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Transformed Minds

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Transformed Minds

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Transformed Minds

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Introduction

In a recent editorial published in the *Chronicles of Higher Education*, an Ivy League professor warned of the danger to “skeptical and unfettered inquiry” occurring at “intellectually compromised institutions” — namely, evangelical colleges and universities — that “erect religious tests for truth” or arbitrarily “draw lines around what is regarded as acceptable teaching and research.” According to the author, the “primacy of reason has been abandoned” at such places, given their naïve faith in the truth of Scripture — a faith that is impervious to any scientific evidence suggesting otherwise. According to him, any statement of faith that dogmatically establishes a set of nonnegotiable doctrinal commitments unavoidably interferes with the academic freedom of the scholar to pursue the truth wherever it may lead. As such, these Christian institutions of higher learning are unquestionably guilty of subverting the “core academic mission by this or that species of dogma,” and thus do not meet the strictly rational criteria of the secular research university.

At Cedarville University, we have a statement of faith that guides and structures our academic inquiry. No doubt many in the secular academy, like the author above, will accuse us of indoctrinating rather than educating our students. To this we reply with a question: What is the real difference between the two? The word educate in Latin (*educatus*) means “to lead” forth in a definite direction. All educators, including those at secular institutions, begin somewhere and lead their students somewhere; at Cedarville, we openly acknowledge that our fundamental starting point is the Word of God, which commands us to “train up a child in the way he should go” (Prov. 22:6) so that he will not depart from the only foundation of wisdom and knowledge: Christ (Col. 2:3).

There is no such thing as “skeptical and unfettered inquiry” — not even in the public university. The so-called intellectual neutrality of knowledge, such as the scholarly detachment from religious beliefs or value-free inquiry, is a myth. No one can rationally start with an open mind, objectively analyzing evidence in order to evaluate the credibility of a particular worldview or system of thought. Rather, it is one’s personal worldview that ultimately gives intelligible meaning and interpretation to all the facts of his or her experiences. Because one’s fundamental beliefs are the principles that inform one’s scholarship, no one can impartially handle his or her basic beliefs or articles of faith as objects of scholarly study — that is, as just another point of view among others within the

academy. In short, all academic institutions — including the author’s ivy league school — enforce a particular dogma or creed.

For instance, the prevailing worldview of higher learning can best be summed up by the late Carl Sagan who, at the beginning of his PBS-broadcast of *Cosmos: A Personal Voyage* (in 1980) pontificated, “The Cosmos [Nature] is all there is, or ever was, or ever will be.”

The unquestioned assumption in the secular academy is that there is nothing beyond the physical universe of any importance to the scholar. Revealed religion can make no truth claims in academe because the sole criterion of knowledge is natural reason and empirical science. This is not to say that religion cannot be seriously discussed there, but it would only be appropriate to do so when it is the subject of one’s scholarly research (such as a sociological analysis or cultural study) — not as the controlling paradigm of a rational investigation. Admittedly, there are still those in the public university who cling to their Bible and their personal faith commitments, yet in their professional capacity publicly compartmentalize their intellect from their privately held religious beliefs. For many others, however, religion and moral values are mere social constructions, for nothing exists beyond the natural world undergoing evolutionary change. There are no objectively real ethical precepts that transcend space and time — excepting, of course, certain assumed “universal” values that left-leaning professors and students arbitrarily champion in spite of their moral relativism: “social justice,” environmentalism, human rights, nuclear disarmament, and world peace. Unaware of the logical need to reconcile their deeply held moral commitments as to how one ought to live with their companion set of scientific beliefs regarding the evolutionary origin of the universe — the transient nature of the human animal and the loss of objective and moral meaning to life — the modern scholar lives out the contradiction lying at the heart of his or her worldview: an intellectual system of thought that is neither comprehensive nor internally consistent.

For the Christian, on the other hand, there is a unifying principle informing our understanding of what is the right way to live and to learn. Cedarville University transmits an objective body of truth predicated on Him who transcends all cultural communities; we do not follow the teaching of the world, glamorizing “perspectival diversity” nor encouraging our students to construct their own realities, because there is only one reality revealed to humankind in God’s revelation. Instead, we provide students with foundational principles (presuppositions) rooted in Scripture that will

guide them as they work out their own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12). It is our understanding that a genuine critical thinker is one who first thinks biblically, and then reasons from this scriptural foundation; we do not start with rational autonomy and then reason our way to God's Word.

As with any core body of knowledge, there is a unifying principle structuring our understanding of what is the right way to live and learn. At Cedarville University, we vigorously study all intellectual thought and culture. Given that the etymology of the word philosopher means one who “loves the truth,” and according to Scripture, Christ is the Truth (John 14:6; Col. 2:3), all Christians must be philosophers in addition to being theologians, which means we are expected by our Creator to know good philosophy from bad philosophy. To take seriously Paul's injunction to avoid “the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called ‘knowledge’” (1 Tim. 6:20), it is necessary to be fluent in secular wisdom in order to promote a Christian theory of knowledge against the false knowledge of the unbelieving world. We must know good philosophy in order to refute the vain reasoning of the pseudo-philosopher. How else can we avoid answering “a fool according to his folly” (Prov. 26:4), unless we have the intellectual wherewithal to expose and refute the specious reasoning of our worldly opponent “lest he be wise in his own eyes” (Prov. 26:5)? Therefore, we study unbelieving thought and culture for critical discernment so that we will not be robbed of our treasure of knowledge in Christ (Col. 2:3); to preserve this knowledge, we intellectually engage our secular peers, exposing their hidden faith commitments, challenging their most basic premises while modeling for them a unified field of knowledge. We study their philosophy in order to “contend for the faith” (Jude 3), to hold more firmly to God by confuting those who “contradict sound doctrine” (Titus 1:9) and to be an effective witness both to the philosophical and the nonphilosophical unbelievers among us (1 Pet. 3:15). Finally, we must be ever vigilant, distinguishing and identifying true, biblical reasoning from autonomous reasoning — lest we too in our academics employ the same rational method of the fool “who said in his heart, “There is no God”” (Ps. 14:1).

Since the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (Prov. 1:7), Christians must be “renewed in knowledge” (Col. 3:10) — not held “captive by philosophy and empty deceit” (Col. 2:8). As such, Cedarville students routinely study ideas that challenge their belief systems. We find that a great way to illustrate the sufficiency of Scripture is to expose them

to the proverbial wisdom of this world so that they may then see His Truth for themselves in stark and superior contrast. We fully expect our students to know more about the intellectual systems of Marx, Darwin, or Freud than do actual Marxists, Darwinists, or Freudians so that they will then (1) know what they believe, (2) know why they believe what they believe, and (3) be rationally able to critique all other opposing systems of thought that fall short of God's Word.

To that end, we have assembled this brief collection of essays written by the professors who teach in the Department of History and Government at Cedarville. Each article explores the biblical foundation for the academic disciplines unique to our Department, such as history, sociology, and government. The authors make it clear that apart from God's written revelation, there would be no rational basis — no intelligent meaning or purpose — underlying these disciplines. Thus, it is not just our argument that we teach these academic subjects as well as or even better than our secular peers; rather, it is our contention that the very existence of these academic subjects themselves presuppose the truth of the Christian worldview, and can only be rationally apprehended and experienced in any meaningful way within a biblical framework of knowledge.

And so, we do not avoid but, rather, insist that our core values govern our scholarship; how could we, or even our secular colleagues, do otherwise? We, the authors of these articles, unapologetically state our biblical worldview up front and will continue to articulate it to the world in our publications and model it for our students in the classroom — lest we do them a profound disservice by not leading them forth in the way they ought to go.

Chapter 1: Human Nature and the Christian

Marc Clauson

Human Nature and the Christian

Theologians and philosophers have debated the question of what humans are like for thousands of years. Whether Christian or not, the questions are the same: Do we as humans have a fixed or changing basic nature? If so, what is it like? What makes us human? What happened (or did not happen) to human nature at the Fall? And how do the answers to these questions influence the way we think about politics, economics, psychology, sociology, theology, philosophy, and even science? This chapter seeks to answer these questions from an explicitly biblical standpoint, taking the Scriptures as the fundamental set of presuppositions on which to build any and all arguments.

We will classify and articulate the various views on human nature into four categories, each having its historical antecedent, but only one consistent with Scripture. These four traditions are (1) Augustinian-Protestant Reformed, (2) Semi-Pelagian-Arminian, (3) the philosophical view of John Locke, and (4) the Psychological-Nihilist.

We believe that of the above views of human nature, the closest to the biblical view is the Augustinian-Protestant Reformed approach (No. 1). As such, we will now examine the biblical view of man, based explicitly on Scripture itself. This is where we must ultimately look for the truest idea of human nature.

The Biblical View of Human Nature

The first statement from God about man's nature is the crucial one: Genesis 1:26–31 tells us that God made man and woman “in the image of God.” The phrase means first that in some sense humans were created to be like God — though not in His power or omniscience. Most theologians have said that the ways in which humans are like God (but not God) include our capacity for a right relationship with God, ability to reason, creativity, sociability, dominion over creation, and freedom or choice. Some of these are implied in the Genesis text (dominion in Gen. 1:26, sociability in 1:27).

The Fall, however, changed all that in profound ways. Everyone knows the Genesis 3 account of the sin of Adam and Eve, their expulsion from the Garden, and the fundamental alteration in their nature. What changed

and how did it change? First, Adam and Eve sinned in act when they ate the forbidden fruit (Gen. 3:6). We are told that “their eyes were opened” — a change had occurred inwardly. Second, they covered their nakedness because now they “knew” good and evil experientially. In fact, we are told that they would know good and evil in this way. It is also telling that they both evaded responsibility for their act, an indication that the results of their disobedience effected a real change in them internally (Gen. 3:10, 12–13). Sin now was part of who they were. They were not merely externally punished. How did it affect them and all their progeny down to us?

We are told that before grace has been given, we are “darkened in our understanding,” (Eph. 4:18). “The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving” (2 Cor. 4:4); Paul acted “ignorantly in unbelief” before his conversion (1 Tim. 1:13). Here we see the noetic effects of sin, the effects on the mind, which is not able, apart from illumination, to understand the true nature of reality or knowledge. The will is also affected. Our desires became evil (Gen. 3; 1 Pet. 4:3; 2 Pet. 2:10, 18), our intentions became directed toward evil (Gen. 6:5; 8:21). Human choice is disabled when it comes to choosing actions or words that please God. To summarize, after the Fall, the image of God is “defaced,” though not obliterated. The effects of that marring are profound, not just for the spiritual life of each individual, but also for every institution individuals “touch” during their lives — family, church, political and economic institutions. As one writer put it, “The Fall, in bringing corruption into the world, made necessary [the] institutions which should correct and control the sinfulness of human nature.”¹

The Augustinian-Reformation View

According to Augustine, man after the Fall, though still in God’s image, was “not able not to sin.” Augustine was the most influential theologian in the West until the Middle Ages. The Reformers, however, later revived his anthropology. For instance, Martin Luther and John Calvin both taught that man was originally created in the image of God, but that the image had been severely damaged by sin. Calvin, for example, citing Romans 3, wrote that Paul is “indicting the unvarying corruption of our nature” and that “so depraved is his nature that he can be moved or impelled only to evil.”² This leaves little doubt. Sin permeates every aspect of the human life to some degree or another. Again the implications are profound.

¹ A. J. Carlyle, *A History of Medieval Political Theory in the West*, 6 vols. William Blackwood, 1950, vol. I, 120.

² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559), edited by John T. McNeil, translated by Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols. Westminster Press, 1960, II.iii.2 and II.iii.5.

This idea would be carried forward in later Reformed tradition, for example in the *Canons of the Synod of Dort* (1618) and the famous *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1647) and its Baptist variations. The Puritans of England and America certainly agreed with the Reformers on the nature of sinful man; it is held by most evangelical churches today. To reiterate, for Augustine and this line of doctrine, man is made in God's image, but the Fall has so affected all of man, spiritual capacities as well as natural, that he is unable to will or to reason as he ought.

Unbiblical Views of Human Nature

The Voluntarist or Free Will Position

Though we call this the Free Will view, it goes beyond just the will. This idea of human nature asserts essentially that the Fall did not have the catastrophic effects on man in the manner that Scripture teaches, and in the theological formula articulated by Augustine and the Calvinists. The origin of this view began in Late Antiquity with the British monk Pelagius, who taught that there was no sin nature and that the will therefore was completely free. The ability to reason is only distorted when it comes into contact with bad influences. Pelagius was condemned as a heretic, but his influence lingered in a modified form.

The church condemned Pelagius but did not fully affirm Augustine's views. As a result, the teaching on human nature was able to steer a middle course that came to be known as Semi-Pelagianism. This view largely was accepted in the church until the Reformation. Thomas Aquinas represents the detailed expression of it. Man was not so devastated by Adam's sin that he lost all autonomy of will; man and God cooperate as partners in the process of salvation. Though man was harmed by the Fall in his relationship with God, human nature remains naturally capable of thinking and willing correctly. Given that a portion of our will and reason remain nearly unaffected by the Fall, man's nature is only partly fallen, yet humans still need grace for righteousness before God. Aquinas continued and elaborated this view, and his theology eventually became the official version of the Roman Catholic Church.

One might say that this view is a Roman Catholic teaching and not relevant to Protestants. However, a variation of it arose among later 17th- and 18th-century followers of the Dutch Protestant theologian Jacobus Arminius, who taught that the Fall profoundly affected man as a whole; every human was born a sinner in need of grace to do any good. Arminius argued that when Adam and Eve sinned, the "Holy Spirit

departed,” the conscience was “depraved,” they suffered a “privation of the image of God,” and they lost their “original righteousness,” which amounted to original sin. Arminius adds, “But in his lapsed and sinful state man is not capable, of and by himself, either to think, to will, or to do that which is really good. . . .” Arminius looks much like a Calvinist with regard to his view of fallen human nature, though he differs when he adds that grace from God is resistible and that the will and intellect retain some natural capability.³

Arminius certainly did not go as far as Aquinas, but he did begin a tradition among Protestants that views man’s nature as only partially disabled by the Fall. Unfortunately, this view translates into a greater problem: that humans can be autonomous in their reason and will, and that as a result, we don’t have to worry too much if we allow the foundations for our knowledge and practice to ignore the Bible. This is precisely what happened, as the followers of Arminius deviated even further than he himself did. It would not be too much to say that Arminianism, in its more radical form at least, aided the shift to modern philosophical thinking about human nature and natural (or unaided) moral ability. If Arminianism is the theological backdrop for free will, then modern philosophy is its rational conclusion.

The Philosophical View of Human Nature

Beginning in the 17th century, with hints even earlier, a philosophical view of human nature developed that primarily exalted reason as autonomous. Not all philosophers agreed on just what this looked like, but all agreed that the rational and moral ability of human beings were in fact not affected by the Fall, at least not in any significant way. Moreover, the very idea of a “sin nature” begins to disappear as a philosophical explanation for any limitations in man. Instead, humans are defined by an essence that is either some sort of “blank slate” or is morally good. René Descartes provides a glimpse of this new view around 1637 when he used unaided reason first to derive his own existence, then that of other humans, followed by the existence of the natural world, and finally the existence of God Himself. Obviously that gives a lot to the creature’s ability to reason on his own authority! But for autonomous reasoning to have such great intellectual capacity, humans simply could not have been born in a morally distorted condition.

³ *The Writings of James Arminius*, translated by James Nichols, 3 vols. Baker Book House reprint, 1977, Vol. 1, 252, 253-254; vol. 2, 77-79.

John Locke represents a crucial transitional figure here. While acknowledging the existence of sin, Locke nonetheless thought of the individual as a “blank slate,” or rather, as he actually wrote, “a white paper” or “empty cabinet.” For him, the knowledge of sin is not innate, nor is the mind preprogrammed with “innate Principles.”⁴ Rather, men come to know what is sinful in the same manner that they attain knowledge: through experience of the natural world. Not completely secular, Locke argued that God’s divine law is still the measure of right and wrong, yet according to him, this law is capable of being known through the correct use of reason alone — apart from Scripture — because its content is revealed “in nature” and the natural man is rationally able to apprehend and assent to it. Thus, he rejects the traditional Augustinian and Calvinist idea about human nature — especially moral depravity.

Locke’s “blank slate” psychology has continued to play a crucial role in the “nature versus nurture” debate in the social sciences. He must be seen as teaching both a measure of *nature* (the moral condition we are born into) as well as a measure of *nurture* (upbringing and social environment), with nurture taking the lead for him. Yet even this represents a major departure from orthodox Christianity. Even though the Church has always understood that humans are shaped in various ways by their environment, this “nurture” was normally in terms of bad influences operating on an already sinful nature. Humans were then not fundamentally better with nurture, except perhaps externally. They could not be made better internally, for only God’s grace could achieve that transformation — a fact Locke neglected. In doing so, he represents yet another subtle but important shift in our understanding about human nature. The lines of philosophical thought from this point on would only further undermine the Christian view.

The 18th and 19th centuries saw yet further deviations from the Augustinian view of human nature. Marquis de Condorcet, like many of his Enlightenment colleagues, advocated a very optimistic view of human nature, even more so than Locke. He wrote a work titled *Outlines of an Historical View of the Progress of the Human Mind* in 1795, in which he attempts to show how humans have continually progressed over time, resulting in a genuine advancement of the human person, particularly the mind. It is clear Condorcet has broken with the Christian tradition,

⁴ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1700), 2 vols, edited by Peter H. Nidditch. Clarendon, 1979, Vol. 1, 55, 79.

as he makes no mention of any biblical origin of humans, their initial God-given nature or their fall into sin; rather, man can sanctify himself through reason and science. Condorcet writes,

no bounds have been fixed to the improvement of the human faculties; that the perfectibility of man is absolutely indefinite; that the progress of this perfectibility, henceforth above the control of every power that would impede it, has no other limit than the duration of the globe upon which nature has placed us.⁵

Humans have only been restrained from progress in the past because of ignorance, a lack of reason, and servility to corrupt traditional authorities (church and state). Obviously man is not fallen and, thus, there are no obstacles within human nature itself to unlimited progress. For instance, a contemporary of Condorcet, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, held that man in his original state of nature was inherently good (“noble savage”) and that it was only society that came later, which corrupted him. Many Enlightenment rationalists, in opposition to the teaching of Scripture, held to this very optimistic view of human nature.

