Theology Matters

A Publication of Presbyterians for Faith, Family and Ministry Vol 4 No 3 • May/Jun 1998

Church Renewal Brings Cultural Transformation:

The English Revolution Of the Early Nineteenth Century

by Herbert Schlossberg

In spite of considerable progress in the last few years, there is a good deal of discouragement among those seeking renewal in the church and the society. It is as if people are despairing of ever achieving real reform. Is it really possible that a society and a church that have lost their way to the extent ours have done have ever come back to some semblance of health and faithfulness? Yes, often, although the usual approach to history serves to conceal that fact. To illustrate this let us consider one particular period of history, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in England. But first some background.

The Decline of English Society

In the aftermath of Oliver Cromwell's death, the son of the executed King Charles I was invited back from his exile in France to reassume the throne his father had last occupied. The Restoration of the monarchy in 1660 was the occasion for a widespread purge in the Church of England. After ripping the bodies of Cromwell and his lieutenants from their graves for a public hanging, the regime of Charles II executed or imprisoned some of the puritan leaders and expelled Anglican clergymen with puritan leanings from their posts. A generation later the Glorious Revolution of 1688 was greeted with revulsion by many high churchmen who believed they were witnessing the ousting of the king to whom they had sworn allegiance as part of their religious duties. Being unable to accept the legitimacy of the rule of William and Mary, they lost their clerical jobs in 1690. With the most dedicated clergymen of the Church gone, first the militant Protestants and then the high churchmen, the future was not promising. As one modern observer puts it:

> The 'moderate,' 'reasonable' men, the time-servers, self-seekers and pluralists—these all were left: but the wings of faith were gone. Had the 'National' Church studied how best to extinguish all spiritual fire within the realm and to crush all crusading initiative, she could have devised no better plan than these two tragic expulsions.[1]

English life thus entered the eighteenth century, a historian concludes, "like the surface of the moon. . .pockmarked with extinct religious volcanic craters."[2]

That judgment may seem overstated, but contemporaries were saying similar things. Here is Bishop Butler in the Advertisement to the first edition of his *Analogy of Religion*, published in 1736:

> It is come, I know not how, to be taken for granted, by many persons, that Christianity is not so much as a subject of inquiry; but that it is, not at length, discovered to be fictitious. And accordingly they treat it, as if, in the present age, this were an agreed point among all people of discernment; and nothing remained, but to set it up as a principal subject of mirth and ridicule, as it were by way of reprisals, for its having so long interrupted the pleasures of the world.[3]

Herbert Schlossberg, Ph.D. is a Presbyterian elder and author of numerous articles and books including Idols for Destruction *and* A Fragrance of Oppression.

Across the Channel, Montesquieu wrote in 1730 that, "There is no religion in England. If anyone mentions religion people begin to laugh."[4]

Amid the general rejection of Christianity folk religion flourished in many places, the kind of superstitions that one finds almost any place among the uneducated and unevangelized.[5] The upper classes had their own version of paganism, with morals to match. Sexual libertinism was endemic in the ranks of the nobility and at times the court as well. Crime was rampant, and the only response of the authorities was to impose draconian penalties; scores of offenses were punishable by hanging. Public drunkenness was endemic and lamented in almost every serious discussion of the state of the realm.

If Christianity had become a joke to many people, that was partly because the Church had become a joke, the clergy leading the way. The poet George Crabbe, himself a clergyman, wrote of the parson of the Vale of Belvoir, intending this poetic tale to represent the degradation of the Anglican clergy:

> A Jovial youth, who thinks his Sunday's task,
> As much as GOD or Man can fairly ask;
> The rest he gives to loves and Labours light,
> To Fields the morning and to Feasts the night;
> None better Skill'd the noisy Pack to guide,
> To urge their chase, to cheer them or to chide;
> A Sportsman keen, he shoots through half the day,
> And skill'd at Whist, devotes the night to play;
> Then, while such honours bloom around his head,
> Shall he sit sadly by the Sick Man's bed,
> To Raise the hope he feels not, or with zeal
> To combat fears that ev'n the pious feel?[6]

If the Church was in bad shape, what of Dissent? Perhaps the Baptists, Presbyterians and Congregationalists had the determination and resources to accomplish their sacred calling. That seems not to have been the case. William Jay, a dissenting minister born in 1769, thought that the dissenters were to blame for the growth of Methodism. Their ministers were well educated in contrast to the rank and file of Methodist lay preachers, but "with a very few exceptions, pointless, cold, and drawled off from notes," he wrote in his autobiography. Instead of seeing the successes of the "boisterous, rude, coarse, incoherent" Methodist preachers as a judgment on their own proud ineffectiveness, thus leading them to repentance and reform, they maintained their disastrous course.[7]

Yet the 1730s, black as they seemed to Christians living then, may have been the bottom of the trough. Two years after Bishop Butler wrote about the eclipse of Christianity, John Wesley was converted through faith in Christ and the next year the Methodist movement began. Methodist assemblies began spreading, particularly in mining and fishing villages on the fringes of the kingdom, places like Cornwall and Wales.

Successive Waves of Renewal in the Religious Life of England

The lethargy began very slowly to lift from England when the Wesley brothers started the Methodist movement. Loyal priests of the Church of England until their deaths decades later, John and Charles Wesley found themselves unwelcome in the Anglican churches but more than welcome by ordinary people to whom they preached in the fields. As they traveled throughout England and Wales preaching the gospel of repentance and faith in Christ, they planted meetings in the villages and appointed local leaders who exercised oversight through prayer, Bible study and fellowship meetings. We have much evidence of the complete transformation not only of persons, but families and whole communities. The Wesleys believed they had a particular calling to minister to the poor, and their colleague, the Calvinist Methodist George Whitfield (also an Anglican priest), made inroads among the high-born, through his disciple Lady Huntingdon, the daughter and wife of earls.

Along with the Methodist itinerants isolated Anglican parishes began to ring with the preaching of the gospel in a way that had become exceedingly rare. Jones of Llandowror in Wales, Walker of Truro in Cornwall, Venn at Huddersfield, and Newton of Olney (later of St. Mary Woolnoth in London) were the most famous of a gradually increasing number of Evangelicals bringing new life to these communities, the new life of the gospel.[8] Evangelical publications soon spread throughout the land, a potent political center was established in the London suburb of Clapham, and pockets of very strong Evangelical presence dotted the countryside. In Cambridge Isaac Milner and Charles Simeon produced two generations of Evangelical clergymen, and Simeon's famous Trust found them pulpits aplenty. On the west coast near Bristol Hannah and Martha More, spurred on and financed by their friend, William Wilberforce, created order and prosperity out of a wild and lawless place where economic life had stagnated and culture was almost completely absent. The basis for their work was the patient teaching and preaching of the gospel.[9] Earlier in life, Hannah More had been one of the most promising poets of the age; close friend of luminaries like Samuel Johnson and the actor David Garrick, she had turned aside from London literary life in order to lead the Evangelical revival in her own neighborhood. Her literary output, especially her *Cheap Repository Tracts*, modeled on the secular chapbooks, made an enormous impact throughout England.

In addition to the cultural scene, the Evangelicals in parliament made spectacular progress in reforming some of the most disgraceful practices in the kingdom. William Wilberforce, newly converted in the late 1770s, began a half-century of effort in ridding the nation of slavery. It took prodigious labors, but in 1811 he and his colleagues finally induced a hitherto reluctant parliament to outlaw the slave trade. And in 1833, the same week that Wilberforce died, slavery was banned throughout the British Empire. Meanwhile Lord Ashley (better known by his later title, the Earl of Shaftesbury) was calling attention to the terrible conditions in the factories and mines under

which children labored to the ruin of their morale and their health. The parliamentary investigations and ameliorative legislation that followed was due almost wholly to these efforts.

