laws of thought (even those like the Barbara syllogism) which non-Christians and Christians use alike. Thinking themselves to be wise, they have in principle become fools instead. The vanity of unbelieving philosophical thought, as presented in the Bible, is not the exclusive province of ancient or modern culture. It is the result of that primal *enmity* which stands between God (or His people) and all apostate cultures indiscriminately.

### Schaeffer's Own Nature/Grace Dichotomy

The apologetical outlook of Francis Schaeffer was unfortunately not sufficiently perceptive of that fact. Ironically, even though one of the major thrusts of Schaeffer's scholarship was to repudiate the dichotomy of lower story "nature" (the external particulars) and upper story "grace" (concepts, value and meaning), Schaeffer's apologetical method *reintroduced* a nature/grace dichotomy of its own.

According to Schaeffer, the philosophical challenge issued by the apologist does not pertain to the *natural* order, for unregenerate man can make sense of his world scientifically and logically *as far as he goes*. As a result, Schaeffer claims that the apologist is supposed to show is that there is "more to reality" — another realm, another dimension — which the unbeliever's thinking has not touched. What is wrong with the non-Christian perspective on the physical world is not that it is, in principle, *unintelligible*, but simply that it is *incomplete*. And thus Schaeffer says to the materialist philosopher or scientist after he has expounded what he knows about the universe:

This is all very fine [the non-Christian outlook], but it's drastically incomplete. It's as if you had taken an orange, sliced it in half, and only concerned yourself with one of the halves. To really understand reality in our universe you have to consider both halves — both the seen and the unseen....You are completely unbalanced. You only know half of your own universe.<sup>21</sup>

Schaeffer then mysteriously comments that between the views of naturalism and supernaturalism there is "a total antithesis"; the two "can never be brought into synthesis."<sup>22</sup> But on Schaeffer's conception of the difference between believing and unbelieving thought, there is little reason at all that they could not be synthesized. The difference between them is virtually *quantitative*, not *qualitative*. The unbeliever merely does not have "both halves" of the orange, and what he says about the half he does have is "all very fine," according to Schaeffer's portrayal.

Though some who are justly fond of Schaeffer for his personal ministry might claim that this is a minor inconsistency (an unfortunate illustration), this sort of "mistake" is *not* a minor matter for apologetics. Getting things so wrong on *this* particular point would be akin to a medical doctor making the "minor error" of confusing his patient's lungs and legs. Moreover, this unfortunate illustration is *not* at all *uncharacteristic* of what Schaeffer repeatedly says elsewhere. I would have you take for instance his notion that believers and unbelievers alike have a presupposition-less understanding of "the facts" against which they may judge the respective adequacy of the Christian and non-Christian "presuppositions."<sup>23</sup> There is apparently no antithesis for Schaeffer when it comes to regenerate and unregenerate minds understanding the facts.

So then, Schaeffer's conception of the apologetical situation was neither calculated nor suited to present a bold challenge to unregenerate thought in the realm of science or logic (the lower "half of the orange," if you will). And the reason why it was not is that such a conception does not understand or appreciate the true nature of the deep-seated and all-pervasive antithesis between the Christian and non-Christian worldviews. The antithesis presented in Scripture and which must be respected by the apologist actually operates at a far more *fundamental* level than what Schaeffer himself had seen. The true antithesis is of entirely different order than Schaeffer thought.

My discussion of Dr. Schaeffer has not intended to take anything away from our appreciation of the man and what he accomplished by God's grace. Rather, it has aimed to help us to understand that the antithesis revealed in the Bible operates between believers and unbelievers at the level of their basic worldviews — not merely in their opinions about logical consistency or about "the other half of the orange" (the unseen universe). Hopefully, we can now accurately perceive and philosophically appreciate this weighty truth by setting it in contrast to Dr. Schaeffer's overly light handling of it. After all, the very idea of apologetics calls for a healthy and sound notion of antithesis, or else apologetics makes no sense. Δ

<sup>21</sup>*Death in the City*, (Chicago: Inter-Varsity, 1969) pp. 129, 130, 131

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.* p. 131

<sup>23</sup>*He is There*, pp. 65,66,81 — "Presupposition" has come to mean little more than "hypothesis" for Schaeffer.

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# The Challenge and Beauty of Church Discipline

**Christ has graciously given His church a system of discipline by which to protect His people and vindicate His glory**

**Timothy J. Harris**

## The Basic Orientation

Church discipline refers to the authoritative right and duty of church officers, for the edification of the church and the honor of Christ's name, to admonish church members, and to control access to the sacraments. This essay will explain the scriptural basis of church discipline and indicate how it is of great importance in the life of the believer.

In Matthew 18 we can see the basic elements of church discipline, where Christ teaches that the sin of a brother who fails to heed two stages of admonitions is to be "told to the church." In this passage, Christ presupposes due process, that is, a forum in which evidence may be examined according to rules, witnesses cross-examined for competence and truthfulness, and the "charge" itself evaluated as to its relevance and importance. To deny that this passage presupposes certain minimal notions of due process would lead to the unacceptable alternative, that the Word of God invites believers to publish indiscriminate gossip and unsubstantiated allegations.<sup>1</sup> If church discipline entails due process, then church discipline requires a church court. Apart from a church court, there is simply no way to carry out the command of our Lord in Matt. 18.

The "brass tacks" involving all the practicalities entailed by the existence of a church court offends people who have a "spiritualized" notion of what the church should be like. But Almighty God often ordains very practical

<sup>1</sup> Such an alternative is so unacceptable that it scarcely seems necessary to mention that it would violate numerous Scripture passages, as "he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter" (Prov. 11:13b); "thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people...I am the Lord" (Lev. 19:16); "...tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not" (1 Tim. 5:13), etc.

remedies such as church courts, and officers to operate such courts. When Jethro suggested to Moses the appointment of coregents, his concern was very likely pragmatic (Ex. 18:13-15). Yet, in the providence of God, this solution took on the force of divine ordination by virtue of the fact that Moses, God's prophet, heeded the suggestion and appointed coregents (Ex. 18:24-26). A similar (and specifically spiritual) pattern was ordained by God when the 70 "elders" were called into God's presence in a feast before the Lord on the mount (Ex. 24:9-11).<sup>2</sup> At this feast, they, in a sense, represented the people before God; later, as judges, by virtue of their divine ordination, they represented God to the people.<sup>3</sup>

This representative, covenantal, and authoritative principle of organization continued with minor variations even up to the time of the NT in the synagogue<sup>4</sup> and was re-ratified as it were, in the appointment by the apostles of elders in each congregation (Acts 14:23). So the requirement of setting aside men to be, at once, representatives of, and authorities over the congregation is established by the weight of both the Old and New Testaments (e.g. Acts 15:4,6,22,23; 20:17,28; 16:4).

The authority to guard the sacraments is moreover an inescapable concept inasmuch as this function must unavoidably be exercised. Even the most liberal church, after all, has some constituted authority which is able to *set aside* any restriction that could be placed on access to the sacraments. But Scripture is more explicit. After quoting Num. 15:30,31 and especially Deut. 17:12 ("The man that will do presumptuously, and will not hearken unto the priest that standeth to minister there before the Lord thy God, even that man shall die; and thou shalt put away the evil from Israel") Ursinus concludes:

From these two passages just quoted, it appears that God commanded such as were rebellious and wicked to be cut off from the Jewish commonwealth, and would not allow them to be received amongst the number of his people. Much less, therefore, would he allow them to be regarded as members of his visible church, and be admitted to her sacraments.<sup>5</sup>

## The Purposes of Church Discipline

The necessity of church discipline may be seen by listing the various purposes for discipline as presented in Scripture. These may be summarized by saying that discipline guards the purity of the church, preserves the church by removing evil, and provides severe but loving correction for one who is in danger of falling into perdition. Overarching these purposes, however, must be our concern for the glory of God and the vindication of His name; for "whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all

<sup>2</sup> Following G. Gillespie, *Aaron's Rod Blossoming* (Sprinkle Reprint) p. 5, we recognize that the elders of Ex. 24 were a different group from the leaders put in office in Ex. 18.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 4-15; cf. also R.L. Dabney, *Discussions*, vol. 2, "Theories of the Eldership," pp. 128ff.

<sup>5</sup> The commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism, trans. G.W. Williard, (1852) Presbyterian & Reformed; Phillipsburg (no date) pp. 442-443 (comments to question 83).

things were created by Him, and for Him: and He is before all things..." (Col. 1:16-17). The needs of men, let alone the perceived needs or demands of men, must never be of the first order of consideration. God's concerns must always be our first concern; and he who would make God's concerns his own first concern will do well to heed the demands of the Word of God for the proper manner of approaching Him in worship. Ursinus summarized the gist of this demand succinctly:

Jeremiah severely reproves those who had the boldness to come into the temple whilst they were still defiled with their sins. (Jer. 6:7,10,20.) Ezekiel declares that God will not be enquired of by those who go after strange gods, and then present themselves in his temple. (Ez. 20:31.) And, in the 20th verse of the same chapter, he says that those profane his sabbaths, and pollute his sanctuary, who come into his house defiled with their idols. The prophet Amos rejects the sacrifices and worship of wicked transgressors, saying, "I hate, I despise your feast-days, and I will not smell in you solemn assemblies." (Amos 5:21.) The prophet Haggai forbids (2:13,14) the unclean in soul to touch that which is holy, where he speaks of moral and ceremonial uncleanness... And, in Prov. 15:8, it is declared that "the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord."<sup>6</sup>

By virtue of these behavioral demands, the church is to be a rather exclusive body. Indeed, the church fellowship is to demand, on pain of expulsion, a much higher standard for fellow believers than is held for unbelieving associates (I Cor. 5:9-10). The church must not tolerate overt evil in even a small measure, for "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (I Cor. 5:6, in the very context of church discipline).

As regards the individual being expelled, Paul uses the most dire terminology imaginable when he commands, "Deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh" (I Cor. 5:5). Even then, however, Paul has an eye on the restoration of the unruly one "that his spirit may be saved" (same verse). Paul presents a stark contrast which those outside the church will never be able to fathom: he instructs the Corinthians in such severe terms, yet he does so tearfully (II Cor. 2:4) and with the hope for restoration always of foremost concern (II Cor. 2:7-8).

## Some Distinctions

Only Scripture can produce the norm for church discipline. As such, Scripture must define the bounds, jurisdiction, and purpose of church discipline, for it would be the epitome of hubris for man to arrogate to himself the right to read someone else out of the company of the visible church. In order to properly apply the Scriptural teaching of church discipline, however, we must understand a few fundamental distinctions.

There is first the distinction between behavior and belief. This distinction is summarized in the Westminster catechism, for example, in answering the question, "What do the Scriptures principally teach?"<sup>7</sup> "The Scriptures prin-

cipally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man." We may take this summary as dividing the jurisdictional scope of discipline between that which applies principally to the teachers and leaders of the church, and that which applies to all members without distinction. Whereas matters pertaining to "the duty God requires of man" applies to all men without distinction, the matters of "what man is to believe concerning God" applies, so far as *discipline* is concerned, most especially to the teaching leadership of the church. The latter are required to be "apt to teach" (I Tim. 3:2) as well as to gainsay error (Tit. 1:9), even among true believers who may struggle with this or that doctrinal point. Though worthy of a discussion in its own right, this essay does not address the special category of church discipline applicable to teachers.

The behavioral aspect of discipline, though, reveals a second important distinction. Discipline in the form of public censure is only one extreme of a continuum. It is important to bear this in mind since several passages deal with that gentle and continual admonition as the environment in which all believers are to submit to one another (Matt. 18:15; Gal. 6:1; Prov. 25:12; etc.) It is at this level that what we know as church discipline really begins. But beyond this responsibility of all believers to admonish one another, the shepherds, in discharging their solemn duty, have a positive obligation to warn all those in their care to repent of sin. Paul declares that his ministry was not only "public" but "house to house" (Acts 20:20) and that he diligently "ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears" (Acts 20:31). Because Paul took his responsibility to discipline the body seriously, he can say that he is "pure from the blood of all men" (Acts 20:26). The obligatory nature of the function of discipline for both shepherds and all believers is brought into sharp focus in Hebrews 13:17, which warns that the under-shepherds "watch for your souls, as they that must give account."

## The Keys of the Church — Not Autarchy

The Matthew 18 passage alluded to above concludes with the words which have almost become a cliché in our time, "where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them"<sup>8</sup> (Mt. 18:20). But an examination of its context shows that this verse is really a word of assurance that Christ stands behind the proper humanly-rendered word of discipline. For, two verses earlier Christ says, " whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." This, in turn, is presented as the climax of the process of admonition described in verses 15-17. In effect, Mt. 18:20 is one expansion of the passage in which our Lord declares to Peter and the apostles that whatsoever the apostles binds on earth is bound in heaven (Matt. 16:19). What these passages teach is that the word of rebuke (and excommunication (Matt. 18:17), when done properly, carries the full authority of God himself.

But, rebuke is proper only when it is based on the Word of God. Calvin explains the relation of these so-called

<sup>6</sup> Z. Ursinus, op.cit. p. 443

<sup>7</sup> Westminster Larger Catechism question #6; Shorter #3.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Stookey in his "Wedding Song" is only one of the more well-known cases of those who imagine they can lay claim to this verse.



"keys of the church" to the Word of God as follows:

This command concerning forgiving and retaining sins and that promise made to Peter concerning binding and loosing ought to be referred solely to the ministry of the Word, because when the Lord committed his ministry to the apostles, he also equipped them for the office of binding and loosing. For what is the sum total of the gospel except that we all, being slaves of sin and death, are released and freed through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus and that they who do not receive or acknowledge Christ as their liberator and redeemer are condemned and sentenced to eternal chains? ...It was important for the apostles to have constant and perfect assurance in their preaching, which they were not only to carry out in infinite labors, cares, troubles and dangers, but at last to seal with their own blood....It was important for them to be convinced that in such anxiety, difficulty, and danger they were doing God's work; also, for them to recognize that God stood beside them while the whole world opposed and attacked them; for them, not having Christ the Author of their doctrine before their eyes on earth, to know that he, in heaven, confirms the truth of the doctrine which he had delivered to them. On the other hand, it was necessary to give an unmistakable witness to their hearers that the doctrine of the gospel was not the word of the apostles but of God himself; not a voice born on earth but one descended from heaven.... Accordingly, Christ has testified that the forgiveness of sins which they preached was the true promise of God; the damnation which they pronounced, the sure judgment of God. This testimony, moreover, was given to all ages, and remains firm, to make all men certain and sure that the word of the gospel, whatever man may preach it, is the very sentence of God, published at the supreme judgment seat, written in the Book of Life, ratified, firm and fixed, in heaven.<sup>9</sup>

Here, Calvin expounds the *locus classicus* of the keys of the church in a way that gives a satisfactory account of how the apostles, in their historical placement, might very well have reflected on the Lords' words. Calvin also grants the most awesome and solemn meaning to the exercise of the keys, yet without in any way allowing grounds for the tyrannical claim of self-authenticating power such as is made by Roman Catholics.<sup>10</sup> The centrality of the *ministry* of the Word and the obedient hearing of the Word, precisely because it is the Word of God, is the point. The crux of church discipline, in which we can see its glorious beauty, is, therefore, the *appeal to conscience in a manner that is displayed objectively*. This idea will become more clear as we continue.

<sup>9</sup> Calvin, Inst. IV. 11.1 (pp. 1212-1213 Westminster Press edition).

<sup>10</sup> On the very recently reaffirmed continuation of autarchy in the Roman Catholic Church, see T.Schirmacher "Has the Roman Catholic Church Changed?" Antithesis, Vol. I, No. 2 (Mar/Apr 1990) pp. 23-30

## The Scope of Church Discipline

Having briefly sketched out the grounds for church discipline, we may now examine its scope. The example presented in 1 Corinthians 5 at first glance would seem to support the commonly held view that church discipline is warranted only in cases involving outbreaks of sin of the most egregious and scandalous sort — "such as is not so much as named among the Gentiles". It is significant, however, that as Paul develops the argument for excommunication, he cites broad categories of overt sin as illustrations of the kind of sin to which this response is warranted (1 Cor. 5:11). Already in this list we see instances of offenses in rather surprising categories. In addition to extortion, Paul cites

- offenses that go far beyond those that people universally recognize as punishably wrong (fornication, drunkenness, idolatry),
- "victimless" crimes (fornication, idolatry, covetousness; drunkenness?),
- an offense which is largely inward in its manifestation (covetousness, or greed), and
- an offense often excused as being either merely "temperamental," or too universal to warrant counter-action by the church (railing, reviling, slandering).

The desultory nature of this list shows that it is hardly meant to be comprehensive. Clearly, any sin persisted in to the point where such sin becomes scandalous to the church warrants the discipline Paul describes.

## Subjection to Church Discipline: Voluntary or Compulsory?

If Scripture requires a church court and submission to the church leaders, then church membership is inescapably a Christian duty. Obviously, I am not under the oversight of, or subject to, just any group of men, anywhere, recognized by someone as elders. There is an inherent local character to oversight, and the specific, individual relation of shepherd/sheep must be publicly recognized for it to be exercised. In other words, in the very nature of the case it must be that leaders, on the one hand, have proper credentials, and we must be able, on the other hand, to determine which persons over which they exercise jurisdiction. This dual necessity is sufficient to prove the obligatory nature of church membership.

At the same time, it is evident that this relation is legally voluntary, in the sense that no group of elders, even granted that they have proper credentials, has the power to compel anyone to make the covenantal commitment required of them by Scripture.

The nature of subjection to church discipline as being at once voluntary (with respect to its physical constitution) and yet obligatory (with respect to the command of God) raises an interesting question: may one resign from this "voluntary association"? Clearly, resigning would seem to be a convenient way to escape the nuisance and potential embarrassment of facing charges in church court.<sup>11</sup> In general, how should a tendered resignation be received by the church?