A Christian might think that philosophers could not deviate much farther from the biblical view. Unfortunately, the worst was yet to come — and is still with us — in theology and science. In the 19th century, the intellectual world rejected the very truth of the Bible, except as a record of primitive and superstitious religion, while simultaneously embracing evolution. Neither academic trend was totally unexpected, as they had been foreshadowed earlier. But the culminating effect was devastating.

When Charles Darwin published *On the Origin of the Species* in 1859, the theological world was at least partly ready to accept it. According to the theory of evolution, humans were at best a more highly evolved animal, having descended through long ages from much simpler animal forms. An inescapable implication of Darwin’s work (as well as his later works) was that since humans did not come by a direct, fiat creation of God, the Genesis narrative was false and the theology of sin had to be replaced by some other explanation for human nature. For both secular evolutionists and certain Christian intellectuals enamored by Darwin’s theory, humans are “getting better,” for no other reason than that natural selection and adaptation were “weeding” out the bad traits and passing on the good.

⁵ Marquis de Condorcet, *Outlines of an Historical View of the Progress of the Human Mind*. J. Johnson, 1795, Introduction.

This view in particular has become popular among economists and political thinkers in the field of sociobiology.

The Psychological-Nihilist View

The Existentialist view of human nature (which I have called Nihilist) is currently diffused into various academic disciplines. Existentialists like Jean-Paul Sartre believed that humans had no nature at all. As Sartre would put it, “existence comes before essence.”⁶ One develops an “essence” (or nature) by acting in the world, by using one’s freedom. In one sense this view resembles Locke’s blank slate, but Locke allowed for some pre-existing “structure” of the mind that cooperated in shaping the human being. This structure was “built in” by God. But Sartre was an atheist. Therefore, the human came into the world with essentially nothing and thus “makes” himself into what he will become. Man is not pre-determined but, rather, self-determined.

The Psychological view, on the other hand, derives its understanding of human nature from observation and experimentation. Seeking scientific respectability, psychologists tended to move toward more naturalistic explanations for human behavior.⁷ But they still were faced with the problem of how to explain external behavior with a satisfactory internal view of human nature. Locke’s “white paper” theory was popular, as was a purely physical-material explanation. The problem has not really disappeared. At present, the dominant view of human nature among psychologists is some variation of the blank slate, though some have argued that humans have no nature. In addition, psychologists have been attracted to the theory of evolution, which teaches that human behavior and the “mind,” have changed over a long period of time for the better.

It is not always clear how psychologists have reconciled these different views within the profession. But it is certain that none except Christian psychologists still accept the traditional Christian understanding of human nature — yet it is a crucial issue in the discipline. Explaining why human beings do what they do cannot be done simply by observing stimuli and resultant behavior, as the Behaviorists did in connection with B. F. Skinner’s views. It may be the dominant view that “Human behavior is a product both of our innate human nature and of our individual

⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, translated by P. Mairet. Methuen, 1948.

⁷ Leslie Stevenson and David L. Haberman, *Ten Theories of Human Nature*, Third edition. Oxford University, 1998, 189.

experience and environment.”⁸ No one would deny that experience and environment play a role, but sin also must be accounted for in order to diagnose problems accurately. The foundational assumption must be that humans are created in the image of God, but that the Fall produced a sin nature that has profoundly affected the internal and external lives of all humans.

Adding these various intellectual traditions together, a largely optimistic view of human nature dominates today’s intellectual culture, and it even has infiltrated the Christian church to an extent. According to the new order, man is not fallen; he may not be perfect, but he is perfectible. The term “sin” has been banished, as has “sin nature,” even of the Arminian kind. One doesn’t have to look very far to find any or all of these various shades of the “new man” being taught; they permeate our intellectual, legal, and cultural institutions. And yet, sin is the major aspect of human nature involved in the questions surrounding most areas of thought and practice; it is the elephant in the room.

On the other hand, we should be cautious not to elevate sin such that it destroys the image of God in us. It is in His image, and by and with the work of God’s grace, that any human is able to make the best use of his divine image by laboring to make the world a better place consistent with the known (revealed) will of God. We do not yet live in the final eschatological Kingdom and so utopia is a foreclosed option. But we can glorify God to the greatest extent in this life by taking into full account the reality of both the divine image and our sin nature as we consider how to engage our culture for God. We can think about all aspects of life and thought with these considerations in mind, and we can then engage in purposive action that is realistically just and promotes flourishing. And we can design institutions that also account for our sin nature and that will constrain potential or real bad actions while enabling the conditions for productive and free activity.

Applications of the Christian View of Human Nature

When we study human nature from a Christian perspective, it is not for the purpose of mere curiosity. The results of scriptural foundations have very crucial applications to virtually every area of life and thought, from personal ethics and the family to politics, economics, and beyond. The way we think about human nature influences how we consider all these

⁸ Alan S. Miller and Satoshi Kanazawa, “Ten Politically Incorrect Truths About Human Nature,” *Psychology Today*, July 1, 2007.

areas and how we give counsel about how various aspects of human action (politics, economics, etc.) ought to be organized. In this section we will examine some selected areas of application to suggest the range of life and thought to which a biblical view applies.

Economics and Human Nature

The biblical view of human nature and the Fall ought to have a special role in the realm of economics. Economics is the discipline that concerns human action in markets and the role of state intervention in those markets, as well as the legitimate (or illegitimate) role of government in providing public goods and services. By virtue of being created in the image of God, we saw that humans possess creativity, the capacity to reason (including the ability to calculate means and ends), and are innately social creatures. In addition, humans were given dominion over the earth to make it a better place for the glory of God. The implications for possession, production, and exchange are evident. Humans are not only mandated to have dominion, but are given the creative capability to “make things” and to use reason to solve production problems in order to make better and cheaper goods or provide better and cheaper services. Because humans are social, they will be driven both to cooperate and to exchange some things for others. The result is that those who make one thing better tend to specialize on that (and do it better and more efficiently) and sell that to others who make what they want better and more cheaply. Both parties benefit, and wealth is created. Expand this process among many and there is a market that is able to coordinate many simultaneous transactions that enhance life and produce human flourishing. Ideally, of course, this is all done for God’s glory and His Kingdom.

Contrast this with the economic system of Karl Marx. Marx was indeed a child of the Enlightenment, and his influence in politics and economics cannot be overstated. Marx believed that human nature was malleable; however, humans were changed not by some inward action, but outwardly, by economic systems, by the organization of material production. According to Marx, the ideology of capitalism contained within itself the seeds of its own destruction. Owing to its natural tendency toward increased competition, the capitalist system would inevitably produce “alienation,” or frustration and discontent, among the proletariat (factory workers). Why? Because he predicted that such ruthless competition in the market place (desire for profit) would increase unemployment (because businesses would go under) and lower wages.

Eventually this worker dissatisfaction would produce a revolution, leading to a socialist state. But as individuals now operated under a new economic system — noncapitalist, yet communal and cooperative — their hidden cooperative nature would emerge and the state would “wither away.” Utopia would be achieved!

Unlike Marx, we consider true human nature, to help markets function as much as possible as they should. The goal is to create the incentives for proper behavior in market settings that are as free as possible — not to inhibit markets unduly. Admittedly, if humans remained in a pre-Fall state, markets would work perfectly. But sin has entered and humans are predisposed to behavior that sometimes disrupts the efficient and just working of markets. Jealousy, envy, and greed make humans susceptible to behavior that interferes with others’ desire for freedom and pursuit of economic well-being. Even without those motives and their resulting actions, the mind is also distorted by sin, causing individuals to think falsely about their own habits, motives, and about the effects of their conduct. Therefore, a set of fundamental rules is necessary to constrain certain behavior and to provide positive incentives for other kinds of behavior.

Rules then actually make for more prosperity and flourishing. Rules include laws against theft, fraud, and duress. They may also ensure that one is able to keep what he earns, with the exception of legitimate taxation. With these basic rules in place humans are free to be productive without fear that their creativity and productivity will be ruined when someone appropriates their “creation.” The market is able to produce tremendous flourishing, but it is made up of individuals who are subject to selfish and sinful behavior. Therefore, while maintaining the greatest possible freedom for market institutions, we must at the same time establish rules to prevent sinful behavior and to enhance human flourishing as a result of those markets.

But we also want to be careful not to confuse selfishness with self-interest or to assert that humans are selfish all the time. The Bible does correctly label all humans as sinful, even in a state of belief. Selfishness is, of course, sin. But self-interest can be legitimate, as it drives humans to provide for themselves and their families. Otherwise they might simply fall into sheer laziness or a kind of profligate altruism and, ultimately, into poverty. Adam Smith made such a useful distinction, and we do well to maintain it, while at the same time we do not condone selfishness. In addition,

humans can be properly altruistic as Christians in whom the Holy Spirit is working to bring about compassion.

However, it is also the case that compassion cannot be coerced, as Adam Smith also stated and as Scripture makes clear. The Bible exhorts and encourages Christians to love, but such genuine love is created in us, for as the inner man is changed by God, the heart is “softened.” Neither the state nor any economic system (contra Marx) can affect inward compassion. We may be tempted to argue that since believers are called to care for those in need, and since individuals and churches don’t have sufficient resources, we can simply push this off to the state. But three problems arise. First, as already noted, the state cannot actually convey compassion. Second, the state can only coerce action. Third, to accomplish the goal of aiding the less fortunate, the state must coercively take from some and redistribute to others, since the state does not itself create wealth. Is that then consistent with biblical standards? In other words, is that a just solution?

Another problem that arises as a result of the Fall is that humans lack perfect knowledge of the present and certainly of the future. Christian theology recognized this problem, but in the 20th century it had been largely forgotten in the wake of optimism regarding the capacity of central planning to arrange and guide an economic system. Friedrich Hayek reminded us of the problem once again when he wrote on “The Use of Knowledge in Society” in 1945. Though Hayek was not a Christian, he agreed with the Christian view that knowledge is limited in scope and time due to the Fall, even though Christian theology would also allow that the problem can be lessened and partially overcome by the Scriptures and the work of the Holy Spirit. If local knowledge is really all we can have accurate access to, then planning an economy from the top down is counterproductive, even harmful. Markets should largely be left alone to bring about the best results without having to know everything necessary for a given decision.

These problems take us back into the realm of government, especially its relationship to private action. Crucial questions arise: How much government? Is there a limit to state intervention? If so, on what grounds? Is there and should there be a limit to such intervention in market processes? Given the potential for sinful behavior among all, and given that a particular institutional setting does not “magically” transform individuals from private sector egoists into public sector altruists, we

must think about how to organize government itself so that we minimize the ability of individual decision-makers to do mischief. Even beyond that, what ought to be the scope and power of government entrusted to decision-makers? The existence of sin makes a difference in how the Christian answers these questions. Checks, balances, and limits seem to be preferable to unlimited scope of power and unlimited individual authority.

Given human nature as including the image of God, we would favor the institutional arrangement that best promotes the elements of creativity, calculation of means and ends through reason, and freedom to pursue ends within the limits of law. We would also favor the institutional arrangement that best harnesses any selfishness for good ends, over ones that actually tend to incentivize negative behavior. Markets fulfill these conditions. They are not perfect institutions; no human institution is perfect, since it is made up of imperfect individuals.

So in the end, we may say that self-government is the ideal type, with allowances to be made for the necessity of governmental action to constrain theft, fraud, duress, etc. It is precisely because of the corrupt nature we possess that the best form is to leave maximum freedom within the boundaries of appropriate law. The state through its “ministers” does not know what the needs, desires, and problems of each individual are, and cannot ever attain such knowledge, either in sufficient quantity or quality. Individuals generally know this best, and only need to know as much as necessary for each transaction or act of production, given that only individuals are capable of attaining local knowledge. The real question is which type of institution, given our natures, moves us closer to the ideal, even if the ideal is unattainable this side of Paradise?

Human Nature and Law

Law of course is closely related to politics and economics. Put simply, law is the authoritative and enforceable command of some legally constituted body. Law then is a set of rules. But for laws to be consistent with reality and also with special revelation, a proper view of human nature is essential. For a long period, especially after the Roman Emperor Constantine’s accommodation of Christianity (ca. 4th c. A.D.), law codes of the West reflected Christian foundations, including the ideas about human nature in Scripture.⁹ It was not assumed that humans were either inherently good or that what they did was environmentally determined so

⁹ Harold Berman, *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition*. Harvard University, 1985.

that they were not responsible agents. Rather all humans are responsible agents, but all sinful (hence, the reason why we act irresponsibly). It was for that very reason that the Mosaic legal code in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy established the particular legal precepts. In fact in two texts, Genesis 9:6 and Romans 13, we see implied that government exists in part to make laws and to punish wrongdoing when those laws are broken. This in turn implies that human nature will inevitably be sinful — or the law would not be necessary. The study and thinking about law must therefore take account of human nature or fail to achieve any ultimate good.

In addition, it is worth stressing that, unlike some modern thinkers, Christians do not believe that law perfects humans or moves them toward perfection, as if an “environmental change” can effect a change in the internal disposition of human beings. While it is true that humans are also made in the image of God, and retain some vestige of that image, the sin problem is too great to overcome without grace. But law cannot provide grace, an internal working of the Holy Spirit producing a “habit” of living that is based on a changed nature. Law in the end can at best only restrain external acts. It can also point forward to grace, but by itself it has no power to make an inward change.

This also means that law cannot and ought not to attempt to address internal motives, as it has recently begun to attempt (so-called “hate crimes” for example). These must be left for the working of God in the individual as the Word of God is proclaimed and the church is involved. True internal change is impossible through law.

Finally, the ultimate purpose of law is justice.¹⁰ This concept means that one receives under law what he or she is due. If an offense has been perpetrated, then punishment of some kind results. Law must be administered impartially and universally for justice to apply at all. Otherwise justice cannot ensue. The temptation is to allow mercy to encroach too far on justice, and this error is partially rooted in a faulty view of human nature (and of course a faulty view of God). Humans are considered to be inherently good or perfectible, and so it is thought that mercy is necessary to promote that process of perfection. But if the state gives only mercy, then not only has no punishment been meted, but the other party has not received a just outcome and God’s standards have been violated.

¹⁰ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs*. Princeton University, 2010.

Moreover one of God's very attributes is justice, and that is understood in Scripture as His perfectly correct response to any and all actions commensurate with the nature of that action. It is what we are due based on God's standards. We then take our cues about the content of justice from the God revealed in the Scriptures, not from man-made ideas. Since humans will attempt to evade God's standards, and since God is holy, He must also be just in not overlooking man's rebellious nature. In the realm of personal salvation, God can justly show mercy because of Jesus Christ's work of atonement. But in the realm of public and private law, justice must be administered according to God's standard. That realm is the realm of external behavior and comprehends both believers and unbelievers here on earth during its existence.

But law is also concerned with procedure, and procedure is also related to human nature. Since humans are not perfect or perfectible, it is necessary that when law intervenes, that is, when individuals are charged by the state, the state itself, consisting also of human judges and juries, must be constrained by arrangements that preserve the God-given rights of those charged. These rights are procedural because they do not guarantee a certain outcome, but they do maximize the chances that the outcome has been arrived at fairly and justly. Otherwise the possibility for arbitrary actions by the state would be enormously increased and at some point would become rampant.

In addition, when we speak of law we should also mention the concept of the rule of law, by which laws are known, relatively clear and especially applied to all, including those who make the laws. The rule is *Lex, Rex*, "law is king" — not "the king is law." Because of the universal sinfulness of human nature, we can no more trust the officers of the state to act perfectly than we could trust ordinary citizens to behave perfectly. Though we would welcome both, we can count on neither, so a rule of law is absolutely essential.

Conclusion

Humans have a definable nature that has been created by God, first in Adam and Eve, and that was then distorted, though not destroyed, by the Fall. The image of God in all humans involves several innate (but, of course, marred) characteristics that make us in some way "like God." God has made humans to be essentially rational, creative, sociable, free, and potentially capable of having a relationship with Him. These elements are important as we consider how humans can best serve God in their

vocation and as stewards of His creation, understood broadly. This consideration in turn involves the type of institutional context best suited for human flourishing in God's world.

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Chapter 2: Integrating Biblical Truth into the Teaching of Sociology

Robert G. Parr

In His response to a lawyer's question about which commandment is the greatest commandment in the Law, Jesus answered that the greatest and foremost commandment is that "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matt. 22:37). A proper understanding of God as revealed in the Bible and how human beings may rightly relate to Him serves as the lens through which Sociology is viewed at Cedarville University. Whether one is an atheist, an evolutionist, or a believer in Jesus Christ, each one will sift knowledge through a mental grid or worldview which gives meaning and significance to life.

All human minds begin thinking and knowing with presuppositions, assumptions, or starting points that are taken for granted. These assumptions cannot be proven but they are accepted by faith. This so-called circular reasoning is the only way humans can think. There are no neutral, value-free, objective ways for humans to begin their approach to knowledge.

The atheist "proves" the nonexistence of God by beginning with the problems of pain and suffering. The presupposition is that a good and all-powerful God would not permit the pain and suffering we see in the world. Therefore, God is either (1) all-powerful but He does not care, (2) good but impotent to do anything about pain and suffering, or (3) God does not exist. The atheist concludes that the nonexistence of God makes the most sense, more so than the other two options.

The evolutionist "proves" the fictitious nature of the first 11 chapters of the Genesis account by beginning with the presupposition of the uniformity of nature. This fundamental "unprovable" starting point assumes that the laws of nature have always operated as they function now in the physical world. If a star is located millions of miles from the earth, then that star must have existed in that location long enough for light to travel that distance under current conditions.

At Cedarville, we begin with the fully completed, created universe of the first two chapters of Genesis, a universe that God made with the

appearance of age. That is, Adam was a mature man on the first day of his existence. By contemporary time tables, Adam and his world appeared to be much older than they were at the end of the first week of creation.

Neither the atheist nor the evolutionist is thinking neutrally, objectively, or in a value-free manner. The atheist assumes a universal standard of goodness, justice, or love and insists that God must measure up to that standard. If God fails to do so, and the atheist insists that the problems of pain and suffering prove that He does not measure up, then God must not exist.

In so reasoning, the atheist “brings God down to our size” in the sense that God is held accountable to a moral standard. At this point the moral standard is the ultimate measure of reliability, a type of god or idol, expressed in the form of a foundational presupposition. Then God Himself must bow to the ultimate standard of justice, goodness, or love in order to validate His existence. The atheist posits a “straw man god” that is not the God of the Bible.

