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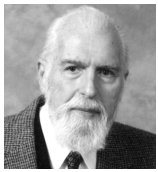
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Molech Worship and Baptism

By R. J. Rushdoony

And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Again, thou shalt say to the children of Israel, Whosoever he be of the house of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn in Israel, that giveth any of his seed unto Molech; he shall surely be put to death: the people of the land shall stone him with stones. And I will set my face against that man, and will cut him off from among his people; because he hath given of his seed unto Molech, to defile my sanctuary, and to profane my holy name. And if the people of the land do any ways hide their eyes from the man, when he giveth of his seed unto Molech, and kill him not: Then I will set my face against that man, and against his family, and will cut him off and all that go a whoring after him, to commit whoredom with Molech, from among their people. (Lev. 20:1-5)



What this text deals with is a very important matter. Children are the future of any society: control over the children means to command the future. Now Molech (also seen as Moloch, Melek, Milcolm, and Malcolm) means *king*. Molech worship was state worship, and the ceremony referred to in Leviticus 20:1-5 means the dedication of the child to the state.

Who Owns the Children?

Every culture has had rites of dedication of the child (often the male child, to symbolize heads of families) to the father, tribe, clan, or state. *Ownership* was affirmed by the rite.

In Molech worship, the child was passed over a low fire, or incense burner, before an image of the king, or the god of the state, or some insignia of the state to indicate that the child's life now belonged to the state and could be used at the ruler's will. Only on rare occasions was a child actually sacrificed, or slain. Most of the time, the ritual meant dedication. It was a rite of ownership. We have Molech worship with us still, the claim of the state to own the child and to command his life.

This makes understandable why God takes the dedication of the child to the state or any other false god as so evil. He is the Lord, the Creator.

"The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" (Ps. 24:1). To give our children to any other than the Lord God is a criminal act, a fearful sin. We cannot give God's property to anyone other than the Lord: we are stealing what is His to give to another.

In some cultures, as in Sparta, a deformed child could be exposed to die; the state in other instances could decree abortion or ban it, depending on its need for warriors and state servants. All these represented forms of Molech worship.

Modern education is statist education for statist goals. The curriculum is designed, not to glorify God and prepare the child for His service, but to prepare the child for citizenship in the modern power state, to live or to die for social concerns. Humanism has demanded more human sacrifices than any other religion known to man. Marxism alone is clear evidence of this.

God's Ownership

As against all the pagan forms of dedicating the child to some variety of Molech worship, the Old Testament required circumcision. Circumcision means cutting off the male foreskin. It is a symbolic castration. It declares that man's hope is not in generation, but in regeneration, in the saving power of the Lord God of Hosts.

According to Ezekiel 36:25, the sign of the new covenant would be baptism:

Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I clean you.

The Jews baptized proselytes to indicate that their entrance into the covenant was through the Messiah.

Now baptism of children is no more an act of choice on their part than was circumcision on the eighth day an act of choice on the part of a male child. Our salvation is not an act of choice but God's act of Grace. Properly understood, all baptism, and especially the baptism of children, is a witness to our faith in predestination. In the baptism of our children, we give them to God, promising to rear them in His nurture and admonition, and we pray that He makes them His own, members of His congregation and kingdom.

The baptism of a child is thus an affirmation of the sovereignty of God's grace. It is a declaration of His property rights over us and over our children. We have a duty to serve God, and also to pray for our children's children, that they be God's children also.

Having received grace, we affirm our children's need for grace. Baptism is thus a witness to our faith in God's sovereignty, His mercy, His predestinating grace, and His mercy unto our children's children. ☐

Wedding Vows

By Mark R. Rushdoony



Too few Christians have any idea what marriage represents or the significance of its institution in Eden.

Marriage either serves God's purposes or it serves man's. If it serves God's purposes it will be a source of joy and strength; if it serves the purposes of individuals it will be a source of constant conflict, as well as personal and social instability.

God created Adam with a purpose; work was given to him before he sinned. God commanded Adam "to dress and keep" the Garden of Eden (*Gen. 2:15*). Moreover God brought "every beast of the field, and every fowl" to Adam "to see what he would call them." Naming implies more than just a word association; God's work was purposeful. Naming involved understanding and classifying for the purpose of advancing Adam's calling to exercise dominion. Because of Adam's capital of knowledge and understanding, we see his immediate descendants using animals for sacrifice (*4:5*) and as an economic enterprise (*4:40*). Civilized behavior and advanced economic activity thus began immediately because of Adam's mature understanding of agriculture (from his dressing and keeping the garden) and animal husbandry. The arts (*4:21*) and industry (*4:22*) accompanied the immediate development of urbanization (*4:17*). Adam's task of naming the animals may have taken a considerable length of time; certainly no zoologist could undertake such a task conscientiously in a brief time frame. We have no idea how long this took; we are only told that in Adam's study of the creatures "there

was not found a help meet for him." Thus, God created Eve, also with a purpose, that of being a "help meet" for Adam.

Marriage and Man's Purpose

The purpose of marriage thus begins with man's created purpose, work. Adam worked prior to his marriage to Eve. He thus set the pattern: he showed himself to be a mature and

Eve was Adam's "helpmeet" which implies a helper suitable, completing, who could mirror Adam

obedient man of God before he took a partner to help him in his work. Marriage is a social unit established to further man's responsibility in his calling, not self-serving ends. Marriage is thus purposeful. This does not mean it is not a source of personal fulfillment, only that such fulfillment is in the context of service to God.

Eve was Adam's "helpmeet" which implies a helper suitable, completing, who could mirror Adam. As Adam was created in the image of God (knowledge, righteousness, holiness, and dominion), Eve was to be a mirroring partner; she reflected what Adam needed. Marriage thus formed a social unit furthering man's calling, work.

The Rhythm of Life

In his joy, Adam declared of his wife, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh...." "This is now" can mean, "this is the rhythm." "Bone of my bone" refers to Eve as the structure of his life, and "flesh" refers

to life itself.¹ Adam was thus saying that his wife was the rhythm of his life's structure in whom he would find his life's context.

Today marriage is seen as a partnering in terms of personal compatibility. But without a larger context of purposefulness, marriage often becomes a shell game of who's fulfilling whose needs. Sinful husbands want wives to fulfill their wants and perceived needs and sinful women want husbands who do likewise. Marriage, then, becomes war or, at best, a peace treaty. Some revolt against such marriages by choosing instead to evade marriage in the single life. God said, however, "It is not good that man should be alone." Evading marriage as an institution is an evasion of maturity and responsibility and God's context for life.

The Presbyterian Book of Common Worship (1932), which my father used in my wedding service and many others, clearly demonstrates the covenantal view of marriage. It includes two sets of vows. I can clearly remember my father's explanation of their significance to Darlene and me, though it was over twenty-six years ago. The first set of vows was offered, in turn, by the groom and bride while facing the minister of God. It represented their covenant before God:

___ wilt thou have this woman [man] to be thy wife [husband], and wilt thou pledge thy troth to her [him], in all love and honor, in all duty and service, in all faith and tenderness, to live with her [him] and cherish her [him], according to the ordinance of God, in the holy bond of marriage?