The Evangelical movement in the Church of England was already in its prime, and perhaps past it, when Thomas Arnold became headmaster at Rugby school in 1827. The public schools by then had richly earned their reputation as lawless and godless places, run more by unruly pupils than by the masters, who were mostly clergymen. We have numerous testimonials from surviving pupils who report the terror they endured in these places. (Dickens caught something of the flavor of these schools in *Nicolas Nickelby*, and he responded to criticism by asserting that there were many schools much worse than the one he invented in that novel.) Arnold was determined to change all that, to create a school that would produce Christian gentlemen, and the example of Rugby is generally considered to have transformed the English public schools. He had been part of the liberal faction (the Noetics) at Oriel College, Oxford, and the later Broad Church movement drew much of its inspiration from him. But Arnold was very different from many who would come to identify with his example. Some of his sermons had a strikingly evangelical tone to them although Arnold was in some ways very critical of the Evangelical party in the Church. His view of conversion, for example, could have been uttered by Simeon or Newton: ". . .it is not improvement that is required, but a change of heart and life; a change of principles, of hopes, of fears, of masters; a change from death unto life; from Satan to God."[10] Arnold was widely recognized as being completely devoted to the person of Christ. Many of his more conservative enemies, such as John Henry Newman, adverted to the religious fervor and high moral tone of his pupils when they arrived at Oxford and Cambridge.[11]

Newman was himself the *de facto* leader of another very important element of the religious renewal within the Church of England, called variously the Tractarian or Oxford movement. For about seven years, beginning in 1833, this group issued numerous writings called *Tracts*, although they were mostly academic pieces very different from the evangelical tracts that flooded the land. These writings made the case for a recovery of what Newman and his friends thought was the proper role of the Church in the religious life of the nation. This was the High Church position that had languished in Anglican thinking, and that the Tractarians sought to bring back to the center. Like others among the Tractarians, Newman had been an Evangelical, but had gradually come under the sway of High Church colleagues at Oxford. Until 1840, the controversy roiled not only Oxford, but all of the Church of England. In that year, Newman issued the infamous Tract 90, which played into the hands of his enemies by seeming to validate their contention that Tractarianism was a cat's paw for Roman Catholicism. This brought his influence in the Church of England to an end. Five years later he entered the Roman Catholic Church. Tractarianism as a movement was dead as a consequence of the uproar over Tract 90, but the Tracts nevertheless circulated throughout the land, and clergymen influenced by Newman, Froude, Pusey, Keble and others were ensconced in parishes throughout England. Moreover, the next generation saw a movement indebted to the Tractarian example: the ritualist priests active in mission work and social transformation in many of the large cities.

Evangelicalism was only one of the competing elements of this religious renewal within the Church of England, but its spirit nevertheless permeated the whole. It had never claimed to be anything more than a recovery of what had been lost by neglect or unbelief. The other renewal movements within the Church were fully as contemptuous of the odd combination of moralism and antinomianism which was characteristic of eighteenth-century English religion—the reduction of Christianity to moral declamations accompanied by immoral living—and in reaching back for neglected elements of Christianity had almost necessarily seized on some of the same ones as the Evangelicals had. Arnold and his followers disliked the Evangelical emphasis on the plenary inspiration of the Bible as well as the "priestcraft" of the Tractarians; the Tractarians disliked the failure (as they saw it) of both the Evangelicals and the Arnoldians to appreciate fully the role and authority of the Church; the Evangelicals thought neither of the other two understood the centrality in the Christian gospel of both the authority of the Bible and of personal conversion. Nevertheless, all three, despite the mutual recriminations, looked much more like each other than they did to the characteristic religion of the previous century. Moreover, the dissenting groups—especially the Congregationalists, the Baptists, and the Methodists (which had separated from the Church of England by early in the nineteenth century)—had become fully as imbued with the spirit of evangelicalism as had the Evangelicals in the Church.

The Cultural Transformation of English Society

There is space here to do no more than provide a brief overview of the effect of the Christian renewal on English society. One of the most noticeable changes brought about by the renewal was the concern for education. The Wesley brothers insisted on advanced reading of a moral, theological and philosophical nature for their itinerant preachers. This body of literature was composed of works written by Methodist leaders, but also included reprints of many other authors, often in abstracted form. The *Christian Library* (1749-1755) consisted of fifty volumes of edited material from a variety of sources. This was a kind of *Reader's Digest* two centuries before its time, and it was one reason that even a humble Methodist home was likely to possess a small collection of books.[12] A lively periodical literature also developed, and the Wesley hymns alone provided a fairly comprehensive theological education. Wesley's followers were not in general well-educated or sophisticated, but the leadership gave them university-level books to read; the works of Jonathan Edwards, for example (even with the Calvinism excised), provided an intellectual regimen that would have required close attention from almost anyone.

As important as the Sunday School movement was in the spread of both literacy and religion, there was considerable opposition to it on religious grounds in both England and America. Opponents feared the Sabbath was being desecrated by the secular task of teaching reading, especially when it was done in houses of worship. Some thought the primacy of the family in teaching religion would be compromised by having it done by others.[13] Notwithstanding those fears, the Sunday Schools were still teaching religion in 1867, when a national survey was taken of Sunday Schools operated by the Church of England. The surveys—and also biographies—tell of the important role these schools played. In one collection of Lancashire biographies, eleven out of fifty-eight of the subjects born before 1830 were educated exclusively in Sunday Schools, with an additional twenty-three receiving some of their schooling there. Of another 107 people, nine were educated at least predominantly in the Sunday Schools and thirteen others partially. An 1842 survey of boys in mining towns showed that twenty-seven had no schooling except what they received in the Sunday Schools.[14]

As religious schooling emerged from a purely volunteer society to a more regular one, it was increasingly influenced by two rival societies which had similar goals and methods. Joseph Lancaster, largely supported by dissenters, and Andrew Bell, from the High Church wing of the Establishment, both advocated the monitorial system, in which older pupils helped teach younger ones. As in the case of the Sunday Schools, these schools taught faith and morals along with the basic literacy work for which they are better known.

For several decades the main influence on the direction of teacher training was exerted by the Evangelical physician and bureaucrat James Kay-Shuttleworth. He established the Battersea Training School in 1842, which was the prototype for some forty similar institutions. Kay-Shuttleworth intended to set the pattern for the whole English educational system. He regarded the teaching of children as a drudgery that could not be done well except by raising up a corps of dedicated people who would accomplish the task with a sense of calling, rather than merely as a job, and he believed that sense could be transmitted to the teachers only by combining intellectual and religious training.[15] As he later wrote, "The main object of a normal school is the *formation of the character of the schoolmaster*, as an intelligent Christian man entering on the instruction of the poor, with religious devotion to his work."[16] His method for inculcating the right spirit into the prospective teachers was by the example and instruction of the principal, by holding religious services in the school, attendance at church services, and "acts of charity and self-denial," as a prelude to a life-long habit of such behavior.[17]

What the English Read

The fact that many more English people could read in the early nineteenth century than before had to have made an enormous difference in how they thought and acted. These new readers tended to be among the upper levels of working people—not the mass of unskilled laborers, but rather shopkeepers and the higher grade of domestic servants, to many of whom the reading material of their betters filtered down.[18] Such people did not rely solely on hand-me-downs, however; many became good customers of the book-sellers. A survey taken of a lower-class London neighborhood in 1848 revealed that the average family possessed eleven books, and that did not include the serial literature that was the original venue of such estimable works as Dickens's novels.[19]

To understand better the difference all this made, we have to consider just what it was that all these new readers were reading. In the first place, the Bible was sold and read more than any other book, which was just the end sought by many of the schools when they opened their doors. The Bible also proved to be the catalyst for the creation and maintenance of the most successful of the pan-evangelical organizations. Such groups as the London Missionary Society and the Tract society suffered internal conflict due to the differing views of dissenters and churchmen, but the determination of the British and Foreign Bible Society, founded in 1804, to do only one thing—publish and distribute Bibles without comment, which became the Society's "fundamental principle"—saved it from all that. By 1814, the Society had more than 100,000 subscribers, and numbered auxiliaries in almost every English county. A decade later, by one estimate, there were more than 850 auxiliaries and 500 Ladies groups.[20] England became drenched with biblical knowledge. Newman recalled being "brought up from a child to take great delight in reading the Bible. . . ."[21]

Autobiographical writings from the period suggest that after the Bible the two books having the most formative effect on Englishmen were *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Paradise Lost*, themselves both based on the Bible. Bunyan's allegory was taken by many as a historical account of real people, and Milton seems to be the author who created a taste for poetry among the youth.[22] Newman's brother-in-law, also a Tractarian leader, noted that people frequently said these two writers did more to influence English religion than even the Bible.[23]

Surprisingly, one of the most influential pieces of literature during the whole of the nineteenth century was a grammar textbook. Lindley Murray was asked to write a book that would assist instruction in a York school for women. As a result *English Grammar* was published in 1795, and republished many times over the decades. Murray was a devout Evangelical, and the book was larded with appropriate examples and illustrative precepts that provided the meat for the grammatical bones of the language. It met with the praise not only of evangelicals, but of almost everyone interested in the task of instructing people on the intricacies of the English language. But the grammar was jacketed with a heavy dose of the religious teaching that was already covering England from so many other sources. As with Murray's grammar, so it was with almost all children's literature, a fact, as one modern scholar puts it, "immediately obvious on every page of every book."[24]