<sup>11</sup> Resignation is of course to be distinguished from a proper transfer.

The question can perhaps be put in its most awkward form as follows: when a member, not in overt rebellion, but professing to have lost faith in God, tenders his resignation, not (apparently) to escape discipline, but to reflect honestly the change in the state of his own heart, should this resignation be accepted without further process by the session?<sup>12</sup> It is assumed, of course, that much in the way of counsel and private exhortation would ensue, but given the persistence of the resigner, should the resignation simply and passively be accepted?

This question arose in the Presbyterian church in the nineteenth century in connection with the revision of the book of discipline. In 1857 a committee consisting of Charles Hodge in the north and James Henley Thornwell in the south, among other luminaries, was commissioned to prepare a new manual of discipline. This committee concluded that church membership was voluntary: accordingly, it held that one who resigned his membership on the grounds of unbelief should simply be "erased" from the rolls of the church, but without further ado other than perhaps announcement of the erasure.<sup>13</sup> Thornwell wrote in defense of this position:

Every man has a right to withdraw from the Church whenever he pleases, in the sense explained in our former article — a right in the sense that no human authority has the right to detain him. As before God, he has no more right to apostatize than to commit any other sin. He is bound to believe and keep the commandments. But men have no commission to force him to do either. If he wants to go, they must let him go. "They went out from us," says the Apostle — not that they were expelled, but they went out of their own accord, freely, voluntarily — "because they were not of us." They found themselves in the wrong place, and they left it.<sup>14</sup>

Thornwell was careful to define the "right" of defection, not as if the defector had such a right before God, but rather in the sense of the absence of any right to obstruct him in his defection.<sup>15</sup> Note carefully, however, that Thornwell also excludes the case where offenses worthy of discipline have occurred.<sup>16</sup> He focused on the case of a man

<sup>12</sup> "Session" is used here to refer to the duly-constituted panel of church leaders which render judgment in church discipline cases. In non-Presbyterian circles this panel may be referred to by other names, such as "consistory."

<sup>13</sup> The exact text goes as follows: "In cases in which a communicating member of the church shall state in open court that he is persuaded in conscience that he is not converted, and has no right to come to the table of the Lord, and desired to withdraw from the communion of the church; if he has committed no offence which requires process, his name shall be stricken from the roll of communicants, and the fact, if deemed expedient, published in the congregation of which he is a member." Cited by R.L.Dabney, *Discussions*, Vol.II, p. 332.

<sup>14</sup> *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell*, Vol.4: Ecclesiastical, p. 370.

<sup>15</sup> "The right of a man to do a thing, and the right of others to hinder him, are entirely distinct, and yet, from the poverty of language, we are often compelled to represent the non-right of others to hinder as his right to do" *Ibid.* p. 324.

<sup>16</sup> "The injury they have done to [the church's] name and character they are as much bound to answer for as any other

who quietly and "unoffensively" renounces the faith and wishes peacefully to withdraw. Nevertheless, even in this tightly restricted case, Dabney, in responding to the proposed change took up the gauntlet in no uncertain terms: "The attempt has been made several times in General Assemblies — as in 1848 and 1851 — to establish this most sweeping, mischievous and un-Presbyterian usage."<sup>17</sup> Dabney's objections to Thornwell's view center chiefly on the following considerations.<sup>18</sup> (1) The rule (allowing simple resignation) would in practice provide a ready escape-hatch for those in danger of being cited for sin, and effectively put an end to church discipline of any kind. (2) The rule is premised on a falsehood, namely, that unbelief is not a disciplinable sin. (3) Consequently, church sessions would be remiss before God in relinquishing their duty before God to exercise discipline on such grounds. (4) Moreover, there are only two kingdoms, that of Christ and that of Satan; dismissal from the church can only be to the kingdom of Satan, and (ironically) it would be overly harsh to so relegate a church member to the kingdom of Satan, or to absent the wholesome presence of the fatherly censures of the church, before outward behavior of a scandalous sort made it obligatory and necessary to do so.

Reading Dabney's arguments today makes it clear how far, in just a little over a century, even the conservative Reformed churches have departed from the standards of their forefathers. We are barely in a position to even follow the debates. Just one citation from the extended passage is presented to show how not just our practice but our very way of thinking about issues has radically shifted.

Are not avowed impenitence and unbelief incompatible with Christian character, and does not their tolerance in communicants "bring disgrace or scandal" on the Romish and other communions, which formally allow it, in the eyes of all enlightened men? They are, then, a disciplinable offence. But hear Paul (1 Cor 16:22), "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha." Here we have the very formulary of excommunication pronounced, and it is against the man who "loves not the Lord Jesus Christ;" that is, just the man who, in modern phrase, avows himself as "lacking in the suitable qualifications for the Lord's supper."

The church, we hold, is solemnly bound to teach the same doctrine in her discipline which she preaches from her pulpits, otherwise she is an unscriptural church. She is bound to testify by her acts as well as her words, against the destructive and wicked delusion so prevalent in consequence of the wresting of the doctrines of grace, that because grace is sovereign, therefore, the failure to exercise gracious principles is rather man's misfortune than his fault. It is this dire delusion which hides from men the sinfulness of their hearts; it hath slain its ten thousands. With what consistency can the pulpit proclaim that unbelief is sin, and then send forth the same pastor into the session room to declare to the misguided

offenders, and they are not to be at liberty to plead the right of withdrawal as a cover for their crimes." *Ibid.* p. 371.

<sup>17</sup> R.L.Dabney, *Discussions*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* 332-339

transgressor, in the tenfold more impressive language of official acts, that it involves no censure, and that its bold avowal is rather creditable than blameworthy? Shall not the blood of souls be found on such a session?<sup>19</sup>

In dealing with this member who confesses to unbelief and wishes on those grounds to be released from the jurisdiction of church discipline, Dabney counsels extended, tender, and forbearing treatment on the part of the session, but with this difference from that proposed by the commission: "the session should do judicially, on the ground of his own avowal, what he had requested, except that they should *debar* him from the Lord's table until repentance, *instead of giving him license to neglect it.*"<sup>20</sup>

Though it is far from my desire to adjudicate between such giants of the modern church as Dabney and Thornwell, it does appear that Dabney met Thornwell's basic objection and presented a solid Scriptural case, one which rings true to a sound understanding both of human nature and of the reformed understanding of the church.<sup>21</sup> Yes, the church is a voluntary organization with respect to outward compulsion; but there are only two kingdoms, and only to its own peril will the church pretend that there is a principle of freedom which supersedes the lifelong obligation of all who profess entry into the kingdom of light.

## Conclusion: Consequential Living with a Clear Conscience

The most surprising element of church discipline can now be appreciated more fully: the fact that no outward or physical compulsion of any kind is involved.<sup>22</sup> Much of the cumbersome trappings, even nuisance, of the civil court system is to be found, but with this difference: there is no bailiff, no jail: so far as anything outwardly observable, the convict walks away as free as the one who is exonerated.

With church discipline, then, the basic appeal is to the transgressor's conscience. By conscience we do not adopt the modern perverse sense of "take it or leave it as it appeals to me." By conscience we refer instead to the inner sense of one's standing before God in light of holy writ. The leaders of the church, fulfilling a commission from God Almighty Himself, solemnly pronounce judgment, as it were as a proleptic enactment of the judgment day itself, but with a glorious, gracious difference: there is still time for repentance! By providing a forum wider than our own private ruminations — which, after all, are prone to be twisted, evasive, and self-deceptive — church discipline affords a chance to be examined and to "make it right" in the sight of God. Thus, we should all view church discipline as a tremendous blessing.

Because church discipline relates directly to one's standing before God, there is no room for evasion or dissimulation. Just as there will be no room for evasive tactics on that Great Day at the end of history — no finger pointing, no self-

righteous assertion "you can't prove that from the words I used"— so one should not attempt to evade responsibility in the church court by such tactics. In a very real sense, one stands immediately before God in the church court, and as such, those who stand before the court should diligently adjust their attitudes accordingly.

Although church courts, unlike civil courts, do not employ physical coercion, ironically, church courts place a far more rigorous demand than that required of him in the civil court. If, for example, I am brought to court for a speeding violation, I am not obligated to confess to all the times I have exceeded the speed limit but for which I have not been caught. In order to ensure that justice is meted out fairly, there is a sense in which it is the state's responsibility to build up its own case, and not seek confessions. Indeed, state-extracted confessions have often been the seedbed for tyrannous regimes to follow. I may present any lawful argument in favor of extenuating circumstances and lenient treatment, and even hire a lawyer to do the same more skillfully. In the church court, on the other hand, it is a privilege and not a disadvantage to have one's motives cross-examined in the context of getting right with God. Excuses are out of the question. If I am being examined because of fornication, it would be highly appropriate to mention any personal history of a struggle with lust: the more sins that can be straightened out, the better!

For those that have not caught sight of the glorious beauty of church discipline, fearfulness is often the main obstacle. The fearful one must ask himself, however, what the real object of his fear is. Is the worried look of one, the furrowed brow of another, the imploring expression of still another, something to strike terror into one's soul? One should ask himself whether his fear is not rather the fear of having sin exposed which was comfortably hushed up and tucked away in the privacy of his heart. Fear in this sense is sin. Overcoming such sinful fear is necessary in order for the believer to stand before God with a clear conscience. This comes near to the essence of godliness.

Indeed, the practical effect of church discipline, rightly applied, is so beneficial, that if anything, the temptation might be to seek it out: to apply to be examined before the church court routinely. But there are at least two reasons why such a response would be wrong. First, such an orientation would tend toward narcissism. The goal of sanctification should be first and foremost keeping one's eyes on Christ, and not even on my own puny residual wickedness. Second, such a desire could be an unconscious disguise for self-righteousness, in that the hope for vindication before the examination of the church court could be confused with actual righteousness before God.

A number of practical issues have been left untouched here: for example, the biblical rules of evidence and why these are important; the times when appeal of a judgment is proper; the problem of personal animosities thwarting the true goal of discipline, etc. I have tried to show that church discipline is Biblically required, and like all Biblical requirements once understood, is not only an obligation, but a thing of great beauty. Δ

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* p. 336

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* p. 338

<sup>21</sup> Thornwell's view however can hardly be cited by moderns in their defense: "The man is treated as an offender...the guilty party is solemnly, and by the sentence of a court of Jesus Christ, excluded from the fellowship of the saints, because the love of God is not in him. The sentence, too, is an awful one, the most awful that can be pronounced on earth save that of excommunication." *Collected Writings*, p.325.

<sup>22</sup> Except in the sense that access to the table might have to be physically blocked, if it came to that.

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# Is Christianity Unintelligible?

**George Smith's much touted case against God is strong on bravado but fallacious to the core. Atheists need to be less gullible.**

**Douglas M. Jones III**

Anti-Christian literature can be very edifying. Such literature often addresses the reader in authoritative and table-pounding tones which suggest that enlightenment has finally arrived. One can envisage squealing college freshmen devouring these works to free their consciences from the Sunday school bondage of their earlier "naive" days. Humanist publishing houses rave about the newest refutations of Christianity, and atheist debaters enthusiastically push these wares

at the back of auditoriums. But when all is said and done, the arguments contained in some of the better texts are really quite silly and dogmatic, thus serving to edify the believer by confirming the Christian view of reality. Such is the case with George Smith's *Atheism: The Case Against God*.<sup>1</sup>

Smith's well-known book is one of the better defenses of atheism currently available. Smith's aim in the book is "to demonstrate that the belief in god is irrational to the point of absurdity; and that this irrationality, when manifested in specific religions such as Christianity, is extremely harmful"<sup>2</sup> The book is partitioned into four discussions covering such topics as the nature of atheism, the concept of God, reason and faith, natural theology, atheistic ethics, and "the sins of Christianity."

My aim is to evaluate several pillars in Smith's case for atheism. He aims to demonstrate that the notion of a *supernatural* and *transcendent* god, in general, and the Christian God, in particular, are "permeated with ambiguities, contradictions, and just plain nonsense" resulting in "a conceptual mess of unequaled proportions" (50). (Presumably Smith has a complete list of conceptual messes somewhere.) According to Smith, this conceptual mess largely derives from the theist's claim that:

god is mysterious, unfathomable or in some way beyond man's comprehension. The idea of the 'unknowable' is the universal element linking together the various concepts of god, which suggest that this is the most critical aspect of theistic belief. The belief in an unknowable being is the central tenet of theism, and it constitutes the major point of controversy between theism and critical atheism (39).

Smith goes on to argue that knowledge of the unknowable is contradictory, and so, Christianity, in particular, is unintelligible. He concludes this discussion by claiming that "In essence, the case for atheism is fully established at this point...Atheism has won by default" (88). So, given Smith's own claims regarding his case for atheism, when we find that his central arguments for the unintelligibility of the Christian God are silly, we may justifiably maintain that his general case for atheism is silly too.

## Smith's Case for Unintelligibility

The path by which Smith concludes that the concept of God is unintelligible may be sketched in the following manner.

Smith begins the second chapter, "The Concept of God," by claiming that the theist bears the burden of explaining the content of his belief that God exists. Smith chooses to use the term "god" generally to designate any supernatural or transcendent being" (32). Such a notion, Smith maintains, implies that (a) "god must be something other than part of the natural universe," and (b) "a god must be a being of some kind which is presumed by the theist to exist" (32).

Smith holds that the use of "supernatural" in his definition of god has metaphysical connotations, whereas the term "transcendent" connotes epistemological concerns. He takes the first term to suggest that god is above or beyond the natural universe, exempt from "the framework of natural law"(37).

In turn, the concept of a supernatural being implies, according to Smith, that god is "epistemologically transcendent; i.e. it falls beyond the scope of man's intellectual comprehension" (38). Smith takes this point to be the most critical dispute between theism and atheism (39).

### No Supernatural Beings

Smith then turns to criticize these notions of "supernatural" and "transcendent" in order to make his case against theism in general. He offers three arguments against a supernatural being. The first is that the term "supernatural" is insufficient in that it only "tells us what a god is not — that it is not part of the natural universe — but it does not tell us what a god is" (39).

Smith's second argument is that the notion of a supernatural being is incomprehensible since we cannot *conceive* of a being outside of a natural law framework.

The third and most important argument is that a supernatural being cannot exist because entities may only exist within a framework of natural law, since existence requires finite characteristics which are only available within natural law. (No, I'm not making this up.) We will return to this argument in a moment, but we must note Smith's concluding thoughts on this point: "The theist, even if he agrees with this analysis, is bound to remain singularly unimpressed" (41) — surely this last claim deserves some international prize for gross overstatement.

Nevertheless, Smith has the theist respond to his arguments against a supernatural being by conceding that "we cannot comprehend 'supernatural' existence... See, I told you so. God transcends human understanding; he is unknowable" (42). Smith then uses this "standard defense" of theism to turn to criticize the second aspect of his definition of god, namely, "transcendence," which again Smith uses to mean "unknowable in principle" (42).

### No Transcendent Beings

Smith argues that all theistic views which maintain "that god's nature is unknowable *in principle*" (he includes Christianity among them) can ultimately be reduced to reli-

<sup>1</sup> (New York: Prometheus Books, 1989).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. xi. Hereafter, page citations will appear in the text.

gious agnosticism. Religious agnosticism maintains that the nature of god is completely unknowable, but this view is hopelessly contradictory, according to Smith, for several reasons.

First, agnosticism claims to know something, namely existence, about a being that is completely unknowable. Second, it claims to know that one attribute of god is unknowability, but such an attribute cannot be known. Third, it requires omniscience, since one must know all things in order to claim that certain items are beyond the reach of man's understanding.

Smith concludes that "to claim that god is incomprehensible is to say that one's concept of god is unintelligible, which is to confess that one does not know what one is talking about....The idea of the unknowable is an insult to the intellect, and it renders theism wholly implausible" (45). But Smith doesn't stop there; since his understanding of "supernatural" is a "metaphysical corollary" (a bit of Aristotelian magic) of Smith's understanding of "transcendent," then by refuting his understanding of the latter, he has refuted his understanding of the former — a job well done; Smith has refuted Smith and saved me some time.

Smith, seriously convinced that he has the theist sweating, argues that the theist has two alternatives: either abandon the notion of a supernatural being or defend a supernatural being but maintain that this being is knowable at least to some extent. Since the former is atheism, the theist will generally choose the latter, which "brings us to the Christian conception of God" (46).

Smith's goal in his discussion of "The God of Christianity" (Chap. 3) is to demonstrate that Christianity reduces to the absurdity of religious agnosticism: "Scratch the surface of a Christian and you will find an agnostic. The Christian God is simply the agnostic god with window dressing" (50). Smith attempts to demonstrate this claim in four stages:

First, he argues that Christian theology historically lists "incomprehensibility" as one of the attributes of God, but if so, then knowledge of God "lies beyond the reach of man's reason" (48).

Second, he argues that the Christian attempt to provide some knowledge of God fails since it invokes the notion of "unlimited attributes" (omnipotence, omniscience, etc.) which is a contradiction in terms. According to Smith, this notion is contradictory since in a natural law framework, all attributes must be determinate and limited. (Again, I'm not making this up.) But, if so, then an "unlimited attribute" is a contradictory "unlimited limit."

Third, Smith argues that all attempts to describe the attributes of God, either negatively or positively, fail, since human language, with its finite references, can never provide "direct knowledge of God's nature" (59) — the Christian God cannot be captured by human language.

Fourth, he evaluates and rejects each of the major attributes of the Christian God as contradictory and/or confused.

On the basis of these four arguments, Smith notes that:

The atheist is now saying *more* than, 'I do not believe in god because there is no evidence for its existence.' It is logically impossible for a god—a concept replete with absurdities and contradictions—to have a refer-

ent in reality, just as it is logically impossible for a square circle to exist. Given the attempts to define god, we may now state—with certainty—that *god does not exist* (88).

Don't confuse these sentiments with old tele-evangelist scripts. Smith has seriously convinced himself of these claims. But should he be convinced?