After this covenant with God was pledged before His minister, the bride was “given away.” The father duly endorsed the propriety of and his approval of the covenant by either placing the woman’s hand in the groom’s or by giving it to the minister of God to do so, adding further solemnity to the next set of vows, the personal covenants. Each would exchange these vows facing one another, for these were personal vows each to the other:

I ____ take thee ____ to be my wedded wife [husband]; and I do promise and covenant before God and these witnesses: to be thy loving and faithful husband [wife], in plenty and in want; in joy and in sorrow; in sickness and in health; as long as we both shall live.

The Marriage Covenant

I have always felt these short vows were particularly beautiful in their elegant style and in their implicit recognition of the double covenant involved in marriage. Marriage is an institution with significance beyond the individuals, who must be called to an understanding of it beyond their own relationship. Marriage must be seen as a personal covenant in terms of a greater covenant before God; it must likewise be governed by a higher law than the fulfillment of personal need. It is an assumption of calling before God and responsibility before Him. Thus, the woman is “given away” to the authority of the husband, and for this reason “a man shall leave his father and mother” (*Gen. 2:24*). The man leaves the authority of his parents (but not his responsibilities to honor them) and “cleaves” unto his wife. He fully accepts his role as head of the new family, and is directly responsible to God to whom he addressed his vows.

Much has been written in recent years about the personal relationships involved in marriage. Marriage seminars and self-help books tend to emphasize the complexities of understanding one’s spouse and responding to them. This is an important aspect of marriage, but not the only one. Personal relationships do not make social institutions and need not be consecrated for “as long as you both shall live” by vows. Marriage is a covenantal relationship which gives us the rhythm and context of life. Personal needs change with time and so personal relationships change, even within a marriage. Our obligation before God, in and through our marriage, however, never changes.

That is why we solemnize our vows in the “holy bond” of marriage.

The institution of marriage was made in the Garden before the fall into sin. Sin distorts both men and women from their God ordained purpose and has certainly made the institution of marriage more challenging. The answer to sin, in marriage and elsewhere, is the redeeming power of Jesus Christ, Who makes all things new. If men and women will see marriage in terms of their higher commitment to God, their mutual obligations become clearer, if not easier. ☒

¹ R.J. Rushdoony, “The Doctrine of Marriage,” *Towards a Christian Marriage*, (Ross House Books, 1994), Elizabeth Fellersen, ed., 15.

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An Enterprise Based Educational Method

By Ronald Kirk



Educational methods properly grow from an educational philosophy with its particular goals. A Biblical educational philosophy, in turn, properly stems from a Biblical understanding of life. What does God intend to accomplish with human life in this world? How does He intend to do it? In order to design sound educational methods, Christians must understand God's ways for us. Through faithful Biblical scholarship, we strive to know God's purposes, true human nature, and how we must obey Him. God's providential economy reflects His general gospel purpose. In turn, the gospel life depends on a faith- and character-based educational method to prepare for it.

A Gospel Economy

Salvation is the mere beginning of Christian life. The cardinal dominion mandate of Genesis reflects and supports the requirements of mankind's redemption. God thus created a general economy in the earth to support His evangelical purpose. A life of faithful Christian adventure and enterprise builds faith and a character to support it, raises resources for the gospel, and creates opportunities for Christian influence to prepare neighbors' hearts for Christ. Economic demands under the curse of the Fall discipline men toward the requirements of Scripture. Since the Fall, enterprise has faced difficulty to a high degree. This difficulty reduces man's

leisure for sinful indulgence, and it offers an incentive for men to turn to Christ for help. Enterprise in a climate of economic severity produces, among other godly objectives, a spirit and character able to accept the hazard and pains of investment. Enterprise thus prompts faith. Its necessity spawns creativity and industry. Its prosperity inspires generous philanthropy. Economic competition and the need to create goodwill among customers provoke men to serve one another with goods and services. The hazards of enterprise encourage a system of civil justice and liberty to protect property and life. When Christians cooperate in the adventure — learning courage, toughness of mind, faithfulness of heart and absolute trust in God — the character for Christian leadership in these things grows! All these things discipline and quicken men toward dependence on Christ and good will toward men. But they discourage *slavish* dependence. Enterprise and a character of faith reinforce each other. Incidentally, socialism negates the evangelical benefits of enterprise.

A Biblical Classroom Method

If faithful enterprise should be a Christian way of life, then Christian education must inculcate a spirit of adventure — the hazard of comfort and ease — for the sake of exciting accomplishment. Education should build the firm foundations for a life of faith and Christian enterprise. We must build, through the educational process,

a toughness of mind and an overcoming faith. These things are needed, because all accomplishment ultimately is a providential gift of God. Christians must learn to depend upon Him. The very methods we use to teach the child in the home and school should serve to prepare the foundations for a faithful walk with Christ.

Having established the basics of God's economic system to accomplish His evangelical purposes, the identification of a Biblical method of education is almost embarrassingly simple: We attempt hard things by faith, with confidence in Christ. The teacher provides a task of carefully measured difficulty, which the student attempts. He perseveres. He trusts the Lord to bring the increase in due season. Success begets success, always building greater faith and character foundations for new endeavors. If God's adventure of life and its various enterprises require a character of faith and courage to overcome difficulties, then we must train our children in these capacities.

A word regarding the evolutionary view of development is appropriate here. In opposition to the Biblical one, the modern educational view routinely assumes in practice that nerve pathways develop naturally over time. In this view, asking a child to attempt a task, before neural pathways have developed to support it, is cruel, because the task is impossible for him. We grant that certain foundational accomplishment must first

be established to support a new skill. Yet we insist upon a Biblical view of development that the nerve pathways, scrambled because of original sin, form through persistent effort, over time. “Train up a child in the way he should go.” How old must one be before his nerve pathways naturally, sufficiently develop to enable playing the violin like Itzhak Perlman? It does not happen. Long

***Trust Jesus. Keep trying
and in a little while you
will do it for yourself.***

periods of trial with eventual success are the pattern of God’s way for men. In my experience, the historic faith view of development typically yields the results all educators seek. If socialism undermines the benefits of enterprise, socialistic educational methods undermine its foundations.

If attempting difficult enterprise produces character and accomplishment, then we possess our basic educational method. Capability and skill result from effective practice by faith. We must not assume that because any particular thing is now difficult for the student, he is not capable. We must resist the pernicious view of atheistic psychology that environmental, in this case genetic, determinism rules. While rarely explicitly spoken, the idea that if a thing is not easily learned the student is not capable at all permeates all of modern education. But if he now has no capacity, how can we expect the child’s accomplishment? The answer lies in Christ. He gave our potential. He is the power of our success. Faith corresponds to God’s willingness to help in all things. We must believe this truth for ourselves and on behalf of our children. Quitting is faithless-

ness. For naturally disadvantaged learners or those who suffer from the results of poor methods, for such learners of all ages, this is a most particularly important principle.