With books too expensive for many people, lending libraries met the demand. C. E. Mudie (from 1842) and W. H. Smith (1858) became the largest buyers of books in England and in effect became the arbiters of what the reading public would have available. Both were evangelicals. Mudie was a dissenter, who occasionally preached and wrote hymns, and Smith considered becoming a clergyman. They judged books not only from a business perspective but also from the standpoint of their religious faith, avoiding what they considered indecency or blasphemy. They affected the book purchasers' reading habits as well as the borrowers', because of their influence over the decisions of publishers. Considering whether to publish a new novel, the publishing offices would resound with the crucial question: "What will Mudie say?"[25]

Some of the evangelical publications were far from being narrow, strictly religious organs. From the start the *Christian Observer* dealt with matters beyond the theological and ecclesiastical. In the issue of February 1802, for example, the section entitled "Literary and Philosophical Intelligence" included items on natural philosophy, medicine and surgery, history, poetry, veterinary medicine, landscape gardening, exploration, geography, anatomy, zoology, chemistry, astronomy, archeology, agriculture and paleontology. There were news items from Britain, France, Prussia, America, Turkey, Russia, and Italy. Each issue had a long section entitled "A View of Public Affairs." The *Observer* claimed a theological basis for its interest in cultural matters, inasmuch as it recognized "no hostility between serious Religion and Elegant Literature." "Philosophy and genius rejoice to take up their cross and follow Christ."[26] It reviewed Lord Byron's *Childe Harold* more favorably than many would expect, favorably enough in fact to elicit Byron's letter of appreciation.[27] Even the obstreperously dogmatic Evangelical newspaper, the *Record*, was surprisingly catholic in its scope, publishing articles from a range of fields almost as diffuse as the *Observer's*.

The literature of the age was saturated with religious terminology, images, ideas. Sometimes this seemed to be an almost unconscious reflection of the increasingly religious milieu. Jane Austen, Walter Scott, the Brontë sisters, George Eliot, Charles Dickens and many lesser-known novelists showed this in their work.[28] But other novelists were consciously using their tales to bear tidings of some message, usually a religious message. When Trollope called himself a "preacher of sermons," he was identifying himself with what had become a dominant feature in nineteenth century fiction.[29] Hannah More's *Calebs in Search of a Wife* was, in effect, a treatise on Evangelical social ethics. Charlotte Yonge acknowledged that her novels were intended to function "as a sort of instrument for popularising Church Views," by which she meant Tractarian views.[30] Thomas Hughes's fabulously popular novel, *Tom Brown's School Days*, was intended to preach the gospel according to Thomas Arnold, as he more or less acknowledged in the sixth edition. "Why my whole object in writing at all, was to get the chance of preaching. . . .I can't see that a man has any business to write at all, unless he has something which he thoroughly believes and wants to preach about.[31]

Later on in the century the religious revival would have its effect on children's literature. The didactic material for children began to be invested with religious meaning and with mystery, principally through the work of the Scot George MacDonald, who began his adult life as a dissenting minister.[32]

So pervasive was the influence of evangelical language on the period that it was adopted, often unconsciously, by those who disbelieved it or even were hostile to it. Much autobiographical writing exhibited those traits because of the evangelical emphasis on personal testimony as a means of evangelism.

The Moral Revolution in England

The early nineteenth century was the swing period between the rampant moral antinomianism typical of the eighteenth century and the well-known penchant for morality associated with the Victorian period that began with the new Queen's ascension to the throne in 1837. The contrast was highlighted by the radical atheist tailor Francis Place, friend and disciple of Jeremy Bentham, who recalled his childhood in the London of the 1770s and '80s. Speaking of ordinary lower class people of that period, he feared that those living a generation later would not believe how far English society had come:

> The circumstances which it will be seen I have mentioned relative to the ignorance, the immorality, the grossness, the obscenity, the drunkenness, the dirtiness, and depravity of the middling and even of a large portion of the better sort of tradesmen, the artizans, and the journeymen tradesmen of London in the days of my youth, may excite a suspicion that the picture I have drawn is a caricature. . . .[33]

Place may not have understood well the causes of the seismic shift in the moral sensibilities of the English public, but he had lived through the changes and he could describe what he had seen.

Families living on the edge economically had a special stake in the moral condition of husbands whose status as providers was dependent upon a reasonable degree of regularity. Drunkenness and gambling could turn a marginal existence into absolute penury, and women were known to weep for joy at the conversion of their husbands in the local chapel, for it afforded some hope that the family provider would be able to provide. The oft-told and possibly apocryphal story of the recent convert in a Durham mining village illustrates what happened untold times: the miner being questioned by his chums asked them if they remembered what his home was like a few months ago compared with now. If Jesus could turn beer into clothing for his children and furniture for his house, why should he not be able to turn water into wine? These villages were sometimes divided into two separate cultures, the pub culture and the chapel culture. The occasional secularist teetotaler would belong nowhere.[34]

For those living in the fifty years before Victoria came to the throne, to be able to exit from a life of drunkenness and debauchery was a kind of liberation. The miner did not consider himself oppressed by the ethos of the chapel, but rather delivered from the destruction toward which he was heading, along with his family. The miner's wife (or the fisherman's or the weaver's) now had bread and meat on the table after payday, and his children had shoes on their feet. A leading Congregationalist minister in Manchester declared in 1843 that commerce:

> is constantly teaching men that thought and labour, during the years immediately before them, present the only path to repose and enjoyment during the years in the distance. Men are thus taught, that in relation to the affairs of the world, no less than to the affairs of religion, the man who would be successful "must take up his cross and deny himself."[35]

Yet that did not quite get it right. It was not "commerce" that did the teaching so much as the minister and his colleagues.

By the time the French commentator Hippolyte Taine visited England after mid-century, he discovered that not only were novels free of explicit sexual material, but that it was almost impossible to induce Englishmen to speak of an illicit sexual life: "for many of them this is a closed book the mere mention of which is shocking."[36] He also noted that drunkenness among the upper classes was rare, a very different condition than had obtained a half-century earlier.[37] Taine was speaking of the upper classes, but throughout the society the same was true wherever the evangelical ethos had advanced. There seemed to be few Englishmen who believed that the health of the society could be preserved in the absence of personal moral rectitude by the bulk of the population.

The late-Victorian biographer John Morley disliked the evangelicals intensely, complaining about "this dull and cramped" religion. But he credited them with "impressing a kind of moral organization on the mass of barbarism which surged chaotically into the factory towns."[38] Even this was not exactly so, since it emphasized, as sceptics of the late nineteenth century were wont to do, the alleged compulsion of the Christian reformers. The French historian Élie Halévy was much closer to the truth in speaking of their moral *influence*. They opposed cruelty to animals on religious grounds, and it fell into desuetude before becoming illegal. In such ways, said Halévy, evangelical religion became the "moral cement of English society."[39] This was a thesis far more defensible than the speculation for which he became famous (and notorious)—the cause and effect relationship between Methodism and the lack of revolution in England.

The middle classes played a prominent role in the religious revival. The organizational skills to build the great voluntary societies, the increasing fortunes that men were willing to put to use for the purpose, the widespread literacy which enabled them to learn the principles of their faith and to teach them to others, all combined to make the middle class the great engine of the revival. Many of the main features of the Victorian social scene were products of middle class religious practices. It was evangelical family life, with its family devotions, its father at home and its well-behaved children, its attendance at Sunday worship, its sense of responsibility for its own members and its neighbors, its participation in the societies intended to do good, that became middle class Victorian family life.

The upper classes were not immune from the religious revival. Whitefield had worked with the Countess of Huntingdon for the conversion of her noble friends, and the effort had not been entirely fruitless. Hannah More had preached that the reformation of English morals was dependent upon the high-born to show the example to the rest of society: the message was in her title, *Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great to General Society* (1788). "Reformation must begin with the GREAT, or it will never be effectual. *Their* example is the fountain whence the vulgar draw their habits, actions, and characters."[40] Wilberforce's title showed he had a similar idea: *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians in the Higher and Middle Classes in this Country Contrasted with Real Christianity* (1797). And so also his friend Thomas Gisborne's title, *An Enquiry into the Duties of Men in the Higher and Middle Classes of Society* (1794), which instructed even the King on his duties as a Christian monarch.

It will now be obvious to readers what I have until this point skirted: this newly re-Christianized culture was the culture of Victorianism. It sounds odd to say favorable things about the Victorian period because the propagandists have done their work so well. Lytton Strachey[41] portrayed the Victorians as laughable hypocrites, and the various scholarly works of Sydney and Beatrice Webb and J. L. and Barbara Hammond and later Marxist historians like E. P. Thompson created the impression of the smugly prosperous grinding the faces of the poor into the dirt—almost the opposite of the reality.