## The Follies of Atheism

The most embarrassing aspect of Smith's presentation is that no great technical interaction is necessary to confute his claims. From beginning to end, Smith's most basic fallacy is that he begs-the-question on the grandest scale. In other words, his arguments only succeed because they blatantly presuppose that atheism is true and Christianity is false. Given that assumption, it is a simple exercise to conclude that atheism is true, in which case Smith's book would have been much shorter and not sold as well. However, as we will see, he not only assumes what he attempts to prove, but his critique only succeeds if he is omniscient, in which case, his book would have been much more expensive.

### On Begging the Question

The weapon Smith uses most significantly throughout the various turns in his argument is his claim regarding the limits placed on the concept of God by a non-theistic natural law framework. But this assumes what needs to be proven. A parallel and equally silly counter-argument might be that Smith's atheism is false since it fails to account for divine attributes. But a silly response is all that a silly argument calls for.

We find Smith's question-begging argument in his initial discussion of a supernatural being. His argument (40) can be filled out as follows:

Premise 1 — The universe and every entity behave in accord with natural law ("uniformity of nature").

Premise 2 — Natural law is determined by the limited nature of existence.

Premise 3 — Existence is limited in that every entity has a specific nature, determinate (finite) characteristics, that determine the capacities of that entity.

Premise 4 — Whatever does not have finite characteristics does not exist.

Premise 5 — A supernatural being does not have finite characteristics

Conclusion — A supernatural being does not exist.

If you remember, Smith is so impressed with this argument that he has the theist concede and shift the debate. But why would a theist concede to such a silly argument? What theist would grant the anti-theistic premises? Even theists who hold to some form of natural law metaphysic would not grant that every entity is limited by natural law, and yet that is exactly what Smith requires.

Even more laughable are the universal generalizations contained in most of the premises. How does Smith justify such claims as "Every entity has a specific nature," or "to be something is to be something specific," or "regularity in nature is a consequence of limitations," or "no existing thing can randomly do anything at any time under any conditions," or "the principle of natural law itself is a constant."

Has Smith investigated every entity and every

aspect of the universe? Can he provide empirical studies demonstrating his claims about existence and regularities? And while he certainly provides no *a priori* proof for such dogmatic claims, they would be fun to see anyway. Perhaps Smith would like us simply to bow before the authority of Aristotle on such questions, but Christians are far too skeptical for such dogmatisms.

Smith's premises require omniscience, and short of that, Smith's own epistemology leads to skepticism, since the above magical premises are so integral to his epistemology (90). This outcome is not surprising to the Christian, since this tension is the constant state of those who reject a Biblical view of reality; they are tossed back and forth between omniscience and skepticism.

### **On Begging a Bigger Question**

Smith not only happily assumes a universe which precludes the Christian God, he also begs-the-question regarding the ultimate standards one uses to evaluate the war between atheism and Christianity. Both Christianity and atheism evaluate arguments and evidence on the basis of some standard beyond which there is no further appeal; this Absolute standard is inescapable. For the Christian, the Absolute standard is the personal triune God revealed in Scripture. There is no higher court of appeal by which the Christian evaluates what is rational, ethical, or real. A Biblical outlook simply does not countenance any human standard of rationality to which God must answer. If God is truly Absolute, as he is presented in Scripture, then He stands as the ultimate judge over all issues in logic, ethics, reality, and knowledge. The Christian God is not in the dock being forced to answer to our finite standards.

Atheists must howl at this sort of stance, since it appears to beg-the-question against any atheistic claim. Yet the atheist's howling is naive. If there were some higher standard of "reason" or "conceivability" by which both the atheist and Christian could adjudicate their dispute, then the Christian God would not be Absolute; He would be limited by something outside and above His nature. Yet the Christian does not worship some being subordinate to Platonic Forms or some alleged higher standard of reason or goodness. The Christian God is truly the final court of appeal.

The atheist also has a final court of appeal. The atheist also bows before an Absolute standard. And just like the Christian, the atheist does not permit anything to correct or evaluate this ultimate standard, for if he did then the standard would obviously not be the *final* court of appeal.

The ultimate standard for the non-Christian, in general, and Smith, in particular, is *finite human rationality* — or the autonomous human mind. Though this Absolute standard is often portrayed as "Reason," it is, from a Christian standpoint, a *distortion* of reason. Nevertheless, this non-Christian Absolute functions in much the same manner as the Christian Absolute. Non-Christians even use religious terminology when they refer to this Absolute — "bowing before the bar of reason" or "reason is the only guide" or "we cannot dispute reason" or "an offense against reason."

Smith is rather blatant in specifying his religious commitment to his Absolute. Note just a sample of statements which point to his atheistic dogmatism:

"We obviously cannot accept the proposed attributes of God uncritically; we must determine if they are intelligible" (61);

"According to atheism, all of existence falls (in principle) within the scope of man's knowledge" (89);

"The idea of the unknowable is an insult to the intellect" (45);

"We cannot imagine an 'immaterial being' because the concept of 'matter' is essential to our concept of 'being'" (67);

"How can one conceptualize existence apart from matter, energy and their derivatives, when these are the only kinds of existence of which we have knowledge" (54);

"Theism offers us a bit of 'knowledge' which, if true, would destroy the foundation of all present knowledge by obliterating the naturalistic context within which we comprehend reality" (90).

What more need be said? Any being not bowing to the finite human intellect cannot exist! Smith in principle rules out any Absolute which stands as an epistemological judge over his Absolute. But since the Christian God is just that — an Absolute standard evaluating finite human rationality — Smith again begs-the-question against the Christian, this time by using a standard which guarantees the falsity of Christianity. It is no wonder then that he can offer such bravado as "the Christian...is defending the rationally indefensible" (88). Smith's bravado, however, reduces to the assertion that Christianity is false because atheism is true (said perhaps with a loud voice and an authoritative glare). But this sort of claim is not very convincing.

Smith has entirely missed the debate. Instead of assuming the falsity of Christianity and passing this off as some high-level rational analysis, Smith should enter the debate between two competing Absolutes. Which Absolute is superior? We may ask this question because we are not abandoned to relativism; we are *not* left with two faith commitments. We may determine the superiority of one of the views by, among other things, demonstrating that one view fails to meet up to its own claims, or similarly, by determining which view of reality provides the preconditions of the knowledge we do indeed have.

The Christian argues that Smith's Absolute fails on its own standards. Smith's atheism claims to provide a basis for knowledge when in fact it destroys the very foundation of rationality, logic, science, and ethics. For example, Smith needs to explain how he can appeal to reason at all. How does a materialist account for logical laws which are universal and immaterial? How is he justified in invoking universal generalizations when he is not omniscient? How can he reconcile appealing to a naturalistic framework and yet repeatedly invoke ghostly entities such as essences, natures, consciousness, justice, and evil? In short, if Smith were more consistent with his outlook, then he would weed it of its dependence on Christianity, but such a purge would destroy all his claims to knowledge as well.

### **Unknowability, Inapprehensibility, and Incomprehensibility**

Given Smith's fallacious moves so far, we may clearly reject his case for atheism. He needs to try again. But Smith repeatedly makes another mistake which is

worth noting. Following his rejection of a supernatural being (by begging-the-question), he turns to a critique of a transcendent being. He emphasizes that it is on this point that he secures the destruction of Christianity and theism in general.

As noted above, Smith's central criticism rests on the claim that "theism [including Christianity] maintains not just that god's nature is unknown to man at the present time, but that god's nature is unknowable *in principle*" (42). According to Smith, this means that the theist has knowledge of the unknowable. But this is contradictory, and so Christianity, in particular, is unintelligible.

All of Smith's arguments in support of this criticism rest on an elementary misunderstanding. Smith simply confuses incomprehensibility with inapprehensibility. Inapprehensibility is the view that God is unknowable. Incomprehensibility, as Frame states, "presupposes that God is known. To say that God is incomprehensible is to say that our knowledge is never equivalent to God's own knowledge, that we never know Him precisely as He knows Himself."<sup>3</sup> God knows as the Creator, and we know as creatures, but both may know the same objects, use the same criterion of knowledge, and understand truths of God's nature. We are not forever cut-off from the Christian God.

In fact, rather than being unknown to anyone, Scripture maintains that God is known to *everyone*. He has revealed Himself so clearly that unbelievers are "without excuse" (Rom. 1:20; Ps. 139). They show evidence of their knowledge of God, but they deny and suppress that knowledge (Rom. 1:18). Hence, contrary to non-Christian claims, the Christian God is inescapable. Everything one does, from mathematics to common discourse, presupposes the reality of the Christian God.

Though Smith must radically deny all of this, he need not assume the non-Christian view of God evident in his "unknowability" claims. If Smith could stand outside his narrow-minded atheism for a moment, he too could see the rationality of these claims regarding the knowability of God. For Smith, is it so strange to imagine that if the Christian God exists, controls all things, reveals Himself, enables humans to communicate and understand His work, and provides standards of rationality, that He has no hindrance to making Himself known? As Frame notes, "He is not incapable of revealing Himself because of the finitude of the human mind... There are no barriers to knowing Him."<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, Smith's claim regarding God's alleged unknowability is not simply a vocabulary mistake. Smith could and does respond that the problem is that God is unknowable because he is outside of the naturalistic framework required for knowing anything. But such an appeal merely begs-the-question against the Christian a third time. We, therefore, need not be impressed with Smith's conclusions.

We see then that Smith's main pillars in his case for atheism, i.e. his critiques of a supernatural, transcendent, unknowable being, are strong only if we begin by assuming that atheism is true. But this is what he was supposed to prove. Any true skeptic, then, whether Christian or non-Christian, ought to reject Smith's arguments as being rather silly. Ironically, Smith's failure to make his case, despite his bravado, helps confirm Scripture's claim: "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God'" (Ps. 14:1). And that is why *Atheism: The Case Against God* can be a very edifying text for the believer. I highly recommend it. Δ

<sup>3</sup> Frame, John. *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Presbyterian & Reformed Publ. Co., 1987) p. 21.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.* p. 20

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# Homelessness, the Poor, and Local Property Regulation

**Too often when facing the question of homelessness we give wrong emphasis to the question, and so we're directed to wrong remedies**

**James Rogers**

We may easily hate New York city and Berkeley for imposing rent control and causing homelessness — most of us, after all, don't live there. It's a little more difficult to oppose the governmental largesse that we all receive in the form of satisfying our middle and upper class demand for homogenous neighborhoods — i.e., local zoning ordinances.

Nonetheless, recent conservative analyses of homelessness have focused on the former not the latter. My goal is not to ignore the effects of rent control in causing homelessness but to emphasize the far more pervasive species of local property zoning regulations which contribute to this social problem.

The homeless fall into four broadly distinct categories: very poor families, substance abusers, deinstitutionalized mental patients, and runaways. The last two homeless groups, although significant social problems in themselves, do not represent, strictly speaking, a residential housing problem; they're homeless for reasons other than a general housing shortage.

Nonetheless, existing indices confirm the suspicion that even with runaways and the mentally ill excepted, the number of homeless poor and substance abusers has increased.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, the precise

<sup>1</sup>The numbers discussed by conservatives and skeptics tend to avoid the hyperbole of the self-styled homeless advocates. See, e.g., Tom Main, "The Homeless Families of New York," *The Public Interest*, Vol. 85, Fall, 1986, pp. 4-6; William Tucker, "The Housing Crisis that Overregulation Built," *Policy Review*, Vol. 50, Fall, 1989, p. 20; Robert C. Ellickson, "The Homelessness Muddle," *The Public Interest*, Vol. 99, Spring, 1990, pp. 53, 57-58; Tom Main, "The Homeless of New York," *The Public Interest*, Vol. 72, Summer, 1983, pp.14ff.; E. Fuller Torrey, "The Scandalous

number of homeless people is mired in dispute. The most credible estimates belie the truth of the oft-cited figure of three million homeless, a figure snatched out of the air by self-styled homeless advocates.<sup>2</sup> A recent article in the *National Journal* reports more accurate estimates of the homeless population which range from a low of 254,000 to a high of 735,000.<sup>3</sup>

Writing in *The Public Interest*, housing expert Tom Main comments that “[b]etter nose counts of the homeless...would not only clear the air of current inaccurate figures but would provide useful guides to policy.”<sup>4</sup> One would think that Main expresses only the blandest of bland truisms in his sentiment — who opposes better information, after all? — but such is not the case in the hyper-charged political atmosphere that poisons reasonable discourse on homelessness. Many homeless advocates, most notably Mitch Snyder, believe that homeless folk numbering “only” in the several hundreds of thousands would not warrant our concerned attention. Such advocates habitually oppose attempts to get accurate counts of the homeless — their opposition to the recent Census effort being only the most public attempt in a series of similar attempts. Be this as it may, the existing, albeit fragmentary evidence, confirms what our eyes tell us, that there are more homeless people populating our cities, streets, and shelters.

So what to do? Too often when facing the question of homelessness we give wrong emphasis to the question and so we’re directed to wrong remedies or we give up, believing the problem intractable. The question with its usual spin asks: Why are there *more people* without housing? The question, slightly altered, better directs our attention to an oft-neglected factor: Why is there *less housing* for this segment of society?

The answer to this question, while not requiring the correction of wholesale “institutional violence” and “exploitation,” as ritual declamation would have it, nevertheless does strike at the flabby belly of perks reserved by our local governments for America’s prosperous majority. And our responsibility for the impact of these policies upon the poor and marginal cannot be discharged simply by thrusting a quarter into an anonymous, outstretched palm.

The recipe for state-generated homelessness? Mix sixty years of local zoning regulation with one part rent control; add a generous dash of wholesale mental hospital deinstitutionalization and a severe breakdown in family structures, especially among the poor — and you have a dandy social tragedy. As noted above I treat only the residential aspect of the problem; I emphasize that my solution is no panacea for the entire problem. There is no magic policy elixir to remedy every illness, spiritual as well as physical, resulting in this social tragedy.<sup>5</sup>

Neglect of the Mentally Ill Homeless,” *Policy Review*, Vol. 48, Spring, 1989, p. 10; Peter Salins, “Toward Permanent Housing Problem,” *The Public Interest*, Vol. 85, Fall, 1986, p. 28; W. Robert Curtis, “The Deinstitutionalization Story,” *The Public Interest*, Vol. 85, Fall, 1986, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup>Carl F. Horowitz, “Mitch Snyder’s Phoney Numbers,” *Policy Review*, Vol.49, Summer, 1989, pp. 66-69, and Ellickson, pp. 52-53.

<sup>3</sup>“How Many Americans Really Are Homeless?” *National Journal*, No.48, Nov. 26, 1988, p. 3032.

<sup>4</sup>Main (1986), p. 20

<sup>5</sup>Yale law professor Ellickson, pp. 55-57, discusses several of the distinctive social transformations contributing to the in-

In years gone by, the poor could find inexpensive, permanent and livable housing. Less concerned with permanence, alcoholics and drug abusers desired only a flat in which to crash for the night — but that could be had in any number of marginal, dirt cheap hotels. Returning to those days, Tom Main writes, requires “reforming [cities’] housing policies with an eye to increasing the availability of low-income housing”; policies like zoning and rent control are prime targets for reform.<sup>6</sup>

Even a cursory examination of the dynamics created by zoning laws and rent control indicate their importance in the economic pathology of homelessness. Local zoning laws, initiated in the 1920s, quickly spread to all but a few cities, and effectively ended growth of housing affordable to the poor. Of course, the effects were not immediately visible. Zoning regulations do not change cities’ existing housing and business patterns immediately upon institution. Rather, the laws alter housing and business patterns over decades as cities experience steady growth. Unintended consequences, thus, do not manifest themselves for many years.

Both residential and business zoning contribute to creating homelessness. Residential zoning affects the poor especially; commercial zoning regulation seems to affect substance abusers most heavily. In the late sixties, the National Commission on Urban Problems concluded that “the regulatory powers of local governments in [many cities] are being used to bar vast land areas to apartments, mobile home parks, and other dwellings that can meet minimum standards of health, safety and amenity...”<sup>7</sup> How does this occur?

Local zoning boards set minimum lot size requirements for new residential developments. These limit new housing construction to more expensive homes: No contractor, after all, would build a \$5,000 house on a \$100,000 lot; and if he did, there would be no one to buy it — the poor couldn’t afford the lot, and the prosperous wouldn’t want the small house.

Additionally, boards impose “single-family” restrictions over entire developments, thereby stifling apartment construction as well as preventing two or more poor families from sharing the rental or purchase cost of one house. Economist and law professor Bernard Siegan found that these restrictions sharply increase apartments’ real estate costs because they induce an artificial scarcity of land on which to build apartments.<sup>8</sup> Larger cities also ban affordable mobile homes from being located on vacant lots. Dartmouth economist William Fischel, summarizing the finding of a study of Houston, Texas, one of the few cities without zoning, writes that “[housing] cost is lower and [housing is] more plentiful for lower-income people than in

crease in homelessness in the eighties. Perhaps Tom Main (1986), p. 7, best described the relationship between the social factors and the housing problem: “The housing crisis...seems to be a necessary but not a sufficient condition for bringing on the kind of problems we see now.”

<sup>6</sup>Main (1986), p. 21

<sup>7</sup>National Commission on Urban Problems, *Building the American City* (New York: Praeger Press, 1969), pp. 7-8, 18-20, 199-234.

<sup>8</sup>Bernard Siegan, *Land Use Without Zoning* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1972), pp. 114ff.



comparable cities."<sup>9</sup> In all, Siegan concludes, zoning "appears to lower the price [of housing] for the rich and raise the price for the poor."<sup>10</sup>

In addition to the burden of distorted housing markets placed upon the poor by the many U.S. communities with strict zoning control, cities with rent control (most significantly, New York City) further distort rental markets to the detriment of the poor. On the one hand, if newly constructed apartments are also rent-controlled, the controls render the facilities less profitable, and thus deter new construction and constrain supply relative to an unregulated market. On the other hand, if the new apartments are not rent-controlled, then older apartments — those most likely to be affordable to the poor — are torn down and replaced by expensive new apartments or condos. In either case the supply of affordable housing is more constrained relative to the demand than it would be without rent control.