Corollaries to the Faith Approach

Without assistance, the principle of overcoming difficulty by faith may appear as no more than Darwinian “survival of the fittest.” Biblical Christians must not adopt a sink or swim view of education. The Holy Spirit is the Comforter, the *Parakletos* — the One called alongside to help. The comforter does not merely offer sympathy as we often think with the English word. Rather, to comfort is to strengthen, as with the related word *fortify*. In the same way, Christian teachers come alongside to help the needy. When we ask a child to do anything toward the accomplishment of his education, we must assume he has no present capacity whatsoever to do the thing we ask. Because the child may not now be able, we must provide the forms, like the forms that build concrete structures, to ensure the child’s success.

Teachers typically introduce a learning task, explain it, give some examples, and then tell the child to go work it out. We expect a child to stretch. Such is the essence of faith. For a well-prepared child, that next step is ordinarily not difficult. However, for a child without the necessary foundational abilities, the task may seem, and for now be, impossible. In such cases, we use what we commonly refer to as *hand-over* help. In this, the teacher is the child’s safety net of success. If we ask the primary level child to write an alphabet letter on the first day of school, we will make guidelines on the chalkboard and take the child through all the little details to form that letter. Then the child tries it. “Oh, Lord, this is awful,” we might pray

when we see his first attempt. The scribbling goes from one part of the paper to the other. Rather than bang one’s head on the chalkboard, we smile, take the child’s hand, and help him form a proper letter. “See you can do it! Trust Jesus. Keep trying and in a little while you will do it for yourself.” The child tries once more. He needs help again. He tries again. The key to success is not mere practice, but corrected and directed practice toward a more and more excellent expression. The hand-over principle applies to every subject and every level of accomplishment, whenever a student becomes stuck. Moreover, the teacher must have compassion and patience during the time of groping and thrashing common to all great learning experiences. Impatience can torpedo a child’s delicate faith.

In addition to helping the student, we carefully organize the subject according to the most basic wholes—the rudiments—building upon them little by little. Repeatedly overwhelming the weak student encourages him to form a habit of short-circuiting and giving up. If a task does overwhelm the student, the teacher backs up and reduces the task to something more accessible. The teacher provides the structure of learning to ensure success.

For example, there are several important steps toward learning to read. First, a child must be capable of sitting still for some time and following simple directions. If he cannot do this, his parents should concentrate on teaching him the skills of attention and simple, obedient response. The child may assume certain simple responsibilities such as picking up his toys. Mom may read to him for longer and longer periods. Writing is a collateral skill to reading, so the child needs to know how to handle his pen. The teacher must instruct and guide its use. No playing is allowed. “The

pen is a serious tool and you are ready to handle it for the Lord!" The teacher teaches the names, sounds, and characters of the letters. The student says them and writes them repeatedly until he recognizes the phonograms by sight and sound, and is capable of forming them by voice and by hand. He begins phonetically to spell words of greater and greater difficulty. Governing rules provide the tools for assembling phonemes into words for writing, and decoding for reading. Practice with many particular words within the present vocabulary builds practical skill and confidence for reading new, unknown words. A sequence of techniques for decoding words and initial practice with limited vocabulary material quickly leads to early reading mastery.

Because learning is not linear (attempt it once and master it) the teacher must review constantly. While pressing ahead is important, patient and rigorous review and practice will produce mastery in due season. "Push ahead and fall back" marks not only George Washington's military tactics, but sound educational method. It is all faith and courageous investment.

A child's learning method preferences should not discourage the teacher from both feeding a student's strengths, and disciplining him to overcome his weaknesses. The teacher must moreover guard against the student's compensating and equivocating to avoid the learning process. Perfectionism, which insists on excellent appearances, is sin because it denies the element of faith, investment, and the day of small things.

The key to great Christian accomplishment is a tough, adventurous, enterprising mind, seasoned by facing difficulty with faith. According to his son-in-law Chauncey Goodrich, Noah Webster, the Father of American

Christian Education, said, "The great object of early trainings is to form the mind into a capacity of surmounting intellectual difficulties of any and every kind." With this overcoming character and the skills of learning, nothing will discourage a child or adult from great accomplishment.

A faith- and character-based life depends on a faith- and character-based education. If we teachers will resist the temptation to conform to modern standards of psychology and learning theory, but rather diligently apply a Biblical framework to teaching method, we will see a revolution of learning that may match or even surpass the great accomplishments of our early American forefathers and mothers.✉

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On Marriages and Commitments

By Samuel L. Blumenfeld



Whenever I read my *Sunday Boston Globe*, I enjoy scanning the wedding announcements to see if I know any of the couples or their families. It gives a quick view of culture, religion, education, careers, and honeymoon destinations, all which reveal a great deal about our society in a very small amount of printed space. But this Sunday, there was something on the Special Occasions page that had never been there before, a section headed by the word Commitments, which listed three same-sex “affirmations of partnerships,” the partners being all males.

Homosexual “Marriages”

Most of the heterosexual marriages took place in churches of all sorts of denominations. One took place at an inn on Martha’s Vineyard. But on the whole, religion seemed to play an important part in the marriage. Weddings are traditionally religious ceremonies, and although we live in a largely secular culture, when it comes to such important occasions as weddings and funerals, families turn to religious traditions — Christian or Jewish — that have been handed down over several thousand years.

The widespread preference for church weddings is of course due to our general acknowledgment that newlyweds need all of the spiritual help they can get as they embark on their new lives as married couples. Marriage, along with

parenthood, is a very demanding state of existence, requiring strong love and commitment.

And so I was interested in seeing whether same-sex commitments reflected the same values as normal marriages between men and women. There were no gay church weddings. Biblical traditions made such religious ceremonies unlikely, if not impossible. No doubt there are liberal ministers who would perform such ceremonies. But their congregations may not have caught up with the new thinking.

The first male couple “affirmed their partnership” at the parents’ home of one of the partners. A Unitarian minister officiated at the ceremony. Unitarians, of course, are humanists who believe in total sexual freedom and reject the Bible’s prohibitions against homosexuality, infidelity, premarital sex, and promiscuity. Humanists claim to have morals, but they have nothing to do with restricting sexual expression. And the word “sin” isn’t even in their vocabulary.

The second male couple “affirmed their partnership” in the garden of their home, officiated by a Justice of the Peace. The third couple “affirmed their partnership” at their home in a “new age” ceremony that relied mainly on Buddhist thought. It was officiated by the sister of one of the partners. The concept of sin doesn’t even exist in new age philosophy.

Same Sex “Divorce”

Now, we know that in America many marriages end in divorce. The high hopes of the marriage, with its commitments and affirmations, are wrecked on the shoals of infidelity, neglect, selfishness, alcoholism, and general incompatibility. Generally, it is the children who suffer most in such marriage break-ups. They usually love both parents and are torn by the need to be loyal to both while having to navigate the distance between them.

Same-sex commitments will face the same kind of disintegrating forces. Homosexuals are notoriously promiscuous, since sex plays such an important part in their lives. But just as newspapers hardly report on divorces of average heterosexual couples, they won’t tell us about how long same-sex partnerships manage to last.

In order to be listed in the *Boston Globe’s* Commitments section, same-sex couples “must have their partnerships affirmed in an officiated ceremony.” And so, our liberal media has taken another step away from Biblical cultural and moral standards and extended the frontiers of humanist cultural hegemony over American society. Yet, even the *Boston Globe* did not call these same-sex commitments “marriages.” They are partnerships.