The words “accountability” and “responsibility” do not apply to the God of the Bible. God is not accountable to anyone or to anything. If He is accountable to something other than Himself, then that something is god. In any type of thinking, there is an ultimate standard or court of appeal for determining what is just, true, good, and significant. That final court of appeal is one’s ultimate measure of reality and what is determined to be true. Everyone has such an ultimate standard, and that standard is one’s starting point in thinking, one’s basic presupposition, or one’s god. It cannot be proven but must be taken for granted (by faith).

That ultimate standard is the object of one’s faith, and everyone expresses faith in order to think and to maintain a viewpoint about what is real, what is true, and how humans should behave. Even the attempt to be “nonjudgmental” assumes a world in which moral judgments are relative and nonbinding upon other people. So is one “nonjudgmental” relatively or absolutely? Everyone is a person of faith, regardless of devout religious commitment or firm atheistic allegiance.

The God of the Bible is beyond definition, which means that He defines everything else. The Bible does not attempt to define God, but it assumes His existence from the outset — “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). The Bible records the activity of God

and from that activity we extrapolate the attributes that describe God's character. He creates from nothing because He is the Creator. The products of God's creation are good because God is good. He sends His Son to die for sinners because God is love. He justifies guilty sinners because He is just.

The Bible does not even record an independent or analytical definition of what it is to be a human being. Humans are created in God's image, a reflection of who God is. Humans find their meaning and significance in relation to God and in submissive obedience to His Word.

The strategy of Satan in tempting Eve in the Garden of Eden was to present the first woman with an alternative meaning for the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God said she would surely die if she ate of the fruit of the tree, but Satan said her eyes would be opened and she would become like God. Now Eve has two interpretations of the tree's significance and she places herself in the position of judging which interpretation is the correct one, which one she is going to accept as true.

At this point in Eve's thinking, God's word carries equal authority with Satan's word and Eve is the judge or final court of appeal for determining who is telling the truth. When we are no longer rightly related to God, we determine for ourselves if God exists and, if so, how He ought to deal with us in order to warrant our trust and confidence. The result is that God must prove Himself to us in order to earn our allegiance.

This can be illustrated by referencing Josh McDowell's book *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*.¹ The book is an excellent source for answering challenges to the factual accuracy of the Bible, matters related to historical, scientific, or geographical accounts in Scripture. But the title of the book leaves the reader with the wrong impression about his relationship to God. It reinforces the impression of the unbeliever that he stands in judgment of God. *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* places the sinner on the judge's bench and God down in the defendant's seat where He must bring into court the evidential support for His existence and credibility. The judging sinner, in turn, determines whether God's evidence supports His claims.

Here we have the independent, self-sufficient God being subpoenaed into court and indicted as guilty until proven innocent. So again God must

¹ Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*. T. Nelson, 1999.

give account for His claims to being God. If, in this fictitious courtroom, God were to be required to raise His right hand, swearing “to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth,” by whom will God swear? Who or what is greater than God and will authorize that indeed God is telling the truth? The Bible says, “Let God be true and every man a liar” (Rom. 3:4). No sinner and liar is in a position to judge whether or not God is telling the truth. The God who is true and faithful stands in judgment over liars.

God is self-sufficient in the sense that He does not go outside of Himself to understand Himself. God possesses complete, exhaustive knowledge of who He is. He cannot know anything more about Himself because there is nothing more to know. Thus God cannot learn, grow, or develop, so He will never change. If one is perfect then change cannot be an improvement. If the infinite, limitless God knows all there is to know about Himself, then it follows that He knows everything there is to know about His creation and the humans He created in His image.

We as human creatures do not have total knowledge of ourselves because we are finite and sinful. What we know about ourselves we learn by going outside of ourselves. I stand 6’3”, wear size 15 shoes, and have gray hair. I know I am tall because I can look over the heads of most people in a crowd. I know my feet are big because shoe stores usually do not stock shoes my size. I know I am old because when in a classroom of college students, I am the only one with gray hair. As humans we must go outside of ourselves to find out who we are and to identify ourselves. But God does not go outside Himself to discover who He is.

God has created humans to be social creatures. We are not meant to live in isolation as hermits. The academic discipline of sociology is the study of the individual and society. But when humans cut themselves off from God and His Word, we are left to the mercy of society to provide us with our identity and meaning.

So ultimate social meaning can go in one of two directions: (1) individualism or (2) group association. Individuals will find their ultimate significance in their personal accomplishments: success, popularity, romantic attachments, or freedom to live as they choose. If group membership is the ultimate arbiter for determining significance, then collective identity is the most important feature in life. So people will take pride in their ethnic identity, gender, nationality, religious

denominationalism, social class, or sexual orientation. One's source of identity and significance is rooted socially either in individualism or the group, both of which are forms of social idolatry. Western culture tends to worship at the altar of individualism, with the accompanying collapse of community resulting in detachment and isolation. Eastern culture tends to worship at the altar of the group, with the accompanying devaluation of individuals who are expendable for the collective cause (the suicide of terrorists illustrates the point).

The resolution to the individual vs. group dilemma (the problem of the one and the many) is found in the Triune God of the Bible, the one God who is three persons. Redeemed sinners find their meaning and significance in their union with and right standing before God (the vertical relationship). Then those same individuals can give themselves in ministry to their fellow human beings (the horizontal relationship) without demanding that society provide for them their identity and significance in life. The child of God is liberated from the idolatry of individualism and group association to serve the true and living God. The redeemed do not have to worship society or secure its acceptance and approval in order to live significant, worthwhile lives. "We do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:18).

The problem of the one and the many may be rephrased in terms of the question, "Which is more important (ultimate), unity or plurality?" Which is more important, God the Father or the Trinity? Both coexist equally in the Triune God. So in human relationships, which is more important: the family or its members? the church or its members? the university or its students? the United States of America or its citizens?

Within the Trinity, value and worth are based upon essence, that is, the identity of each person of the Godhead. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are each equally God with all of the same attributes and nature. But each member of the Godhead performs a different function in God's redemption of sinners. Paul informs us in Ephesians 1:3–14 that the Father planned redemption (3–6), the Son accomplished redemption (7), and the Holy Spirit applies redemption (13–14). The significance of each member of the Godhead is based upon and rooted in essence (who He is), not upon their function (what He does).

Likewise with humans, our value and worth is found in who we are as God's image bearers and as redeemed sinners. But since we are social creatures, we find that we are assigned roles in our relationships to others in government, the home, and the church. Each of these institutions has an authority structure in which the majority of members are to submit to the authority of those ultimately accountable for the functioning of government, the church, and the home. But the Bible does not present an elitist view of authority in which the president, the pastor, or the head of household is better than or superior to those under their care and supervision.

Examples of the church and the home provide opportunities to apply biblical perspectives to everyday relationships in those settings. The approach of the sociologist to religion is instructive as is the characterization of society as multicultural.

The relationship between the individual and the group can be illustrated in the church. The head of the church is Christ but the human leadership in the church is the pastor. In the body of Christ it is not the individual member nor is it the body in its corporate existence that is more important. Both are equally important. But in the United States we have placed such an emphasis upon the ultimacy of the individual in our culture and our religion that a common understanding of Christianity is "me alone in my prayer closet with my Bible and my God."

*This self-centeredness is expressed in American Christian music with the isolated individual speaking to God in the first person singular without any sense of community or social attachment to others. Examples of such music are *In the Garden*, *Christ for Me*, *I Must Tell Jesus*, and *He Knows My Name*. This correlates with a common Christian lifestyle in the United States where we have many freelance Christians who have no attachment to "the organized church."*

But the New Testament concept of the Christian life is our approach to God based upon the fact that we have been incorporated into a unity and we cannot operate independent of that body of Christ to which we belong. It is because we have been incorporated into the body of the redeemed that we pray, "Our Father." We are not instructed to pray individually *as an isolated person*. The primary stress in the New Testament is not upon the individual and God but upon the individual in his corporate relationship and God.

We celebrate the unity-plurality relationship in the church through the Lord's Table or Communion. God intends that the plurality of the church participate in a unifying ceremony in which there would be common bread and a common cup. In the contemporary world, we eat individual pieces of bread and drink from separate cups for hygienic reasons, but it tends to undermine the symbolic sense of corporate attachment.

It must be acknowledged, however, that salvation is a personal, individual event described in Scripture as being born again. Just as children are born individually into a family, so children of God are born individually into the family of God. Salvation is individual, not communal in nature.

At the point of salvation, the Holy Spirit grants spiritual gifts to each child of God. Those gifts are for the social purpose of giving or ministering to others. But in our individualistically self-absorbed culture, we have developed a private prayer language from the gift of tongues and turned a gift of the Spirit inward upon ourselves.

Likewise with marriage, we see plurality in unity when two become "one flesh." God created humans to live in a plurality-unity relationship because God *exists* in a plurality-unity relationship. In marriage a husband and wife demonstrate the kind of relationship in which the Godhead exists. Is it possible for the Son to detach Himself from the Father and the Spirit and attach Himself to another? Is it possible for a redeemed one to separate himself from the body of Christ? Marriage is established when a man leaves his father and mother to become joined with his wife in a "one flesh" union.

The order of God's creative activity is that marriage occurs first, followed by family (childbearing). In the chronology of the naturalistic evolutionist, family occurs first followed by marriage. Marriage arrives late on the evolutionary time clock after eons of reproduction. Which comes first, marriage or the family? The biblical and evolutionary views are in complete contrast to one another, and the ramifications are profound.

If marriage began in a cave with the female agreeing to settle and nourish the young while the male hunts down dinosaur meat and brings "home" the food, then what is so sacred about it? What is there to preserve? Why not experiment with multiple partners, same-sex relationships, and cohabitation? The current state of *marriage as a mating relationship* is the logical conclusion to the evolutionary starting point.

The recognition of so-called same-sex marriage illustrates where an evolutionary beginning leads. The biblical marriage is a one-flesh, life-long, faithful union between a man and a woman who raise the natural or adoptive children God gives them. Children are most likely to thrive in a home where they are in close contact with an adult man and an adult woman who are committed in a legal marriage to work together with one another until death. The plurality in unity of marriage offers children an everyday example of how two opposite-sex people can function together as a team, ultimately providing insight into the Triune nature of their Creator.

In contrast, same-sex relationships are notorious for their instability and the absence of exclusive faithfulness. Current data indicates that when legal marriage is available to same-sex partners, the overwhelming majority of them do not seek it. The loss of commitment in the culture at large contributes to acceptance of homosexual pairings so that an attraction to a person of the same sex is justified as an “orientation” that is deeply rooted within the individual. The biblical understanding of “love” is that of a commitment to give oneself to another person in spite of one’s subjective emotions, attractions, or satisfactions. We are the recipients of that kind of divine love, a love that is not the expression of an internal, subjective orientation.

God’s creative priority is for marriage to occur first, followed by childbearing. Marriage is the lifelong foundation upon which the family is built. Children are to be raised so they might leave and establish their own lifelong marriages. Marriage is permanent; parenting is temporary.

The evolutionary worldview has led to the reversal of that order so that almost half of children born in the United States are born to unmarried women. In many communities, mothers remain unmarried while men float through the neighborhood siring children. In such an arrangement, the most permanent relationship is that of a mother and her daughter who raise the next generation together with no male assistance or presence in the home. Now the family is permanent and marriage is temporary, if marriage occurs at all. There is nothing surprising about this, given an evolutionary beginning. It is the logical and natural conclusion.

Shifting from the institutional expression of religion to the very nature and existence of religion, sociologists perceive religion most often through the lens of secularization theory. French sociologist Émile Durkheim could

be referred to as the father of secularization theory.² He believed that the modernization of society would result in the disappearance of religion. Religious superstition was an adolescent phase through which culture evolved before it could mature. Secularization theory compartmentalizes religion, separating it from the rest of life, such as the family, education, government, and the economy. As such, religion is understood largely to be ritualistic behaviors that people in America perform on Sunday morning.

Disconnecting religion from the rest of life is a recent historical development of the modern era. Previously a people's religious belief system saturated every part of life. We continue to see this today in the Islamic world, but God's revelation of Himself in Scripture exalts Him as Lord of all, involved with and interested in every aspect of our lives, around the clock, seven days a week.

What follows the compartmentalization of religion is the social science definition of religion as "belief in the supernatural." This is a convenient definition for secularists and atheists who claim that religion operates by faith and faith is irrational or post-rational. The implication is that secularists are rational and operate on the basis of evidence, not faith.

As specified earlier, the biblical theist is skeptical of anyone or any system of thought that claims to operate without faith. The sacred-secular dichotomy is built upon the illusion that religion can be disconnected from the rest of life, and in doing so, any kind of faith goes with it. If God is the creator and sustainer of all that exists, then nothing could be further from the truth.

The field of cultural anthropology examines cultural variations from the perspective of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism is a mixed bag that can be beneficial or detrimental to one's view of cultural diversity. When multiculturalism is defined as the promotion of understanding cultural differences in society so that we might communicate more effectively across cultural barriers, we would agree. But many social scientists go beyond this definition to insist that all cultural groups are equal within society *and across societies*. The truth is that all cultures are tainted by the effects of the Fall and there is plenty of room for improvement in each one of them.

² Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Free Press, 1965, 39–42, 102–107.

Beginning from a naturalistic, morally relativistic perspective, social scientists in the fields of sociology and anthropology often argue that all cultures are equally viable because people within those cultures experience their world with the same deep emotions and profound effects as we experience ours. *Other people* want peace and happiness just as much as we do. Presumably, this approach enhances tolerance of people who do not appear to be like us. That is not an unworthy goal, but to conclude that all cultures are to be accepted and no judgments are to be pronounced upon any culture is a stretch for anyone who lives in the real world. Even the United Nations makes judgments by reprimanding member countries for the brutal treatment of their minorities. No one argues that Hitler's Nazi Germany, Stalin's Russia, or Mao's China was equally as good as any other culture of the 20th century.

Some cultures are better than other cultures. A simple, empirical way to measure that appraisal is to trace the flow of migration around the world. Follow the footsteps of immigrants and refugees to observe how people vote with their feet and with their lives. They are fleeing the worst cultures and heading for the best ones within their reach.

But beyond the empirical data is the influence the Judeo-Christian ethic has upon society. Those societies that apply the Ten Commandments most consistently will be those societies that will be magnets for immigrants. Corruption, bribery, and court systems that disregard the law do not provide the cultural climate that people flock to join.

A cultural phenomenon that occurs particularly in the East is the prevalence of what are called face-saving or shame cultures. People in this part of the world attempt to preserve honor and dignity so one is not embarrassed or put to shame before others. To maintain a good face is to avoid exposure resulting in rejection by others.

Living in such a culture reinforces the human tendency to become more concerned about how others view us than how God views us. Guilt is the concept Scripture uses to describe how God views us concerning the problem of sin. Moral guilt is defined by the violation of God's law. Guilt calls for forgiveness while shame calls for acceptance. Guilt is due to moral sin while shame is a sense of social embarrassment.

Christians in shame cultures face the likelihood of being shamed for their Christlike character and witness. Scripture instructs believers that they will

suffer persecution for Christ (2 Tim. 1:8, 12, 16; 1 Pet. 4:12–16). In such cases of misplaced shame, believers are to be clear-minded enough to give greater weight to God’s view of them than society’s devaluation of them.

God has created human beings in His image, and that image includes attachments and relationships with others. We are social creatures by design. The study of sociology at Cedarville University examines the connection between the individual and the group in light of what Scripture says about human nature and the purpose for which God has created us.

To summarize, we begin our thinking with two foundational assumptions: (1) God exists, and (2) He has revealed Himself in the Bible. The God with which we begin is beyond definition. He defines everything else in His created world. If anything other than God is the ultimate measure of significance, then that standard is god and it is the object of faith in which its proponents believe. From a biblical point of view, we refer to those objects of faith as idols. Those idols can be the social idols of individualism or the corporate group. By virtue of being created as religious creatures in the image of God, we must worship someone or something. Wherever we begin our thinking reveals the object of our trust. Human beings created in the image of God cannot think otherwise.

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Chapter 3: Thinking About God and Government

Mark Caleb Smith

I am a Christian. I am also a political scientist. Putting those two facts together causes many people to break for the intellectual “EXIT” signs that surround any discussion. The specter of combining religious faith, which is in some ways so personal, with government, which touches us all, feels ominous and foreboding. But, for the orthodox Christian, who is convinced that we are to hold “every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5)¹, we have a responsibility to understand the contours of the relationship between God and government.

In some ways, the Bible has remarkably little to say about government. There are no books of 1 and 2 Politics, and there is no Paul’s Epistle to the Legislators.² There is very little focused discussion of political issues and no discursives on the appropriate forms of government. There is no blueprint for political effectiveness and no blanket endorsement of an appropriate, Christian ideology. This can be frustrating, especially when we approach specific policy questions. What is the optimum rate of taxation? How much government regulation of the environment is appropriate? How long should prison sentences be? The Bible may provide principles that will help us think through these matters, such as the Christian attitude toward taxation, stewardship, and justice, but it rarely yields concrete answers to pointed policy questions.

In other ways, the Bible is full of government. Obviously, the Old Testament focuses on the nation of Israel, which was ruled by an array of good judges, bad kings, and ugly violence. Many of the world’s great empires rise and fall across the pages of Scripture. The Egyptians, Babylonians, Medo-Persians, Greeks, and Romans all figure prominently in the Bible’s narrative. Christ’s ministry took place against the backdrop of Roman occupation. The Apostle Paul was a Roman citizen, and he used that status to serve his purposes on occasion. Perhaps most interestingly, the Bible portrays some children of God as they lived in hostile societies.

¹ All biblical quotations, unless otherwise noted, come from the English Standard Version (2001), published by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

² Granted, there are 1 and 2 Kings, but these are historical books that recount Israel’s struggles (akin to 1 and 2 Chronicles). There are many political lessons in these books, but they are not necessarily normative. Instead, they are descriptive. Drawing firm political inferences from them is difficult, especially when we move beyond the fact that Israel had a unique history with God enjoyed by no subsequent nation.

Joseph and Daniel were not only strangers in strange lands, but they rose to positions of power and influence in public affairs.

Thankfully, there are some specific biblical passages that focus on the idea of government. Romans 13:1–7 most clearly reveals a set of biblical principles that demand attention.