At first glance, a constrained supply of low-priced rental units might not appear to burden the poor especially. But rent control, which prohibits allocating apartments through the price system, requires an alternative allocation mechanism — "connections." Often only the more affluent have, or can purchase, the connections needed to find an apartment. The dynamic of the situation gradually and disproportionately squeezes the poor out of access to the given supply. A study of rent control in New York found that richer people displace poorer people in rent controlled housing at the rate of about 1 percent every year. (While this may not seem like much displacement at first glance, the percentages add up significantly over the span of, say, a decade or so.)

When we shift our focus from regulation of residential property to regulation of business property, we see local governments establishing a similar dynamic in the market for cheap hotel rooms. Zoning boards geographically limit businesses to certain districts — thus putting a premium on the land in those areas. Cheap, marginal hotels have been torn down by the score in order to erect more profitable establishments on the land.<sup>11</sup> Without zoning regulation, many, if not most, of these hotels would have remained and served that niche of the market created by equally marginal persons — drunks and addicts.

To be sure, a lot of people don't like drunks and addicts, but that's no reason to take away their market access to a roof and a mattress. What's more, if we, that is our communities, thought we would get rid of this group of people by tearing down cheap hotels, we were obviously wrong: they did not disappear with the shabby hotel. We see them every day; indeed, we step over them every day. The question is, shall they be with us on the street, or with us protected, at least, by a roof?

Over the years our communities, in effect, have prohibited the construction of new, cheap housing. Over the years we've built homes for only the middle class and those richer; we've left poorer folk to bid against each other

<sup>9</sup>William A. Fischel, *The Economics of Zoning Laws*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins Univ. Press, 1985), p. 233.

<sup>10</sup>Siegan, p. 99

<sup>11</sup>Although the number may be somewhat inflated, Kim Hopper and Jill Hamberg, of the New York Community Service Society's Department of Public Policy, claim that between 1970 and 1982, 1,116,000 single-room units, representing nearly half the total stock, were lost to the market. *The Making of America's*

for a dwindling supply of affordable housing. Many poor families balance on a very thin edge: rent swallows a substantial portion of the monthly check; any unexpected expense — broken arm, temporary layoff — is sufficient to push such families into overcrowded temporary shelters.<sup>12</sup>

Sixty years of zoning laws have had their intended effect: our neighborhoods need not admit cheap housing; our business districts need not suffer run-down hotels. But to ban low-cost housing does not and cannot ban the people who need and use low-cost housing — they are still with us, albeit without shelter and on the streets.

Here, also, we find the genesis of the need for public housing: Our communities passed laws that prevented construction of low-cost housing, yet the people who would have otherwise used that housing must live somewhere. In response to this need, the government constructed hundreds of thousands of units of housing since the sixties. Today, many projects are abandoned; many others are not decent places to live, but no options exist for their residents. Public housing is perhaps the most spectacular failure of Great Society programs.<sup>13</sup>

We must remember, however, that it was affluent America's *political* demand for "nice" neighborhoods that caused the housing shortage for the poor; that caused their need for public housing. The lesson is true so often: unwise government intervention begets only more intervention. Zoning and rent control must end in order to provide a permanent solution to homelessness.

Deregulation, in this case, accomplishes an end that liberals think conservatives ignore, through means that conservatives think liberals ignore. (Not to worry, the common law nuisance tort, a free market mechanism, will still prevent the location of an unwanted garbage dump next door.) This solution equally challenges both sides to live by the principles they advance: Will we give up our state enforced privileges and let the poor back into our neighborhoods and again let substance abusers crash in a shabby hotel instead of the street? Δ

*Homeless* (New York: Community Services Society of New York, 1984), p. 34.

<sup>12</sup>Among the poorest households, the median rent burden hovers around 46 percent of income, and for over one fourth of these households, rent consumes upwards of 75 percent of income. Harvard-MIT Joint Center for Housing Studies, cited in Irving Wedfield, "Poor Tenants, Poor Landlords, Poor Policy," *The Public Interest*, Vol. 92, Summer, 1988, p.11.

<sup>13</sup>Incidentally, regarding the notion that cuts in federal housing dollars caused the increase in the homeless population, Ellickson, pp.54-55, observes: "According to computations by University of Virginia economist Edgar Olson, federal housing subsidies for low-income families went from \$5.8 billion in fiscal 1980 to \$13.8 billion in fiscal 1988. Adjusting for rent inflation, this represented a real spending increase of over 50 percent. Between 1980 and 1987...the stock of public-housing units increased from 1.2 million to 1.4 million, as projects that Carter's HUD had put into the system were completed....Thus from 1980 to 1987, the federal government came to provide housing aid to an additional 1.3 million low-income households — more households than the entire public-housing program had assisted in 1980."

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## ...Operation Rescue Critique Continued from page 14

date to do God's work, God's way, in God's time.... To advocate civil disobedience before the exhaustion of alternate resistance is to thwart God's redemptive program and the rule of law.<sup>21</sup>

Sadly, this O.R. supporter, as with most O.R. supporters, seems to have forgotten this all-important truth. But no matter how many forget or attempt to minimize this truth, it nonetheless pierces to the heart of any "Christian" movement which prematurely resorts to disobeying the state. Instead of allowing our activism, compassion, and ire to lead us down the path of disobedience, Christians who are true to Scripture must seek to channel that activism, compassion, and ire toward fully exhausting their legal alternatives before they resort to disobedience.

This brief survey of higher laws reveals that while proponents of O.R. tout a "higher law," their actions reveal only a profound misunderstanding and misapplication of that higher law. God's higher law, properly understood, teaches us that God (1) possesses absolute authority, (2) establishes civil authorities, (3) commands Christians generally to obey such authorities, (4) neither permits nor requires Christians to disobey authorities who permit evil, and (5) requires Christians to disobey authorities only (a) when such authorities command them to sin (command Christians to do what God forbids or forbid them to do what God commands), and (b) when Christians have no legal means by which they can obey God.

## II. Analyzing the Case for O.R.

With an accurate view of God's higher law clearly delineated, we must now begin to examine the case for O.R. to see that while Scripture sanctions the end of saving life, it by no means sanctions the illegal and physically coercive means by which O.R. seeks to bring about that end. While O.R. supporters claim that they satisfy the Biblical criteria above, we will see that their claims do not stand up to the weight of Biblical scrutiny.

The best case for O.R., in "syllogistic" form, runs something as follows:

### Major Premise:

**If "rescuers" are forbidden to do what God commands and have no legal means by which they can obey God (save life), then "rescuers" must disobey man and obey God (i.e., their disobedience is Biblically justified).**

### Minor Premises:

**Premise A. "Rescuers" are forbidden to do what God commands**

**Sub-premise 1. since the Biblical law of bystander liability commands Christians to participate in "rescue missions" (i.e., to intervene physically between an abortionist and an expectant mother and thereby block access to abortuaries in order to rescue babies**

**from being murdered), and**

**Sub-premise 2. since human laws (e.g., trespass laws) forbid "rescuers" from fulfilling the law of bystander liability.**

**Premise B. "Rescuers" have no legal means by which they can obey God (save life) .**

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### Conclusion:

**Therefore, "rescuers" must disobey man and obey God (i.e., their disobedience is Biblically justified).**

### A. "Rescuers" Are Not Forbidden to Do What God Commands

In order for "rescuers" to be forbidden to do what God commands, they must be able to prove that the law of bystander liability commands them to "rescue" the unborn by conducting "rescue missions" (as they define the term) and that human law forbids them from obeying the law of bystander liability.<sup>22</sup>

#### 1. The Biblical Law of Bystander Liability Does Not Command Christians to Participate in "Rescue Missions"

Despite O.R. rhetoric to the contrary, those who claim that the illegal and physically coercive tactics of O.R. are not Biblically justified do not deny the validity of the law of bystander liability. To be sure, God commands Christians to be their brothers' keepers (Gen. 4:9),<sup>23</sup> to return wandering livestock (Ex. 23:4-5; Deut. 22:1-4), to come to the aid of those who are sexually molested (Deut. 22: 23-27), to rescue the weak from the wicked (Ps. 82:1-4), to deliver those led away to slaughter (Prov. 24:11-12), and to apply curative aid to those who are attacked (Lk. 10:30-37). In short, the law of bystander liability boils down to loving our neighbors as we love ourselves (Matt. 22:39). Basically, the law of bystander liability is the flipside of the sixth commandment's prohibition of murder. The sixth commandment, then, not only prohibits unjustified murder, it also requires that we take affirmative measures to protect and preserve life.

While ceding that the law of bystander liability imposes a wide-reaching affirmative duty to protect and preserve life, O.R. advocates fallaciously apply the law of

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<sup>22</sup> Before examining the case for O.R., we must deal with an important issue: the disturbing way many O.R. advocates simply assume that O.R. trods the high moral ground (i.e., the how-dare-you-Biblically-question-what-we-do attitude). While many O.R. proponents may wish to assume that the disobedience they advocate is Biblically justifiable, Scripture itself informs us otherwise: according to Scripture, those who disobey the state bear the burden of Biblically justifying their disobedience. As we have already seen, Scripture commands us that we must generally obey civil rulers, and that we must disobey such rulers only when they command us to sin and only when we have no legal means by which we can obey God. Until and unless O.R. supporters can prove that O.R. satisfies the Biblical criteria for disobeying the state, they have not met the burden which Scripture itself places on their shoulders, a burden which they cannot wish away by simply assuming the Biblical propriety of their disobedience.

<sup>23</sup> See the analysis of Genesis 4:9, II, A, 1, a below.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

bystander liability to justify the concept of "rescue missions." In other words, this analysis grants the principle, but argues that O.R. advocates misapply it in their attempt to justify "rescue missions."<sup>24</sup> While Scripture commands us to "rescue" in the common sense of the word, by examining many of the major O.R. "proof" texts, we will see that Scripture does not require Christians to participate in so-called "rescue missions."

#### a. Genesis 4:9

After God chastised Cain for slaying his brother Abel, God asked Cain where his slain brother was, to which Cain retorted, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" On the basis of Genesis 4:9, proponents of O.R. wish to argue that unborn babies are our "brothers" and that we must conduct "rescue missions" to "keep" (protect) them.<sup>25</sup>

It is difficult indeed to see how this passage justifies the concept of "rescue missions." To suggest that Genesis 4:9 justifies "rescue missions" is to eisegete, that is, to read into the text that which it does not teach. As those who must rightly divide the word of truth (II Tim. 2:15), however, we must exegete passages of the Scripture, that is, draw out from the text that which it actually teaches.

While granting that we are our brothers' keepers, this passage does not justify "rescue missions" for at least three reasons. First, Genesis 4:9, strictly speaking, deals with direct liability for murder, and as such, has little if anything to do with bystander liability. O.R. advocates cannot just assume that what is true of direct liability for murder is necessarily true of bystander liability.

Second, even assuming for argument's sake that Genesis 4:9 relates to bystander liability, it does not present a conflict between God's law and man's law. As such, it cannot be read in isolation from what Scripture has to say about the Christian's duty in such a situation. O.R. proponents must realize that they are fallaciously interpreting passages such as Genesis 4:9 when they interpret such passages along a single axis (bystander liability) instead of along a dual axis (bystander liability and disobedience to the state), since "rescue missions" typically involve disobedience to the state. This is not to say that Christians are never justified in disobeying the state to fulfill the law of bystander liability. It is only to say that advocates of O.R. cannot just assume that they have satisfied the criteria for disobeying the state, since that is the very question in dispute.

Third, because Genesis 4:9 says nothing about the conflict between God's law and man's law, those who appeal to Genesis 4:9 and thereby conclude that "rescue missions" are justified beg the crucial question in dispute: that "rescue missions" fulfill the mandate of this passage. To merely assert that this verse commands one to intervene illegally and physically between an abortionist and an expectant mother (i.e., to assert that this verse commands "rescue missions" as defined by O.R. advocates) is to beg the question as to the means we are to employ to fulfill the mandate of this passage. Genesis 4:9 simply does not justify "rescue missions."

#### b. Exodus 23:4-5, Deuteronomy 22:1-4

In these case law applications of the general bystander principle, we learn that we have an affirmative duty to

<sup>24</sup> Those familiar with the contours of legal reasoning will immediately recognize the structure of this argument: while this analysis grants the validity of the bystander principle (the "rule of law") illustrated in the various bystander passages ("cases"), this analysis argues that the present case of O.R. is distinguishable from those cases. The flaw, then, is not with the bystander principle, but rather, with the way O.R. advocates apply it.

<sup>25</sup> Foreman, debate with Hagopian.

return wandering animals or lost goods, whether those animals or goods belong to an enemy or a neighbor. And, as Paul reminds us in I Tim. 5:18, what is true of animals is all the more true with respect to human beings. Yet, while these passages impose an affirmative duty to return wandering animals or lost goods, they do not justify "rescue missions."<sup>26</sup>

First, several crucial differences serve to obviate any analogy O.R. advocates wish to draw out of these passages to justify their tactics. To begin with, notice that the object of concern (i.e., the animal or the good) has wandered away from the one who "controls" it (namely, its rightful owner). Exactly how does that work out in the present case of O.R.? Far from wandering away from a rightful owner (or far from being misplaced), the unborn child is contained in the body of his mother! Additionally, since the object of concern (the unborn child) has not wandered away (because he is contained in his mother's body), there is no feasible way to "return" the child which is the duty these passages impose. Moreover, with a wandering animal, the owner would nearly always consent to having his neighbor return his animal, whereas the expectant mother does not always consent to the "rescue." Furthermore, returning a wandering animal or good does not entail physically coercing someone to conform to a Christian ethic, whereas even O.R. advocates admit that the methods they employ involve such physical coercion.

Second, as with Genesis 4:9, these passages say absolutely nothing about violating human law, in general, let alone trespassing on private property, in particular. O.R. proponents simply beg one of the most crucial questions in dispute by just assuming that these passages somehow permit, or even require, Christians to trespass in order to "rescue." And, not only does the O.R. advocate assume without argument that he can violate human law with impunity, he also assumes without argument that the tactics he employs fulfill the mandate of these passages.

#### c. Deuteronomy 22:23-27

In this passage, God imposes capital punishment for rape as follows: if the woman does not cry out, both the woman and the rapist are to be put to death (verses 23-24), but if the woman cries out, only the rapist is to be put to death (verses 25-27). While one who overhears the woman cry out should do whatever is reasonably necessary to extricate her from the rapist, is "rescuing" the woman the focus of this passage? A close reading of this passage reveals its true focus: the woman's consent to the rape. The woman's cry proved that she did not consent to the rape and, hence, was not worthy of death.

But even assuming that the focus of this passage is rescuing the victim from sexual attack (for which there is no textual evidence), O.R. advocates seek to justify the concept of "rescue missions" by employing two related, but equally false, analogies. Analogy one: If a stranger raped a woman on his private property, should the Christian "rescue" the woman? Analogy two: If a mother allowed a stranger to kill her newborn baby on his private property, should the Christian "rescue" the child?<sup>27</sup> According to O.R. advocates, if "rescuing" the woman (or the child) is Biblically justified, then so is rescuing a child a la a "rescue mission."

Careful scrutiny, however, reveals that such analogies fall prey to serious errors. First, the best case scenario: even granting the analogies for argument's sake, the analogies generate a serious logical dilemma for their proponents, especially as pertains to O.R.'s alleged commitment to "non-violence." O.R. advocates themselves admit that if they were faced with the woman (child)-in-the-field scenario they would "do

<sup>26</sup> Crenshaw, C. *Herald of the Covenant*, Vol. 13, No.1, p. 7

<sup>27</sup> Terry, *Operation Rescue*, pp. 2, 194, Belz, *Suffer the Little Children*, p. 31, and Foreman, debate with Hagopian.

whatever was necessary" and whatever they could do<sup>28</sup> to rescue the woman or the child. At the same time, however, they adamantly insist that their methods are "non-violent."<sup>29</sup> But if you came across a woman about to be raped (or a child about to be killed), and you would do "whatever was necessary" to "rescue" the woman (child), then, in principle, you would use violence (extreme force) if necessary to rescue the woman (child).

At this point, O.R. advocates retort by contending that such extreme force is unnecessary to "rescue" the unborn since they have "rescued" children without recourse to such extreme force.<sup>30</sup> But even O.R. advocates would tell you that of the thousands of children that they could have "rescued" they have at best "rescued" a few hundred.<sup>31</sup> So, have O.R. advocates really done whatever is necessary to save the life of most every single child about to be killed as the analogies suggest? Since members of O.R. really believe that abortion is murder, and since their analogies suggest that they would do whatever was necessary to "rescue" the child, then they should — by their own analogies — be willing to use even extreme force, if need be, to save every single child.

These analogies, then, pose a serious dilemma for O.R. advocates: either (1) O.R. advocates must admit that the analogies are false since O.R. advocates, on the one hand, claim to be "non-violent" but, on the other hand, offer analogies which admit the possibility and legitimacy of such violence (in which case O.R. advocates are reasoning irrationally); or (2) O.R. advocates must admit that in principle they would use violence, if need be, to rescue the woman (child) — every woman (child) — about to be raped (murdered) (in which case their professed commitment to "non-violence" is arbitrary). So much for the best case scenario which assumed the veracity of the analogies for argument's sake.

There is no reason, though, to grant the analogies in the first instance. Two crucial differences obviate such analogies. The first reason why the proffered analogies are questionable is that the analogies presuppose that the "rescuer" will actually extricate the victim from the aggressor. Exactly how does that play out in the case of a "rescue mission?" If, on the one hand, the O.R. advocate views the expectant mother as the "aggressor," then how does he go about extricating the "victim" from the aggressor?<sup>32</sup> If, on the other hand, the O.R. advocate were to view the abortionist as the aggressor, then the deadly threat perceived by the "rescuer" would warrant a deadly level of force, if necessary, to save each and every child. Once again, the one who proffers these analogies is thrown back into the violent/non-violent dilemma articulated above.