In Massachusetts there is a movement to have marriage defined in the state constitution as matrimony between a husband and wife, a union of a male and female. Webster’s dictio-

nary of 1850 defines marriage as “the act of uniting a man and woman for life; wedlock; the legal union of a man and woman for life. Marriage is a contract both civil and religious, by which the partners engage to live together in mutual affection and fidelity until death shall separate them. Marriage was instituted by God himself, for the purpose of preventing the promiscuous intercourse of the sexes, for promoting domestic felicity, and for securing the maintenance and education of children.”

That was the Christian definition of marriage acceptable to all Americans in the nineteenth century. Today, we are being urged to accept another definition, which includes same-sex partnerships. Although polls indicate that most Americans do not accept such partnerships as marriages, our progressive media is slowly working to change the attitudes of the American people. Their thinking is that today’s population may reject same-sex marriages, but after the younger generation will have been duly “educated” in their humanist public schools, they will accept them. Christians who oppose them will be labeled intolerant bigots.

Christian Responses

Despite this pressure for liberal conformity, there is a growing movement among young Christians to promote abstinence before marriage and an enthusiastic acceptance of the traditional definition of wedlock. Courtship is replacing dating as the means of bringing young people together for future marriage and family building. Dating, as practiced in today’s decadent youth culture, has been the cause of more social unhappiness and suffering than any other activity among the young. Jealous rage among spurned teenagers has led to physical abuse and even murder.

However, the pure Christian approach to marriage and family is bound to attract more and more young people who yearn for a clear vision of future happiness as lived in accordance with God’s precepts. Thus, they want nothing to do with the depravity and destructiveness of today’s mass youth culture.

Marriage, with all of its traditional trappings, is still extremely popular among Americans. All you have to do is pick up one of these phonebook-size bridal magazines to realize that women want marriage, not only for future happiness, but for all the material goodies that go with today’s expensive, glamorous marriage ceremonies. Even discount merchants now feature Bridal Registries so that relatives and friends can buy gifts for the couple at moderate prices.

Weddings now require elaborate receptions in hotel ballrooms, com-

plete with flowers, music ensembles, gourmet dinners, cocktails, photographers, limousines, etc. Marriage is big business in America, but same-sex “partnerships” do not as yet have the kind of commercial clout that warrants publishing fat magazines devoted to gay marriages. Perhaps the heterosexual magazines will set aside a special section for gay weddings. Which means that in some areas of the country with large gay communities, these elaborate receptions will become indispensable, or else it won’t seem like a real marriage. ❏

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Woman's Role In Marriage

Sandra A. Lovelace



Opinions about a woman's role in marriage abound. Around the world the spectrum runs from viewing women as abject chattel to infallible matriarchs. Even within American society, attitudes about the position of women in marriage vary greatly. Men and women alike seem uncertain or confused about this issue.

This perplexity is reflected in everyday language. Until recently, the proper way to address married couples was "Mr. and Mrs. John Smith." This format is still the manner in which couples are introduced in official settings, or in which envelopes are addressed for formal occasions. However, in informal situations "John and Jane Smith" is no longer a predictable nomenclature.

It is now common for married couples to be addressed as "Jane and John Smith" or "John and Jane Smith-Jones" or "Jane and John Jones-Smith" or "John Smith and Jane Jones." There are instances where the groom forfeits his own family name and takes his bride's. I am aware of at least one situation where the bride wanted to change her name upon marriage, but did not want to take her groom's name. Therefore, he had his family name legally changed to a neutral selection.

Of course, there is undoubtedly a host of reasons for this assortment of addresses. Friends and family members who have known a bride all of their lives, or for a significant amount of time before meeting the groom, may recognize the couple as "Jane and John." There may be a cul-

tural or ethnic basis for combining two last names into one with a hyphen. However, for many modern brides the choice of address comes out of a confused understanding of a woman's role in marriage and of marriage itself.

Losing Yourself

Many women today believe that when they join their lives with a man they will somehow be lost. They fear their identity will be swallowed up in the "Mr. and Mrs." Others see the listing of a husband's name first as a definitive statement about the importance of the two parties. They do not want to play second fiddle, subjecting their every need and desire to that of an overlord.

Indeed questions of value and worth, importance and dominance keep many couples from entering into a marital union. Not surprisingly, this confusion is expressed in the way people are addressed, or wish to be addressed. Throughout Scripture we are made abundantly aware of the connection between someone's name and his or her role, personality or significance. It is when we move away from this foundation that misunderstandings begin.

God calls us to submit our opinions, views, and beliefs to the truth of Scripture in every area of life. The Bible is the standard against which we are to measure every thought, word, and deed. This precept is no less true in the area of marriage than in other spiritual domains. The first book of God's Holy Word is a good place to begin to build a proper view of the marital union.

In the Beginning

In Genesis we learn that God spoke and, *ex nihilo*, out of nothing, all the elements of Creation came into being. The crowning piece of this miracle of His power came on the sixth day when He created Man in His own image. Genesis 1:27 tells us that "male and female he created them." Genesis 2 gives us more details about the specific process whereby Adam was created, being formed from dust and receiving the breath of life.

God then placed Adam in the Garden of Eden and assigned him to work and take care of it. At this point we are told that God decided that it was not good for Adam to be alone and that He would make a helper suitable for him. This word is repeated a few verses later when we are told that no suitable helper was found for Adam among the beasts and birds. Genesis tells us that God put Adam to sleep and took one of his ribs from which to fashion this helper.

Eve was brought to Adam who pronounced her "bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh" and "called her woman." It is out of this Creation relationship that marriage is defined (*Gen. 2:24*). There is a special physical connection that underlies the husband and wife union. However, there is also a deep functional and practical aspect to the design of the marriage relationship reflected in the word used to describe the purpose for Eve's creation.

The word we read in English as *helper* is translated from the Hebrew word *ezer*. This word is used 21 times in the Old Testament to mean either help or helper. In virtually every in-

stance, *ezer* represents divine assistance and most often refers to the work of Christ. Psalms 121 and 124 are prime examples of this usage.

Psalms 121 opens with the psalmist's question, "where does my help (*ezer*) come from" and the response that "My help (*ezer*) comes from the Lord, Maker of heaven and earth." The following verses describe the breadth and depth of the Lord's eternal care. Psalm 124 calls out praise to the Lord for His deliverance from fearful and powerful enemies. The psalmist makes clear Israel's sure destruction without the Lord's intervention. In closing, he proclaims, "Our help (*ezer*) is in the name of the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth."

Being an Ezer

Someone described as a helper in the world today is seen as an underling, a less qualified or valuable per-

son. The integrity of Christ's divine assistance flies in the face of this view. Through His willingness to be our helper (*ezer*), Christ elevates the *ezer* role. His taking on of the *ezer* position defines it as a calling of honor.

The work of Christ as an *ezer* is magnificent and manifold. It includes care and creativity, sacrifice and service. A woman who truly understands the relevance of His example to her call as a wife can spend every one of her earthly days actively expressing fealty to her King. She need not be confused about her value or worth nor concerned about a loss of identity or importance.