One of the disappointments in looking back at the evangelical, Arnoldian and Tractarian portions of the Christian renewal is the gulf of incomprehension and hostility that separated each of them from the others. The evangelicals saw the *gospel* in narrow terms, believing that the recovery of the teaching about sin and redemption in Christ would lead to whatever else was necessary. The Tractarians believed that nothing could avail if the vessel in which the gospel was found—the *Church*—were neglected. Arnold and his followers had their focus on the *world* that ought to be transformed by the recovery of the gospel. Gospel, Church, and World. The extent of the change wrought in society by the religious revival was revolutionary in its scope and its depth, and in the staying power of the transformation, but we have not seen in this what might have happened were the three visions combined more perfectly into one, mutually compensating for each others' deficiencies.

The renewal, as with those before and after, was not permanent; perhaps human nature makes that impossible. But for decades, the tincture of vital religion spread through the society, giving to it the coloration of a revived

Christianity. This new society, the product of a silent revolution from within the nation's own Christian tradition, was far from perfect, but it freed the slaves, taught the ignorant, brought spiritual life where there was darkness, turned the drunk and indigent into useful citizens and effective parents, and ameliorated the harsh conditions brought about by industrialization, internal migration, and rapid population growth. It was a revolution that succeeded in making almost all things better. There are not many like that.

There is no reason to believe the spiritual renewal of the early nineteenth century was the last one that God has planned for the world. And there is no reason to believe that the PC(USA), with its rich treasure of reformed heritage, cannot be a vehicle for bringing another one about. The combination of moralistic preaching with a cavalier winking at openly immoral behavior, sadly common in our denomination, was the essence of the eighteenth century English religion that formed the backdrop for the revival of the English Church and nation two centuries ago. Our own renewal movement should take heart from that fact.

---

[1]. J. Wesley Bready, *England: Before and After Wesley; The Evangelical Revival and Social Reform* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1971), pp. 24f.

[2]. Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England: From Watts and Wesley to Maurice, 1690-1850* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1961), p. 143.

[3]. William Thomas Cairns, *The Religion of Dr. Johnson and Other Essays* (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1969 [1946]), p. 3. The Evangelical *Christian Observer* quoted this passage in March 1846 (p. 164) to argue that as bleak as their own period might look it was still far better than a century earlier.

[4]. Elizabeth Jay, ed., *The Evangelical and Oxford Movements* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983), p. 1.

[5]. On folk religion in nineteenth-century England see James Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society: South Lindsey, 1825-75* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), ch. 6. Obelkevich has been criticized for not making clear the nature of the relationship between Christians and pagans in South Lindsey. For that discussion see Hugh McLeod, "Recent Studies in Victorian Religious History, *Victorian Studies*, v. 21, #1, Autumn, 1977, pp. 249ff. For other examples of popular superstition see David Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture, England 1750-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1993 [1989]), pp. 159f.

[6]. Stephen Prickett, "The Religious Context," *The Romantics*, ed. Stephen Prickett (London: Methuen, 1981), pp. 115f.

[7]. William Jay, *The Autobiography of the Rev. William Jay*, ed. George Redford and John Angell James (London: Hamilton, Adams, 1855), p. 144.

[8]. I follow the convention of capitalizing Evangelical when referring to members of the Church of England and using lower case when referring to dissenters and to the evangelical movement in general.

[9]. The best source for this is the first-person account in Martha More, *Mendip Annals or a Narrative of the Charitable Labours of Hannah and Martha More*, ed. Arthur Roberts (London: James Nisbet, 1859).

[10]. Thomas Arnold, *Sermons*, 3 vols. (London: Rivington, 1829-34), vol. 1, p. 53.

[11]. See, for example, John Henry Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, ed. A. Dwight Culler (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, The Riverside Press, 1956 [1864]), p. 273.

[12]. T. B. Shepherd, *Methodism and the Literature of the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Haskell House, 1966), p. 94.

[13]. Edwin Wilbur Rice, *The Sunday-School Movement, 1780-1917, and the American Sunday School Union, 1817-1917* (New York: Arno Press & the New York Times, 1917 [1917]), pp. 128f.

[14]. David F. Mitch, *The Rise of Popular Literacy in Victorian England: The Influence of Private Choice and Public Policy* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), pp. 126, 137f; John William Adamson, *English Education, 1789-1902* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ, Press, 1964 [1930]), p. 37.

[15]. R. W. Rich, *The Training of Teachers in England and Wales During the Nineteenth Century* (Partway, 1933 [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1933]), pp. 64ff.

[16]. James Kay-Shuttleworth, *Four Periods of Public Education* (London: Longman, Green, 1862), p. 387.

[17]. *Ibid*., p. 406.

[18]. Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press Phoenix Books, 1957), p. 82.

[19]. Louis James, *Fiction for the Working Man, 1830-1850* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1963), p. 8.

[20]. Roger H. Martin, *Evangelicals United: Ecumenical Stirrings in Pre-Victorian Britain, 1795-1830* (Metuchin, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1983), pp. 84-92.

[21]. Newman, *Apologia*, p. 21.

[22]. J. S. Bratton, *The Impact of Victorian Children*'s *Fiction* (London: Croom Helm, 1981), pp. 255f.

[23]. T. Mozley, *Reminiscences: chiefly of Oriel College and the 0xford Movement*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (London: Longmans, Green, 1882), vol. 2, p. 367.

[24]. Amy Cruse, *The Englishman and his Books in the Early Nineteenth Century* (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1968 [1930]), p. 87. C. S. Lewis wrote *The Abolition of Man* to expose the anti-Christian presuppositions of a twentieth-century grammar book.

[25]. T. W. Heyck, *The Transformation of Intellectual Life in Victorian England* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), p. 35; Altick, *English Common Reader*, p. 296.

[26]. *Christian Observer*, Preface to the edition of 1810, p. v.

[27]. *Ibid*., June, 1812, pp. 376-382. This is a long review in double columns of fine type that is much more favorable toward the stylistic features of the poem than its philosophy. Byron's letter of December 3, 1813, is reproduced in Ernest Marshall Howse, *Saints in Politics: The "Clapham Sect" and the Growth of Freedom* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1952), p. 107. Byron wrote that he had not responded to public criticism for years, but that he appreciated the "very able, and I believe just criticism [that] has been afforded me" in the *Observer*.

[28]. There is a large critical literature arguing this point. Here is a sampling: Samuel F. Pickering, *The Moral Tradition in English Fiction, 1785-1850* (Hanover, New Hampshire: Univ. Press of New England, 1976); Gene Koppel, *The Religious Dimension of Jane Austen's Novels* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988); Enid L. Duthie, The *Brontës and Nature* (London: Macmillan, 1986); Richard E. Brantley, *Wordsworth's "Natural Methodism"* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1975).

[29]. Clarence R. Decker, *The Victorian Conscience* (New York: Twayne, 1952), pp. 46f.

[30]. Georgina Battiscombe, *Charlotte Mary Yonge: The Story of an Uneventful Life* (London: Constable, 1943), pp. 13f. For other examples of Tractarian novels as sermons, see Joseph Ellis Baker, *The Novel and the Oxford Movement* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1965 [1932]).

[31]. Thomas Hughes, *Tom Brown's School Days*, 6th ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1870), p. viii.

[32]. See Marion Lochhead, *The Renaissance of Wonder in Children's Literature* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1977).

[33]. Francis Place, *The Autobiography of Francis Place (1771-1854)*, ed. Mary Thale (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1972), p. 45.

[34]. Most local and industry histories have illustrations of this. For example, see John Benson, *British Coalminers in the Nineteenth Century: A Social History* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1980).

[35]. Donald Read, *Press and People, 1790-1850: Opinion in Three English Cities* (London: Edward Arnold Ltd., 1961), p. 33.

[36]. Hippolyte Taine, *Notes on England*, trans. Edward Hyams (Fair Lawn, N.J.: Essential Books, 1958 [1872]), p. 95. Taine's book was based on visits to England in 1858 and 1871.

[37]. *Ibid*., p. 116.

[38]. Jerome H. Buckley, *The Victorian Temper: A Study in Literary Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951), p. 118.

[39]. Élie Halévy, *The Triumph of Reform 1830-1841*, v. 3 of *A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. E.I. Watkin (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1961), pp. 162f.

[40]. Hannah More, *Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great to General Society and an Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World*, new ed., London: Cadell and Davies, 1809 [1788] p. 78.

[41]. Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians (*Garden City, N.Y.: Garden City Publishing Co., n.d. [1918]).

What Ever Happened to the Great Ends of the Church?

by James R. Edwards

In the second century Tertullian asked, "What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem?" The unique and kerygmatic proclamation of the Christian faith, asserted Tertullian, could not accommodate itself to the leveling ethos of Hellenism and Greek philosophy and still remain Christian. We need to ask a similar question today: What does American pluralism have to do with the great ends of the church? Until this question is properly resolved the mainline denominations will not be free from their debilitating dead-end.