The second reason why the present case of O.R. is readily distinguishable from the proffered analogies is that no one is "rescuing" the children about to be aborted in any meaningful sense as the analogies suggest. What the "rescuers" really do, on their own analogies, is the functional equivalent of lining up three hundred Christians on the private property of the murderer to sing hymns and pray — not exactly

<sup>28</sup> Terry, *Operation Rescue*, pp. 23, 194.

<sup>29</sup> Foreman, debate with Hagopian. Belz, *Suffer the Little Children*, p. 154.

<sup>30</sup> Foreman, debate with Hagopian.

<sup>31</sup> During the debate, Foreman claimed that, as of May 1989, O.R. had "rescued" 250 lives. While we praise God whenever life is saved, and while God may save lives in spite of and not because of disobedience, that is not the point in dispute at this juncture. The point in dispute is that what O.R. advocates do is not anything like swooping a child in their arms and galloping to safety, which is the image their false analogies suggest.

<sup>32</sup> Because the analogies suggest that one can feasibly remove the victim from the aggressor and because there is no way to do so in the present case (since the child is contained in the body of his mother), O.R. advocates reason by means of a false analogy when they appeal to such analogies to justify "rescue missions." During the debate, I took

what the ordinary usage of the word "rescue" implies. Meanwhile, one of three things usually happens: (1) enough supporters of the mother show up to escort her onto the murderer's field, (2) the mother returns to the same field a few hours after the "rescuers"(?) have been taken into custody, or (3) the mother takes her child to another murderer down the street. Now, I ask you, is this a "rescue" as the analogies suggest? The rhetoric of O.R. simply does not accord with the reality of O.R.

#### d. Psalm 82:1-4

Many proponents of O.R. appeal to this passage which, in part, commands, "Vindicate the weak and the fatherless; Do justice to the afflicted and destitute; Rescue the weak and the needy; Deliver them out of the hand of the wicked." From this passage, O.R. advocates posit a general duty "to physically intervene on behalf of the children about to be sacrificed."<sup>33</sup> This argument warrants three responses.

First, if one were to read this passage in context, he would note rather quickly that this passage is directed primarily to rulers and not their subjects. Those who do not endorse the illegal and physically coercive tactics of O.R. believe that rulers should be counseled and advised to fulfill the dictates of this passage. That is why they lobby intensely, protest rigorously, and preach faithfully. But that is far from suggesting that this passage requires Christians, as private citizens, to participate in illegal and physically coercive "rescue missions."

Second, O.R. advocates are once again interpreting this passage along a single axis which is all the more culpable in this instance since the context of this passage itself reminds us of our general duty to obey civil authorities. Were O.R. advocates to read this passage carefully, they would see that, even in the process of indicting rulers for not judging according to God's dictates, this passage refers to rulers as "gods" (cf. Ex. 21:6, 22:8). Why does Scripture refer to such rulers as "gods?" As we have already seen, such rulers are called "gods" in these passages not because they rule perfectly in accord with God's perfect justice, but because they rule in a representative capacity for God. This passage, then, refers to rulers as gods to encourage them to rule as God does and to encourage all men to submit to their authority.<sup>34</sup> As imperfect sinners, however, rulers fall far short of ruling perfectly in accord with God's perfect justice. When rulers fail to abide by God's perfect justice, such rulers need to be reminded of their divine commission. Nowhere does this passage encourage subjects to disobey such rulers. Rather, this passage, properly understood in light of its context, instructs us to obey such rulers. Thus, even though this passage indicts rulers for failing to abide by God's perfect justice, this passage confirms the fact that believers are generally to obey civil rulers who may even permit evil in their midst.

Third, as with each passage we have reviewed so far, O.R. advocates continue to eisegete and beg the crucial question at issue: that the passage in question supports O.R.'s illegal and physically coercive tactics (i.e., that physical intervention via a "rescue mission" is the way one goes about

this proffered analogy to its logical conclusion by asking Foreman how O.R. members extricate the victim from his aggressor in the present case without performing an abortion or cesarean section. Foreman's only answer was that the question was ridiculous. I immediately responded by informing Foreman that the absurdity was intentional since the question was formulated as a *reductio ad absurdum* of Foreman's analogy. Because Foreman did not grasp the argument, he resorted to *ad hominem* invective, something he demonstrated a propensity to do throughout the entire debate.

<sup>33</sup> Terry, *Operation Rescue*, p. 122.

<sup>34</sup> Spurgeon, Charles, *The Treasury of David*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers, no date), Vol. II, p. 415.

fulfilling the mandate of this passage).

### c. Proverbs 24:11-12

This passage is parallel to the Psalm 82 passage analyzed above and enjoins readers to “[d]eliver those who are being taken away to death, And those who are staggering to slaughter, O hold them back.” From this passage, O.R. advocates wish to justify “rescue missions.”<sup>35</sup> Yet, while this passage provides a moral imperative to rescue, there are several reasons why that moral imperative does not justify “rescue missions.”

First, in accordance with a sound hermeneutic, we must never wrest passages of Scripture from their context. O.R. advocates spurn such interpretive guidance and simply assume that this passage justifies illegal and physically coercive “rescue missions.” Read in light of its immediate (local) context and in light of the general context of Scripture as a whole, this passage counsels against disobedience. Just ten verses after the proffered O.R. proof text, the author commands his readers, as we have already seen, to “fear the Lord and the king; Do not associate with those who are given to change” (Prov. 24:21). Those who are “given to change” are those who oppose the law and lawful authorities.<sup>36</sup> The immediate context of this passage could hardly be clearer. And, as we have also seen, Psalm 82:1-4, a passage parallel with Proverbs 24:11-12, also instructs us to obey imperfect rulers. Thus, the context of Proverbs 24:11-12 eschews the illegal tactics employed by O.R.

Second, while it is true that Proverbs 24:11-12 contains a moral imperative, O.R. advocates themselves admit that this moral imperative is not absolute (unconditional). The moral imperative in Proverbs 24:11-12 does not give Christians carte blanche to use any and all means of saving the life of the unborn (e.g., kidnapping expectant mothers until they give birth, bombing abortuaries, or murdering abortionists). So the real question becomes: Exactly what is the nature of the moral imperative taught in this passage?

In order to ascertain the exact nature of this moral imperative — in order to rightly divide Proverbs 24:11-12 — we need to answer three questions: Who are the victims? Who is to rescue the victims? And how are the victims to be rescued?

To begin with, the ablest commentators on the Book of Proverbs are well-divided as to the identity of the victims in this passage. Exactly who are these victims? Keil and Delitzsch, for example, believe that the victims are capital criminals; as such, Keil and Delitzsch believe that this verse condemns all capital punishment.<sup>37</sup> Whybray strongly disagrees with their interpretation and notes that the victims referred to are recipients of violence in the streets.<sup>38</sup> Still other commentators offer other plausible alternatives. Turning a blind eye to this textual difficulty, O.R. advocates build their argument on a rather weak foundation, since the verse does not explicitly or implicitly identify the victims about which it speaks.

But even granting for argument's sake that, at the most general level, the victims to be rescued are those unjustly sentenced to death, we must still note that the passage nowhere specifies exactly who is to rescue them. Because this proverb is parallel with Psalm 82, and because Psalm 82 is

primarily directed to rulers, it would appear that this passage is directed primarily to rulers and only secondarily to their subjects. But even if rulers fail to rescue these victims, neither passage gives private citizens, acting without authorization from the state, the prerogative of disobeying such rulers and resorting to physical force, whether minimal or maximal.

Assuming that the victims of this passage include unborn children and assuming that citizens are given an imperative to rescue them, exactly how are such children to be rescued? Read carefully, Proverbs 24:11-12 nowhere specifies exactly how such victims are to be rescued. Once again, O.R. advocates beg the question as to the legitimacy of the means they employ. They simply assume that a tactic developed primarily by Ghandi and popularized in America by Martin Luther King, Jr. fulfills the moral imperative of this passage — a gratuitous assumption, to say the least.

But Proverbs 24:11 may provide us with a hint as to how innocent victims are to be rescued when it commands, “O hold them back.” The Hebrew verb used in Proverbs 24:11 is *hasak*, and conveys the notion that the actor has power over the object.<sup>39</sup> In the closely related language of Ugaritic, the verb means to “take hold of.” In other words, the root of this verb sometimes conveys the unmistakable sense of physical force. In Isaiah 14:6, for example, the King of Babylon is said to have “subdued the nations... with unrestrained persecution [*hasak*]” — physical persecution that could not have been stopped. What's the point? If *hasak* is used literally to convey the notion of physical force, then all Christians have a mandate to use force far greater than merely strewing their bodies in front of a door or on a sidewalk.<sup>40</sup>

Yet, while Scripture sometimes uses *hasak* literally to convey the notion of physical force, sometimes Scripture uses *hasak* figuratively with absolutely no hint of physical force, not even a limp body. Used figuratively, *hasak* conveys the notion of restraining without any physical force. For example, Scripture commands us to “hold back” our lips (Prov. 10:19), our words (Prov. 17:27), and our feet (Jer. 14:10) from evil.

So, exactly how are we to rescue innocent victims? How are we to interpret *hasak*? No matter how *hasak* is interpreted, Proverbs 24:11 simply does not support the concept of “rescue missions.” If *hasak* should be interpreted literally (actual physical force), then all Christians have a mandate to use as much force as is necessary to save every victim being led to death, thus proving that O.R.'s alleged commitment to “non-violence” is both arbitrary and unbiblical. The only problem, though, is that Scripture does not give private citizens the prerogative of using physical force apart from state authorization. The general context of Scripture, then, seems to counsel against interpreting *hasak* literally and using Proverbs 24:11-12 to justify “rescue missions” since “rescue missions” necessarily involve physical coercion contrary to state authorization.

Since it appears that *hasak* is to be interpreted figuratively, then Proverbs 24:11-12 does not sanction physical force at all, not even the minimal force of a limp body strewn in front of a mother about to enter an abortuary. Interpreted figuratively, *hasak* includes preaching and praying, protesting and picketing, lobbying and lawyering, counseling and consoling. All would be legitimate ways to fulfill the moral imperative in Proverbs 24:11-12 in contradistinction to the illegal and physically coercive tactics employed by O.R. The bottom line is that either way one interprets this passage, it simply does not support “rescue missions.”

<sup>35</sup> Interestingly, during the debate, Foreman admitted that Proverbs 24 cannot be used to prove a Biblical obligation (option?) to rescue.

<sup>36</sup> Keil, C. F., and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmann's Publishing Company, 1989 [1872]), Vol. VI, p. 138.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 131-132.

<sup>38</sup> Whybray, R. N., *The Book of Proverbs*, (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p. 140.

<sup>39</sup> I am indebted to Greg Price for bringing the definition of *hasak* to my attention.

<sup>40</sup> In other words, if this passage justifies “rescue missions,” then this passage proves too much.

**f. Luke 10:30-37**

O.R. advocates mistakenly appeal to the parable of the Good Samaritan to justify "rescue missions" when the parable, properly understood, offers no support whatsoever to "rescue missions."

First, the Good Samaritan, unlike members of O.R., never broke any human law when he rendered aid to the victim. Once again, O.R. advocates are interpreting this passage along a single axis.

Second, the Good Samaritan did not physically coerce others in society to conform to a Christian ethic, an essential ingredient of "rescue missions" as even O.R. advocates themselves admit but try to minimize.

Third, far from coming on the scene before the attack to prevent it, the Good Samaritan came on the scene after the attack to render curative aid. This, of course, is not to suggest that Christians are to refrain from preventing physical attacks, but it is to suggest that this parable cannot be pressed into service to justify "rescue missions" which, by definition, are preventative and have nothing to do with administering curative aid once an attack has already occurred.

"But," asks the O.R. advocate, "what if the Good Samaritan had come on the scene before the attack? What would he have done then?" These questions, though perhaps well-intended, are misplaced, since we are to speak only where Scripture speaks and to remain silent where Scripture is silent. But, even granting the legitimacy of the questions for argument's sake, there is one thing the Good Samaritan, in all likelihood, would not have done: he would not have lined up three hundred other Samaritans to sit down along the Jericho road and sing hymns!<sup>41</sup>

Fourth, O.R. advocates appeal to the Good Samaritan parable and thereby imply that Christ's castigation of the priest and the Levite applies with equal force to those who do not endorse "rescue missions." Once again, O.R. advocates demonstrate a propensity for jumping to conclusions and drawing false analogies to Biblical texts. Read carefully, Christ contrasts the priest and the Levite who did nothing with the Good Samaritan who did something. Many of those who vocally disagree with O.R.'s unbiblical tactics are involved in all facets of Christian social action, in general, and saving the lives of the unborn, in particular. Consequently, they do not fall under the castigation of the priest and the Levite.

**g. Matthew 22:35-40, Mark 12:28-31, Luke 10:25-29**

As noted above, the law of bystander liability can be summarized by Christ's command to love our neighbors as ourselves. In context, the Markian account reads as follows:

And one of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He [Christ] had answered them well, asked Him, "What command is the foremost of all?" Jesus answered, "The foremost is, Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with

<sup>41</sup> See the refutation of the rape-in-the-field and child-in-the-field analogies in II. A. I. c above which can be applied with equal force to refute the Good Samaritan analogy.

all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.

Though this passage definitely teaches that Christians are to love their neighbors as themselves,<sup>42</sup> it by no means mandates "rescue missions."

Those who appeal to this passage to justify "rescue missions," commit themselves, wittingly or unwittingly, to serious theological and logical error. If this passage justifies "rescue missions" to prevent abortion, then it also mandates "rescue missions" to prevent idolatry and a whole host of other evils. O.R. advocates attempt to deny this Biblical analogy to idolatry by claiming that the former involves the finality of physical death whereas the latter does not.<sup>43</sup> Such a distinction, while persuasive at first blush, does not accord with Biblical categories of thought.

First, in the passage above, Christ taught that the foremost commandment (in terms of breadth and scope) is to love God, while the second greatest commandment is to love one's neighbor. But even O.R. proponents would readily admit that one cannot properly love his neighbor until and unless he first loves God. Since, then, the foremost commandment broadly implies the second, a society that does not love its neighbor (a society that permits abortion) is a society that does not love God (an idolatrous society). If this passage justifies "rescue missions" to obey the second greatest commandment, then *a fortiori* it justifies "rescue missions" to obey the greatest commandment. So, if the command to love one's neighbor as oneself compels Christians to participate in a "rescue mission" to prevent entry into an abortuary, then it likewise compels "rescue missions" to prevent entry into a mosque. To escape the throes of inconsistency, the O.R. advocate must either admit that he is bound to prevent idolatry by resorting to "rescue missions" or that this passage does not justify the concept of "rescue missions."

Second, consider the parallels between abortion and idolatry. (1) Just as God absolutely prohibits abortion (Ex. 20:13, 21:22), so He absolutely prohibits idolatry (Ex. 20:3-4). (2) According to Scripture, both abortion and idolatry are capital crimes (Ex. 21:22-25; Deut. 13:1-18). (3) Contrary to Scripture, both abortion and idolatry are legally protected and permitted in the United States to such an extent that both are considered to be "constitutional" or "civil" rights. (4) As a result of this legal protection, millions of children have been led away to death, physically (in the case of abortion) and spiritually (in the case of idolatry). (5) God commands us to rescue those led away to spiritual death (Js. 5:20; Jude 23) even as he commands us to rescue those led away to physical death. Since O.R. advocates wish to infer a duty to participate in "rescue missions" to prevent abortion, were they consistent with their rhetoric, they should also be willing to participate in "rescue missions" to prevent idolatry.

Third, the judgment of God knows no distinction between abortion (murder) and idolatry. In fact, one of the texts O.R. advocates are fond of quoting (out of context) is Leviticus 20:1-5, which speaks of God cutting off His people for sacrificing their children to Molech. To be sure, Molech worship involved murder. But that murder was merely a function of the

<sup>42</sup> Christ taught that one's "neighbor" includes all men, including one's enemy.

<sup>43</sup> Foreman, debate with Hagopian.

underlying idolatry of Molech worship, which required child sacrifice. Were O.R. advocates to read this chapter in context, they would note in verse six that the very same judgment of God which would befall those who sacrificed their children to Molech would also befall those who merely consulted spiritists and mediums. What is the common denominator? Idolatry. Therefore, if Leviticus 20 justifies "rescue missions" in the case of abortion, then it also justifies "rescue missions" in the case of idolatry.

Fourth and finally, our Lord himself taught us that eternal death (the end result of idolatry) is far worse, and to be feared far more, than mere physical death (the end result of abortion) when He commands us not to "fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both body and soul" (Matt. 10:28).

So, according to Scripture, is abortion categorically different from idolatry or somehow more heinous so as to justify the illegal and physically coercive tactics of O.R.? Were one to examine the full testimony of Scripture instead of isolating and misinterpreting alleged proof texts, he would see that, if anything, idolatry is even more heinous to God than abortion. Thus, from God's perspective, abortion and idolatry are not Biblically distinguishable, as proponents of O.R. erroneously maintain in order to justify "rescue missions" in the case of abortion.

Why, then, do O.R. advocates vehemently attempt to resist the Biblical analogy to idolatry? Because that analogy, perhaps better than any other, reveals the tenuous justification for "rescue missions." Even many O.R. advocates grant that there is no Biblical justification for blockading temples and mosques since idolatry is only state-permitted and not state-commanded. Precisely! The same is true of abortion.<sup>44</sup>

Thus far, we have seen that O.R. advocates erroneously press the law of bystander liability into service to justify "rescue missions." By examining many of the verses to which O.R. advocates appeal, we saw four common errors which permeate the case for O.R. First, each supposed proof text is distinguishable from the present case of O.R. such that those who appeal to them construct Biblically false analogies. Second, O.R. advocates read into these bystander passages permission to disobey the state when these passages are either silent on that score, or in context, actually command Christians generally to obey the state. As we saw, O.R. advocates interpret these passages along a single axis (bystander liability) instead of along a dual axis (bystander liability and disobedience to the state). Third, O.R. advocates assume without argument (i.e., they beg the question) that their illegal and physically coercive tactics (i.e., "rescue missions") fulfill the mandate of the bystander principle. Fourth and finally, at many crucial junctures, O.R. advocates selectively and inconsistently interpret various bystander texts to justify "rescue missions" while they simultaneously deny the logical implications of their erroneous interpretations.