¹Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. ²Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. ³For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, ⁴for he is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer. ⁵Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God’s wrath but also for the sake of conscience. ⁶For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. ⁷Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

This is a rich text full of critical teaching. We have some discussion of how we ought to relate to government — we are to honor, respect, and obey it. We also see a description of what government is called to do — reward good behavior and punish bad behavior. Government officials are referred to as “ministers of God.” This is fascinating, especially when we consider Paul’s audience. Roman Christians were not normally blessed with the kinds of political leaders we would naturally associate with the divine. All of these things matter and are worth exploration, but I wish to focus on how this passage helps us understand three questions. Where does government come from? What is government’s purpose? What is the Christian response toward government?

Where Does Government Come From?

Life is, in some ways, a process of asking and answering questions. Toddlers are consumed with understanding reality, which compels them to ask questions like, “Why is the sky blue?” As we answer these questions, we are educating. The answers start simply for the sake of understanding. “The light from the sun creates that color.” As children grow, the answers get more complicated. “Because solar light scatters blue

molecules in the atmosphere.” Eventually, the questions become more fundamental even though they may begin in the same place. So, “Why is the sky blue?” grows into “Why is physical reality the way it is?” If we truly narrow things, all of life’s questions are the same: “Why?” Answers must begin or end in one of two places. “God” or “not God.” Tomes have been, and forevermore will be, written about these answers. Cultures coalesce and fracture around these answers, which, like it or not, shape society; either reality, for most, is grounded in the sacred or it is not. Embracing the initial path leads to many other forks, but this is one we cannot avoid. The origin of government begins in the same place.

Political philosophers are famous for a thought experiment referred to as “a state of nature,” or a setting in which humans are free from either society or government. The conditions established within this “state” are frequently used to justify the need for government (as with John Locke³), or as an ideal setting before humans were tainted by government and society (as with Jean-Jacques Rousseau⁴), or as a starting place for particular conceptions of justice (John Rawls⁵). Regardless of the motivation or outcome, the state of nature is deliberately devoid of God. If we take Genesis 1–3 seriously, no matter how we interpret some elements, there is no “state of nature” divorced from God and His supernatural intervention in His creation. God was not only the active part of the creative process, He was a presence among His creatures. Eden was not separated from divine reality, but the divine defined the reality, including the potential need for government, even in that setting. One might argue that the Fall resulted in a “state of nature,” and that this state is more reflective of this philosophical construction, but the Fall was a consequence of God’s curse, so sin, not some sort of benign humanity, would be the defining characteristic of this condition. Such an environment would share little in common with most states of nature, except for maybe that of Thomas Hobbes⁶, who saw life without government as a destructive war between mutually fearful and self-interested individuals. However, even for Hobbes, government resulted primarily from the human need for government for self-protection as opposed to being rooted in a divine decree.

³ John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, edited by C. B. Macpherson. Hackett Publishing Co., 1980.

⁴ Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men*. Hackett Publishing Co., 1992.

⁵ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, revised edition. Belknap Press, 1999.

⁶ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*. Hackett Publishing Co, 1994.

While Genesis portrays God as active within His creation, Romans 13 is even clearer as it addresses God and government together. Taking the passage at face value leaves us with only one answer to the following question: Where does government come from? The answer is “God,” for there is “no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.” This is, more than anything, the Bible’s fundamental insight about government. While many Christians may know this on one level, that knowledge too often fails to permeate our political thoughts and actions. The divine origin of government should recondition the manner in which we see government. Government proceeds not from our own tainted hands, the clutches of the Devil, or from words printed on a brittle parchment locked in the National Archives, but from an omniscient and omnipotent God. The first lesson, then, is that government is not about us and it does not flow from us, but it is about God.

In Romans 13:1, Paul uses the word “instituted.” What is an institution, at least according to Scripture? God institutes three things — the family, the church, and government. What do these have in common? They are social (as opposed to individual) organizations that allow humans to achieve things collectively they cannot adequately achieve on their own. The family provides a stable environment for producing, raising, and shaping children. The church accomplishes God’s mission by spreading His word and providing a community for Christians. What about government? What does it do? Paul gives at least a partial answer in Romans 13. Government exists to instill justice and restrain evil through the use of the “sword,” or “coercive” power. There is much more to say on this front, but that comes in the next section.

The presence of evil, though, raises an interesting issue for the nature of government and God’s institution of it. Did God create government only as a response to sin? In other words, is it more accurate to say government, though from God, can be traced to the fall of humans in Genesis 3? Is government only a consequence of sin? Though it might be tempting to say it is, this view is too limited.

God created Adam and Eve in His own image (Gen. 1:26). What, precisely, does this mean? We can debate the nature of the *Imago Dei* and still not come to an agreement. However, we do know there are particular divine elements imprinted on us as created beings. One of those is our social nature. In that same passage referenced above, we read “Then God said, ‘Let *us* make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness’ (emphasis added).

We know from throughout Scripture that God exists as three persons in one being — the Father; the Son, Jesus; and the Holy Spirit. The picture we have of this Trinity is one of eternal, communal relationship. Within the Trinity there are defined roles and distinctive responsibilities. In Galatians 4:4, Paul says that God “sent forth” Christ. In John 3:17 there is similar language. In John 14:26, Christ acknowledges that God will send the Holy Spirit. In Acts 2, we see God pouring out the Holy Spirit upon the disciples. So, part of these distinctive roles involves not only a relationship, but also something of an ordered hierarchy. Even within this perfect social interaction, there are decisions made and roles fulfilled.

Genesis 2, which is a more detailed account of Adam and Eve’s creation, displays part of God’s rationale for why He made both male and female. God says to Adam, “It is not good that the man should be alone.” From our creation, as humans we need others. We must, as created beings, function with others; this is our natural condition, even apart from sin. There is no implication that Adam’s state of loneliness was a moral failing, but part of his created essence. We are not meant to be alone. This reality is the beginning of society, or the existence of human community.

Genesis 1 also reveals a natural, human responsibility. In verse 26, God gave His creatures a duty to exercise dominion over the rest of His creation. In Genesis 1:28, God told Adam to subdue the earth as part of this dominion. God requires this work, which would demand a sort of decision-making. To exercise dominion would require careful planning, some allocation of resources (especially of time), and a labor arrangement (who does what and when). For this to happen with more than one person would necessitate a decision-making process.

All of these ideas together — the social nature of the Trinity, human creation in God’s image, our need to be with others, and the task God gave us — at least plausibly suggest the seeds of government were sewn before the Fall. There is the possibility that government is not simply a response to sin, but it is part of who we are as divine image-bearers.⁷

There are other reasons for us to view government positively, regardless of how we think about the timing of its origin. Again, in Romans 13

⁷ There are other arguments that could be made regarding government as a condition outside of sin, but they don’t fit neatly into this discussion. Those would include the fact that divine government is still utilized and needed after Christ’s return. The New Heaven and the New Earth will still have a sovereign. Christ will reign, more than implying a kind of governmental arrangement. Also, the angels themselves appear to have a hierarchy or structure, with the archangel having a place of superiority.

Paul spells out three critical facts that seem to denote God's favorable view of government. First, as we referenced, God instituted government. Second, God endows government with a particular set of responsibilities — the pursuit of justice through the use of the sword. This is one of the connections between temporal and divine justice. Third, Paul also labels those who govern as the “servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.” Not only does God provide government with a task, government serves as God's agent as it carries out this task and it serves Him as it does so.

This may seem to be overkill, but why is it critical for us to establish that government is part of God's plan for human beings? There are two reasons. First, to help distinguish what we consider a biblical view from popular, cultural understandings of government, which ignore its divine source. Second, there are some competing Christian conceptions that are also flawed. There are Christians convinced that government, far from being a divine tool, is Satan's domain, a rival for our allegiance, perhaps even the very “whore of Babylon” that weaves her way through John's Revelation.

This conception dominates among Christians who are pacifists of one sort or another.⁸ The essential argument is that Christ, through His death on the cross, showed us that subordination is the fundamental Christian approach to conflict. Christ's ethic of love and sacrifice stands in sharp contrast to government force, which is “anti-Christ.” Far from being an agent of God's grace, government is more accurately part of Satan's web of influence. As seen in Luke 4:5–6, Satan has control over the kingdoms of the world, and he revels in creating dehumanizing wars. As believers, when confronted by ungodly force we are obligated to respond with peace so that we might highlight the present injustice. Through this kind of confrontation, we show Christ's love to the world in the most powerful way possible. Depending on the source of the argument, Christians are unable to participate in the use of force in any way, which means serving in government may not be an option. Though pacifists often admit that God institutes government, it exists as a lesser of evils, so government combats wickedness with its own brand of evil that, while technically necessary, is still opposed to God and His will. God's relationship to government, then, is most accurately described as allowing evil to achieve His purposes. Government's immorality, for many, makes the distinction

⁸ John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*. Eerdmans Publishing, 1994. Gregory A. Boyd, *The Myth of a Christian Nation*. Zondervan, 2006. Shane Claiborne and Chris Haw, *Jesus for President*. Zondervan, 2008.

between good and bad government somewhat meaninglessly, for all governments are worthy of rebellion in the pacifistic sense of the term.⁹

This view is, I think, difficult to square with the biblical evidence. While there is no doubt that government is influenced by sin, just as everything else is, and that government is uniquely capable of destruction and evil, there is almost no direct teaching in Scripture that government, as an entity, should be seen this way. Reducing all government to such a condition also presumes a disturbing amount of moral equivalence that makes it impossible to characterize governments as “good” or “bad.” While no government this side of heaven is perfect, some are morally and ethically better than others and to lump them all into an equivalent stew of evil seems ethically naked and theologically stunted.

Regardless of where one comes down on these matters — whether government is a consequence of sin or part of who we are as image-bearers — the basic answer to our question is still the same. We have government because God instituted it for His purposes. This matters, not just for academic purposes, but as a contrast with the world that surrounds us. Whether you are orthodox or a heretic; a premodern, modern, or a postmodern; a Libertarian or a Green; a Democrat or a Republican, the divide between “God” and “not God” still persists. Our culture, in its effort to minimize God, has answered the question of where government comes from with “not God.” I disagree.

What Is Government’s Purpose?

There are at least three possible answers to this question, two of which were previously referenced. First, government performs an ordering and collective decision-making function that is necessary within human community. As described above, this task may transcend the existence of sin.

Second, Paul describes government’s most obvious responsibility in Romans 13:2–4 — to reward good behavior and punish evil behavior. Government punishes with what Paul refers to as the power of the “sword.” This is government in its most basic sense. The pursuit of justice might demand many things, but legally it requires government to provide people what they deserve in the here and now — either reward or punishment — based on their behavior. Government functions to restrain evil in our world. Even if the seeds of government were indeed sewn before the Fall, after the Fall, government’s task includes this necessary restraint.

⁹ Yoder, 200 (f.n. 8).

There is little disagreement on this point, at least outside of some pockets of anarchists, who want no government restraint. If you are either religious or secular, government has a positive role to play in society. Disagreement emerges, to a point, about the source of this bad behavior that must be curbed by government.

The Lord of the Flies, by William Golding, is a penetrating novel. The story is simple, but the message it carries is profound. A sizeable group of young boys gets stranded on a deserted island. The schoolboys are used to uniforms, getting into line, doing lessons, and obeying teachers. They are used to lives of structure and constancy and authority. They are stranded, though, without adults. And while it takes time, Golding portrays a slow but steady degeneration as the boys eventually form gangs and hostilities erupt. At one point, our protagonist, Ralph, witnesses something he would have found previously unimaginable, an act of violence against his good, decent, and largely helpless little friend called "Piggy." Golding writes that at that moment, "Ralph wept for the end of innocence, the darkness of man's heart, and the fall through the air of a true, wise friend called Piggy." More than anything, *The Lord of the Flies* is a testament to human corruption. It suggests that civilization is a veneer that once peeled away is revealed only to hide a twisted species capable of brutality and hatred.

Christians typically ascribe this kind of evil to sin, a word that has fallen out of favor during the last century. While not unlike the "state of nature" discussed above, the novel succeeds when it shows civilization and society apart from governmental order. And though I argue there has never been such a thing as a state of nature, it is not hard to imagine that life apart from that government would be, for most of us, intolerable.

When we think of how our government acts, or often refuses to act, or how it wastes money, or how there are elements of corruption, or how it seems our leaders just cannot come together to solve problems, we feel frustrated, and rightfully so. But, to be Christian about government, we must grasp two important things.

First, even the government we have, as frustrating as it might be, is far better and more preferable to life without that government. Though it might sound crass, and I cannot speak from personal experience, I think I would rather have a bad government as compared to no government. Without government, I fear we would look not all that differently than

Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, just on a different scale. We would collapse into a system where pure power defines reality, where our families and possessions are at the mercy of the biggest kid on the block. We would, without government, organize our lives around simple survival. Even with a poor government in place, there must be order for that government to survive; there must be some structure, some system of punishing wrongs (even if they are terribly defined), and some ability to protect people from simple, naked aggression.

In this way, I see government as an element of God's grace in our lives. We have government so that we might enjoy our lives, even if they are hard. We should, at the minimum, thank God for government because it provides enough order to exist. And, if we are blessed to live in a stable society that has a better-defined view of justice, where we can live in peace and watch our children grow up, where we can provide for ourselves without constant fear of oppression, we have even more for which to be thankful.

Second, we should always be aware that government itself, since it is made up of human beings who are equally capable of that twistedness, can also be a scourge. Government, in some ways, has a unique ability to be violent and destructive because governments hold the majority of power in our societies. If one of government's responsibilities is to use force to restrain evil, we must consider that this force to counteract evil can, in itself, be turned into evil.

The 20th century was the American century. It was the century that ended with the U.S. as the only superpower. It was a century in which we sent a man to the moon and led the greatest technological revolution in human history. For America, the 20th century was a great age. Remember, though, it was also marked by terrible wars. World War I and World War II claimed millions of lives. Those wars were initiated by governments, fought by governments, and, eventually, ended by governments. Our military cemeteries are full of people who died because governments failed to settle disputes. Not only did governments fight one another in long, bloody conflicts, governments also destroyed millions of their own people. Nazi Germany's death camps were set up to rid its own population of undesirables — Jews, the handicapped, and homosexuals, for example. Joseph Stalin, leader of the Soviet Union, starved millions of his own people in Ukraine because the agricultural system there undermined Communist ideals and the wealthier people posed a political

threat to Stalin's control. Estimates vary, but somewhere around 10 million people died as Stalin exported food from the region to fuel his own ambitions.

It is hard for us to come to grips with this kind of wickedness, but we must realize that wickedness on this scale was made possible by government's organization, utilization of resources, and control over society. When we ponder government, then, we must remember that while it can be a gift from God, like all of His gifts, sinful humans can also pervert it. Without both of these realities in mind, we have an incomplete view of government.

The power of the sword cuts both ways, it seems. Government appropriately wields the sword when it punishes the law-breaker. It abuses the sword when it perverts the notion of rewarding the good and punishing the wicked. Scripturally, we see this phenomenon, of government gone bad, in a variety of places, but the Old Testament places the issue squarely before us. Even in Israel, God's chosen people, the powerful would frequently distort the legal system to deny justice to their opponents or enemies. 1 Kings 21 tells us the story of Ahab, Jezebel, Naboth, and a vineyard. Ahab, the king, wanted the vineyard, which was located next to the palace, for his own use. Naboth refused to barter for or sell the land because it had been in his family for some time. Ahab's wife, Jezebel, upon discovering the situation, used the king's power to frame Naboth for blasphemy, primarily by bringing two false witnesses against him. Why two witnesses? At least two were required to convict and execute Naboth, who was stoned to death outside the city. This is a simple example of those in power misusing the machinery of government to reward evil and punish good.

This distortion of justice must have been a common occurrence in ancient Israel, for the prophets were consumed by the notion. In Amos 5, both God and His prophet heap scorn on God's children for their treatment of the poor and the righteous. The wicked take bribes, trample on the poor, and they fail to establish justice. God's solution? We find it in verse 24. "But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." Not only is the establishment of justice part of government's responsibility according to God's plan, justice guarantees that people are treated fairly before the law, in spite of their wealth, background, gender, or skin color.

There is one final purpose for government, and though we will only touch on it briefly, it may be the most critical, at least in the cosmic sense. God instituted government, but He did so as part of His creation. Government has a role to play in God's plan for the world. God does not do things by accident. He does not make mistakes, nor does He make things up as He goes along. God, the Bible tells us, sees all of reality — past, present, and future. Time is even part of His creation.

I think, if we look at the Bible, government is one tool God uses to achieve His divine will. Let's take a look at the book of Daniel to see this spelled out clearly. In Daniel 1, we see that God used the Babylonians to bring justice to His own people. We see throughout the book that God even worked among the Babylonians through His servant Daniel, who gave faithful counsel and witness to King Nebuchadnezzar. We see similar things in Egypt, where God used Pharaoh, and even the hardness of Pharaoh's heart, to both enslave and free Israel. These are all critical parts of God's divine plan and these parts involve God's use of government for His own purposes.

In fact, I think this is part of what Paul is referencing back in Romans 13. When God institutes government, He does so for His own purposes. Our governments, as instituted by God, have a role to play in the drama of history. Those governments can glorify God and earn His blessing, or they can dishonor God and earn His punishment. Just as government dispenses God's justice in the here and now, God dispenses justice, both in the here and now and in eternity. However, I do not think we can always determine when a government is behaving well or poorly. Nor do I think we can easily draw a line between government activity A and outcome B and call it "God's Judgment." This way of thinking is too simple and presupposes we have God's view of all events or that we understand His reasons. We are, after all, meager creatures when compared to the one who created us.

What Is the Christian Response Toward Government?

Romans 13:1–7 spells out some of our obligations to government. Paul exhorts the Roman Christians to "be subject to," "respect," and "honor" those in authority as we "do what is good" and "pay taxes." Paul sets a high standard for how we must approach those in power. For the sake of simplicity, let's boil these notions down to two ideas: obedience and honor.

Obedience to government is not a uniquely Pauline concept. Similar themes are echoed in 1 Peter 2:13–17, and in Christ's admonition to render unto both God and Caesar (Matt. 22:15–22). Christians are commanded to obey not merely to escape punishment, but, as Paul notes, "for the sake of conscience." Put simply, we obey because it is the right thing to do, regardless of other factors. This is the difference between going the speed limit only when a police officer's cruiser is stationed alongside the road, and in adhering to the law on an empty and desolate highway. Conscience is a sterner master than fear of retribution, and acquiescence to conscience's demands reveals a transformed heart and a will that is pliable to God's dictates.