Americans are deeply committed to the just and equitable access of all citizens to the rights and freedoms guaranteed by a constitutional democracy. Whether we are theologically conservative or liberal, the values of tolerance, inclusiveness, diversity, and pluralism are assented to without question. We hold these values inviolably, and this gives them an inherent and ultimate place in our lives. They are so imbedded in us that we transfer them reflexively to the mission of the church, often assuming that they are interchangeable with the purpose of the church. The result is that we are now experiencing in the mainline the reverse of what happened in 17th century Puritan America, where church norms were imposed on society at large, violating certain civil rights by narrow theological concerns. Today, the broader civil concerns, as they are defined by pluralism, inclusivism, and tolerance, are being imposed intentionally or otherwise on the church, violating the church as an elect community of faith.

Consider the following. The Presbyterian Panel has consistently shown that the hierarchy of the Presbyterian Church (USA) is significantly more liberal on theological, social, and political issues than is the denomination as a whole. Those who hold a high view of Scripture and confession have long felt that denominational leaders underrepresent or exclude them from positions of influence. Those who desire to be faithful to Scripture and creed, and who wish to make their voice heard in the denomination, do so on the premise that pluralism guarantees them "a place at the table" just as it does other theological persuasions.

This illustrates our problem. The assumption behind this and similar scenarios is that pluralism, diversity, and inclusiveness are *in themselves* Christian objectives. The acknowledgment is rarely questioned, and all the more powerful because of it. Marvin Ellison's recently published *Erotic Justice: A Liberating Ethic of Sexuality* (Westminster/John Knox Press, 1996) voices this very point. Ellison, co-author of the antinomian 1991 Presbyterian study document, *Keeping Body and Soul Together*, writes, "The fundamental ground rule for liberating sexual ethics is that voices from the margins must be brought to the center of the conversation *on their own terms.*" Clearly, the assumption here is that pluralism, not theological and confessional orthodoxy, guarantees one a place at the table. It is this assumption that I wish to challenge.

Rev. James R. Edwards, Ph.D. is a frequent contributor to Theology Matters *and professor of religion at Whitworth College in Spokane, WA.*

Great Ends versus Great Society

Are pluralism, inclusivism, diversity, and tolerance ultimate values in the church? Are the values of the modern democratic state interchangeable with the great ends of the church, or are they not? And if they are not, what is their relationship to the great ends?

The *Book of Order* identifies the great ends of the church as:

> the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind; the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God; the maintenance of divine worship; the preservation of the truth; the promotion of social righteousness; and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world (G-1.0200).

A case can surely be made that the democratic values we cherish are presumed in various ways in the above ends; I, for one, would wish to make that case. But what is also clear—and what the mainline seems to have forgotten—is that nowhere are pluralism, inclusivism, and diversity declared *the* specific ends of the church. If they play a role—as I believe they do—they play a role in subordination to the great ends, not as replacements for them!

The mainline has fallen victim to its own judgments of "state churches"—whether in the Byzantine era, in Nineteenth Century Europe, or in churches co-opted by communism. It is easy to see how secular values weakened or supplanted the gospel in such circumstances. What is harder to see (and admit!) is what we have done to the great ends of the church in the name of pluralism or inclusivism. Years ago Dorothy Sayers wrote a book entitled *Creed or Chaos?*, in which

she argued for a hard and solid Christianity over a soft Christianity. In her typical adroitness Sayers challenged the assumption that the way to make Christianity survive was to empty it of creedal content, take away theology, and substitute soft and vague concepts of Christian sentiment.

Like Tertullian, Sayers describes our predicament. We have ceased calling sinners to conversion, and church discipline is lax or non-existent. We have been less than zealous for the truth of the gospel and purity of faith. We have failed to teach our children the faith. We have been indifferent to apostasy, mission, and personal holiness. Even in social ethics, the rally cry of the mainline since the 1960s, our record is less prophetic than we imagine: after all, the pronouncements of general assemblies in the past three decades are not very different from the platform of the Democratic Party.

Let the Church be the Church!

What can be done? The answer, I suggest, is to recover a Biblical-confessional model for the church. The great ends of the church, not sociological values and ideologies, should determine who sits at the table. One is invited to Christ's table not *because* one is marginalized, or oppressed, or even, as is so often heard in Presbyterian circles, because one belongs to the hallowed "middle way" between polarizing extremes. Sitting at this table is determined by the Lord of the Banquet, who is known through Scripture and creed. It is time, as Barth and MacKay pleaded, to let the church be the church!

What is preventing this from happening? The answer, often suspected but not often voiced, is that it runs afoul of the dominant ideology of pluralism. Johann von Goethe said of himself, "In natural science and philosophy, I am an atheist; in art, a pagan; in sentiments, a Christian." Goethe's self-description describes our day, including much thinking in the mainline. Many mainline pronouncements and policies are content to voice vague Christian sentiments while compromising or denying the foundational doctrines of Scriptural and creedal Christianity. Goethe knew that his self-description was not compatible with "the faith once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). Would that the mainline knew the same.

A plethora of denominational documents generated for study and consideration in the past three decades has energetically substituted a "first article" faith for a "second article" faith. That is to say, the saving benefits that Scripture and creed attribute solely to Christ—and which are granted to believers as gifts of grace—are now attributed to human nature. In most mainline denominations there is confusion over whether Jesus is *the* Lord, or *a* lord; whether God's will is known uniquely from Scripture and creed, or whether God's will is known through changing social custom; whether the love of God is known through Christ, or apart from Christ; whether apart from grace we stand condemned as sinners, or whether our nature is condoned by God; and whether the work of Christ on the cross and sanctification by the Holy Spirit alone render life pleasing to God, or whether human nature itself is sufficient to please God.

The Bible, and the creeds that derive from it, speak a language of theological and moral objectivism. Recent philosophers have developed an axiom that a truth claim cannot be established without the denial of its opposite. "If there is nothing that an assertion denies then there is nothing that it asserts either." This is equally descriptive of truth claims in Scripture and creed. The essence of Scripture and creeds is to call things by their proper names—and impute value to the names. The Biblical-confessional world is one of discernment and discrimination between truth and error. Among the Bible's non-negotiable affirmations is that God is one, and that God demands exclusive love and devotion in his self-revelation that culminates in Jesus Christ. Since God alone is creator and redeemer, he opposes polytheism, paganism, idolatry, and apostasy—in whatever forms they take. Most of the major creeds in church history list explicit affirmations and negations under each article of belief. The language is meant to be clear and unambiguous: truths are declared and confessed; and errors are shown incompatible with truth and condemned.

Such objectivist thinking is considered "disjunctive" today. Among the few things our experimental and permissive day is unwilling to include is confessional Christianity, which is increasingly regarded as a vice to be condemned. The pressure on the church has been so intense and effective that the mainline, for the most part, has been forced by its ultimate allegiance to pluralism to entertain a gospel of charitable respect toward views incompatible with the gospel, and equivocation and timidity for anything associated with the person and work of Jesus Christ. Jerusalem has become a suburb of Athens. When a denomination no longer subscribes in any meaningful sense to the Apostles' Creed, or as the Apostle Paul said, to the "*diapheronta*" (Rom 2:18)—the things about which we cannot disagree and still remain Christian—then the church is guilty of heresy.

God is not an idea, as Adolf Schlatter used to remind Adolf von Harnack. Ideas change as times change. But God is a person, and as a person God has a specific, definable nature. To confess God means that there is also non-God, and non-God cannot be confused with God. God calls and creates a special, peculiar people for himself, and he is jealous that this people know whence they have come, why they exist, and to whom worship and service alone are due. The particularity of God is manifested supremely in Jesus of Nazareth who both attracts and repels by his presumption to be God in human form. The claims of the early church about Jesus echo his particularity: he is "*the* way" to the Father (John 14:6), there is salvation in *no* other name under heaven (Acts 4:12).

Jesus and Religious Diversity

It is commonplace today to appeal to the inclusivity of Jesus. In many respects Jesus was inclusive, for he invited outcasts within Judaism, as well as Gentiles outside it, to forgiveness and fellowship with himself in a way that was unprecedented among Jewish rabbis. But in other respects Jesus was more exclusive than his Jewish contemporaries, particularly in his refusal to replace God with Torah (or with any ideology) and in his refusal to identify the Kingdom of God with any of the prevailing sects of Judaism.