## **2. Human Laws Forbidding Trespass Do Not Forbid "Rescuers" from Fulfilling the Law of Bystander Liability**

If, as argued above, the bystander principle does not compel or permit illegal and physically coercive "rescue missions," then human laws forbidding trespass, loitering, and unlawful assembly do not forbid "rescuers" from fulfilling the

<sup>44</sup> This is true since both abortion and idolatry are state-permitted and not state-commanded. If the O.R. advocate rejoins by arguing that human laws forbid him from obeying God, then the same logic applies with respect to idolatry. Trespass laws, after all, would also prevent Christians from staging "rescue missions" at mosques and temples. Far from commanding any Christians to sin, the state permits others to sin. And, as we have already seen, Scripture does not permit or require Christians to disobey the state merely because the state permits others to sin.

bystander principle (properly understood and applied). Consequently, while such laws may prohibit "rescue missions," they do not prohibit the Christian from fulfilling the law of bystander liability since the Christian has numerous means by which he can save the life of the unborn and thereby fulfill the bystander principle. Thus, to argue that laws prohibiting trespass prevent the Christian from fulfilling the bystander principle is to reason by means of a false dilemma (either participate in a "rescue mission" and thereby fulfill the bystander principle, or refrain from a "rescue mission" and thereby disobey the bystander principle).

In addition to employing this false dilemma, O.R. advocates also fail to see the logical conclusion of their rhetoric at this juncture. O.R. advocates, for example, suggest that if laws forbidding trespass keep one from preventing an abortion, then such laws have "everything to do" with preventing abortion.<sup>45</sup> Aside from rivaling newspeak, this argument can be reduced to absurdity with relative ease: if laws which forbid trespassing have "everything to do" with abortion, then laws which prohibit murdering, bombing, and kidnapping would also prevent one from fulfilling the bystander principle (as interpreted by O.R.), and on the logic of this argument, would have "everything to do" with abortion.

## **B. "Rescuers" Have Legal Means by Which they can Obey God (save life).**

So far, we have seen that O.R. advocates have been unable to establish that they are forbidden to do what God commands. They are also unable to prove that they have no legal means by which they can save the life of the unborn.

When faced with the Biblical requirement to exhaust all available legal means of recourse, O.R. advocates usually retort by noting that there are no alternatives for "that" baby<sup>46</sup> about to enter the abortuary (let's call him "baby John"). In other words, the O.R. advocate claims that while there are legal means to save the unborn in general, there are no legal means to save baby John in particular: apart from a "rescue mission," we are told, baby John will die. As we will see, however, this argument is suspect since it assumes (1) that baby John should be a "rescuer's" focus, (2) that no legal means exist to save baby John, and (3) that the O.R. advocate acts consistently with his rhetoric.

First, baby John is not the only baby to be saved in the short and long-term. Christians must use their finite resources (time, money, manpower, etc.) to save as many baby Johns and baby Susans as possible. Imagine, for a moment, that the O.R. advocate is correct when he states that there is no legal way to save baby John. Suppose, further, that staging a "rescue mission" to save baby John will require an inordinate amount of resources (time, money, manpower, etc.). Suppose further, however, that the same amount of resources could save ten or twenty babies or more, if not today then tomorrow. No one wants to make these kinds of tough choices. We want to save all the babies! But saving all the babies is not currently feasible. So the real issue becomes how we can best use the limited resources God has bestowed on us to save as many babies as possible. This may mean that we must instead use these same resources to save baby Mark, baby Susan, and baby Amanda; but they are just as precious in the sight of God as baby John.

Admittedly, some of the legal means currently available are long-term solutions. Christians, for example, can work to regenerate individual members of society which is the only sure path to long-term social and cultural transformation so that even more baby Johns and baby Susans will be saved over the long term. They can reform society to Biblical stan-

<sup>45</sup> Foreman, debate with Hagopian.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* See also Belz, *Suffer the Little Children*, p. 79.

dards by engaging in legal, peaceful, and non-coercive appeals, pickets, and demonstrations. They can study the salient issues in the abortion controversy, learn to become articulate spokespersons, and seek to influence and educate society, accordingly. They can vote with their consumer dollar by refusing to patronize doctors who perform elective abortions, by withholding contributions from organizations which are involved in the abortion holocaust, and by simultaneously contributing to pro-life causes and organizations. They can encourage those who have been traumatized by abortion to bring lawsuits to force abortionists to internalize the "cost of doing business," drive malpractice premiums to cost-prohibitive levels, and force abortionists out of "business" (since they will no longer have an economic incentive to "stay in the trade"). They can develop a long-term perspective and fight the battles now to prevent the legalization of RU-486 (the "abortion pill") and, thereby, over the long term, save millions upon millions of baby Johns and baby Susans. (After all, were RU-486 to be marketed, it would render O.R.'s current tactics futile, unless, of course, O.R. is willing to post a "rescuer" in the home of every woman who attempts to swallow the pill!)<sup>47</sup>

Second, not all currently available legal methods are long-term solutions. In fact, we can save baby John today by dissuading his mother from aborting him, and we need not perpetrate illegality and physical coercion in order to do so. We can save baby John by promising to adopt him or by giving needed financial assistance to his mother before, during, and after she gives birth, thus convincing her to carry baby John to term. We can work in crisis pregnancy centers or engage in sidewalk counseling. Even O.R. advocates themselves confess that "many babies have been saved and will continue to be saved through these efforts."<sup>48</sup> If, by their own admission, members of O.R. have legal means by which they can save life, then they have no Biblical basis to disobey civil rulers because, contrary to the Biblical principles articulated above, they are not being commanded to sin and they are not put in a situation where they must choose between obeying God or man. In fact, they are not put in a position where they must choose between God or man precisely because there is a *tertium quid*, a third way out: they can obey God by saving lives legally — perhaps even the life of baby John.

In order to even make the baby John argument, then, the O.R. advocate must first assume that a "rescue mission" is the only way to save baby John. But, when push comes to shove, crisis pregnancy workers and sidewalk counselors have saved far more baby Johns than O.R. without squandering limited resources, without galvanizing pro-abortion opposition, and without perpetrating illegality and physical coercion. If O.R. advocates want to claim that a "rescue mission" is the only effective way to save baby John (which is what the "baby John" argument postulates), then at minimum they better be able to marshal empirical data to prove that their illegal and physically coercive methods save more lives, more efficiently, than any other legal and non-coercive means. No such empirical data is forthcoming.<sup>49</sup> And, even were such data produced, such data would still not prove that members of O.R. are without legal means of saving baby John. To be sure, crisis pregnancy workers and sidewalk counselors will not make the evening news. But they will save life. And they will be able to save the lives — the baby Johns — O.R. members cannot save,

because crisis pregnancy workers and sidewalk counselors do not have to contend with the "down time" of arrest, arraignment, imprisonment, and/or trial.

In response, some O.R. advocates claim that legal alternatives, such as sidewalk counseling, are ineffective since sidewalk counseling without a "rescue mission" only gives the counselor a few seconds, whereas sidewalk counseling with a "rescue mission" gives the counselor several minutes to dissuade a mother from aborting her child.<sup>50</sup> But, if a stopwatch determines the moral propriety of "rescue missions," why not just slide down the continuum of physical coercion a bit more and kidnap mothers for nine months until the child is born. Surely nine months, on this logic, would be better than several minutes!

Third, while O.R. advocates profess that they save baby John, in reality they barricade an abortuary in the hopes of saving as many babies, in general, as possible. Were O.R. members really out to save baby John in particular, they would have no reason to stop when his mother enters the abortuary. But no! They profess to save baby John when, in reality, they are only interested in baby John until his mother enters the doors of the abortuary! So, while O.R. advocates seek recourse in the baby John argument, their actions betray their own rhetoric. While they say the issue is not saving lives generally (because then they would have to admit that they have numerous legal means to do so), in reality they end up only saving lives on a general basis and not an individuated basis as they purport.

Indeed, we should save life. But we must save life in the way God has commanded us to do so. If God has provided us legal ways to save life, how can members of O.R. shrug Him off? Do they know better than God? While members of O.R. claim that they are forbidden to do what God commands, we have seen that this claim is not supported by Scripture. Members of O.R. are not forbidden to do what God commands because they have misinterpreted and misapplied the law of bystander liability in an attempt to justify "rescue missions" and because they can avail themselves of numerous means by which they can legally and non-coercively save the unborn.

By perpetrating illegality and by physically coercing others in society to conform to a Christian ethic, members of O.R. basically proclaim "enough is enough!" But God says that His thoughts are not our thoughts, nor His ways our ways (Is. 55:8-9). Members of O.R. say "enough is enough!" But God says that He makes all things beautiful in His time (Ecc. 3:11). Members of O.R. say "enough is enough!" But God says that we should not lose heart in doing good, for in due season we will reap if we do not grow weary (Gal. 6:9). So where does the "enough is enough!" attitude come from? From God — or Ghandi?

Isn't it time members of O.R. really learned to obey God rather than man? Δ

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<sup>50</sup> Foreman, debate with Hagopian.

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<sup>47</sup> Foreman chose not to respond to this argument during the debate, a tactic he often employed.

<sup>48</sup> Belz, *Suffer the Little Children*, p. 128.

<sup>49</sup> Although Foreman, during the debate, said that he could empirically prove that O.R.'s *illegalities* alone have saved the 250 lives O.R. claimed to have saved (as of May 1989), he never marshaled forth such empirical data. This was not the *only time Foreman overstated his case* by merely asserting or assuming what he should have proved.

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# For the Record

*This regular feature is an attempt to provide an elementary Biblical analysis of various topics in Christian theology and practice. We anticipate that this and future contributions will be helpful in explaining fundamental theological issues to those who may be relatively unfamiliar with them.*

## Trading Places: The Priesthood of All Believers

David Hagopian

So much for the tweed coat, button down collar, and loafers. Oh no, not for this professor. In his attempt to claim solidarity with the common man, he wears boots, disparagingly known as "longhorns" in the farmbelt, and thus spurns any accommodation to the evil capitalism that would actually pay him more than the janitor who cleans his halls at night. In fact, in a well-known article, this Harvard law professor once suggested that the janitors at the law school should trade places with the professors. Only problem: nobody bothered to ask the janitors if *they* wanted to trade places with the professors.

In a recent edition of *Wall Street Journal*, however, a Harvard law student did just that. What he found was that the janitors at the law school, on the whole, were not too pleased with this lofty professorial suggestion since lurking behind it was the arrogant assumption that being a Harvard Law School professor was somehow more desirable

than being a janitor. So, while the good ol' professor may have tried to safeguard the dignity and integrity of the janitor as a person, he did so at the tremendous expense of denigrating the janitor's vocation. In the end, the professor's lofty suggestion ended up promoting what it ostensibly attempted to deny: that professors are better than janitors.

Over and against such pseudo attempts to preserve dignity and integrity among those who pursue various vocations, stands a clarion truth of Scripture: the Reformed doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. This doctrine restores true dignity and true integrity to all believers since it teaches that all believers are priests and that as priests, they are to serve God — no matter what legitimate vocation they pursue. Thus, there is no vocation that is more "sacred" than any other. Because Christ is Lord over all areas of life, and because His word applies to all areas of life, nowhere does His Word even remotely suggest that the ministry is "sacred" while all other vocations are "secular." Scripture knows no sacred-secular distinction. All of life belongs to God. All of life is sacred. All believers are priests.

### Our Great High Priest

As priests, we must always remember that our priesthood, from beginning to end, is rooted and grounded in our Great High Priest whose priesthood was not ordained by man, but rather was ordained by God. In fact, God swore with a binding oath that Christ was, is, and will forever be our Eternal High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 5:6, 6:20, 7:26-27). And as our Eternal High Priest — as the God-man — Christ is the sole Mediator between God and man (I Tim. 2:5), having offered Himself as our sacrifice once and for all in order that He might expiate (cleanse) us from the guilt of our sin, propitiate (turn away) the wrath of God, reconcile us to God, and redeem us as His people.

But Scripture doesn't simply teach us that our high priest died on our behalf; it also teaches us that

because of His death we have been made priests in Him. The same Priest "who loves us, and released us from our sins by His blood," also "made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father..." (Rev. 1:5-6). What a glorious truth: Christ as our High Priest not only atoned for our sins, but also, as Calvin so aptly put it, received us "as his companions" in this great priestly office (*Institutes*, II.XV.6).

### Called as Priests

Thus, on the basis of His priestly work on our behalf, Christ has bestowed upon us a royal priesthood. This priesthood, however, would be meaningless apart from the fact that God richly bestowed His favor upon us, chose us for Himself, and called us to be His people and His priests. Put simply, we would not be priests were it not for the fact that God chose us to be His priests. That is why most every passage which speaks of us as priests also speaks of us as those who have been called by God, as God's chosen people.

In his first epistle, for example, Peter applies the attributes of the people of God under the Old Covenant to us as believers and explicitly proclaims that we are the people of God. In Scripture we learn that God mercifully called the children of Israel to be His people, and promised them that if they walked in obedience to His Covenant, they would be His "own possession", "a kingdom of priests" and a "holy nation" (Ex. 19:5, cf Deut. 14:2, 21). Conjuring up this imagery and applying these attributes to believers, Peter writes:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

In the same vein, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders in the fifth chapter of Revelation sing that the Lamb was slain and with His blood purchased for God "men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. And Thou has made them to be a kingdom of priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth" (Rev. 5:9-10).

First Peter 2:9-10 and Revelation 5:9-10, then, teach us about the mercy and grace of God who called us to be His priests. In particular, we learn at least three important truths from these passages. First, God, by the blood of Christ, has mercifully called people of every tribe and tongue and nation out of darkness into His marvelous light. Second, as those called into His marvelous light, we are also called to be His chosen people and royal priests. Third, because we are royal priests, we are to serve God daily by proclaiming His excellencies and reigning upon the earth to His glory. Put simply, by God's grace we are royal priests and as such we are to serve God daily as we reign for Him.

## Priests in Our Vocations

Since we are to serve God daily as priests, the priesthood of all believers should not be relegated to the status of a timeworn theological slogan. It is a cornerstone of Reformed theology which should change how we live our lives each and every day, including how we pursue our daily vocations. Properly understood, the priesthood of all believers teaches us that all believers are priests, no matter what their vocation — their calling — in life might be. Lutheran puts it so well:

A shoemaker, a smith, a farmer, each has his manual occupation and work; and yet, at the same time, all are eligible to act as priests.... Every one of them in his occupation or handicraft ought to be useful to his fellows... (Woolf, *Reformation Writings of Martin Luther*, 1.116).

According to Luther, all believers have equally received the treasures which God has given, from the shoemaker to the farmer to the smith. No vocation stands over and above the rest. No vocation is more "sacred" than any other. No vocation is better than another. God has called all believers, without exception, to be His royal priests — from the dockworker to the doctor, from the messenger to the manger, from the educator to the executive. No legitimate vocation is too lowly to be the vehicle through which God will do His work (Eastwood, *The Priesthood of All Believers*, p. 12).

The fundamental problem, though, is that many believers fail to understand that they are priests in their daily vocations and accordingly, fail to see that their vocations are vehicles through which God will do His work. As priests, believers are endowed with the incredible privilege of ministering for God daily in their vocations. But because many believers lose sight of their priestly calling, they slosh through their tasks day after day, without seizing valuable opportunities to serve God as priests in their vocations. Let us seize those opportunities and pursue our vocations with vigor and zeal, viewing them as an opportunity to serve our Great High Priest. Humbly recognizing the tremendous privilege God has bestowed on us through our Great High Priest, we should view our personal vocations as one of many spheres through which we exercise our priesthood.

As we exercise our priesthood in our vocations we must also remember that there is no room for arrogance amongst God's people. No believer has more privilege or status in the sight of God because of the vocation he pursues. From God's perspective, those who pursue all legitimate vocations are of equal dignity and integrity. As Barkley once put it, "All men are priests in their daily vocation. All are priests though their duties vary according to their calling" (*Presbyterianism*, p. 18). Indeed different vocations may impose different duties on those who pursue them and one vocation may even pay more than another.

## Being Somebody

But just because one vocation pays more than another does not necessarily mean that the person who receives higher pay is endowed with more dignity or integrity than one who receives lesser pay. That's not what really counts. What really counts, what ultimately distinguishes one person from another, what really makes someone somebody is Christ. So eloquent was Barkley when he wrote:

The only real farmer is a Christian farmer; the only real doctor is a Christian doctor; the only real man is a Christian man; and the only real woman is a Christian woman; and so on covering every detail and aspect and station in life. Apart from Christ we are not what we ought to be (*Presbyterianism*, p. 18).

Indeed, apart from Christ we are nobody and can do nothing (Jn. 15:5). But by His grace we are somebody and can do everything (Phil. 4:13).

Thus, being "all you can be" doesn't happen in the armed forces or in any other vocation for that matter. Being all you can be comes as a direct result of being a Christian, of knowing the Great High Priest, Jesus Christ. Therefore, the priesthood of all believers should not only focus us inwardly to serve God as we vigorously pursue our respective vocations. It should also focus us outwardly to introduce those around us to Christ so that they too can really be somebody.

Being somebody — enjoying true dignity and integrity — doesn't come from trading places with others. Being somebody comes from knowing our Great High Priest who traded places with us by dying in our stead, bestowing His grace upon us, and calling us to be His royal priests.