Scripture also makes it clear that our obedience to government is not absolute. Daniel went to the lions' den (Dan. 6) and his compatriots, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were tossed into a fiery furnace (Dan. 3) for their disobedience to government. They are praised for doing so. The disciples spent time in jail, also for refusing government's commands (Acts 5). Pharaoh ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill baby boys as they were born, but the women, who feared God, refused. All of these events, however, share something in common. In every instance, the people of God are being told to break God's law by governments. Daniel prayed. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did not bow down to a graven image. The disciples preached the Gospel. The Hebrew midwives did not kill the innocent. When conflicts arise between God's commandments and government's laws, our choice, as believers, is a clear one. God's law supersedes that of human institutions, so we cannot sin in order to obey the government. This is true for sins of omission, when we fail to do what is required (pray or preach the Gospel), and for sins of commission, when we do what is forbidden (worshipping an idol or murder). While this still begs many questions (How do we respond to evil governments when they are not forcing us to break the law? Is there a right of rebellion or revolution? Is self-defense against government permissible and, if so, when?), the principle is clear. We must obey government at least until it forces us to sin. At that point, to obey government would be sinful.

Readers should also take notice that the biblical standard includes an acceptance of punishments by government once they are handed down, even if those punishments are for actions taken to obey God's law. Daniel, his trio of fellow Jews, and the disciples all were caught and punished by that government. While God miraculously intervened to protect in the first two cases, he did not in the third. The disciples were beaten for

their deeds. By obeying God, and by willingly accepting government's punishments, we respect government's authority while also clinging to God's commandments. This is how we render to God and Caesar, even when God and Caesar conflict.

Lastly, we have an obligation to honor those in authority. Perhaps more than any other admonition, this strikes at the heart of the American partisan. Resistance and rebellion shape our character. We pride ourselves on an unwillingness to kneel in respect to those God has empowered. This command cuts across our culture, which is more receptive to mockery and ridicule than respect. Surely many of our political leaders deserve a dose of mockery, but our default response to leaders, as believers, must be to honor and respect them instead. In 1 Timothy 2:1–2, Paul tells us to offer “supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings” for “kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.” Honor is about more than simply paying lip service, it is also about humbly praying for the blessing, and interceding on behalf, of our leaders.

This notion, in some ways, is most challenging in a democratic context. We can influence our government in a way that was foreign to Paul and Peter. We advocate and persuade in the public square, and sometimes while doing so we must draw distinctions between ourselves and other parties, policies, and politicians, even those who are in authority over us. The rub, of course, is how do we accomplish this while maintaining respect and honor for our opponents? Our tendency, in the hurly-burly of politics, is to attack, even to the point of treating rival parties and figures as enemies more deserving of scorn and condemnation than honor. Remember, even if we conceive of political opponents as enemies, we are told, in Proverbs 25:21, “If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink.” In Matthew 5:44, Christ tells us to “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” The painful reality, for too many of us, is that we treat those who disagree with us politically — be they presidents or pundits — worse than we are commanded to treat our enemies in Scripture. Far from honoring or respecting our leaders, we seek to tear them down and destroy them.

Perhaps this raises the most difficult question for the politically minded evangelical in 21st-century America. Is it possible to be politically effective and to still hold tightly to this command? If there is tension between political success and fidelity to Scripture, the human temptation is to

succumb to success, while the call of the Divine is to do what is right and to leave the results in the hands of the One who made us and sustains us.

Conclusion: Christian Citizenship in a Republic

To some degree, Paul's admonition in Romans 12 and 13, Peter's teaching in 1 Peter 2, and Christ's declaration to render to God and Caesar in Matthew 22, all point toward a common idea. There is an expectation that Christians should display at least a modicum of earthly citizenship as they relate to the regimes in which they find themselves. Within the Roman world of the first and second centuries, good citizenship largely consisted of obeying, respecting, and honoring the government. Only a select few would have the opportunity to influence government policy in a meaningful way, so these admonitions, to be citizens of sound repute, would be the sum total of political obligations for nearly all Christians in that world. But these teachings were rooted in a political environment with minimal popular political influence; this creates one of the most enduring theological puzzles of the past millennium. How are we, as believers, to apply these ideas when we live in political communities that are far different from those of Christ, Paul, and Peter?

As Americans, we are blessed with a government that allows for many paths of input and influence. We might vote. We can donate time, money, and effort. We could run for office, start interest groups, lobby, blog, or advocate. In short, we can care. Granted, some of us do none of those things, but our system allows for all of these and more. And, perhaps most critically, our system is built upon the idea that we, the people, are to hold our government accountable and responsible for its actions. This is, at base, how a republic is designed to function. We are the fountain of political power. Our elected officials exercise that power, but only as we allow them to do so. In order for our government to work, in any meaningful sense of that word, we must do these things or our government is no longer what it claims to be. For us, these are the traits of good citizenship.

If it is true that the spirit behind the New Testament's teaching on government is that we, as believers, are to be good citizens, we have to acknowledge that spirit, but the spirit of the text does not obviate our responsibilities to its clear teaching (to honor, obey, and respect), for that teaching still binds us. We are called to be faithful to both the letter and spirit of God's commands. In this sense, we may have an obligation to be good citizens, so long as our political environment defines citizenship in

terms that are not at odds with our other Christian obligations. If being a good citizen requires me to worship the state, for example, I cannot do that. If being a good citizen prevents me from loving my neighbor as myself, I cannot do that. But if being a citizen places other expectations upon me, ones that I can square with God's call on my life, I should endeavor to be a good citizen.

There is, however, one additional factor at work. Recall, from above, how God gives government concrete responsibilities. The Bible seems to indicate that when governments fail those obligations, God holds them accountable in some fashion. In our form of government, a republic that operates on popular consent, we, the people, are the supreme human authority. We elect those who make choices and then we hold them responsible, ideally, for those choices. We are the ultimate corrective when government misbehaves, and we are the ultimate engine of change when change is necessary. Though we do not wield the sword of justice, we help dictate which hands wield the sword. We are responsible for holding government responsible. What does this mean? It means that we bear a double burden in a republic. We are burdened, by Scripture, to treat government as we are commanded to treat it, but we are also burdened to steer government toward just outcomes. We are citizens, to be sure, but our citizenship requires more than deference. It requires leadership, accountability, and influence. In some ways, we, the people, are both the governed and the government.

This is why, I believe, that we, as Christians, should not simply sit aside and allow our government to do as it wishes. There is evil in the world. That evil lurks in all places for it inhabits the human heart. Government is one method by which that evil is checked and limited. However, our government, which relies on popular consent, has many co-pilots. If we, as Christians, refuse to play a role in that process, we are refusing an opportunity to steer our government toward better destinations. We should at least try. While we may fail, for there is no guarantee that our actions will matter, there will be glory in our efforts. We can rest with an easy conscience. If we do not act, and we watch American drift toward that evil, we will, at least in some way, be responsible.

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Chapter 4: History and the Biblical Worldview

Richard Tison

The great American economic historian Charles A. Beard, in his presidential address to the American Historical Society, offered this grim outlook for his discipline:

History is chaos and every attempt to interpret it otherwise is an illusion. History moves around in a kind of cycle. History moves in a line, straight or spiral, and in some direction. The historian may seek to escape these issues by silence or ... he may face them boldly, aware of the intellectual and moral perils inherent in any decision — in his act of faith.¹

As we can see, history had no intelligible or moral meaning for Beard; it was simply irrational to him — and yet, he continued to write and publish as if history had value. For the Christian, of course, history does have purpose and meaning — but only within the intellectual framework of a biblical world and life view. Unfortunately, the academic rules of this discipline undermine the very possibility of doing meaningful history, for the secular approach to knowledge, by definition, disregards the Christian worldview and with it, any certainty of knowledge. This is the awful price of fallen man's independence from God: the loss of objective truth and meaning to his experiences.

But why is historical knowledge — let alone any knowledge — uncertain apart from God's Word? The answer is that we are not sufficient unto ourselves but were made to be dependent on our Maker. It is impossible for us to be self-sufficient in knowledge for only God — by definition — can be self-sufficient; this is why we are commanded to live by every word that proceeds from the Father's mouth (Deut. 8:3). Man as a creature is rationally limited and thus needs to be programmed with basic information about the nature of the universe in order to increase in knowledge and establish dominion over all things; only his Creator — God — who exists outside the created order can furnish this necessary intellectual framework by which man can then make sense of the world around him. It was the Creator who equipped humankind with a set of assumptions about how the world is organized; this is the creature's

¹ Charles A. Beard, *Written History as an Act of Faith*, *American Historical Review* 39, no. 2 (January 1934), 228–29.

starting point for acquiring knowledge. Without this basic worldview, we could not arrive at any knowledge whatsoever.

To demonstrate, let us assume — for the sake of argument — that mankind evolved from unintelligible matter into a state of intelligible consciousness. “Evolutionary Adam” would have no basic framework for acquiring knowledge because no God designed one for him. As such, the world around him would have been rationally inaccessible to his understanding because he would have no built-in presuppositions to guide and structure any of his encounters. Thus, evolutionary Adam could not know from personal experience alone whether he truly exists as a separate, thinking “thing” apart from everything else, or whether those objects in the Garden are distinct from, or are mere extensions of, himself. And, assuming that these objects of nature do exist separately apart from Adam, do they — and Adam — have continuous existence over time? — are these objects the same that he experienced five minutes ago or even five days ago? If the first human was mentally a blank slate as posited by evolutionists — Adam would have no intuitive understanding of causality, natural order, and regularity. And without these presuppositions, he could not organize or classify the data of his observations because he would not be able to identify any intelligent, uniform pattern to his experiences. These fundamental assumptions would already have had to have been present in Adam’s mind before he could arrange the facts of creation and establish a foundation of knowledge for further development. These axioms of knowledge, then, were not first discovered by his investigation because no investigation would have made sense without them.

Now, in contrast to evolutionary Adam, let us consider “biblical Adam” whom God commanded to subdue and cultivate the earth. This ordinance would have been impossible to fulfill unless God first supplied Adam with those necessary intellectual tools enabling him to analyze and understand his environment. For starters, in order for God to communicate to Adam, the latter would already need to know language and speech patterns prior to receiving this special revelation. Indeed, the Bible clearly indicates that Adam was fully functional as a rational being from the moment of his creation in adult form. Thus, he did not have to discover from experience that one must eat, drink, and breathe in order to survive — nor accidentally experience submersion to “learn” that humans cannot breathe under water! Rather, what we find from the first recorded act of dominion is a high degree of rational sophistication in Adam: his taxonomic naming (or

categorizing) the animals according to their unique and fixed attributes that he used to separate them according to their “kinds.” This intelligent act clearly presupposed Adam’s fundamental awareness of the rational and uniform order of creation. He intuitively understood he was a creature distinct from all the rest and that none of the others were suitable companions for him — save for Eve: “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Gen. 2:23). Marriage and the social hierarchy that it entails were not acquired habits of human evolution; rather, God created man and woman to complement and serve each other. This truth was not accidentally discovered by the first human couple; it was innate to them.

So, as we can see from Scripture, mankind did not start off intellectually brutish nor did the Fall reduce them to primitive cavemen; quite the contrary, Adam’s progeny very quickly established urban civilization, being skillful in farming (Cain), animal husbandry (Abel and Seth), music and metal-forming (Lamech and Tubal-cain). None of these rational activities would have been attempted apart from the crucial assumption that nature exhibits reliably consistent patterns, for why else would Cain have undertaken farming unless he knew prior to this experience that planted seeds of a certain kind will always yield produce of the same kind in due season? How could Abel have surmised from experience alone that animals always beget their kind and that selective breeding will produce a more desirable flock? How would Tubal-cain have known that metal ores from the earth would be useful, and that they could be forged into bronze and iron instruments? None of these men were forced to endure a long process of trial and error in order to learn that nature is orderly and therefore amenable to planned cultivation of her resources. Rather, the intellectual foundation for all these talents could only have come from God who first made the universe in wisdom (Prov. 3:19–20) — and then equipped man with the cognitive ability and desire to understand this rational creation so as to labor and manage it intelligently according to the Creator’s original command.

Based on this biblical evidence, then, the Fall did not deprive man of his ability to reason, but it did pervert his right use of it. Man has replaced God’s authority by substituting his own, thereby making himself the ultimate judge of truth. The unbeliever will not subordinate his intellect to the authority of God’s revelation; this then forces man to be what he is not: autonomous and independent of God. Because of this, there is a logical impasse within the natural man’s worldview. On the one hand, he believes that physical nature is all there is — just matter moving

in void space; yet, how can unintelligent matter on its own acquire consciousness? On the other hand, the natural man assumes the existence of immaterial principles of reason and justice that permanently stand above all his variable experiences. But if evolution be true, then reason itself is a product of the physical world it purports to understand; mind and reason, too, are evolving (changing). Therefore, if nature is all there is, and it is ever developing into new forms, then there is nothing permanent or unchanging that transcends this universe; there can be no certainty, no truth, no lasting purpose to life in a world undergoing random evolution. In short, there is no fixed reference point for finite man to hold onto — not even onto man himself who “appears for a little time and then vanishes” (James 4:14).

Thus, what the unbeliever claims as true is contradicted by how he actually lives. For instance, notice that Beard continued to write history even though his rational system of thought could not make sense of it. That he still considered it worthwhile to order the facts of history even though his worldview deprived history of any intrinsic meaning demonstrates that the natural man cannot escape the knowledge of God. All men know God because they are confronted with the truth of God who is “clearly perceived” (Rom. 1:20) in the natural order. All mankind have “inalienable knowledge” of God and His creation. Because created in God’s image and bearing His “likeness” (Gen. 1:26), the natural man cannot help but use his mind to know things. As such, human knowledge is possible only because the natural man has his Creator’s knowledge of the natural order — a knowledge that goes unacknowledged by the sinner. Yet, in order to preserve his illusion of intellectual freedom, the natural man willfully suppresses this truth in his unrighteousness (Rom. 1:17-18), denying any knowledge of God or rational dependence on Him. Biblically speaking, the unbeliever is self-deceived due to a self-inflicted hardening of his heart (Eph. 4:18).

Thus, humankind — including historians — in their very core refuse to think God’s thoughts after Him even though they cannot avoid living and thinking within His rational system imprinted on us all. It is in Him that we live and move and have our very being (Acts 17:28). There can be no objective foundation for knowledge or a true basis for human learning apart from the eternal Rock of Ages — the Alpha and Omega — who first established the universe and our manner of knowing it. It is for this reason, then, that the unbeliever is genuinely a “fool” (Ps. 14:1) — a fool because he does not understand that his rational and moral arguments

denying the existence of God can only have intelligible meaning so long as God exists; thus, he must rationally rely on God in order to reason against God, thereby proving the existence of God even in his rebellion! In short, the unbeliever “lives and moves” within an intellectual framework — stolen from Christianity — yet employed against the very One who makes logic, reason, and morality possible.

In order to demonstrate the irrational consequence of the secular worldview, let us examine the logical outcome of human rational autonomy and its dire significance for doing history. If finite man defies God, insisting that the fragmented perspective of the creature is the historical measure of the totality of all things, then there can be no objective “facts” of history because the historian’s experiences are always in the present. The facts of history cannot speak for themselves but, instead, require an interpreter who will assign meaning to them. Ignoring God’s Word as the transcendent frame of reference, man is now “free” to assign his own meaning to history, based on his limited understanding of life. But there are no “neutral” historians. One either approaches the historical facts of God’s universe as a Christian or as a non-Christian; no other option is available. For the unbeliever, then, history is not objectively “discovered” so much as it is subjectively “constructed.” Uninformed by God’s Word, historical interpretation is hopelessly personal and slanted — a slave to the beliefs and values of the moment (historicism) as each generation of historians provide its own meaning to the events of the past — determining on its own authority and limited understanding what has “permanent value” in the flux of nature and human experience.

Seeking objective unity to his fleeting existence, the secular historian will turn to natural causation for an objective, scientific foundation to his discipline. But human experience of cause-and-effect relationships via the scientific method can never rationally prove the uniform regularity of the natural order; this is because the reliability of scientific method first requires that all natural events exhibit a uniform pattern at the very outset; causal sequences in nature and the scientific method that uncovers them can be true only if nature already operates uniformly over time. Thus, one cannot scientifically prove the uniformity of nature because one must first presuppose that uniformity in order for the scientific method to be a valid means of acquiring truth. Furthermore, it is logically impossible to prove the uniformity of all natural occurrences only by our limited experiences of cause and effect relationships because no one has ever experienced all past sequences nor can anyone experience future

ones either. All arguments, then, based on our experiences in the present proceed on the assumption that the future will always be like the past and the present. However, to assume that the future will be like the past and the present is to beg the fundamental question: “How can we rationally know from our finite experiences alone that all of nature and all of the occurrences therein have always been and will always be regular and uniform throughout time?” As it stands, we can only presuppose — but not rationally demonstrate — the uniformity of natural events. Because no human can observe the totality of natural occurrences, the unbeliever’s knowledge of the natural order — the uniform patterns and scientific laws — in the end has no rational basis underlying it because it is severed from a biblical framework of knowledge. Only a special revelation from the One who first created the natural order and then providentially ensures its regularity (Gen. 8:22; Jer. 5:24, 33:20, 25; Prov. 3:19–20, 8:29) can furnish that necessary foundation that gives rational meaning to all the historian’s intellectual encounters with — and within — the natural world.

As we can see, apart from Scripture, history is rationally uncertain and incomprehensible to the non-Christian. For in the unbeliever’s worldview, man can be nothing more than a higher order of matter in motion, which means even his thoughts, sentiments, and cherished beliefs are likewise physical/chemical side effects. Thus, his experiences have no inherent value or purpose nor are any of his actions truly free because they are rooted in the unalterable, random interactions of natural forces, which explains Beard’s predicament. The unbeliever is forced to choose between two mutually exclusive perspectives: natural determinism (material causation/no human freedom from natural forces) or cultural relativism (subjective experiences/situational ethics). Yet, in spite of his worldview, the unbeliever lives his life as if there really are universal norms: objective truth, right and wrong, inherent human worth, etc. His commitment to evolution notwithstanding, the unbeliever behaves as if life has value — as if he was specially created in the image of God and not the unintended byproduct of primordial pond scum; like the psalmist, he intuitively understands that he was fearfully and wonderfully made (Ps. 139:14). This is why he seeks peace and justice — not “survival of the fittest.” This is why he still does history: because he cannot avoid knowing God (Rom. 1:21) and the purpose for which God made him due to the image of God in him.