Adam, and then Eve, his *ezer*, is the model passed down by the parents from whom all mankind descends. It provides an anchor for modern man. A woman need not insist on being addressed as "Jane and John" nor

"Mrs. Smith-Jones" to maintain her personhood. Her identity is wrapped up with that of her Savior, Jesus Christ the Lord. She can be all He intends her to be as "Mrs. John Smith."

The Scriptural standard for a woman's role in marriage is neither ambiguous nor pedantic. It is based in the Creation story outlined in God's infallible and wholly relevant Word. There are more principles concerning marriage provided throughout the Old and New Testaments. Nevertheless, they all spring from and must therefore be understood in light of the truths of Genesis.■

Sandra is an award winning author who has contributed to a number of Christian publications. She and Curt, her husband of 34 years, raised and homeschooled two daughters and dote on their grandchildren.

Christian Worldview ad

Tied Down

By R. C. Sproul, Jr.



The news is full of the horrors of divorce and of single parent children. Everyone (perhaps I should say “Every person,” as I’m sure the lawyers aren’t losing sleep over divorce) is very sad about it. Too many are breaking their vows, and in doing so are breaking the ties that bind. But as is so often the case, our problem in the church is usually not the obvious sins. We like to be a little more circumspect than the world. We don’t go in for easy divorce (at least at our best; the statistics seem to show that self-described evangelicals are in a dead heat with our unbelieving neighbors in the divorce rate). And if we did, there would still be plenty of other good men out there practicing the prophetic gift against divorce. That is not my aim here. No, my point is directed at others, the evangelicals who want everything practical and so go for practical divorce, all the sin without all the baggage.

The Sin Without the Baggage

“Practical divorce” is another, perhaps clearer, word for abdication. What we do instead of divorce is lie down on the job. Like *Bartleby*, when confronted with our familial job description we reply, “I would prefer not to.” We find all kinds of ways to abdicate, to break the ties that bind, while still looking our best.

Often it is merely a matter of time. We simply fail to pay sufficient attention to our wives, husbands, or children. It may be sports, watching or playing. That we could even joke about “football widows” is a sign of

decline. It could be the biggest sport of all, surfing. Whether we surf the east coast on a computer screen or the west coast on a TV screen doesn’t make much difference.

The greatest danger lies in the greatest distractions. “Ministry” works great. Who better to have as your illicit lover than God Himself? Just let the wife or husband complain to the elders about that. Or how about the kids? Aren’t they important? Better yet, call them God’s covenant children. “Sorry I haven’t said one word to you today, but you know, I’ve got these covenant children to look after.”

Abdication doesn’t even require absence. We can spend all kinds of time with our families, and yet have a practical divorce. We do so by failing to perform our functions. When we want our children to see us as buddies, and so fail to discipline, we have abdicated. When we want our wives to see us not as covenantal heads but as evangelical Romeos, we have abdicated. When we want our husbands to see us not as godly helpmates but as Christian playmates, then we have abdicated. When we want our grown children to see us as over-indulgent sitters of their children rather than patriarchs and matriarchs, then we have abdicated. When we want our parents to see us not as blessings to be nurtured in the admonition of the Lord, but as future all-stars or movie stars to be chauffeured hither and yon, we have abdicated.

We have been given roles to play in families. And the family is no place for stream of consciousness improvising. Those roles have been given to us by the Great Playwright Himself. These roles are no more stifling than the

script of *Hamlet*. To be sure, the world beckons us to another stage where we can play the harlot. But God has not called you to be “you,” at least what you think “you” are. He has not placed you upon His stage to hear you warble through yet another rendition of “My Way.” He has called you to be His, that is, ever more like His Son. Like a mask, we put on Christ, not only covering our shame in His glory, but becoming more like Him with each passing day. And surprise, we become more like what we really are. We find that we are putting back together the shattered pieces of the image of God in us.

Blessed Be The Tie

The ties that bind us in our familial roles are also the anchors in our lives. They keep us from being smashed against the rocks in the storm of cultural rebellion. They keep us from drifting into uncharted waters, littered with the rusting hulls of those who have made shipwreck of their souls. The ties that bind us are like those that bound Ulysses, keeping him from leaping to his death in pursuit of the lie of the Sirens. The ties that bind us are the very chains that mark our enslavement to Christ. He bought us, and He owns us. Let us honor Him in all obedience, and with great joy. ☞

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Taxing Families

By John E. Stoos

So Samuel told all the words of the Lord to the people who asked him for a king. And he said, "This will be the behavior of the king who will reign over you: ... He will take a tenth of your grain and your vintage, and give it to his officers and servants... He will take a tenth of your sheep. And you will be his servants. And you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, and the Lord will not hear you in that day." (1 Sam. 8:10-18)



How much did your family pay in taxes last year? No, I don't mean the check that you had to write out after "doing your taxes." And even if you are one of the sharp folks who actually know how much he paid in federal income taxes, that would still not be the complete answer.

My question is, how much of your family income had to go to support the various activities of the federal, state, and local civil governments that serve your community? The truth is that no one knows exactly, but it is certainly much more than most people think.

Last year a "compassionate liberal" caller to my radio talk show was quick to defend all the "good" things that civil governments are doing and insisted that people should be more willing to send in a little more to make sure that civil governments had enough money. I quizzed the caller about how much he thought that should be, and he just kept saying that we should be willing to send in "a little more." After a few more attempts, I simply came right out and asked him directly how much of *his* income he thought the civil governments should be taking — 10%? 25%? 50%? He finally relented and said that it should be something like 20%. He was quite shocked when I pointed out that today the federal, state, and local civil governments take more than twice that amount.

It almost makes you want to bring back those evil kings that Samuel described, who were going to take 10%, or some of those evil feudal lords of the Middle Ages I learned about in school, who took 25% of everything the serfs produced on their lands.

Hidden Taxes

So how did we get to a point where more than 40% of the gross domestic product of our nation goes for taxes to pay for our civil governments? It has been a gradual process, a lot like that much talked about frog that sits in the water as it is slowly heated. Along the way, there have been two schemes that the civil magistrates have used effectively to obfuscate the true growth and current size of civil governments and what it is really costing the poor taxpayers. They are "payroll withholding" to collect income taxes and what I call "hidden" taxes. Combined, these schemes hide the true cost of government and help people think that someone else is paying for all the "good things" that the government now does in addition to the basic functions the civil magistrate should be responsible for in a civil society. These two schemes have been important to the big spenders because if employers actually handed workers a check for the full value of their work and immediately turned right around and asked them to write out a check to the government for over 40% of what they had made, we would

suddenly have a country full of "anti-tax conservatives."

The civil magistrates like to use a withholding system for income taxes because we soon get used to what our "take-home" pay is each week or month. I still remember the first check that my youngest son received: He quickly asked, "Who is this FICA guy and why did he get so much of my money?" The young and the innocent have not yet gotten used to the withholding system. They figure if they worked twenty hours at six bucks an hour they are going to have \$120 dollars to spend and they are very disappointed when the paycheck comes in at about \$80.