And that's a message even our good ol' professor in longhorns needs to hear. Δ

# ISSUE AND INTERCHANGE

*The goal of this regular feature is to provide our readers with opposing arguments on topics pertinent to the Christian life. Due to the power of party spirit, personal credibility, credentials, etc., we have asked all the authors writing for this fea-*

*ture to publish their brief statements anonymously. By doing this, we hope to encourage the reader, in some small way, to focus on the arguments involved in each position rather than on personal factors.*

*The authors selected for the re-*

*spective sides in the debate outspoken supporters of their viewpoints.*

*The burden of proof in the interchange is placed on Advocate One. For that reason, Advocate One opens and closes the debate.*

## ISSUE: Are We Ever Morally Justified in Deceiving Others?

### ADVOCATE 1: There Are Select Circumstances in Which Deception is Justified

Scripture teaches us that we worship a God of truth. This teaching is so prominent that His work can be simply summarized as "truth and justice" (Ps. 111:7), and His holy nature is such that He is not able to lie (Heb. 6:18). We are assured that God's Word is so characterized by truth that we are to remain loyal to it even if that requires believing that all others are liars (Rom. 3:4). Christ is described as one full of truth (John 1:14), and He even designates Himself as truth incarnate (John 14:6). Moreover, Christ promises that the Father will send the Holy Spirit, who is called the "Spirit of truth" (John 14:17). The Holy Spirit, too, is not simply characterized by truth but is identified with truth itself (I John 5:6,7). In contrast, Satan, the opponent of everything holy, is one who has "no truth in him" and is "the father of lies" (John 8:44). God's people are commanded to imitate His devotion to truth — "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Ex. 20:16; cf. Deut. 5:20; Ex. 23:1; Lev. 19:1,11; Col. 3:9). Yet despite such clear classifications and imperatives, Scripture also instructs us that there are circumstances in which one is morally permitted, and sometimes required, to deceive others. In other words, there are rare circumstances in which we are permitted or sometimes obligated to affirm a claim which we know is contrary to the facts.

One foundational principle in support of this view of deception is drawn from the ninth commandment. This commandment appears at first to rule out any legitimate use of deception. But given the fact that rules of similar form are summary rules and

not binding in every particular case, we may conclude that there may be circumstances where we are permitted to deceive. For example, we find a parallel rule in the commandment not to kill. This norm obligates us to protect life, sometimes at great personal cost, yet we know that Scripture permits and, at times, obligates us to take a life (to kill) in some cases of self-defense (Ex. 22:2), capital punishment (Ex. 21:12-14), and warfare (Deut. 20). Yet such cases do not nullify the general obligation to protect life. In similar manner, then, though we are generally obligated to maintain the highest standard of truth, there may be circumstances in which we may be permitted and/or obligated to willfully deceive another.

With this foundation in mind, we may focus on positive Biblical passages which condone certain uses of deception. We find one telling example in the case of the prophet Jeremiah. The Lord had consecrated Jeremiah from birth as a prophet to declare His words to the nations (Jer. 1:5, 10) and promised Jeremiah that he need not fear any man "for I am with you to deliver you" (Jer. 1:8). If Jeremiah were to rebel against God's calling and promises, he would face the judgment of God, as Jonah discovered. Yet at one point King Zedekiah instructs Jeremiah to deceive some officials regarding the content of a conversation so that Jeremiah "will not die" (Jer. 38:24), and Jeremiah goes ahead and blatantly deceives these men. In other words, he affirms a claim which he knows is contrary to the facts and spares his life from unjust aggressors. The Lord does not rebuke Jeremiah for

turning against His command as He does Jonah, but rather, the Lord immediately protects and uses Jeremiah again. Jeremiah deceived to protect life from unjust aggression, and he was justified in doing so.

We see similar deceptions in David's life. When Saul's men pursue David to his wife Michal's house, he secretly flees, and Michal deceives Saul's men with a mock body in David's bed (I Sam. 19:12-17). David life is thus spared from unjust aggressors. David also deceives Achish king of Gath by feigning insanity (I Sam. 21:13). The ploy works and Achish's servants fail in their efforts to aggress against David.

Then of course there are the classic cases to prove this point. In Exodus 1:15ff we learn that Pharaoh commands the Egyptian midwives to kill any sons born to Hebrew women. The midwives disobey, and when Pharaoh inquires why they failed to follow his command, they consciously distort the facts; they in fact "let the boys live" (Ex. 1:17), but they claim that they weren't even at the births in time (Ex. 1:19). Immediately following this deception, we read "So God was good to the midwives..." (Ex. 1:20). The fruit of fearing God was deception. They too deceived in order to protect against unjust aggression.

In another classic case, we find that God Himself directs Samuel to deceive Saul's informants. The Lord calls Samuel to go and anoint one of Jesse's sons as king in the place of Saul. Samuel openly expresses his fear that Saul will kill him if he discovers what his mission is, and so the Lord directs Samuel to deceive the infor-

mants by concealing his true mission: "And the Lord said, 'Take a heifer with you, and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the Lord'" (I Sam. 16:2). Samuel does this and spares his own life.

Finally, the most prominent case is Rahab's deception. Joshua sends spies to Jericho, and the king of Jericho calls on Rahab, who is harboring the spies, to "Bring out the men who have come to you" (Josh. 2:3). Though at that moment they were in fact in her home, she claims, contrary to fact, that "the men went out; I do not know where the men went." (Josh. 2:5). When the potential aggressors left, Joshua's spies made an oath to protect her and her family from the coming destruction "for she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent" (Josh. 6:25). She is blessed for her deception. Hebrews 11:31 and James 2:25 continue to praise Rahab for her righteous work of deception. Hence, once again, deception is justified when one is protecting life against the threat of unjust aggressors.

But Scripture does not limit cases of legitimate deception to imminent danger alone. Deception is also justified in times of war. The general principle is drawn from the protection of life, but the cases go beyond those discussed above. Joshua deceptively attacks Ai by means of an ambush. This is not on the surface a defensive maneuver or protection against imminent unjust aggression, but it is condoned. Similarly, Elisha deceives the army of Syria who seek him. God

blinds the army at Elisha's request, and they then petition Elisha to lead them to Elisha in Dothan. Elisha replies that "This is not the way, nor is this the city; follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom you seek" (II Kings 6:19). He conceals his identity and leads the invading army right into the hands of the king of Israel. One other instance of wartime deception is noteworthy. God had punished Israel for its rebellion by using Canaan to oppress it. Under Judge Deborah, Israel attempts to route the Canaanites, whose army was led by Sisera. Sisera does finally flee and hides in the tent of Jael the wife of Heber. She promises to protect him from death and hides him in her tent (Judg. 4:18). But this is not to be the case, for she instead drives a tent peg through his temples. The whole army was subsequently subdued, and Jael is praised as "the most blessed of women" (Judg. 5:24).

Thus Scripture permits the use of deception in these two types of circumstances: protection of life against unjust aggressors and wartime. We need to specify the aggressors as "unjust" in order to rule out lying in cases where the person ought to have his or her life taken. For example, Scripture does not justify a murderer who deceives civil authorities in order to protect him or herself from execution. But we are permitted to lie brilliantly to protect life against unjust aggressors whether they be rapists or Nazi tyrants searching for Jews. More-

over, as we've seen, a nation or militia is justified in its use of deception against enemies in war situations. Among other things, we may use spy networks, camouflage, and false confessions. But note, contrary to the practice of many modern nations, the deception is to be used against the enemy not a nation's own citizens. We would not be justified in deceiving our own citizens by fabricating facts in order to rally the people behind some military cause or offer systematic propaganda programs after the manner of WWI allies.

Finally, there is one other category of justified deception, but it is so unlike the first two cases that is not proper to label it as deception at all; this is the category of accepted cultural deceptions: the surprise party, false comedic claims, fake moves in sports, and others. None of these are truly deceptions since they are part of a cultural fabric which all accept and expect. True deception assumes that one side of the party is ignorant and would be an unwilling partner. Yet this is not the case with these cultural "deceptions," and so they are justified forms of deception, only if we are willing to strain the term beyond normal usage.

Given all of the above, we are not only permitted, but at times, obligated to deceive others. We are, of course, focusing on very rare circumstances. None of the above should be used as a license for sin. Truth telling is the Christian's norm.

## ADVOCATE 2 Deception is Impermissible

The Advocate of the White Lie (hereafter "AWL") begins by citing Scripture in a line of argument that properly belongs to his opponent. For the most compelling argument in favor of strict truth-telling is precisely this: truth is defined by God's nature and thought, which cannot change, and our words should be in conformity with that nature.

Indeed, the identity in relation between God's thinking and the truth is so significant that even inadvertently passing on of false information involves one in sin, as John Murray pointed out with great acumen. If we accept a job because of the heartfelt assurance on the part of the recruiter that "he is sure a promotion will occur

within the first year," and that proves not to pan out, do we not then feel violated on account of the false information, regardless of the "sincerity" of the person who gave the false information? It is enough to simply observe the far-reaching and accumulating effects of inadvertently erroneous communications in one's workplace, to become convinced of the great evil this entails.

AWL hopes to sidestep the crushing force of the relation between truth-telling and the character of God by being the first to mention it, then quickly moving on to prove the "exceptions" which Scripture seems to allow. To these we now turn.

The analogy to the sixth commandment is doubly flawed. First, the

language is technically not "thou shalt not kill" but more precisely "thou shalt not murder." The apparent "exceptions" to the command (self-defense, capital punishment, etc.) are therefore not exceptions at all, but rather disjunctive to the commandment. But even if they were true exceptions, they would still differ from the case of deception in that they are positively commanded by the same code of law which prohibits murder. We do not find analogous commands in the case of the ninth commandment ("thou shalt not bear false witness.")

The greatest pitfall in AWL's subsequent argumentation is the fallacy of reasoning from historical nar-

ration to ethical norm. Indeed, the actions of men often are mentioned in Scripture, as it were, by way of erecting a scarecrow before a path which ought not to be followed: "These things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted" (I Cor. 10:6). But caution is required in drawing ethical conclusions even from the lives of godly men. For example, is the "lesson" to be drawn from the narration of Abraham's deception of Abimelech (Gen. 20:2) -- (1) that lying is justifiable to extract oneself from a predicted eventuality that is distressing, or (2) that Abraham's lie was foolish and unnecessary in addition to being, quite simply, unlawful? Or is the narration unconcerned with making an ethical point along these lines at all? The most painstaking exegesis is called for in drawing normative conclusions from historical examples.

In order to make a prima facie case for white lies, it would be necessary for AWL to show both that an historical example was a case where a positive presentation of a falsehood is made, and that the specific act was given inspired approbation. AWL's examples fail one or the other of these tests.

In several of the examples, it is frankly difficult, if not impossible, to define where the lie was. In the case of the Hebrew mid-wives, it is first of all not clear that their statement to Pharaoh was a falsehood. It could indeed have been the case that the Hebrew women were "livelier" than the Egyptians, and that as a result they (often) were done delivering before the mid-wives could reach them. Directly to the point, however, is that the apposition of God's approval of the midwives in verse 20 is most likely not verse 19 but rather verse 17: "the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt

commanded them, but saved the men children alive." That is, they are commended for disobeying an unlawful order at great personal risk; not for the words spoken thereafter to Pharaoh.

The case of Samuel in I Sam. 16:2 (The Lord said, "say I am come to sacrifice") is also not a falsehood, as is clear from reading the immediately following verse: "call Jesse to the sacrifice."

As to Rahab: whether or not her lie was necessary for ensuring the safety of the spies is unclear. She had, after all, hidden them on the roof, which implies she was expecting the premises to be searched. Very possibly, then, when the soldiers arrived at her door, she lost her nerve and blurted out the lie. Significantly, the NT passages cited do not single out her lie as a praiseworthy act, contrary to AWL's assertion. Heb. 11:31, emphasizing the faith of each cited individual, refers simply to Rahab's having "received the spies with peace"—no mention of the deception. Similarly, James 2:25, emphasizing the life of action which follows from regeneration, only mentions that "she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way."

The words of Jael to Sisera are simply "turn in, my lord; fear not." As with so many of the alleged instances of justifiable lying, we need to ask, where is the lie? Telling a quivering, cowardly, self-pitying enemy of God to "fear not" can only be construed as a "promise to protect him from death" if that reprobate's own shaky mental condition is to be taken as the standard for judging the soundness of inferences. By any normal standard, however, where is the lie?

The same critical evaluation applies to Elisha's beautiful statement, "This is not the way, neither is this the city: follow me, and I will bring you to

the man whom ye seek." His statement proved to be absolutely true, though in a surprising and gracious way quite different from what the Syrians expected. The Syrians were mercifully delivered from the evil they intended. As they would then reflect back on Elisha's words and the subsequent events, where would they localize the lie? What fault could they possibly find with their treatment at Elisha's hands?

Another serious problem with AWL's idea is that the proposed criteria for determining when lying is acceptable is read into, not out of, the text. Others, with equal plausibility, have suggested that the godly man may deceive whenever the opponent, by his ungodliness, "has no right to the truth." The problem with all of these solutions is subjectivism: the same person that determines that a lie would be justifiable, is the one who is also tempted to lie.

Inevitably, the people who practice this theory begin the descent down the slippery slope. After all, my property represents a portion of my life; therefore, to preserve my property, which is my life, I may lie. Suddenly, it becomes okay to lie to a bureaucrat. After a while, any pesky person that seems to be infringing on my domain may be lied to. In the other direction, the call by a superior to "give an account", which might be threatening to my position, becomes the occasion for excuse-giving, which is a subtle form of a lie. Finally, the deceiver's own mind goes soft: the distinction between truth and falsehood becomes ever more a grayish blur. Categorical answers all start to seem too "simplistic," not because of his subtlety of thought, but because the mental edge has been dulled. We paraphrase Patrick Henry: is life so dear or breath so sweet, as to be purchased at such a price? Forbid it Almighty God!

## ADVOCATE 1 Response

Advocate Two makes a humorous attempt to poison-the-well against justified deceptions by labelling me "Advocate of the White Lie." But, such a label is obviously inaccurate since the common connotation of a "white lie" suggests little, comfortable lies, but such deceptions are clearly prohibited by the Biblical principles I cite. If Advocate Two is truly in need of a convenient label for our positions, he

may feel free to label my view, say, "the true position" and his "the false position." These certainly are convenient, simple, and acceptable to me.

Advocate Two worries that I have used his Biblical support for my case. My position's strong commitment to the God of truth is not in the slightest embarrassed by God's holy direction to protect life by deceiving potential murderers. The two lines of

thought coalesce like love and justice.

I've argued that the ninth commandment parallels the sixth in that both are summary norms which allow clarifying exceptions. Advocate Two attempts to undercut this by arguing that "kill" technically should read "murder," but this is simply false. On the one hand, Advocate Two's reading would produce a confused statement at Deut. 4:42, namely, "uninten-

tionally murdered" instead of "unintentionally killed" his neighbor; but even granting "murder," his interpretation would still produce an exception, given the term's use at Numbers 35:27.

The "greatest pitfall" in my case, according to Advocate Two, is that I infer approval from mere historical narration. I couldn't agree more that such an inference would be fallacious, but I haven't fallen into that simple error. In all of the passages cited, God approves the deception.

Advocate Two fails to respond to the main case I offer, namely, Jeremiah's deception of the murderous officials, and so this case still stands.

*Midwife Crisis:* Advocate Two claims that he cannot determine whether the Hebrew midwives deceived Pharaoh since their report about the Hebrew women may be true. But this misses the point. The midwives determined to "let the boys live" and then claimed, contrary to that fact, that they could not be involved with the birth (Ex. 1:19). This is deception. The only move Advocate Two tries to use to deflect the approval which immediately follows the deception is that the it "most likely" refers to an earlier attitude, but note that he must ignore v. 20's inferential connective to v. 19.

*Samuel's Sacrifice:* Advocate Two appears to use Murray's distinc-

tion between withholding information and offering a falsehood. This distinction has merit in some cases, but Samuel knowingly (and by divine direction!) withholds information in order to foster a false impression. This certainly is a form of deception, and it is justified. Moreover, if, as Advocate Two himself admits in his opening, a person deceives by passing on even inadvertent falsehoods, then how much more so if, as Samuel, a person deliberately creates false impressions.

*Rahab's Blurt?* Advocate Two agrees that Rahab lies but attempts to justify the subsequent approval of her act by claiming that "possibly...she lost her nerve and blurted out the lie." Where is a hint of this in the text? Such a loss of nerve is inconsistent with her place in the "Hall of faith" at Heb. 11:31. Nevertheless, even Advocate Two admits that she is commended for receiving "spies." In other words, she is at least blessed for receiving official deceptions! But the Scriptural commendation is much stronger than that. James 2:25 does not "only mention" her deception in passing, but it cites her deception as the very work which demonstrated her faith — "she sent them out another way."

*Jael's Point:* Advocate Two claims that he is unable to find the lie in Jael's execution of Sisera. In order to make his case though, he suggests that we believe that Jael's "fear not"

exhortation to Sisera is a warning of her impending execution. I think not.

*Elisha's Misdirection:* Once again, Advocate Two attempts to deny that a deception occurs, but he also admits that Elisha's directions were "quite different from what the Syrians expected." This is an understatement; they were not seeking to be captured by their enemy. Elisha deceives them by concealing his identity and taking them where he knew they did not want to go. Again, Advocate Two himself concedes that this is deception in his opening statements.

Advocate Two closes his discussion with two claims: first, that the justified deception position is read into the text, and second, that this position "inevitably" leads "down a slippery slope." Both claims are misguided. The first claim begs-the-question against all of the cases discussed above. The second claim is a blatant example of the "slippery slope" fallacy in that he assumes his slope of horrendous consequences will follow *without further argument* from my position. Bob Hope once committed a similar fallacy by claiming that if we lost the war in Vietnam, we would soon have Communists invading California. Moreover, all I need is one case to disprove Advocate Two's claim that all those who use deception against an unjust aggressor "inevitably" begin lying to everyone... I'll choose Jeremiah.