Let us first consider Jesus' understanding of the relationship of the kingdom of God to the various sects of Judaism. The world in which Jesus lived was more religiously diverse than we often suppose. The first-century pulsated with a plethora of mystery cults and Greco-Roman religions, including quasi-emperor worship. Many of these penetrated into Palestine. Judaism, often thought of as ethnically and religiously homogeneous, was actually a patchwork of royalists (Herodians), isolationists and purists (Essenes), liberation movements (Zealots and Sicarii), and renewal movements (John the Baptist and Jesus), in addition to establishment Pharisees and Sadducees.

How did Jesus interface with this diversity? Consider only the two centrist sects, the Pharisees and Sadducees. There is no record that Jesus sought to engage the Sadducees—or the Sanhedrin dominated by them—with his message and movement. There are, to be sure, isolated references in the Gospels to Jesus' disputes with Sadducees and the Sanhedrin, but it is they—not he—who initiate contact. For his part, Jesus remained aloof from the Sadducees and from their considerable influence on Judaism.

On the other hand, Jesus did seek to engage the Pharisees with his message and movement. Why? The answer seems to be that on confessional grounds—belief in divine providence, sinfulness of humanity, resurrection from the dead, and existence of the spiritual world of angels and demons—Jesus and the Pharisees shared common ground. (That is why they disagreed so!) "Whatever [the scribes and Pharisees] say, do," said Jesus, "but don't follow their example?"(Matt. 23:3). The Sadducees did not share this common confessional ground with Jesus, and the New Testament leaves no record that Jesus shared the kingdom with them. Nor was Jesus' response in this matter particularly unique. The Essenes, for instance, about whom we know a great deal today because of the Dead Sea Scrolls, are not once mentioned in the New Testament.

This brings us to Jesus' understanding of the particularity of the kingdom of God. Jesus vigorously challenged the concept that truth—and God—are generic and unspecified. He spoke of his way as steep, narrow, and difficult, as opposed to the broad and easy way that leads to destruction (Matt. 7:13-14). He characterized his coming not in terms of harmony and tranquillity, but as a sword that cuts and divides (Matt. 10:34). The truth of the gospel has an overriding quality to it, taking precedent over all other allegiances and causing division within the most intimate relationships, "father against son, daughter against mother" (Luke 12:51-53). At point after point, the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) sets forth Jesus' teachings in distinctive contrast to other ways. God and Mammon are opposed to one another, they divide the world, and one cannot serve them both (Matt. 6:24). Indifference to the rigorous nature of the kingdom of God has catastrophic consequences: many who assume they belong on the inside with Jesus find themselves standing outside the kingdom and hearing from the Lord, "I never knew you" (Luke 13:23-30).

The early church preserved this particularity. Peter severely rebuked Simon Magus's attempt to reimagine the gospel (Acts 8:9-24). Those who cause division and act contrary to the doctrine once taught should be shunned, "for they do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 16:17-18). The adulterated gospel of Galatia was a false gospel, no gospel at all (Gal 1:6-10). Representatives of a false gospel in Philippi were "evil workers," "dogs" to be shunned (Phil 3:2). The sharp rebukes of false teaching and teachers in the Pastoral Letters, and in 2 Peter and Jude, illustrate the zeal of the early church to maintain purity of faith and defend it from detractors and corrupters. Every book of the New Testament (with the exception of Philemon) mentions doctrinal error and testifies in one way or another that the preservation of the purity of faith and unity of the church consists in condemnation of false doctrine and exclusion of those who practice it.

The gospel proclaimed by Jesus produced a "crisis," to use the language of the Fourth Gospel. It demanded hearing, discerning, deciding, following, and thus forsaking and excluding incompatible alternatives. The "table" to which Jesus invited people was not defined by Torah or the tradition of the elders, much less by the symphonic vision of Hellenism: it was defined and determined by *himself.*

Identity, Authenticity, and Faithfulness in a Pluralistic World

Kerygmatic Christianity is by its very nature exclusive, in the same way that marital love is exclusive. It is exclusive not out of enmity, but out of allegiance to that which is worthy of being preserved from corruption. The sin above all others of which Moses and the prophets warn Israel is the sin of *forgetting*—forgetting God's oneness, forgetting the people's peculiarity, forgetting the covenant. The great sin in Israel, in other words, is the sin of not being exclusive in relation and service to this God. In the New Testament this same accent of exclusivity falls on the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Mainline Protestantism has historically championed the ideals of liberal democracy, and in doing so it has comfortably regarded society as a social extension of the church. That accommodation is no longer possible—if it ever was. The pluralism of modern culture is not only not compatible with the great ends of the church, but

increasingly inimical to them. The confusion in the mainline today with regard to cultural norms is due to our continuing to think of the church in Constantinian terms as a national institution, a *Volkskirche*, that gives voice to the dominant culture. That is the wrong model. The church is no longer a majority church, but a *diaspora* church. We need to unlearn our old ways. The task before us is neither to ape the culture, nor blindly react to it, but to pray for sanctified wisdom that the church may become a critical, confronting, and compassionate voice for salvation within the culture.

The church of former East Germany may be an instructive model for us today. During its forty years in the wilderness of communism, the church was forced to be the church neither *for* communism nor *against* it—for in either case communism would be a controlling factor—but the church *within* communism, holding fast to its creedal foundations, and accepting its mandate not to mirror society but to bear witness to it from the sole promise of the gospel. The allegiance of the church in East Germany to the mandate of the gospel produced an identity and power against which the state was increasingly defenseless. Although the church did not set out to overthrow communism, it played no small role in its eventual downfall.

Today we too must differentiate between the norms of society we inherit, and the greater norms of the church to which we have been called. Athens is not interchangeable with Jerusalem, nor the city of God with the city of man. Let the church be the church! We must indeed render to Caesar what is Caesar's—equal access (even to those with whom we disagree) to the rights and responsibilities of a constitutional democracy. But we have a higher allegiance to render to God what is God's. Let the church be liberated from a false allegiance to ideological pluralism and liberated for the great ends for which God created it—to glorify himself and bear a redeeming witness to the world.

What is the *Presbyterian Renewal Network*?

A fellowship of Renewal leaders whose organizations are committed to, but independent of, the Presbyterian Church (USA); meeting together for the purposes of mutual support, planning and prayer.

Further information, newsletters and resources can be obtained by contacting individual renewal organizations.

Affirming the Lordship of Christ through. . .

- Prayer Initiatives
- Leadership Development
- Congregational Renewal
- Evangelism
- Mission Outreach
- Polity Reform
- Commitment to the disciplined, moral life and Mutual Encouragement

PC(USA) Evangelical Pastors' Fellowship:

An informal group of pastors and pastors' spouses which meets annually for the purposes of sharing, intellectual stimulation, spiritual refreshment and fellowship.

Rev. Sue Babovich
P. O. Box 203
Vail, IA 51465
712-677-2440

Knox Fellowship:

Assisting churches in evangelism via spiritual enhancement, program development and equipping congregations.

Rev. Bob Pittman
500 Airport Blvd. Suite 329
Burlingame, CA 94010
800-877-6248; 650-347-6248; 650-347-0619 (fax)
knowfellow@aol.com
members.aol.com/knoxfellow/knox.html

Literacy and Evangelism International:

For 30 years assisting churches and missions worldwide by: developing Bible-content, adult literacy primers, training missionaries and nationals in basic literacy & ESL and nurturing church-based literacy programs.

Literacy and Evangelism International
1800 S. Jackson Avenue
Tulsa, OK. 74107-1897
918-585-3826
General@LiteracyEvangIntl.org

OneByOne:

Educating and equipping the PCUSA to minister the transforming grace and power of the Lord Jesus Christ to those in conflict with their sexuality.

Theresa Latini
PO Box 10055
Rochester, NY 14610
716-482-1991 (ph/fax)
onebyone1@juno.com
www.webbuild.net/onebyone/index.html

Presbyterian and Reformed Renewal Ministries, International:

Exalting Jesus Christ and igniting the Church in the power of the Holy Spirit through: Prayer, Leadership Development, Congregational Renewal, Mission Outreach. So that the Church can be empowered to do all that Christ commands. Programs include: Growing in Prayer, Prayer Mountains, The Dunamis Project Equipping Retreats, Spirit Alive, Alive in Christ, and Overseas Mission teams.

Rev. Brad Long
115 Richardson Boulevard
P. O. Box 429
Black Mountain, NC 28711-0429
(704) 669-7373; (704) 669-4880 (fax)
prrmi@prrmi.org
www.prrmi.org

Presbyterian Center for Mission Studies:

Making mission possible by providing resources and making connections to enable Presbyterians to move ahead in God's mission, especially to the least evangelized peoples of the world**.**

Rev. Michael Boyland
1605 East Elizabeth St.
Pasadena, CA 91104

Presbyterian Elders in Prayer:

Encouraging and enabling all Presbyterians, but especially elders, to pray in one accord daily for the renewal and growth of the Presbyterian Church.