Then there is the problem of hidden taxes. The most serious hidden tax in America today is the Social Security Tax. Currently, you are paying over 15% of roughly the first \$80,000 of your income as a "social security" tax. Now, a sharp liberal will be quick to point out that this is just not true because your employer pays for half of this! Technically he would be right because your employer only deducts about 8% from your paycheck and then he matches this amount and the total is sent into the IRS. That is why this is a hidden tax. You never see the money and you don't realize that your employer could give you a raise if he did not have to give the money to the government. Recently Congress tried to "fix" the Medicare system and now we all pay another 2%

on top of the Social Security tax on our entire income.

Samuel was not silent in his day in warning the people of God about how much abusive civil magistrates would waste the people's money and resources. It astounds me that our churches remain so silent while the government takes almost 20% of the income for most of their members to provide for "social security." The better term would be "highway robbery" when you think about what retirement could be like for anyone who saved and invested 20% of his income over forty or fifty years. If we all did this privately we would be a nation of millionaires! In the churches there would be substantially more resources available to spread the gospel, and to care for the needs of the flock and the poor!

The other "hidden taxes" are the ones that we don't think much about or somehow think that others are paying for us, like "business" taxes. For example, if I take \$100 out of what is left of my paycheck and go down to my favorite store to buy a \$100 car stereo, I quickly find out that the \$100 won't get it home. I have to fork over another \$8 for sales tax and that does not come from the sale: it has to come from my income! If you asked the store manager to include this tax in the price of the car stereo, he could agree, but then the sale price would be \$108 not \$100.

In the real world no business actually pays any taxes. Anything the civil governments charge a business is a cost of doing business and must be passed on, just like the sales tax that we can see. So from the time my new car stereo was raw materials in the ground until it is sitting on the store shelf, it has accumulated all sorts of "business" taxes that have been added to the price I must pay from my income.

Thinking about all this has taken a little of the joy out of buying the new car stereo, so it is time to take a long drive and just enjoy my new purchase. But first I pull up to that favorite gas station, and again, it is time to think about taxes. With each gallon pumped, the price here in California includes over thirty-six cents in state and federal taxes plus all the other hidden taxes charged to the drillers, refiners, deliverers, and retailers of the gasoline. Again, it is my income that ultimately pays for these taxes. And the real kicker comes at the register when the owner explains that I also pay that same 8% sales tax on the total price, including the other taxes. Would this be called a tax on a tax?

Back at home, those utility bills now have extra pages just to list all the special taxes that are added. And who can bring themselves to look at the property tax bill? I think you begin to get the picture about just how onerous the tax burden in this country has become.

Family Taxes

There are many in the political realm who want to divide the "social" or "family" issues like abortion and homosexuality from the "economic" issues like taxation. The reality is that all of these issues *are* family issues and must be treated as such. It is easy to see how the issues of abortion and homosexuality are attacks on the integrity of the family, but on the economic side, we must remember that the power to tax is the power to destroy a family. With civil governments taking over 40% of the family income, many have resorted to second incomes to try and make ends meet and most have little to spare for church and charitable work. If the civil governments were once again focused on their proper functions, taking something closer to the Biblical model of 10%, how many

People and pastors and church members should be leading the way...

of these working moms could be home with their children preventing many of today's problems and building a stronger generation of Christian leaders for tomorrow?

God warned the nation of Israel that if they lost their trust in Him and left His principles of governing to trust in a king like the other nations, they would be oppressed and heavily taxed. Our founding fathers understood this well. They established the proper role of a limited civil government with numerous checks and balances. A review of the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution shows how the founders wanted civil government to focus on its proper role of providing for the national defense, safety on our streets, and a just system of commerce where each party is obligated to tell the truth and keep its promises. These same wise men also understood that individuals, families, churches, and community organizations must properly take the responsibility to care for the poor, educate the next generation, and prepare for the challenges of retirement or disabilities. Over the past one hundred years we have shifted these later duties to the civil magistrates, making them obscenely expensive and grossly ineffective. For the sake of our nation and our children the responsibility of these important duties must be restored to the proper institutions; people and pastors and church members should be leading the way.✠

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Does Christ Own Your Children?

Rethinking a Reformed Defense for Infant-baptism

By *Tristan Emmanuel*



When Reformed Christians defend the practice of infant-baptism, we generally present a detailed delineation of covenant-theology. The problem, however, is that most evangelicals just don't know what the covenant is. They do not understand "covenant theology" and, therefore, our defense of infant-baptism based on the inner workings of the covenant generally sounds forced, contrived, and disjointed.

That's not to say that covenant arguments are useless. On the contrary, they are clear and definitive arguments: since Christ did not come to abolish the law but to restore it, the nature of the covenant and its administration has not changed in the slightest (*Mt. 5:17*). It was and still is a covenant of grace. Man comes into union with God by grace alone. This was the clear implication of God's calling of Abram from the land of Ur. God showered grace upon Abram and his entire family — including the male infant who was only eight days old. Since the covenant under the immediate administration of Christ is also of grace, our insistence that infants are still included in the new covenant, as they were in the old, is most fundamentally true.

Unfortunately, too many Christians no longer think in terms of *covenant*. Moreover, they tend to expect all theological answers to be as simple as pointing to a verse in the Bible, and express

great suspicion with arguments that are more complex. Take for example the most common objection to infant-baptism: But show me a passage from the New Testament that commands it.

The Traditional Approach

A typical response to this objection is to rehearse a litany of covenantal evidence starting in Genesis with Abraham, Isaac and circumcision, following through to Malachi to show that for nearly two thousand years God had included infants in the covenant of grace. And the main reason for marshalling this evidence is to get our brethren to think seriously about the nature of the covenant. We want them to realize that God's covenant is not an individual thing — it is fundamentally corporate and familial. But we also want them to understand that their dependence on a New Testament command is misleading. The issue isn't whether the New Testament explicitly commands the baptizing of infants; it is that the New Testament does not explicitly (or implicitly) forbid it. Had the exclusion of infants been mandated by the coming of Christ, not only would this have been a dramatic shift in covenant policy, but also God would have clearly revealed the change. However, He did not, so we cannot exclude them.

Notwithstanding, using a fully developed covenant argument to defend infant-baptism involves a total theological reorientation. Reorientation takes a great deal of effort, and, more specifically, time, for the critic to re-

think every text he believes justifies "adult-believers-only" dogma. All of this is a dilemma for the covenantally-minded apologist.

The Lordship Approach

How does an apologist for the covenant unequivocally defend the Biblical necessity of infant-baptism, knowing that many evangelicals don't understand the covenant, and have been conditioned by an anti-intellectual American culture to expect answers to be as easy as sound-bite news? Answer: The Lordship of Christ.

Notwithstanding the effectiveness of a covenant argument, the most straightforward — dare I say the easiest — argument that justifies the Biblical necessity of infant-inclusion, is the fact that Christ is the Lord. Christ's Lordship makes infant-baptism an absolute necessity!

I realize that some may find this a little hard to swallow. But these are not bald assertions. Think about it: what is Lordship if it doesn't involve complete mastery over everything we are and own? If Christ is Lord, then He is the Lord over every square inch of our existence. If He is Lord, then we may not withhold anything from Him. If He is Lord, then He is Lord of our whole household. If He is Lord, then He is entitled to receive that which is most precious to us — our children. Obvious isn't it? To make it clearer, consider the relationship between

Christ's sovereignty and baptism in the Great Commission.