## ADVOCATE 2 Response

Leaving the technicalities of Hebrew to the experts, the main point is still irrefutable: that in the context of the Mosaic code as a unified law system, the import of the sixth commandment is "thou shalt not murder". The modern translations, such as NASB and NIV, have correctly picked up on this. No codification of circumstances which would justify lying or deception are to be found anywhere in the law.

I showed before that the historical examples in the Bible cited to justify the notion of non-culpable deception fail, either because no lie can be identified, or because divine approval is dubious.

Perhaps the significance of not being able to point to a lie in many of the cases can be made more clear by illustrating in terms of the following principle. Where a questioner has no right to the truth (to which my duty to

fully reveal the truth would correspond), then it is not wrong to seek to conceal the truth. The intent must not be to deceive, but conceal. The nineteenth century theologian Dick (as cited by Thornwell) stated it well: "We are not bound to answer every question which may be proposed to us. In such cases we may be silent, or we may give as much information as we please and suppress the rest. If the person afterward discovers that the information was partial, he has no title to complain, because he had not a right even to what he obtained; and we are not guilty of a falsehood unless we made him believe, by something which we said, that the information was complete. We are at liberty to put off with an evasive answer the man who attempts to draw from us what we ought to conceal."

The distinction is recognized by Scripture in the case of Jeremiah

(who disclosed only the petition that the king would not remand him to Jonathan's house), and Samuel (who disclosed to Saul only the upcoming sacrifice). Indeed, the notion that men harboring evil intent should be entitled to full disclosure of the truth on any subject which they demand is absurd. It is absurd whether the evil intent is murderous in nature, or simply prurient meddlesomeness. The fallacious conclusion, however, would be that the only alternative is to deceive, and that, therefore, deception must be righteous in such circumstances.

Rahab seems to be a strong example because of being cited favorably in the New Testament. There is no question that her action of protecting the spies, seen in the "big picture," was a righteous one; this does not mean that every facet of her behavior was without fault, as Calvin pointed out:

"as to the falsehood, we must admit that though it was done for a good purpose, it was not free from fault. For those who hold what is called a dutiful lie to be altogether excusable, do not sufficiently consider how precious truth is in the sight of God...It can never be lawful to lie, because that cannot be right which is contrary to the nature of God...On the whole, it was the will of God that the spies should be delivered, but he did not approve of saving their life by falsehood."

At first glance, it might appear that James commends Rahab for her lie, when he lauds her for "sending them out another way." It might be thought that this description of her act would only have religious significance if the implied completion of the thought were "...another way from the way she told the king's men." But in view of what has been said, it is more plausible to conclude that she is commended for sending them out "...another way from the normal way of entering and leaving the house." Someone saw the spies enter the house, and the rumor spread quickly. Rahab, at great personal risk, sent them out by lowering them from

the back window on the city wall (Joshua 2:18). For this risky act of evasion she is commended.

The Hebrew midwives, again, are commended for fearing God (Ex. 1:17) and letting the boys live. When their story ends, this commendation is repeated (verse 20). To suppose that the thing they are commended for is *lying* to Pharaoh is absurd, for that would imply that if they had saved the boys and then "taken their lumps," their deed might not have been commendable. Clearly, the praiseworthy act was the determination, at great personal risk, not to obey Pharaoh's unlawful command; their subsequent statement to Pharaoh is incidental.

As a point of speculative interest (but not to establish the principle), I point out that their statement may not even have been a lie anyway. Calvin, however, concedes that the statement was a lie and comments: "though these women were too pusillanimous and timid in their answers, yet because they had acted in reality with heartiness and courage, God endured in them the sin which he would have deservedly condemned. This doctrine gives us alacrity

in our desire to do rightly, since God so graciously pardons our infirmities; and, at the same time, it warns us most carefully to be on our guard, lest, when we are desirous of doing well, some sin should creep in to obscure, and thus to contaminate our good work; since it not unfrequently happens that those whose aim is right, halt or stumble or wander in the way to it. In fine, whosoever honestly examines himself, will find some defect even in his best endeavours."

The case for a strict proscription against telling falsehoods is grounded in the nature of God and commanded in His law. The apparent examples to the contrary are seen not to be decisive. Having established the ethic of truth-telling from solid principles, it is then perfectly legitimate to point out pastorally, that there are real dangers in the disobedience of these principles. It has been my observation that most of the Christians I have known who have adopted a theory of non-culpable deception, in fact have had their mental edge dulled in consequence of it. This is not proof, but it is a brotherly word to the wise.

## ADVOCATE 1 Concluding Remarks

In all, Advocate Two attempted to raise three primary criticisms against my case for the legitimacy of life-saving deception.

1) I argued that the ninth commandment does not prohibit all forms of deception in the same way that the sixth commandment does not prohibit all forms of killing (the location of the qualifications are irrelevant). Advocate Two attempted to rebut this foundational consideration by arguing that Scripture does not grant exceptions to the sixth commandment. In my previous response I offered non-technical proof from Deuteronomy 4:42 and Numbers 35:27 that his interpretation was incorrect. He chose not to respond to my Biblical arguments and instead appealed to the authority of the NASB and NIV. Hence, because my initial consideration still stands, Advocate Two may not appeal to the ninth commandment to buttress his case.

2) Advocate Two also attempted to show that several of the cases I cited were simply not deceptions in the first place (i.e. the cases of Jeremiah, Samuel, Jael, and Elisha).

In his latest response, however,

he chooses either to simply reassert his position or ignore my previous refutations of his claims regarding the cases of Elisha, Jael, and Samuel. Advocate Two now claims that Jeremiah only disclosed part of the truth, but I challenge the reader to find this so-called partial truth in the relevant discussion. The king never did what Jeremiah claims he did; this is pure deception.

Finally on this concern, Advocate Two again attempts to draw a distinction between deceiving and concealing. We are playing with words at this point. I previously argued that one who deliberately conceals information in order to create a *false* impression (Samuel, Elisha, etc.) is deceiving. *In these cases the distinction between concealment and deception collapses.* Advocate Two chooses not to defend his case from this objection in his latest response. Hence, these cases still stand.

3) Advocate Two alternatively claimed that Scripture does not show divine approval for some of the cases.

In regard to the Hebrew midwives, Advocate Two reasserts his prior claims but does not interact with my previous argument. Therefore, this case

still stands.

He thinks Rahab's deception was not approved because James 2:25 commends her for a "risky act of evasion." But no matter how we read this case, we find deception. Remember she receives *spies*. If Advocate Two is going to stick to his position, then Israel sinned for having such deceivers in its army, and Rahab sinned by protecting them.

But beyond these concerns, Rahab receives divine approval for her deception whether "another way" in James 2:25 refers to an abnormal secretive escape or to an alternate route—both are deceptive, and Advocate Two maintains that all such falsehood is impermissible.

Advocate Two closes by offering the pastoral advice that most people he knows who hold my position "have had their mental edge dulled." One could offer similar sincere advice to the opposition. I truly want to receive all the pastoral advice I can get, but Advocate Two has simply failed to counter the Biblical arguments I have offered. Therefore, we do have clear divine direction to deceive others in those, hopefully, rare circumstances where life is threatened. Δ

# Book Review

## *The Excluded Americans: Homelessness and Housing Policies*

by William Tucker Washington, DC: Regnery Gateway, 1990, 389 pages, \$24.95

Reviewed by Jay Fleming

William Tucker has made an invaluable and timely contribution to all who are working toward a strategy for the poor and homeless. At a time when taxpayers are beginning to see how the government has miserably dealt with poverty, *The Excluded Americans* explains how an anti-free market approach in government housing policy actually contributes to homelessness. Tucker exposes how these policies contribute to the expanding problems of all involved: the homeless, renters, landlords, (would be) home owners, housing developers, and the American taxpayers. Tucker examines the different attitudes, policies and consequences of housing politics by comparing New York City, Santa Monica, and San Francisco, with Houston, Kansas City, and other U.S. cities. He even provides his personal experience as a pretended homeless person in Grand Central Station. Tucker includes a collection of supporting anecdotes, case histories, statistics, as well as invoking the theories of Adam Smith and David Ricardo.

Tucker argues that local rather than federal government housing policies serve to reduce the amount of available housing. With less new homes "filtering down" to the lower economic groups, the used housing market prices remain higher thus excluding these groups even to the point where many segments of society can no longer anticipate affordable housing. This is dangerous because when people anticipate owning a home, they are more motivated to save money. If both the dream of and savings for home ownership continue to fade, the baby-boom generation may eventually call for government to take an even greater role in the current housing crisis. Tucker's solution is to deregulate construction barriers which will serve to stimulate home building. By eliminating restrictive rent control and zoning policies, current housing will be freed up so that it filter's down to the lower economic stratum.

Tucker exposes other political, legal, and financial barriers in the housing industry via housing "reform," "controlled growth," exclusionary zoning restrictions on land use, and the building regulation practices. In order to develop a home in Southern California, for example, a developer must jump through several hundred bureaucratic hoops. And jumping through these hoops is very costly. According to Jack Kemp, the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, this adds thirty to forty thousand dollars to the cost of an affordable home in southern California.

*The Excluded American* also dis-

cusses current myths and misconceptions regarding housing policies. For example, Tucker shows how rent control benefits the wealthy instead of the lower economic groups. The poor are also harmed by the growing tenant and landlord wars fueled by "tenants' rights" advocates. For comparison, he also examines rent control policies in other countries. Perhaps more valuable to the current debate is Tucker's refutation of popular explanations for homelessness, the myth of real welfare cutbacks under the Reagan administration, and the (ab)use of statistics in calculating the real number of homeless Americans in recent years. Hopefully, Tucker's analysis will serve to break through the faulty assumptions found on all sides of the political-ideological spectrum.

There may be good news at the federal level in so far as Jack Kemp can lead the Department of Housing and Urban Development in the direction of Tucker's solutions. The HUD Secretary's stated intent is clear: "When we talk about affordable housing we're talking about government bureaucracy, government regulation, zoning exclusively, rent controls that have been defended by John Kenneth Galbraith for years. I want to remove the level of bureaucracy and get America back to a housing policy that will build houses, for the poor and first time home buyers."<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps Kemp's stated efforts will not be in vain so long as voters remember in their community and state elections that local policies affect housing more significantly than national efforts. While critics may argue that the housing industry is ruled by interest rates, the economy is also influenced by productivity and savings which are reciprocally influenced by the possibility of affordable housing.

Robert Hayes of the National Coalition for the Homeless has described the three-word solution to the homeless crisis as, "Housing, housing, housing," but neither such simplistic sloganeering nor even Tucker's analysis deals with the larger problems. Studies conducted by HUD over the last two years indicate that providing a home for some alcoholics, addicts, or the "mentally ill" may not keep them off the street. Their studies estimate that half of the urban homeless have been homeless more than once, suggesting that housing alone does not solve a complex human problem. The HUD survey also found that less than a third of the nation's shelters

<sup>1</sup> Kemp, Gingrich, & Buckley Jr. verses McGovern, Hart, Schroeder, & Galbraith, "Free Market Competitiveness is Best for America," *Firing Line Debate*, Sept. 13, 1989.

provide adequate treatment for substance abuse, "mental illness," or health care. The majority of the homeless have intense and persistent personal and interpersonal problems which for many people can only be addressed by extensive and consistent medical and/or spiritual counseling. If the private sector has assumed the responsibility for the care of the homeless (as the HUD shelter survey indicated with approximately 9 out of 10 homeless shelters being operated by community groups and churches as of 1988), then perhaps what is needed as much as Tucker's analysis is an agenda dealing with the spiritual problems behind homelessness.

For these larger issues concerning poverty, I recommend Olasky, et al, *Freedom, Justice, and Hope: Toward a Strategy for the Poor and the Oppressed*, and Grant's *In the Shadow of Plenty: Biblical Principles of Welfare and Poverty*. The latter book is a companion volume to Grant's text *The Dispossessed: Homelessness in America* which should be required reading for anyone who wants a comprehensive Biblical view of the homeless problem. I would even recommend these books to Tucker considering his concluding remarks: "...I wonder if anybody really knows what is causing homelessness. Building more housing and getting rid of rent control are my favorite solutions, but other things are obviously going to be needed as well. In a sense, homelessness remains an enigma that the homeless themselves must live out. I doubt if *anyone* [my emphasis] completely understands the problem." (p. 355) At the heart of the Christian world-and-life view is Jesus Christ who has himself experienced oppression, alienation, defeat, and other states found at the core of the homeless experience. As such, Christ is the source of genuine relief.

While limited in scope, Tucker's solutions are Biblically sound. *The Excluded Americans* may prove to accomplish more than merely introduce a free market housing policy into the homelessness debate. Like Charles Murray's historic analysis *Losing Ground: American Social Policy 1950-1980*, Tucker may help convert the baby-boom vote to a market based strategy before they lose all hope of home ownership and become vulnerable to even more government housing policies. If a majority of the American voters use Tucker's criteria for electing state and local officials, we will indeed discover improved material conditions for the homeless, a basis for the dream and reality of affordable housing, more personal savings, a stronger economy and a better standard of living for us all. Δ



# Novelty, Nonsense, and Non-Sequiturs

## Magic as Science

*Scientific American* (May 1990) attempts to conjure up another defense of Archaeopteryx, "the oldest know bird, a textbook example of a transitional form between reptiles and modern birds."

The author presents the two prevailing models for the evolution of flight:

*Arboreal model*—"flight evolving from the downward beating of the wings evolved from gliding and originated in animals that climbed and leaped from trees."

*Cursorial model* — "flying arose among bipedal animals making small jumps (to catch insects for example) while running and flapping their forelegs simultaneously to extend the jumps. With progressive development of the wing structures, the jumps became longer and higher until the animals could eventually keep themselves on a flying course by beating their wings."

Of course, the author omits the part about the magic wand.

## Future Leaders Under Construction

A *Better Homes and Gardens* (Jan. 1990) reader offers the following insight for sound parenting:

"I have found a surefire way to end my 2-year-old's temper tantrums. I imitate everything he does, right down to the foot-stomping and screaming. He thinks it's so hilarious that he forgets all about his own complaint."

## The Redistributionist Hustle

The U.S. constitution originally required Congress to enumerate citizens every ten years so as to determine the number, and later, the ratio of representatives in the House.

Times have changed. The 1990 Census form expresses the general shift in political thinking which has arisen since that time:

"Your answers help fund services everyone needs. By putting yourself in the picture — answering the census and being counted — you help make sure your community gets its fair share of federal and state funding for essential programs and services: for schools, health centers, parks, highways, services for the elderly, child care, employment and training programs and much more."

Just think, President Pierce once vetoed a bill redistributing funds to aid the insane because he could not find "any authority in the Constitution for making the Federal Government the great almoner of public charity throughout the U.S."

## Sex Can Kill

In a recent California gubernatorial debate between Democratic hopefuls, Pro-Abortionist, John Van De Kamp chided Pro-Abortionist, Diane Feinstein for her opposition to abortions being performed simply to choose one sex over another. Pro-Abortion groups strongly pressured Feinstein to reject this infelicity.

Noting that both candidates strongly oppose sexual discrimination in employment, what conclusion should we draw from their principles? — We may not consider sex when hiring persons, but we may consider sex if we are planning to kill them.

## I'm Personally Opposed to Murder

Dr. Kristi Van Nostrand, a medical resident, recently quipped, appropriately enough on April Fool's day:

"Abortions should be available for women, but I just can't imagine doing them myself....I feel like I'm ending a life." (*Orange County Register*)

Translation: I believe abortion is murder but women should be allowed to murder.

## To Speculate or not to Speculate

*Time* magazine recently asked Billy Graham about the Second Coming:

*Time*: "Like all Evangelicals [!] you believe in the Second Coming of Christ to be preceded by unprecedented worldwide warfare, famine, and cruelty. But doesn't the waning of the Cold War make such an apocalypse more remote today than, say, ten years ago?"

*Graham*: "I could not answer that because I think the Lord taught us not to speculate on the time of His return...."

[But in the same response he adds] — "I personally think things are now converging for the first time in history' fulfilling the prophesies that Christ Himself made about His coming. I had a German scientist say to me the other day that from a scientific point of view man is almost at the end now."

## Growing Hysteria Over Medieval Collegiate Road-Killings

Among other discoveries, the *Skeptical Inquirer* uncovered the following circumstances behind some of the recent Satanic cult hysteria circulating the nation:

"In one case in New Hampshire, for example, police publicly claimed to have found evidence of ritually slaughtered animals, which were later determined to be only road kills cleaned up by state road workers and deposited in the woods. In another case, in Cobleskill, New York, in response to reports of a 'satanic cult ritual meeting' and impending human sacrifice, police rushed with guns drawn into a wooded site. They found only some college students in hooded garments practicing a medieval play and using wooden daggers and swords as props."

# ANTITHESIS

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The "real world" -- an idea no longer of any use, not even a duty any longer -- an idea grown useless... a refuted idea: let us abolish it!

Frederick Madsen

...they became futile in their understanding, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise they became fools...

Romans 1:21-22

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"If we are to be true to the antithetical nature of Christianity, we must engage in a presuppositional challenge to unbelievers to show them that in terms of their worldview they cannot make sense of logic, facts, meaning, value, ethics, or human significance."

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# ANTITHESIS

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I was in the process of covering up my crime when suddenly God saw me. I felt His gaze inside my head and on my hands. I whirled about in the bathroom, horribly visible, a live target...

...He doesn't exist, I said with polite surprise; never have I had the temptation to bring Him back to life. But the Other One remained, the Holy Ghost, the one who guaranteed my mandate...

...I collared the Holy Ghost in the collar and threw him out; atheism is a cruel affair... I've given up the office but not the truck; I still write. What else can I do?

John Paul Sartre

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them... they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God.

Romans 1:18, 19, 21

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