Thus, Beard was correct in acknowledging the role of faith in his interpretation of history — faith for him being a blind, irrational leap

in the dark, hoping that somehow, there is truth and certainty behind all his encounters in a universe that is indifferent to him. Faith, indeed, is paramount to the discipline of history — that is, a Christian faith grounded in and informed by the eternal, unchanging, and inerrant Sacred Historian who made the world and everything in it. It is He who established universal rules of reason and moral boundaries — who regulates all things yet ensures human freedom because both matter and consciousness have their origin in Him. Because His Word is Truth (John 17:17), the Bible is necessarily the Christian’s historical compass.

Part 2: A Theology of History

At Cedarville University, we reject the ultimacy of human experience, and submit only to the authority of biblical revelation. This is the imperative of Scripture — to hold every thought captive to Christ (2 Cor. 10:5) in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3). God’s Word is foundational to the academic discipline of history, which is necessarily Christian in its rational assumptions. For example, historians assume at the outset the very possibility of factual, objective evidence, cause-and-effect relationships, and our ability to apprehend truth. Only the Bible can furnish these basic premises whereas the autonomous worldview of the unbeliever cannot — hence, the secular historian must subconsciously borrow them from Christianity, incorporating these foundational axioms into his internal belief system. And so, in order for history to be rationally intelligible and meaningful, the people of God must obediently begin with the person of God who established and continually upholds the created order. Without a personal Creator operating behind the scenes, and without His special revelation to explain His actions, the meaning of history from our finite vantage point would be an “impenetrable mystery.”²

The Historical Necessity of Divine Omniscience and Sovereignty

Two biblical doctrines foundational to understanding history are God’s omniscience (Job 24:23; Ps. 33:13–15, 139:13–16; Prov. 15:3; Jer. 16:17; Heb. 4:13) — that is, God knowing all things — and God’s sovereignty or absolute control of all things. The Lord knows everything because He establishes every event of history (Eph. 1:11) for His own glorifying purpose, which we are told is always good (Rom. 8:28). Having created all things and continually sustaining all things through His Son who

² C. Gregg Singer, “The Problem of Historical Interpretation,” in Gary North, ed., *Foundations of Christian Scholarship: Essays in the Van Til Perspective*. Ross House Books, 1976, 53–73.

“upholds the universe by the word of his power” (Heb. 1:3), the Father according to His good and perfect will determines what is possible and impossible in our historical experiences. He knows the future no less than the past because He has foreordained all events that have happened as well as those yet to transpire. This includes both good and bad experiences: “I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and calamity, I am the Lord, who does all these things” (Isa. 45:7). God’s sovereign rule over history, then, is absolute and perfectly righteous, even though His ultimate purpose may be hidden from us (Gen. 50:20). Because God is the author of every moment, history as a form of knowledge is objective without being impersonal — yet personal without being arbitrary or unpredictable.

Scripture explicitly references God’s providential control over the universe as a whole (Ps. 103:19; Dan. 4:35), over the earth (Job 37; Ps. 104:14, 135:6; Matt. 5:45), over the animal kingdom (Ps. 104:21, 28; Matt. 6:26, 10:29), over nations and political events (Job 12:23; Ps. 22:28, 66:7; Acts 17:26), over the creation of life and its duration (1 Sam. 16:1; Isa. 45:5; Gal. 1:15, 16), and over our prosperity and failures (Ex. 4:11; Ps. 75:6–7; Luke 1:52). Not only has the Lord predetermined our life span (Ps. 139:16) but He also intimately exercises His authority over the mundane aspects of it as well, for “Even the hairs of your head are all numbered [pre-established]” (Matt. 10:30). Therefore, what we call “natural law” is really the moment-by-moment upholding of all things by the Second Person of the Trinity, for “in him all things hold together” (Col. 1:17; John 1:3–4; Acts 17:28); Christ is the unifying power of the created order — not an unconscious and undirected natural force.

Since man’s chief end is to glorify God, in order to give our Heavenly Father all honor and glory due Him, Christians must reject the pagan notion that history “naturally” occurs apart from divine control; this is the ancient Greek concept of a world ruled by an impersonal fate that controlled all things and limited what even the gods could do. However, *time* does not exist apart from Him nor does it operate outside His jurisdiction. God knows the future because He foreordained it in the past, even “before the foundation of the world” was laid (Eph. 1:4; see also 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 1:9; Rev. 13:8, 17:8). He did not “fast-forward” through time as if it were independent of Him, and then once informed of our future choices, works in the present to bring them about because He cannot override our “autonomous” decisions. This unbiblical view would diminish God’s sovereignty — and make history capricious — by limiting

what He does in relation to human actions; it would have the Creator responding to the creature's erratic will when the Bible portrays it the other way around: man responding to the Father's unchanging will.

God does not make things up in the course of history in order to compensate for our indiscretions; He does nothing ad hoc. For example, to mete out justice against King Ahab for having stolen Naboth's vineyard, false prophets of the Lord — unbeknownst to them — became the agents God's vengeance against the king of Israel:

Therefore hear the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside him on his right hand and on his left; and the Lord said, "Who will entice Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?" ... Then a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord, saying, "I will entice him." And the Lord said to him, "By what means?" And he said, "I will go out, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets." And he [God] said, "You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go out and do so." Now therefore behold, the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; the Lord has declared disaster for you" (1 Kings 22:19-23).

Even by disguising himself as a soldier, Ahab could not avoid the Father's will, for "a certain man drew his bow at random and struck the king of Israel between the scale armor" thereby killing him (1 Kings 22:34) according to the original decree of the Lord (see 1 Kings 21:19).

God's eternal purposes are sure and never changing (Heb. 6:17) as evidenced by His message to the prophet Malachi: "I the Lord do not change" (Mal. 3:6). The Apostle James ascribes to the "Father of Lights" "no variation or shadow due to change" (James 1:17). Owing then to His immutable nature and unyielding will, our Heavenly Father will not change His mind: "God is not a man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?" (Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29). Whatever the Lord decrees will transpire even though the Bible oftentimes uses (anthropopathic) language suggesting that God may alter His plan in response to historical circumstances. However, such language is necessary in order to accommodate our finite understanding (or ignorance) of the mysterious ways God accomplishes His eternal plan. For instance, in Exodus 32, when God proposed to Moses that He would kill the "stiff-necked" people of Israel whom He had just delivered

from captivity, He was merely suggesting a possibility to Moses with no intention of actually going down that path. His ultimate purpose was to (1) test Moses by giving him the opportunity to intercede and (2) show mercy and grace to His people Israel. God could never have set aside His covenant promise made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and still remain true to His character. As such, we must not conclude that Moses altered God's original plan toward Israel; rather, he in fact carried it out, for it was always the Lord's will to withhold final judgment on this particular occasion ("And the Lord relented of the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people" — Ex. 32:14) as indicated by the outcome (see also, God's similar interaction with King Ahab in 1 Kings 21:25–29 and King Hezekiah in 2 Kings 20:1–7).

As we can see from Scripture, God is the protagonist in history — and He alone is the measure of all things. Here is the reason why: The Lord is not merely more powerful than we, He is all-powerful, and in being all-powerful, He is sovereign over all things; and being sovereign over all things, He controls all things that come to pass. Thus, there can be no contingency — no chance occurrences, no blind fortune or "dumb luck" — in His universe for even "the lot is cast into the lap but its every decision is from the Lord" (Prov. 16:33). All things — even seemingly "random" events — happen because He has ordained them so, and no clay vessel can thwart the Potter's will (Rom. 9). Only for this reason, then, does history have overarching purpose and meaning: because all historical events were planned by God and ultimately bear our Lord's seal of approval.

Divine Grace and the Human Will

God's sovereign control over our lives by no means constitutes blind determinism, where individuals — like Sophocles' tragic character Oedipus — valiantly strive against their grim destiny but are hopelessly overcome by it. Quite the contrary, according to Scripture, we freely choose all that we do, yet we do so in circumstances that God has arranged for us, for according to the psalmist, "You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me" (Ps. 139:5). Moreover, we cannot blame our unrighteous actions on God who controls all things for He never tempts us with evil nor does He entice us to sin (James 1:13); rather, we are tested by God, but tempted by Satan, for "God is faithful" and does not allow us to be tempted beyond our ability but, instead, "provides the way of escape" (1 Cor. 10:13). So, when we do sin, we are at fault, having been "lured and enticed by [our] own desire" (James 1:14).

Owing to original sin, the natural man is morally unable by himself to do what is good because he will not do what is good; he is “a slave to sin” (John 8:34), being “dead in trespasses and sins” (Col. 2:13) and “by nature children of wrath” (Eph. 2:1–3). Indeed, this proclivity to sin is part of our very constitution, as evidenced by the following scriptural passages: “I was brought forth in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Ps. 51:5). “The wicked go astray from the womb” and “go astray from birth, speaking lies” (Ps. 58:3) for “their minds and their consciences are corrupted” (Titus 1:15). Therefore, “What is man, that he can be pure? Or he who is born of a woman that he can be righteous?” (Job 15:14). “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? There is not one” (Job 14:4). “Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then also can you do good who are accustomed to do evil” (Jer. 13:23).

Given this biblical fact that “no one does good, not even one” (Rom. 3:12), it is a foregone conclusion how man will act apart from the grace of God, which restrains the full destructive power of our rebellious nature, thereby making human civilization possible. That there is moral orderliness to our existence in a world under the curse of sin testifies to the fact that God is supervening over and intervening in the affairs of men — introducing righteous spontaneity to what would otherwise be a nonstop committal of lawlessness on our part. Absent this supernatural infusion of grace, we would not have the freedom to do good because all our actions would be immorally yet volitionally determined by our natural condition — a condition from which we are powerless to break free of or overcome on our own. God’s grace is the only way for man to have any choice other than to carry out evil, for apart from God, man faces a grim determinism of his own making because, according to Paul, “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14).

Something, then, must first attune our darkened hearts so that we will hear and understand what God has revealed. Thus, prior to faith, the natural man must be renewed by the Holy Spirit — that “spirit of wisdom and of revelation” — who changes our moral disposition and inclines our hearts to God “by having the eyes of [our] hearts enlightened” (Eph. 1:18). As Paul succinctly stated, “No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:3), who must first “circumcise” the heart of fallen man in order for one to receive the Gospel: “And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that

you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live” (Deut. 30:6; see also Ezek. 11:19, 36:26–27 — “I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes”).

And yet, while God “has mercy on whomever He wills, and He hardens whomever he wills” (Rom. 9:18), we are personally at fault for our own stony heart. Unbelievers are “alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of hearts. They have become callous” on their own apart from God (Eph. 4:18–19a). This is a natural, self-imposed enmity against our Creator, which means our spiritual rebellion is premeditated. Thus, unlike poor Oedipus who, while trying to avoid his horrific fate (i.e., kill his father and marry his mother) only managed to fulfill it, we on the other hand are not dragged along in life against our will but, rather, gladly ratify the Father’s will by all our voluntary choices and actions — for good and for evil.

As we can see, God is the mover of history, and all that happens in history is according to His will. So even while we genuinely choose all our actions (“choose this day whom you will serve ...” — Josh. 24:15) — the Creator has overriding priority over human volition, defining the condition and extent of our choices (Ps. 139:5). He is the cause of all things that happen in history, and we are the willing agents who respond to and carry out His plan (Phil. 2:13). Only a sovereign and righteous God can enable the genuine freedom of sinners to choose according to their will and still hold them morally culpable for all their actions.

Part 3: The Biblical Purpose and Outline of History

In Acts 17, Luke provides an account of the Apostle Paul’s witness to the unbelieving intellectuals in Athens — the “ground zero” of secular wisdom in the ancient world. It is interesting to note that when Paul “reasoned” with these philosophers, he did not set Scripture aside in order to find religiously neutral, common ground with them — that is, first make his case on a rational, extra-biblical foundation and then bring Jesus and the resurrection into his argument; rather, he started with and continued to reason from biblical revelation. In the course of his apology, the Apostle challenged several fundamental axioms of the Greek worldview — not least, their understanding of history: “And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God ...”(Acts 17:26–27).

We should immediately note two important principles relevant to the discipline of history that Paul highlights in this passage. First, God is the mover of history, establishing both the geographical and chronological borders of all kingdoms and nations — not just Israel's. Secondly, because God is at work in history, history has a moral and intelligible purpose: God is directing all events for the reason of enabling humankind “to seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him” (Acts 17:27). What this means is that history is the record of God's redemption — the spiritual restoration of His people. And so it is imperative that we start at the very beginning of this remarkable story, as revealed to us in the biblical account of Creation and the Fall.

The Creation and the Fall in History

When God created man, the Lord gave him dominion over the creation. Bearing the divine image of the Creator himself, humans are God's vassals — administrators empowered to rule in God's name as stewards over the created order. All that the earth has to offer, the Father placed under the authority of our first parents for cultivation — with the exception of one thing: the “tree of knowledge of good and evil.” This tree epitomized rational self-sufficiency — knowledge attained independently of God's Word. Its purpose was to provide man with his first spiritual test: Will man submit to God with all his heart, body, and MIND or would he, instead, lean on his own understanding (Prov. 3:5–6)? God created man to be dependent on Him, to live “by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” (Deut. 8:3), always to walk by faith in the Word of God, who alone determines good and evil, for it is “in thy light that we see light” (Ps. 36:9). Tragically, our first parents, rather than submitting to the command of God, were enticed by the serpent to evaluate God's command using natural revelation (or reason) and the standard of their own finite intelligence. In doing so, they made the categorical mistake of subjecting God — who embodies and defines the totality of all knowledge — to an evidentiary test based on fallible human logic and understanding. By placing God in the dock (witness stand), Adam and Eve made themselves judge over Him who alone is Judge (Job 38–41; Ps. 50:6). In this way, they fulfilled the serpent's declaration: “you will be like God” (Gen. 3:4) — that is, independent, self-sufficient, and rationally autonomous.

Genesis 3:15 — “Enmity”

The result of this insubordination was unremitting hostility between man and his Maker. But God, being rich in mercy (Eph. 2:4) would make many alive through His Son. In Genesis 3:15, we see the first articulation

of the Gospel in history and the resultant dialectical tension (spiritual polarity): “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” In this passage God promised that He would preserve by His grace alone (otherwise, there would be no enmity between the sinner and the serpent), a lineage that will be faithful to Him: “I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me” (Jer. 32:40).

Thus, beginning with Cain vs. godly Abel and then Cain vs. godly Seth, the eventual intermarriage of these two lines accelerated the moral decline of humanity, culminating in the last remnant of Seth, Noah, who alone “found grace in the eyes of the Lord” (Gen. 6:8). After the Flood, the Bible indicates that this special lineage fell to one of Noah’s sons: “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem.” It is from his descendants that we get the Semitic peoples, including the Hebrews. But more importantly for those of us in the West, Japheth — whose extended offspring include the Greek and Roman peoples — would vicariously share in his brother Shem’s blessing: “May God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem” (Gen. 9:26–27). And so the Gentiles, who were “once alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise” (Eph. 2:12), are those descendants of Japheth who would come to salvation in the messianic age (see Acts 14:27; Eph. 2:11–22). Thus, Noah’s blessing represents the inclusion of Gentiles in the covenant, which began 2,000 years ago and has increased ever since.

Abrahamic Covenant

Unfortunately, the post-diluvial human race, in corporate rebellion against God, refused to honor the original creation ordinance to fill the earth and subdue it; they disobeyed God in order to make their name great (Gen. 11:4). The Lord then forcibly dispersed mankind from the plains of Shinar (Sumer) — the cradle of Mesopotamian civilization — graciously scattering the human race by language in order one day to unite many to Himself. And so we find that the redeemed lineage — the “Seed of the woman” (Gen. 3:15) — narrowed even more in history when God reached out to a lone individual in order to establish His “everlasting” covenant, promising to make Abraham’s name great: “And I will make of you a great nation ... and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” In response to this gracious call, Abraham trusted God and it was credited to him as righteousness. For this reason, according to Paul, “it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.” We are all one in Christ Jesus, “And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring,

heirs according to promise” (Gal. 3:7–8, 28–29). This, then, is that “mystery of the Gospel” — “that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” first established in the covenant with Abraham (Eph. 1:9, 3:6; Col. 1:26–27).

Sadly, we know by the Jewish rejection of their Messiah and persecution of the New Testament Church, that Israel exchanged the inclusivity of the Gospel for the exclusivity of Hebrew nationalism. And yet, according to Paul, from the very beginning God had ordained that ancient Israel was to be the means by which all the nations “might feel their way toward him and find him” (Acts 17:27). For instance, in Exodus 19:6, we are told that the Father established His people to be a “kingdom of priests” — set apart from the world in order to be a holy example so that many outside Israel would be justified: “And all the peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the Lord . . .” (Deut. 28:10). Speaking through the prophet Isaiah, God promised to send His Servant, who would come out of Israel in order to bring salvation to the nations: “I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth” (Isa. 49:6). This included even Israel’s most dreaded enemies, who would likewise be part of the family of God: “Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance” (Isa. 19:25; see also Jonah).

God the Author of World History

Given this redemptive arc structuring ancient history, we must be mindful of the fact that while God guided Israel, He also influenced the historical development of her inhospitable neighbors — utilizing them as instruments of His retribution or blessing on other nations. One such pagan kingdom He enlisted in His judgment of the nations was Assyria (named after its god Ashur): “Ah, Assyria, the rod of my anger; the staff in their hands is my fury! Against a godless nation I send him, and against the people of my wrath I command him, to take spoil and seize plunder, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets” (Isa. 10:6). This does not mean that Assyria intentionally served the Lord in this capacity, because we are told, “But he [Assyria] does not so intend, and his heart does not so think: but it is in his heart to destroy and to cut off nations not a few” (Isa. 10:7–8). It was through this unbelieving race that the Lord said, “I remove the boundaries of peoples, and . . . I bring down those who sit on thrones” (Isa. 10:13), orchestrating and granting success to their conquests: “Have you not heard that I determined it long ago? I planned from days of old what now I bring to pass, that you [Assyria] should turn fortified cities into heaps of ruins” (2 Kings 19:10–12, 25).