Lord of the Nations

All Christians recognize the evangelistic imperative of the Great Commission: "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..." But many Christians, including Reformed Christians, have overlooked its connection to baptism and its implication for infants. This is unfortunate because the Great Commission not only establishes the evangelistic imperative, it teaches us that Christ has divine right to own and administer every nation on earth. In concrete terms this means that Christ has the divine prerogative to claim every individual, and every family in every nation.

Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity, has always owned the nations. He is, as Paul describes Him, the "firstborn" of creation (*Col. 1:15*). This is a title that established His legitimacy as the rightful heir of the world.¹ However, in the time-space continuum, Christ did not directly rule over and administer the world. This task was delegated to another — Satan (*Mt. 4:8; Lk. 4:5-6*). The Bible speaks of Satan ruling the nations (*Jn. 12:31; 16:11; Eph. 2:2*). This is a difficult concept to appreciate. Nevertheless, the Bible teaches that the nations were held under the rule of Satan, until the coming of the rightful heir, Christ. Naturally Satan used and abused his authority to deceive the nations and cause them to rebel against God.

When Christ appeared in redemptive history, He was commissioned with a number of objectives: destroy the work of sin by atoning for the sins of the church, and loose the nations from the grip of Satan. Christ did just that. In coming as the rightful heir,

Christ systematically began to destroy the work of Satan (*Mt. 12:25-30; Lk. 11:20-23*). On the cross He completely destroyed the judicial effects of sin, and He toppled Satan's regime, and consequently Satan's influence over the nations (*Jn. 12:30-33; 16:11; Rev. 12:10*). Christ's work throughout His earthly ministry, culminating on the cross, dethroned Satan.

Christ's defeat over sin and Satan merited not only the Father's favor, but also the Father's reward. And the Great Commission is the fulfilment of the Father's inheritance promise to Christ. From all eternity the Father promised the Son that He would grant Him direct authority to administer and enforce His direct reign over the inheritance.

I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, "You are My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel" (*Ps. 2:7-9*).

Discipleship of All Nations:

The nations under Satan's administration were deceived, and they rebelled against God. With the coming of Christ, however, God placed His King, Christ, on the throne of the universe. Essentially, the Father fulfilled His vow when Christ arose from the grave and gave Him, the rightful heir, the deed to every nation under the sun. That didn't mean that every nation immediately became a Christian nation; it simply meant that Christ was given the right to rule directly over the inheritance. The nations had always been His, the difference now is that the nations are His to organize and administer directly into the kingdom.

In practical terms, the Great Commission is simply the undoing of Satan's work and influence over the nations. Under Satan the nations were deceived, and they rebelled. But under Christ they are being disciplined to submit. Therefore, the Great Commission is Christ's policy of kingdom reconstruction. Christ is undoing the effects of Satan's reign by reconstituting every nation to reflect His policies. Christ accomplishes this through the church. Christ is marshalling His disciples forward in the task of breaking all rebel states with a "rod of iron" and "dashing them to pieces" with the gospel of the kingdom.

Naturally, this has bearing on infant-baptism. But to see the connection, we need to deal with the concept of "nation" in the Great Commission. What does Christ mean by nation? Is He referring to different groups of people, to various ethnic groups in the world? Or is it rather to geography; is He calling us to go to all the different places in the world and to make disciples there? What does He mean?

The underlying assumption for many is that Christ can't literally mean all nations, including every individual and family germane to a nation, because such a task would seem entirely implausible. The predominant belief is that Christ is simply commanding us to go and make disciples "out of" all the nations. There is a major problem, however, in that the text does not support such a view.

The text is emphatic: "Go therefore and make disciples of *all nations*." The wording is very specific and it categorically implies corporate-ness. Christ wants the nation as a corporate entity disciplined. Moreover, He means to disciple all that makes a nation a nation. In other words, He wants to make disciples of the whole nation, including all people in the nation and all the essential cultural institutions

that are unique to that nation (*i.e.*, its civil government, judiciary, schools, religious institutions, etc.).²

Dr. Ken Gentry, author of *The Greatness of the Great Commission*, agrees. He states:

The term [that] Christ employed... carries with it an important significance... He calls for the discipling of "all the nations" (*ethnos*), involving men as individuals united together in all their social-cultural labors and relations.³

The aim of the Great Commission is to undo the influence of Satan in every facet of a nation's life. Put positively, the Great Commission seeks the comprehensive influence of Christ's sovereignty over every facet of a nation. Obviously, national institutions like supreme courts or civil governments can't be disciplined in the strictest sense, only people can. Nevertheless, national institutions play a vital role in the social fabric of every nation because they are an expression of the will and passion of people, and so they must be subjected to the reign of Christ; after all, without people cultural institutions don't exist. Therefore, since Christ wants all people disciplined in every nation, it is indicative that the social fabric of a nation must become completely permeated by the policies of Christ — the nations must be disciplined. Matthew Henry puts it this way:

Christianity should be twisted in with national constitutions, ...the kingdoms of the world should become Christ's kingdoms, and their kings the church's nursing fathers ...[we must] make the nations Christian nations ...Christ the Mediator is setting up a kingdom in the world, bringing the nations to be his subjects.⁴

Discipleship Begins with Baptism

So far, all we've established is that Christ wants the nations of the world. But we still haven't answered the question of infant-baptism.

Since we are trying to establish that infant-baptism is a necessary outworking of Lordship, it is important to see the relationship between discipleship and baptism. A disciple is simply someone who has been brought into the organic kingdom of Christ. The question of regeneration, election, or the inorganic kingdom is a point I will soon address.

How does one go about making a disciple? Those who argue for believers' baptism only would insist that the process begins first with preaching the gospel to individuals and thus eliciting faith in them. Some might even assert that it involves teaching the law, since Christ said: "teaching them all that I have commanded." But the *ordo salutis* (order of salvation) is not necessarily the concern of this text. What is of concern is discipling, and the text makes clear that the process of discipling officially begins with baptism. Christ says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Some believers-only advocates might want to argue that the Great Commission actually justifies their theology since Christ is commanding us to make disciples, then baptize them and then teach them. But this rendering is incorrect. The assumption that we must first lead someone to faith before we can baptize, and then begin instruction in morality, is incorrect. Although in most cases, faith probably precedes baptism and instruction in righteousness, it is not necessarily the case. Many people have come to faith after baptism, not

before. Moreover, the actual rendering of the text places no primacy on the order of salvation. Christ does not say make a disciple first, then baptize him, and then teach him to obey. He says that someone who has been baptized has become a disciple, after which the process of instruction begins in earnest. Regardless of the order, a person does not become an official disciple of Christ until he is baptized in the Name of the Triune God. Therefore discipleship, in that sense, begins with baptism.

How does this relate to infants? Christ wants all the nations to become His disciples. He wants disciple-nations, and the process of discipleship begins with baptism. Therefore, discipling the nations as nations means He wants them baptized corporately. The baptism of the nations is essential to the Great Commission. He simply will not accept the idea that the baptism of a few individuals here and there is in keeping with His commission. Christ wants the nations baptized in His name so that the nations might be organized into His kingdom and come under His direct administration.