Rev. Ilona Buzick
1617 West 42nd St.
Kansas City, MO 64111
816-561-8177

Presbyterian Frontier Fellowship:

A Validated Mission Support Group working in partnership with the WorldWide Ministries Division to help develop a vision, a prayer base, and financial support so the PCUSA can help plant the church among the 8,000+ Unreached People groups in the world who do not have a viable church of their own**.**

Rev. Harold Kurtz
6146 Kerby Avenue
Portland, OR 97217
503-289-1865
HaroldK@teleport.com

Presbyterian Lay Committee:

Working within the Presbyterian Church (USA)
to lift up Scripture as the highest authority on which denominational policies and programs should be evaluated. The Lay Committee pursues five renewal objectives primarily through publications that seek to inform, motivate and equip lay people for active involvement in the work of Presbyterian governing bodies.

Parker T. Williamson
P. O. Box 2210
Lenoir, NC 28645
704-758-8716; 704-758-0920 (fax)
www.layman.org

Presbyterian Outreach Foundation:

The Outreach Foundation is a Validated Missions Support Group of the Presbyterian Church (USA) dedicated to renew a passion for Christ-centered evangelism and mission in and through the Presbyterian Church. We are a means whereby individuals and congregations can give financial support and be personally involved in Presbyterian evangelistic missions validated, but not funded, by the Presbyterian Church (USA).

Rev. Bill Bryant
317 Main St. Suite 200
Franklin, TN 37064

Presbyterians for Democracy and Religious Freedom:

PDRF seeks to reform the witness of the Presbyterian Church (USA) on social and political issues. It challenges church bodies to put forth a witness that focuses on basic scriptural teachings, that is non-partisan in matters where Scripture gives no clear guidance, that is derived from a broad and balanced study among all the church's members, and that pays particular attention to the urgent biblical imperative of solidarity with fellow Christians persecuted for their faith around the world.

Mr. Alan Wisdom
1521 16th Street, NW, Suite 300
Washington, DC 20036
202 -986-1440; 202-986-3159 (fax)
102676.56@compuserve.com

Presbyterians for Faith, Family and Ministry:

PFFM is working to restore the strength and integrity of the Presbyterian Church (USA)'s witness to Jesus Christ as the only Lord and Savior, by helping individual Presbyterians develop a consistent Reformed Christian world view. PFFM's bi-monthly publication *Theology Matters* includes articles which discuss the doctrines of Reformed Christian faith and their world view implications by contrasting them with false beliefs.

Rev. Sue Cyre
P. O. Box 10249
Blacksburg, VA 24062
(540) 552-5325
scyre@swva.net

Presbyterians for Renewal:

A network of individuals and congregations committed to spiritual renewal throughout the PC(USA) by means of prayer, programs and proclamation. Areas of ministry include: Christian Life Conferences, Congregational Renewal, NPWL, Referral Services, Seminary and Youth and Wee Kirk Conferences**.**

Rev. Joe Rightmeyer
8134 New LaGrange Rd. Suite 227
Louisville, KY 40222-4679
502-425-4630

Presbyterians Pro-Life:

Working for renewal of the church, particularly in the application of Christian faith to moral standards related to matters of life and death and sexuality.

Terry Schlossberg
P. O. Box 11130
Burke, VA 22009
703-569-9474;703-644-5708 (fax)
PresProLife@compuserve.com
www.ppl.org

The Presbyterian Forum:

Disseminating timely information and opinions using the full potential of the World Wide Web; promoting the creation of networks of support and encouragement in each of the presbyteries of the church, and facilitating such appropriate constitutional action which genuine and lasting renewal may require.

Rev. Bob Dooling and Bob Davis
PO Box 608
Pasadena, CA 91102-0608
970-663-3810; 818-957-4063
presbybob@aol.com
www.frii.com/~mvpc/gaweb

Voices of Orthodox Women:

A nationwide network of women committed to the renewal of the Presbyterian Church (USA) through the promotion of the doctrines and practices of historic, biblical and confessional orthodoxy against those of an encroaching culture**.**

Mrs. Sylvia Dooling
2409 N. Estrella Ave.
Loveland, CO 80538
970-669-4656
sdooling@aol.com
www.vow.org

The Historic Principles of Church Order from the *Book of Order,*

"In setting forth the following form of government, worship, and discipline, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) reaffirms the historic principles of Church order which have been a part of our common heritage in this nation and which are basic to our Presbyterian concept and system of church government, namely: . . . 3) That our blessed Savior, for the edification of the visible Church, which is his body, hath appointed officers, not only to preach the gospel and administer the Sacraments, but also to exercise discipline, for the preservation of both truth and duty; and that it is incumbent upon these officers, and upon the whole Church, in whose name they act, to censure or cast out the erroneous and scandalous, observing, in all cases, the rules contained in the Word of God." [G-1.0300, 03]

Westminster Confession of Faith from the *Book of Confessions,* "And because the powers which God hath ordained, and the liberty which Christ hath purchased, are not intended by God to destroy, but mutually to uphold and preserve one another, they who, upon pretense of Christian liberty, shall oppose any lawful power, or the lawful exercise of it, whether it be civil or ecclesiastical, resist the ordinance of God. And for their publishing of such opinions, or maintaining of such practices, as are contrary to the light of nature, or to the known principles of Christianity, whether concerning faith, worship, or conversation; or to the power of godliness; or such erroneous opinions or practices as, either in their own nature, or in the manner of publishing or maintaining them, are destructive to the external peace and order which Christ hath established in the church: they may lawfully be called to account, and proceeded against by the censures of the church." [6.111]

Study 4: The Continuity of the Doctrine of God

by Rev. Theresa Ip Froehlich

In May 1998, Israel celebrates her 50 years of Jewish statehood. Exactly half a century ago when David Ben-Gurion declared Israel's independence, he promised that the country would adopt a constitution by October 1 of that year. Fifty years later, Israel still has no constitution.

Some countries like England seem to get along fine without a constitution; other countries like Soviet Union had an impressive constitution but paid only lip service to it. But the absence of a constitution in Israel is highly significant because it results from deep disagreements about what it means to be a Jewish state and what kind of society Israel should be: secular or religious? The disagreements revolve around practical daily issues. Should Bar-Ilan Street, a main road in Jerusalem, be closed to traffic on the Sabbath because it cuts through an Orthodox Jewish neighborhood? Must the Israeli Army recognize and provide benefits to the gay partner of an officer?

Perhaps the Presbyterian Church (USA) is a mirror reflection of both the Soviet Union and Israel. While the PCUSA has a constitution, which consists of the *Book of Confessions* and the *Book of Order*, it does not command the same level of respect from all its leaders and members. This disregard and disrespect for the constitution result from and result in deep disagreements about what it means to be "Presbyterian," "Reformed," and "Christian."

Some of the definitions of what it means to be "Presbyterian," "Reformed," and "Christian" reflect a "deconstructionist" mindset that is very popular in our culture. This is a mindset that automatically discounts and dismisses the historic beliefs of yesterday and yesteryear as outdated, irrelevant and inapplicable. This breeds a kind of experimental theology that constantly seeks to reconstruct and redefine God. The goal of this type of experimentation is discontinuity with the historic beliefs of the church and therefore, it is not shy about declaring an "invented God" as opposed to proclaiming a "revealed God."

Former generations of Christians assumed the continuity of doctrine because they based their faith on the apostolic teachings in Scripture. In today's Presbyterian Church (USA), the experimentalists aim at discontinuity, confusing "Reformed" and "reforming" with "reinventing God." Thus it is necessary to grasp the continuity of the doctrine of God over time.

Continuity of the Doctrine of God

As we revisit the constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA), we rediscover that the God of the Presbyterians is not an invented God. This God is the same God that the Old Testament prophets wrote about, that believers throughout the centuries professed, and that the church bodies throughout the ages worshipped.

* Historical Continuity

The *Book of Order* states, "The confessions express the faith of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church in the recognition of canonical Scriptures and the formulation and adoption of the ecumenical creeds, notably the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds with their definitions of the mystery of the triune God and of the incarnation of the eternal Word of God in Christ." (G-2.0300)

This communicates our commitment to the historic doctrine of God taught in the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds. It also highlights the historical continuity of our present doctrine of God with the ancient doctrine of God.

* Scriptural Continuity

The *Book of Order* states, "In its confessions, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) identifies with the affirmations of the Protestant Reformation. The focus of these affirmations is the rediscovery of God's grace in Jesus Christ as revealed in the Scriptures." (G-2.0400)

This constitutional provision defines "Reformed" as the continuity and consistency with Scripture, the return to and rediscovery of biblical teachings, and the recognition and reaffirmation of the authority of Scripture.