When Paul told the Athenians that the “unknown” God had determined the allotted periods and boundaries of the several kingdoms, he was underscoring the fact that our Lord is the author of all national histories. This is made plain in Amos 9:7: “Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor [Crete] and the Syrians from Kir?” It is God “who removes kings and sets up kings” (Dan. 3:21) — such as the Babylonian ruler Nebuchadnezzar who received his “kingship and greatness and glory” from the Most High (Dan. 5:18). Yet not only does God raise up foreign leaders and hold them accountable, but He also uses these rulers to bring glory to His name and to fulfill His redemptive purpose. For this reason, the prophet Isaiah spoke of a future pagan ruler who — 200 years later — would unite Medo-Persia under his rule: “of Cyrus, ‘He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill my purpose’; saying of Jerusalem, ‘She shall be built,’ and of the temple, ‘Your foundation shall be laid’” (Isa. 44:28). So, not only did Cyrus later rule by God’s decree, his singular purpose in history was to restore Israel, “subdue nations before him and to loosen the belts of kings.” Of Cyrus, the Lord’s “anointed” (Christos), we are told, “It is I, the Lord, who calls you [Cyrus] by your name, for the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by name yet you do not know me. . . . I equip you, though you do not know me” (Isa. 45:1–5). This was in fulfillment of His promise to the people of Israel prior to their entering the Promised Land: “The Lord will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the Lord will drive you. . . . [But] you will return to the Lord your God and obey his voice. For the Lord your God is a merciful God. He will not leave you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your fathers that he swore to them” (Deut. 4:27, 34). And so, in order that His word might be fulfilled, “the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia” (Ezra 1:1) to commence the restoration of God’s covenant people.

What we find throughout the Bible that is vitally important to one’s understanding of history, is this simple truth: the Lord carries out His saving mission among men through men. This also includes working even through hapless unbelievers in powerful places, such as a certain Roman prefect who flaunted his political autonomy before the Supreme Governor of the universe! “You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?” In His response, Jesus meekly corrected Pilate’s secular understanding of temporal rule: “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above” (John 19:10–11). As with everything else that happens in history, Jesus’ interrogation and resultant death was all part of

God's sovereign plan and thus orchestrated every step of the way by the Father (Acts 2:23).

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream: The "Four Kingdoms"

God's management of history is dramatically established in Nebuchadnezzar's historically significant vision (Dan. 2) of an image with a head of gold (kingdom of Babylon), chest and arms of silver (Persian empire), stomach and thighs of bronze (Greece), and legs of iron (Rome) with feet of iron and clay ("partly strong and partly brittle"). According to Daniel's interpretation of the dream, "a stone cut without hands struck the image on its feet. ... Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken into pieces, and became like chaff ... and the wind carried them away. ... But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth" (Dan. 2:31-35). Here, God revealed to Nebuchadnezzar His sovereign plan regarding the rise and fall of these four major kingdoms in the ancient world. The "stone cut without human hands" represents Christ our Cornerstone whose arrival concluded this period of history while inaugurating another: the kingdom of our Lord — the Church — which will "fill the whole earth" thereby ending the dominance of polytheistic religion and culture.

As prophesied by Daniel and fulfilled in subsequent history, the last 2,000 years have witnessed the culmination of the blessing of Japheth via the evangelization of the Gentiles. A Western civilization — once pagan to the core but now culturally steeped in a Judeo-Christian ethos grew out of the ashes of this ancient world — providing political, cultural, and technological leadership. All of this has been accomplished by the hand of God working through people for the purposes of implementing His Gospel; it is the Lord who moves history — not blind natural causation or the mere machinations of man.

Conclusion

The divine mandate to subdue the creation obligates us to order the facts of our experiences in grateful acknowledgement of our Creator and His revealed will. We do not do justice to God's objective revelation in the natural order — that is, His works of creation and providence — if we fail to attach scriptural meaning to it. For this reason, Christians must be critically discerning of secular thought, measuring all things by the yardstick of special revelation. Given the Lord's providential governance of the universe at every level — past, present, and future — the historian

must examine these facts through the lens of God’s Word, authored by the Sacred Historian who orchestrates all things. Only from Scripture can we know that there is no endless repetition or random sequence of events; rather, history is eschatological — advancing toward a prescribed and glorious conclusion: “So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it” (Isa. 55:11). Given the role of Christ in completing this mission, the Incarnation remains the singular event of the cosmos; it was the end of ancient history — its fulfillment now is the template for all events thereafter. This biblical fact must structure our historical understanding as we piece together the experiences of the past. Out of obedience to Christ, we must strive to situate even the seemingly trivial occurrences happening in the “City of Man” within the cosmic backdrop of the “City of God.” This is the only way for history to have objective meaning and lasting moral significance.

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Chapter 5: Biblical Integration in History: The Grand Debate

Thomas S. Mach

Have you noticed how popular Ancestry.com has become? People everywhere are signing up and trying to learn about where their families came from, when they came to this country, what they did, and why they did it. As human beings, we seem to be innately interested in these questions. Now, I realize that quality is not found in everyone. School-age children tend to find history either very interesting or very boring. There does not seem to be much in between those two extremes and, unfortunately, I fear that most fall into the latter category. A scan of late-night television or cable news shows will evidence that most Americans have very little knowledge of the world's or their nation's past. We should find it distressing when a randomly selected individual cannot identify what nation we fought against in the War for Independence, who the president of the United States was during the American Civil War, or what brought the country out of the Great Depression. I could go on a diatribe about how historically illiterate Americans are, how the educational system has relegated history courses to second place behind science and math requirements, and how colleges have dropped history courses from general education programs, but that is not the purpose of this essay. What is interesting, however, is that in spite of the evidence that many of us do not know our nation's history very well, most of us are intrigued by our own personal history. We could simply chalk this up to our narcissistic society, but I would like to think it goes deeper than that.

When we meet people for the first time, one of the first questions asked revolves around what we do for a living. When I tell people that I teach history, I often receive the comment that they did not appreciate history as a student but as they grew older, they came to appreciate it. I think this growing sense of the importance of history has to do with the realization that ourselves, our families, our culture, our nation, and our faith are grounded in the past. Knowing the past gives us a better sense of who we are. More than 26,000 people have traced their lineage back to individuals who sailed across the ocean on the Mayflower and have joined the Mayflower Society. A conflict over who was and was not actually a descendent of Thomas Jefferson led to a major investigation regarding whether or not Jefferson had lived with a slave named Sally Hemings as

common-law husband and wife. The findings of renewed investigation and DNA testing suggest that he did and the resulting descendants should be considered in Jefferson's lineage. The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, which runs Monticello, has accepted the new research while the Monticello Association, the Jefferson lineage society, has been reluctant to do so. Why do these things matter? The relationship between Jefferson and Hemings takes on significance historically for many reasons due to their respective races and economic relationship, but beyond that, the relationship of people descended from them matters for very personal reasons of identity. The fact that my grandfather left school after eighth grade to provide for his mother and sister, yet lived out the American dream, of which I am a benefactor, means a great deal to me. It tells me something both about the stock I come from and the nation in which I live. For many like me, history takes on meaning because in an often impersonal world, it provides meaning and identity for us.

For those of us who follow Christ, we recognize that history has eternal value. The Christian faith is predicated on actual historical events that provide the foundation for the faith itself. As the Apostle Paul wrote, if Christ was not raised from the dead, our "faith is empty" (1 Cor. 15:14). The Christian religion is based on the historical story of Christ coming to earth as a baby; ministering, teaching, and healing broken lives for approximately three years; dying a grisly death on a cross because the Jewish leaders would not accept Him as the Messiah; and raising from the dead after three days just as the prophecy foretold. If Christ did not do the things recorded in Scripture, then He was not the Messiah and there is no reason to believe. For Christians, then, history takes on an eternal significance because it verifies what we believe, and it is the truth upon which we base our lives and our eternity.

Yet there is a broader, less personal question, that must be addressed when we consider history. Is there meaning in the study of the past? If so, where is it found? Philosophers of history have grappled with these and similar questions for generations — really since the beginning of recorded history. The earliest historians — it is generally accepted that the Jewish historians were the first true historians because those of civilizations before them tended simply to chronicle events — noted that events happened for reasons and that the events themselves meant something. The Jewish historians, in particular, recognized that history had meaning because of the existence of God. Since He had created the universe and created man to live in it, the events of man must have some meaning.

Meaning in history, then, comes from the fact that God created man in His image and in the process endowed him with meaning. For secular philosophers of history, the question is much more difficult to answer. Some suggest that history has no meaning. In general, for those that are willing to suggest that there is any meaning at all, the answer given is that in studying the past, we find we have comradery with those who came before us in our suffering. In essence, we learn that life is painful and it always has been. At least we know we are not alone in our pain.¹ From my perspective, that is not enough. I would become something other than a historian if that was the only explanation of meaning in history. Thankfully, as Christians, we recognize that there is meaning and that God is working out His plan for humanity through history.

Notice the distinction between the two evaluations of meaning in history. Why do Christians and secularists arrive at such different answers to the question of meaning in the past? The answer lies in our respective starting places. As my friend and colleague Dr. Richard Tison has ably communicated in his essay titled “History and the Biblical Worldview,” our presuppositions direct our thinking in these matters. If we believe that God does not exist, then man is purely material, a complex set of chemical interactions, and the product of chance. A chance development has no intrinsic meaning. If this were in fact true, then human beings would live and die and in the long-term perspective would have little meaning other than on a temporal level. If we believe that God does exist, then human beings have meaning as a part of His divine creation. Like the artist who can explain what motivated and provides the meaning behind her most abstract piece, God imbued man with meaning when He crafted him out of the dust and breathed life into him. God had a plan for man before He created him, and human history records the unfolding of that plan. As a result, history, the study of the record of man’s events through time, has meaning because of the creative involvement of the God of the universe.

At Cedarville University’s Department of History and Government, we have chosen Romans 12:2 as our department verse. It reads, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is

¹ Karl Popper, “Has History Any Meaning?” in *The Philosophy of History in Our Time*, edited by Hans Meyerhoff. Doubleday Anchor Books, 1937, 305–21; Paul K. Conkin and Roland N. Stromberg, *The Heritage and Challenge of History*. Dodd and Mead, 1971, 240–44; Page Smith, *The Historian and History*. Alfred A. Knopf, 1964, 229, 236.

good and acceptable and perfect.” Renewing the mind is a critical element of what it means to be a Christian intellectual. In the field of history, we start with the presupposition that God exists. Some might critique us and say that our system of thought is weak because it is based on a circular system of reasoning. The reality is that all systems of thought start with presuppositions. As such, any of them could be critiqued as being circular. Our system of thought must have some grounding. Either we start with God, or we start with man. If we start with God, then mankind has meaning and the highest source of knowledge is God’s revelation. If we start with man, then mankind is the product of chance and the highest source of knowledge is reason. The atheist can deride, demanding that the Christian prove that God exists. The Christian can respond in kind, demanding that the atheist prove that He does not. The reality is that neither can “prove” the existence or lack of existence of God. There is plenty of evidence for the existence of God found in His creation, His revelation, and the experience of His church, but His existence is not predicated on that evidence. We know He exists by faith. We know who He is through His Word, which we embrace by faith. The atheist uses a similar faith basis for rejecting His existence and His Word. In his case, the faith is placed in the lack of any truth beyond what the human mind can rationalize. Does that mean that the two systems of thought are equal since they are both circular in their reasoning (one harkens back to a self-authenticating God and the other to a self-authenticating man)? No! Unlike our politically correct society, Cedarville University stands on the authority of the Word as the highest source of knowledge. Surely if God exists, then His Word should be the highest authority. The Christian worldview, grounded in biblical principle, is the only true worldview. It is true because its foundation is true. Our faith is in the true and living God. The atheist’s is in fallible man. As Tison also noted, the irony is that fallen man, whether he recognizes it or not, can only think because of the existence of God. So, he must adopt the assumptions of Christianity implicitly to make his system work at all. God provided the necessary framework for man to think. As Abraham Kuyper emphasized, there is no element of creation over which Christ does not claim ownership.

Once we embrace the notion of God’s existence, something taught by creation and the innate desire of man for meaning, we have to accept the idea that He communicated with mankind through His Word. His creation gave us the idea that He was there. His Word allowed us to know who He is, recognize our lost state, come to right relationship with Him, and understand why human beings have any meaning at all. God used

history in Scripture as a tool to teach us many things about Himself and about ourselves. We can understand from God's use of history why it is an important endeavor for us today. As a result, it is incumbent upon Christian historians to use the principles of Scripture as a guide for understanding and evaluating the study of history. A number of important figures have spent a lifetime plumbing the depths of what Scripture teaches about the study of the past. I will present a few examples of them and explore the contributions they made in helping us understand better how to arrive at a truly integrated understanding of the past.

Key Christian Historians and Their Contributions

One of the great church fathers in western Christianity is Augustine, Bishop of Hippo. He lived from 354–430 A.D. and authored a number of works that continue to influence us today such as *City of God* and *Confessions*. Augustine believed in a teleological approach to history, meaning that he believed that God had a plan that He was working out within human history. God is the Creator and He has a design for the unfolding of history. Augustine held to a linear approach to history because he recognized in Scripture that God began human history with the creation of man and that He would one day bring human history to a close, at least on this earth. As a result, there was a clear beginning to history and there would be a clear end to it in the providence of God's timing. Augustine believed that God was active and involved in His creation. The historian, then, should seek to recognize the hand of God in historical events. Augustine realized that ultimate meaning in history was not found in the events of history themselves, but rather was found in the person and character of the Creator God. The creation story underscored the significance and meaning of man. For Christians, the recognition that man fell is important as well. With this understanding, the Christian historian can have sympathy for the man of the past. While he or she may be sympathetic due to an understanding of man's limitations, the Christian historian must still be willing to judge past events. The Scriptures provide the basis for those judgments and evaluations and they can help mankind make wise decisions in the present.

Augustine underscored what became the foundational elements of a Christian understanding of history. Virtually all Christians who studied history after his time embraced the basic principles he emphasized. Jumping ahead to the 20th century, Herbert Butterfield, a professor at the University of Cambridge, agreed with Augustine regarding his recognition of the uniqueness of man as a creation of God. Historians

see the meaning in human history because mankind was created and given the ability to glorify God. In being given the ability to do so, men were also given the ability to denigrate God. In essence, what Butterfield argued for was the recognition that human beings had free will and could make choices regarding the unfolding of their lives. As a result, Butterfield suggested that Christian historians should reject deterministic understandings of the past, where human players are directed about by unseen powers, such as economic or environmental forces, that cause humans to act in ways that are outside of their control. A Marxist interpretation of history that suggests a cyclical process of class conflict, revolution, and utopian progress for example, is ruled out by a proper biblical understanding of mankind. Butterfield's examination of what influence a proper, biblical understanding of man has on the historian's examination of the past is quite consistent with the position Augustine held.

In other areas, however, Butterfield did not quite see eye to eye with Augustine. Butterfield made a distinction between what he called "technical history" and "interpretive" or "providential history."² In researching and writing the former, he argued, the Christian historian does his or her work no differently than a secular historian. The Christian has a distinctive foundation from which to work, however, when working in the realm of "providential history." Here, Butterfield argued, the Christian historian explores interpretations of the past based on biblical principles and arrives at conclusions that may be radically different from those of the secular historian. Augustine would probably not have driven such a wedge between the two types of history. Others have examined this dichotomy as well, and the question of this divide continues to be a source of debate among Christian historians to this day as will be discussed later. In fact, it is in that debate that Cedarville's distinctiveness will be most clearly seen.

Gordon Clark, a philosopher and theologian in the Reformed tradition, supported the concept of a presuppositional approach to knowledge as outlined earlier.³ More importantly, he argued that there was an objective reality to the past and that it can be discovered. While this seems innocuous enough, it is a position that has become rather controversial in recent years. Postmodern thinking has undermined the notion that the past can be discovered at all. While postmodernism is difficult to categorize and define, various strains of it have chipped away at the concept of

² Herbert Butterfield, *Christianity and History*. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949.

³ Gordon H. Clark, *A Christian View of Men and Things*. William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1951.

knowable truth. Some lines of thinking attack our ability to know truth by emphasizing the various filters in our lives that impair our vision of knowledge. For example, our cultural upbringing and the resulting personal prejudices that it engenders in us make it impossible for us to be objective observers of the present, let alone researchers of the past. Other postmoderns undermine the field by embracing various linguistic theories that see language as nothing more than symbols given assigned meanings by people at specific moments in time. Since the words (symbols) are separate from the historical events themselves (or concepts thereof), and those symbols can only be understood at that given time and place, it is pure hubris on the part of the historian to presume that he could understand the words/symbols used in historical documents. Those documents, of course, are the main sources used by historians in reconstructing and interpreting the past. As a result of analyses like these, postmoderns tend to question the ability of the field to enlighten us about what really happened in the past at all. Instead, all “historians” can do, they argue, is provide narrow, individualistic presentations of the past that may or may not have any resemblance to the past as it actually happened. We will never know, because we have no way of accessing the past. These postmodern theories are interesting for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is their use of modern understandings of what constitutes proven knowledge. Be that as it may, the field of history has tended to reject this postmodern assault. Keith Windschuttle’s book, *The Killing of History*, is just one among many fine responses to the postmodern critique and rightly argues for the veracity and value of the field. If the postmoderns are right, after all, then history as a field disappears and we are left with only literature. While there is nothing wrong with literature (i.e., fiction), the field of history has always purported to be providing a truthful presentation of past events (i.e., nonfiction). So, in today’s world, Clark’s seemingly obvious positions are no longer so obvious and bear emphasis. For Christians in particular, the importance of language and its ability to communicate are vitally important. If God chose to communicate to us through language, for example, then surely it is an adequate means for conveying truth. If we believe that it is not, we are in essence saying that the God of the universe cannot communicate to His creation — a creation, by the way, that He spoke into existence. In addition, as we have already discussed, our knowledge of historical events, accessed through language, is particularly important as an undergirding foundation of our faith.

George Marsden, a historian of the latter 20th century who taught at Calvin, Duke, and Notre Dame, has written extensively on the concept of the integration of Christianity and history. Like Augustine, Marsden embraced the notion of a linear approach to history and the concept that history has meaning because of the existence of the Creator God. Like Clark, Marsden believes that history is knowable, at least to some helpful extent, and it is worth studying. Finally, like Butterfield, he found deterministic approaches to history inconsistent with a biblical understanding of man's volition. Also like Butterfield, Marsden found little difference in how Christian and secular historians operated, except in the areas of topics chosen for examination and, in some cases, sources that might be used in research. Marsden posed an important question — can a reader recognize a Christian historian from a secular historian just by reading what he or she has written? Marsden seems to long for it in his writings on integrating Christianity and history, but he is unsure. He argued that the Christian historian has a unique set of “control beliefs” — a term borrowed from Christian philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff.⁴ Control beliefs influence a Christian's perspective of the past. For example, the recognition that while man may be influenced by various forces, his path is not determined by any of them because he was created as a volitional being, is a control belief that causes Christian historians to reject deterministic interpretations of the past. In this case, as in others, Marsden argues, when historical conclusions conflict with biblical principle, the historical conclusions should — in most cases — be changed. Control beliefs, then, guide interpretation of the past.

These various elements of how biblical principle impacts the view of history by a Christian are helpful, but the question remains whether or not there is a clear, distinctively Christian interpretation of history. Marsden, in a work titled *A Christian View of History?*, shied away from asserting such a thing.⁵ In fact, as was noted earlier, he was not even sure that a history written by a Christian would be identifiable from that written by a non-Christian. Wolterstorff, too, suggested that such identifiable distinctiveness was not necessarily required for Christian fidelity.⁶ So, perhaps then, it appears that Marsden, and Wolterstorff too

⁴ George M. Marsden, “The Spiritual Vision of History,” *Fides et Historia* 14 (Fall-Winter 1981), 59; Paul A. Marshall, Sander Griffioen, and Richard J. Mouw, eds. *Stained Glass: Worldviews and Social Science*. University Press of America, 1989.

⁵ George M. Marsden and Frank Roberts, *A Christian View of History?* Eerdmans Publishing. Co., 1975.

⁶ Nicholas Wolterstorff, “On Christian Learning,” in *Stained Glass: Worldviews and Social Science*, edited by Paul A. Marshall, Sander Griffioen, and Richard J. Mouw. University Press of America, 1989, 70.

for that matter, agree with Butterfield's dichotomy between providential and technical history. Let us examine this conundrum a bit closer by examining two different approaches to historical writing found among Christian historians. Not everyone agrees with Marsden regarding his understanding of the Christian interpretation of history.

The Grand Debate

The first Christian approach to history that we will examine I will call "providential history." There is a similarity to what Butterfield was suggesting in using the term, but there should not be too close an association made between the usage here and what Butterfield described as providential. As an example of the "providential" approach, I will use the well-known book by Peter Marshall and David Manuel, *The Light and the Glory*, published in 1977. It is particularly important to recognize that Marshall and Manuel were reacting, at least in part, to the concerted effort by some in American society to secularize the education of the nation. Religious values and even religious history were being systematically scrubbed from American textbooks as secular humanism gradually became the dominant worldview in the American classroom. Various Supreme Court decisions in the previous two decades hastened these changes as the American understanding of the wall of separation between church and state gradually leaned further and further away from Christianity. Marshall and Manuel wrote American history by overtly seeking to uncover God's hand in the nation's past. Since God had a plan for each individual's life, they surmised, He must have a plan for each nation as well. For example, they argued, Columbus' voyage of discovery could be portrayed by historians as an accident or it could be seen as part of God's plan to bring Christianity to the pagan inhabitants of the New World. Another example of this Providential approach can be seen in Marshall and Manuel's examination of the Pilgrims. When they were attacked by Native Americans, they reported back to England that God had protected them from the arrows of the Indians in battle. The Pilgrims, and the Puritans as well, were convinced that God had called them to the New World to set up model communities based on the teachings of God's Word. Puritan writers noted that they were about God's business of establishing a "City on a Hill" that would be an example to English society of how a Christian society should function. Marshall and Manuel find the thoughts of these early English settlers compelling. They are willing to look at these events in a fashion that is open to the possibility that God was in fact doing something in particular in the creation of America. Given that the United States has done much good in the world and that

it has been a primary source of missionary endeavors for the last two centuries, it is not completely out of the realm of possibility to consider what God might have been doing here.

To stay with Butterfield's terminology, I will call the counter-argument to the providential approach "technical history." As an example of this oppositional approach, George Marsden and Mark Noll will be examined. Marsden was introduced earlier. Noll is an evangelical historian who has taught at Wheaton College and the University of Notre Dame. Like Marshall and Manuel, these men are committed followers of Christ. They represent an important disagreement among believers, however, about how we should approach the study of history. Marsden and Noll are very concerned that the providential approach to history presumes too much about the purposes of God. Could God have been working through the Puritans to obtain a particular goal? Marsden and Noll would consent that He could have been, but we are not able to ascertain what He might have been doing in our evaluation of the past. While Scripture is replete with explanations for why God perpetrated or allowed various events to happen, Scripture is unique because it is divinely inspired. Unless Christian historians believe they are divinely inspired as well, Marsden and Noll maintain, they had better be circumspect about what God is intending in the past.

As an example, Marsden and Noll have written extensively about the founding of America as well. While Marshall and Manuel see it as a nation blessed by God and founded on His principles for His purposes, Marsden and Noll tend to find the founding of America strangely devoid of scriptural rationale. They find the American Revolution to be contrary to biblical teaching regarding obedience to governing authorities. In addition, they argue that while the founding of America presented the first Americans with the potential to create a nation that would embody Christian principle, they fumbled that opportunity and instead created a society that was far more beholden to Enlightenment thinking than biblical teaching. In other words, the Revolution was not as revolutionary as it could have been.⁷

Marsden and Noll tend to attribute the providential approach to history to a particular theological position based on a belief in an inerrant Word of God. Mark Noll wrote a fairly sharp critique of this theological position and its interpretive impact titled *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*.

⁷ Mark A. Noll, Nathan O. Hatch, and George M. Marsden, *The Search for Christian America*. Crossway Books, 1983; George Marsden, *The American Revolution*, Christian Perspectives on History, edited by Henry Ippel and Gordon Oosterman. National Union of Christian Schools, 1973.

In it, he chastised schools like Cedarville for being what he called “anti-intellectual” by holding to a literal Creation account. This position, Noll argued, fails to take into account the scientific evidence for evolution, makes the Christian community look foolish in academic circles, and epitomizes a propensity to ascribe anything to God that cannot be easily explained. Both Noll and Marsden have written extensively about the Creation/Theistic Evolution debate and even testified on behalf of groups seeking to keep Creationism from being taught in public schools. Marsden and Noll believe that God played a role in Creation, but that life evolved over time as argued by most secular scientists of the 20th century. Young earth Creationists, they argue, represent a hermeneutical error of taking Scripture too literally. Tison argues that the variance between these positions is found in both epistemological as well as hermeneutical differences. First, those who hold to a literal Creationist position tend to give “epistemic priority to Scripture rather than to natural revelation”; whereas, Marsden and Noll tend to have “a higher estimate of man’s ability to reason autonomously.”⁸ It could be argued, at least to some degree, that they have succumbed to rational autonomy in their methodology. Second, the hermeneutical difference stems from a method that tends to take Scripture literally when possible based on an examination of how literary and grammatical elements are used throughout Scripture. In essence, this method allows Scripture to interpret Scripture. Tison has asserted that the distinction is not unlike the difference between traditional evangelicals and German biblical critics in the 19th century. These higher critics eschewed the supernatural element in inspiration, choosing instead to focus on the human aspect and seeking rational support for biblical assertions. Tison is correct in concluding that those who “pursued this course in biblical criticism not only failed to attain credibility [in the academy], they also failed to maintain their theological integrity.”⁹ While Marsden and Noll have not given up on the supernatural in Scripture, they do emphasize the human element in the inspiration process. To borrow a critique from John Leith regarding contemporary theologians, they have “been subject to the temptation to understand the Christian faith in light of the dogmas of the Enlightenment, rather than the Enlightenment in the light of the dogmas of the Christian faith.”¹⁰ This approach is much more in line with the rationalism of the secular university. Noll seems very concerned

⁸ Richard Tison, “Intellectual Sanctification: A Biblical View of History and Knowledge,” unpublished integration essay, 2014, 67.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁰ John H. Leith, *Crisis in the Church: The Plight of Theological Education*. Westminster John Knox Press, 1997, 36.

about respectability and tends to criticize those who hold to inerrancy as guilty of bibliolatry. Their “keen preoccupation with the doctrine of biblical inerrancy,” he argued, will have to be left behind so that “the life of the mind may have a chance.”¹¹ The end result, according to Noll and Marsden, is that Christians find it hard to gain acceptance in the academy because they are seen as being anti-intellectual.

Neither Marsden nor Noll deny the legitimacy of the Christian faith or its grounding in the Word of God, but their arguments result in a dichotomy between faith and the academic enterprise. This is particularly ironic given that both are considered leaders in the field in the area of the integration of faith and history. Marsden suggests that in order to gain a seat at the academic table, Christian historians ought to argue for their “interpretations on the same sorts of publicly accessible grounds that are widely accepted in the academy.”¹² An example of this “publicly accessible” or technical history is found in Harry Stout’s book on George Whitfield titled *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism*. Stout’s research led him to the conclusion that Whitfield’s success as an evangelist was largely due to his dramatic flair and his ability to appeal to an increasingly consumer-driven economy. His charisma as a speaker resulted in many people responding to his preaching. This interpretation is one that could have been espoused by a non-Christian historian as easily as it was by the Christian author who wrote it. For someone who does know the Lord Jesus Christ, however, and understands the conversion process, it seems as though room needs to be left for the possibility that the Holy Spirit actually did work in the First Great Awakening, convicted the hearts of people of their sin, and provided the faith for them to come to Christ. Now, it would be unfair to suggest that Stout leaves no room for the supernatural, but his presentation of Whitefield as a self-serving dramatist did elicit quite a bit of concern from Christian readers that he had given a very natural or secular explanation of the Great Awakening. In fact, it would not be too much of a stretch to read his thesis as suggesting that the so-called “conversions” of the First Great Awakening were little more than emotional responses to a charismatic speaker.

So, the works of Marshall and Manuel and of Stout represent two examples of “Christian” approaches to history. Both examples represent

¹¹ Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*. William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1994, 243–44.

¹² George M. Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*. Oxford University Press, 1997, 52.

legitimate concerns of Christian historians regarding the interpretive process. The providential historians represent well the concern that Christian historians be distinctive and follow the model provided in Scripture that suggests that God is at work in history. The technical historians represent well the concern that Christian historians not presume too much in their interpretation of the past and see God's hand in every unexplained event. This latter group knows how challenging academia is, and they want to gain enough respectability within its ranks to gain a seat at the table. Without it, they argue, there will be no Christian voice there at all.

In Cedarville's Department of History and Government, we believe in an inspired and inerrant Word of God. We unapologetically place revelation atop our epistemological hierarchy. When rational argumentation runs counter to clear teaching of Scripture, we will reject that which is gained empirically for that which is revealed by God. Our hermeneutic does lead us to a young earth Creationist position. As a result, these two distinctives set us apart from the vast majority of institutions within the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities. As a result of these theological foundations, we tend to hold a distinctive position that recognizes the best elements of both of the integrative approaches discussed so far. We are very sympathetic to the providential approach that recognizes that God has a plan for us as Christians. It seems appropriate that God should have some purpose for America and it would be foolish to suggest that God has not blessed this country immensely. In studying the Puritans, for example, we recognize that they believed they were on a mission from God. In studying our nation's founding fathers, we recognize that while they were not all Christians, they were generally committed to Christian principles that were either implicitly or explicitly implemented in the founding of the nation. This should not be a controversial statement given the influence of Judeo-Christian thought in all of Western civilization. So, for us today, we need to examine what all of this means. How did those Christian values impact the development of the nation? What has our nation done in this world that was in concert with God's Word? Where are we failing in living by His principles today? It seems reasonable to believe that if the nation acts in a fashion that is glorifying to God and His principles, He might bless it. This is consistent with Old Testament principle. In addition, we should be willing to pursue judicial evaluation of the past based on scriptural principle without assuming God's intentions behind the events that transpired.

At the same time, we at Cedarville recognize some potential problems with the providential approach to history. The most disconcerting issue revolves around the realization that while Scripture reveals what God was doing in a particular historical event, those words were inspired by God. They are reliable because God breathed them through the writers of biblical books. When we ascribe to God actions that we see in historical events subsequent to the biblical revelation, we are presuming upon Him. We simply do not have divine inspiration to speak for Him and quite frankly, Scripture is clear that we are on very dangerous ground if we attempt to do so. If we presume that we know what God is doing in various historical events and write about it, we may be ascribing actions to God that are not appropriate. Another problem associated with this type of historical writing is that it tends to uphold individuals as perfect Christian models. We always need to be careful of doing this as all humans are fallen and their flaws will be seen. If we seek to uplift someone as a positive Christian model, another historian may find some flaw or inconsistency in that person that may harm the Christian witness. Finally, while we may have sympathy with attempts at painting our nation's founders as Christians, we recognize that the evidence suggests that they cannot be portrayed uniformly. Perhaps what matters more anyway, is what influence biblical thought had on the founding of the nation. Regardless, we should recognize that we do not need to twist the historical truth to make God look good. Think about the Scriptures. They are replete with the good, the bad, and the ugly. God is glorified even in human frailty. He does not need our bolstering, and His kingdom is not furthered if we are not fastidious about the truth.

While these criticisms may sound like we at Cedarville default to the Marsden and Noll approach to history, that would not be accurate. As noted earlier, Marsden, in his book titled *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*, argues that Christians need to produce acceptable work and seek a seat at the table in academia. In the field of history, they can do this by eschewing the providential approach, distancing themselves from anti-intellectualism like Creationism, and arguing that the academy ought to be open to all views. Marsden asserted that the university was once a place where all views were welcome in the discourse of ideas. If universities are willing to have Marxists, feminists, progressives, and a host of others at the table of interpretive dialogue, then there ought to be room for Christians. While this approach seems reasonable, look at what is implicitly accepted. Murray Murphey contended that Marsden is conceding that Christianity is just one among many equals in his

argument; when in reality, Marsden and all true Christians argue that Christianity is exclusively true.¹³ Now granted, that does not mean that only Christian historians can uncover historical truth, but some Christians have wondered if using this argument gives up too much. Certainly in our examination of the Stout book, we can see where messages that are clearly anti-Christian can be communicated in works written by well-intentioned Christians. As Tom Nettles noted, “A theist who tries to write history as if there were no God, performs as, and presents the world as, an atheist.”¹⁴ Even more compelling is the critique of Herbert Schlossberg of those who seek respectability within academia. He wonders if gaining the respect of academic colleagues should even be our goal.¹⁵ How do we balance the concept of respectability and having a seat at the table with the biblical imperative for distinctiveness? Where is the line? Romans 12:2 encourages us to think about the importance of distinctiveness. We are to let God’s Word renew our minds so that we can ascertain what the will of God is. The world will seldom respect God’s Word. Christ was reviled as He testified before the Sanhedrin and before Pilate. How often were the apostles thrown out of towns, beaten, and killed because of what they had to say? They did not seem to be pursuing a seat at the table. They seemed to be displaying distinctiveness, even when it was not popular. Most compelling of all is the comment of Bruce Kuklick, a secular historian who is interested in how worldviews impact approaches to history. He noted that if Christians do not have something distinctive to add to the historical conversation, then “they are worthless.”¹⁶ Why should he bother reading us? His comment cuts to heart of the matter. It is both compelling and convicting.

As a result, at Cedarville we tend to believe there is much to learn from both approaches. We do need to do high-quality work that meets the demands of the field in the areas of proper research methodology and engaging, effective writing style. At times, the quality of the work produced will entice recognition from the broader academic field. That will give us a seat at the table and allow us to be salt and light there.

¹³ Murray G. Murphey, “Advocacy and Academe,” in *Religious Advocacy and American History*, edited by Bruce Kuklick and D. G. Hart. William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1997, 67.

¹⁴ Quoted by Justin Taylor, “Should Christian Historians Appeal to Providence in Their Interpretations,” *Between Two Worlds Blog*, December 4, 2014, accessed December 12, 2014, thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justintaylor/2014/12/04/should-christian-historians-appealto-providence-in-their-interpretations/.

¹⁵ Herbert Schlossberg, “Scientific History in Christian Perspective: A Comment on Mark Noll’s Article,” *Fides et Historia* 14, (Fall-Winter 1981), 41.

¹⁶ Bruce Kuklick, “On Critical History,” in *Religious Advocacy and American History*, edited by Bruce Kuklick and D. G. Hart. William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1997, 59.

Without the seat, it is hard to be a light. Nonetheless, it does matter what we are willing to give up to gain that seat. God's purposes are not furthered when His principles are compromised. They are not furthered when Christians focus their criticisms on other Christians who are sincerely seeking to honor God in their academic work. Just as Marsden has suggested academia should be open to Christian historians, Marsden and Noll should be open to Christian academics who come from differing theological positions. Those differences result in differing control beliefs and explain in part why there is no one Christian view of history. The acerbic critique of those, like myself, who hold to the inerrancy of Scripture by Marsden and Noll, does not uplift the body of Christ and the conflict tends to diminish the perspective that non-Christians have of the church. Perhaps Christian historians, and Christian academics in general, should demonstrate the love of Christ in their interaction with one another. Recognizing that the application of scriptural principle in a field like history will take on many different forms and variations, it is quite likely that Christians of many stripes would gain from listening to, engaging, and critiquing one another's work in a godly fashion. That process of "iron sharpening iron" may result in truly integrative work of a quality that might gain the recognition of the broader academy.

When the quest for a seat demands that we compromise, we need to be willing to allow distinctiveness to drive us, not the quest for respectability. At the end of our lives, what will we have gained if we have the respect of the field of history, but have not presented ourselves as distinctively Christian? That distinctiveness may cost us career advancement, but we should be willing to pay the price. It is a small one in comparison to that paid by the disciples of Christ in the New Testament. Perhaps Iain Murray sums it up best,

Certainly the gospel can penetrate academia. It has done so in the past. But it has never done so by a quiet coalescence within systems with which it is basically incompatible. ... The Christian faith is rather at its strongest when its antagonism to unbelief is most definite, when its spirit is other-worldly, and when its whole trust is not 'in the wisdom of men but in the power of God' (1 Cor. 2:5).¹⁷

Even in our distinctiveness, we need to be careful not to presume upon God's plans or intentions in the unfolding of history. While He is

¹⁷ Iain Murray, *Evangelicalism Divided: A Record of Crucial Change in the Years 1950–2000*. Banner of Truth Trust, 2000, 212.

sovereign over it, He has not revealed all of His plans to us and we need to be circumspect when it comes to speaking for Him. Nonetheless, Christians, of all people, should have the greatest appreciation for the past. Ours is a historical faith, predicated upon actual events that demonstrate God's love for us. In return for all that He has done for us, we ought to live distinctively Christian lives — lives that manifest biblical principle our in individual, family, church, and professional roles.

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