By the same token, this provision rejects any doctrine of God that seeks discontinuity with and departure from Scripture or any doctrine of God that denies or denigrates the authority of Scripture.

* Constitutional Continuity

Since Scripture is the foundation for and the judge of the two books of the Constitution, i.e. the *Book of Confessions* and the *Book of Order*, there should be a continuity of doctrine that flows from Scripture to the Confessions and then to the *Book of Order*. The doctrine of God reflected in the constitution must be consistent with and conformed to the scriptural doctrine of God. Where there is discontinuity or inconsistency with Scripture, the *Book of Order* is adjusted to reflect the scriptural teachings about God. The *Book of Confessions* consists of doctrines that have been carefully developed over the centuries to be faithful to Scripture; it is adjusted only when it exhibits a clear departure from Scripture.

What does the Constitution Teach About God?

The *Book of Order* pronounces a Presbyterian concept of God that is based on the Confessions and bounded by the authoritative canonical Scripture. It declares the faith of the Presbyterian communion of believers in the "triune God" (G-2.0300) who has revealed himself in Scripture and the incarnate Christ. Therefore the constitution of the Presbyterian Church proclaims its allegiance to this particular "triune God" and no other. The *Book of Order* in and of itself has no independent authority unless its provisions reflect a definite continuity and consistency with Scripture and the Confessions.

I. The Triune God

The affirmation of this "triune God" is consistent throughout the creeds, catechisms and confessions.[1] The three persons—Father, Son, and Spirit—form the divine community of the Godhead. Being created in the image of God, the human community is to reflect the same quality of community life within the Godhead. However, this image of God in human community was marred by sin as a result of the disobedience of Adam and Eve. The original quality of community life cannot be regained apart from the redemptive work of the cross of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, when Presbyterians affirm our faith in the "triune God," we also acknowledge that the quality of our community life, including our church community, is determined by our relationship with and obedience to Jesus Christ who alone is the source of peace and unity in community.[2] To seek peace and unity through other paths, such as the doctrine of inclusivity, is to usurp the central significance and the redemptive power of Jesus Christ.

II. The God who creates, sustains, rules and redeems

The *Book of Order* also states, "In its confessions, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) expresses the faith of the Reformed tradition. Central to this tradition is the affirmation of the majesty, holiness, and providence of God who creates, sustains, rules and redeems the world in the freedom of sovereign righteousness and love." (G-2.0500)

* The God who creates is separate from us.[3]

Since God is the Creator and we are his creatures, God is the "wholly other" who is distinct and separate from us. For this reason, it is not permissible or possible to claim to be "Reformed" and "Presbyterian" while at the same time worshiping the "god within us" as if the Creator and the creatures are one and the same.

* The God who sustains and rules is above us.[4]

The Second Helvetic Confession teaches that we are "governed by God's omnipotence" (5.029). This is also to acknowledge our call to cooperate with God's purpose, to submit to God's providence, and to offer him praise. For this reason, it is not permissible or possible to claim to be "Reformed" and "Presbyterian" while at the same time disobeying God's commands and disregarding his purposes which have been clearly revealed in Scripture.

* The God who redeems is for us in spite of us.

God redeems us for the purpose of lifting us up after we have fallen from his original design and purpose of righteous and holy living. We have the need to be redeemed because we fall short of the holiness and majesty of God himself. God redeems us so that we may live a regenerate life and we may begin to reflect the restored image of God in us. For this reason it is not permissible or possible to claim to be "Reformed" and "Presbyterian" while at the same time rejecting the possibility of living the new life as a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17) through the power of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

To claim to be "Christian," "Reformed," and "Presbyterian" is to declare personal allegiance to the triune God who creates, sustains, rules and redeems, along with all the implications for obedience and changed lives. This is the God in whom the Presbyterian constitution declares its faith. This doctrine of God maintains a definite continuity with Scripture, and with the historic doctrine of God articulated in the ecumenical creeds, the catechisms, and the confessions. Therefore, the term "Reformed" must not be confused with discontinuity with and departure from yesterday's teachings about God. Instead, being "Reformed" means a definite continuity and a constant realignment with the apostolic teachings about God as expressed in Scripture.[5]

Questions

1. In what ways can the doctrine of the Trinity serve as the unifying principle in the Presbyterian Church?
2. Identify a few popular definitions—what it means to be "Presbyterian," "Reformed," and "Christian"—which are departures from Scriptures.
3. Why is it not acceptable to "reinvent" God?
4. What is the place of history in the study of the doctrine of God?
5. Why do the Confessions form part of the constitution of the Presbyterian Church?
6. Why does the *Book of Order* reference the Confessions in its statements about God?

---

1 Nicene Creed; Apostles Creed; Scots 3.01; Heidelberg 4.001, 4.026-4.064; Second Helvetic 5.015-5.019; Westminster 6.011-6.013; Shorter Catechism 7.006; Larger Catechism 7.119-7.121; Confession 1967 9.08, 9.15, 9.20; Brief Statement 10.1, 10.2.

2 Confession 1967 9.24 states, "The new life finds its direction in the life of Jesus," Brief Statement 10.3

3 Nicene Creed 1.1; Apostles Creed 2.1; Second Helvetic 5.032;Westminster 6.022-6.023; Shorter Catechism 7.008-7.012; Larger Catechism 7.125.

4 Heidelberg 4.027-4.028; Second Helvetic 5.029; Westminster 6.024-6.030; Shorter Catechism 7.011; Larger Catechism 7.128, 7.130; Confession 1967 9.15; Brief Statement 10.3.

5 The Book of Order (G-2.0200) states that "Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda" means "The church reformed, always reforming, according to the Word of God."

News From Around the World

THE VISIONING TEAM of the Presbyterian Coalition, made up of 16 Presbyterian laypeople and clergy presented their proposed "Declaration for the Church" and "Strategies for Church Renewal" to a group of 200 Presbyterians in early May that met in Colorado Springs. The papers are undergoing a second revision and will be presented to Gathering III in Dallas, October 15-17. Copies of the drafts are available on the Presbyterian Layman web site, and the Presbyterian Frontier Fellowship web site.

THE RE-IMAGINING COMMUNITY held a "revival" in Minneapolis the end of April. According to reports, about 172 Presbyterians attended the event. Frank Diaz refused to allow Presbyterian funds earmarked for travel to be used by staff to attend the event.

Sylvia Dooling, head of Voices of Orthodox Women, attended the conference to give witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. What she found at the conference was, "Men and their patriarchal systems are clearly the enemy. They need to be rejected and dismantled. Scripture is either re-imagined, altered, or painted with theological 'white out.' The Gospel of John is utterly rejected and trashed. The divinity of Christ is rejected. Theological language has no precision or linkage to its original meaning."

Dooling observed, ". . .the gospel of Re-Imagining is palatable to our 'new age' assumptions. There is, for example, no sin, no guilt, no shame, no need for salvation, no call to holiness, no need for obedience, no summons to servanthood."

She continues, "You must not be lulled, however, into thinking this is merely a fringe movement. It is not. It has many faithful adherents, and the number seems to be growing. . . PC(U.S.A.), United Methodist and Evangelical Lutherans were the most represented denominations—in that order. These were not fringe people."

Dooling's full report of the event may be found on the Voices of Orthodox Women web site: www.vow.org.

Come Join Us Working for Renewal in the Presbyterian Church (USA)

Join us in being a voice calling the Presbyterian Church(USA) and individual Presbyterians back to Reformed Christian faith rooted in Scripture and our Confessions while also rejecting false gods and their ideologies.

_____ **Enclosed are names and addresses of people I think would be interested in receiving *Theology Matters*.**

_____ **Yes, I would like to contribute to the work of Presbyterians for Faith, Family and Ministry**
Donations to PFFM are tax deductible. We need your support!

Name **Church** **Presbytery**

Address **City** **State** **Zip**

Presbyterians for Faith, Family and Ministry, Inc., P.O. Box 10249, Blacksburg, VA 24062-0249, (540) 552-5325

The Rev. Dr. Kari McClellan is President of Presbyterians for Faith, Family and Ministry (PFFM). Rev. Susan Cyre is Executive Director and Editor of *Theology Matters.* The Board of Directors of PFFM includes eight clergy and two lay people, six women and four men. PFFM is working to restore the strength and integrity of the PC(USA)'s witness to Jesus Christ as the only Lord and Savior, by helping Presbyterians develop a consistent Reformed Christian world view. *Theology Matters* is sent free to anyone who requests it.

Presbyterians for Faith, Family and Ministry, Inc.
P.O. Box 10249
Blacksburg, VA 24062-0249

Address Correction Requested

Non-Profit Bulk Permit
PAID
Permit No. 72
Blacksburg, VA 24062