Is It Possible?

At this point the critic may say that such a task is impossible. It is impossible because its universal scope hardly seems plausible, or that it is erroneous because such a view of the Great Commission turns baptism into a political sacrament, and thus would be no different from baptism by political coercion. It is impossible because we cannot expect the whole nation to be "born-again."

In the first case, the universal scope of Christ's commission is entirely plausible since it is not accomplished in our own strength. Christ made sure of that when He gave the disciples these comforting words:

“and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Second, when the Father promised the Son that He would “dash” the nations in pieces and “break them with a rod of iron,” the Biblical language undeniably conveys some type of coercion; of that we need not apologize. Christ is Lord. As Lord He demands total submission — or you pay the consequences: total annihilation in this life and in hell. I realize this sounds harsh, but it is true. Nations that refuse to bow their national knee will be wiped away. The history of redemption is replete with examples.

Then again, although coercion plays a role, it is not the type that comes by humanistic means. It doesn’t involve military means, manipulation, or economic repression. It comes by disarming the national philosophies of a nation through rhetoric, preaching, debate, teaching, instruction, and acts of love. It comes by engaging the cultural ideas at every level of the nation with the truth of the gospel, believing that over time the gospel will disarm and destroy all lofty speculation — so much so that the nation at every level will give itself over to Christ.

And finally, do we expect every citizen in every nation to become saved? Our answer must be clear: we can’t. We cannot ensure that nations, let alone individuals will be “born-again.” Even if we strategically execute the commission with great success, we can do nothing to save anyone. But Christ isn’t asking us to do that. He is not asking us to make “elect” nations. He is asking us to make disciples of the nations — and this is an important difference.

Not every disciplined nation is necessarily a society of elect individuals. Christ is not asking us to go and make regenerate believers. Although every

born-again believer is a disciple, not every disciple is necessarily born-again. Of course, the ideal is a genuine salvation, and a regenerate society, but this is not what Christ is commanding. He is simply commanding that we work to expand His kingly influence over the affairs of the world, and that means we must make disciples of the nations — leaving the question of their regeneracy and election to Him.

***He is simply
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nations...***

Christ wants to extend His administration over every nation that He now owns. He is seeking to reverse the effects of Satan’s reign. Making disciples of the nations by baptizing them and teaching them is the divinely decreed means by which Christ’s reign advances throughout the world. Making the nations “covenantal” commonwealths is what the Great Commission is all about.

If this is true for nations, it is also true for all families, including the infants. If Christ owns the nations, does He not own all the families in the nations? And if He has commanded that the nations, as nations, should be baptized and instructed, irrespective of their election, then is this not true of all the infants in their respective families? Christ owns the families of the world. Christ owns every individual in the world. They are His by divine decree, by divine right, by divine inheritance. But He wants them in His kingdom. He is their Lord. The Great

Commission presents the single greatest challenge to our individualistic view of Christianity and, therefore, if I have correctly interpreted the Great Commission, infant-baptism is a necessary consequence of Christ’s sovereign reign. ☐

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¹ Many cults have used this passage to establish the creaturely status of Christ. The phrase has nothing whatsoever to do with Christ’s creation. As the Second Person of the Trinity, He has always existed. It is simply referring to His status as the rightful heir of the world.

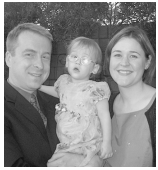
² Even if one argued that *ethnos*, the Greek word for nations, only refers to the “Gentile tribes,” and therefore does not involve the modern concept of a social-political entity (thus dispensing with the idea that we need to disciple a nation’s essential cultural institutions), there is still an essential “corporate-ness” to Christ’s commission. If the nations, strictly speaking, are only Gentile tribes, then Christ wants the tribes — as tribes — disciplined, meaning the whole tribe, and not simply “some out of” the tribe.

³ Dr. Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics), 54. It should be noted that Dr. Gentry explores this point further, by stating: “He calls His followers to ‘make disciples of all the nations.’ He does not merely say ‘disciple all men’ (although this lesser point is true also). In that case he would have chosen the Greek word *anthropos*, which would allow the reference to indicate men as individual humans, rather than as collected races, cultures, societies, or nations. Neither does He call for the discipling of ‘all kingdoms’ (*basileia*), as if He laid claim only to political authority.”

⁴ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, n.d. [1721]), 5:446

Teaching Your Children to Live in God's Covenant

By Walter and Megan Lindsay



A dominant part of family life is teaching one's children. The imperatives of Scripture make it so; the promises are to us and our children. The demands of teaching our children are too important for our children not to dominate family life. And the Lord tells us so:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (*Dt. 6:4-9*)

In this passage, God gives us parents very specific and concrete directions about how we are to train our children to love Him. He does not tell us to teach them to “know” Him through detailed systematic theology, or to “love” Him through warm fuzzy feelings and mushy “Jesus Loves Me” songs. Rather, throughout Deuteronomy He tells us that we are to teach our children to observe His commands so that they will teach their children to do the same. To love God, to know Him, depends on knowing

and doing what He requires. Loving and knowing God is fundamentally covenantal (*e.g., Dt. 5:10; 7:9; Dan. 9:4; Jn. 17:3, 26*), and we are to teach our children how to live according to that magnificent covenant.

Unfortunately, it has become too easy for parents to forget the meaning of this command, thanks to the vestiges of Enlightenment rationalism and Romanticism that prevail in modern thought. Rationalism and Romanticism during the 18th century sought to separate in man what God has not separated, namely his intellect, emotion, and will, and then to redefine what God has already defined. Knowledge and love, both of God and of man, were separated into two separate categories, the one rational and the other emotional, and were redefined, giving the power of God to man.

False Categories and Redefinitions

Whenever man attempts to redefine what God has already defined, the result is very, very messy. God tells us how intimately connected love is with knowing and serving Him, that they derive from Him and His love for His creation. Yet both the Enlightenment and Romantic movements sought to eradicate God from the Creation, and so the world became impersonal and purposeless. Enlightenment rationalism defined knowledge as an act of contemplation, a purely rational exercise of man's infallible intellect to govern a mechanistic creation. And

Romanticism defined love as an emotion, manipulated by man's will and experienced without any reference to value or meaning.

These have had malignant effects on man's daily life. A parent who taught his children romantic love would, therefore, teach them that love was meaningless. And a parent who taught his children rationalistic knowledge would only teach them that knowledge was impossible, and that life was meaningless.

While both Romanticism and Enlightenment rationalism borrowed from Greek thought, each also had its peculiar influence on modern Western thought. Enlightenment thought had been built on the legacy of the 17th century scientific revolution, in which rational science, and man's ability to comprehend and control the creation through it, was elevated as the key to knowing the natural world. By the 18th century, the Enlightenment had given flesh to the bones of this idea, and had created a culture out of the transformation.

According to rationalism, man's ability to know the truth lay completely within his mind, and it was his responsibility to categorize life with his mind, as well as to assign it meaning. These acclaimed responsibilities, of course, greatly affected his daily life. How husbands loved their wives; how mothers disciplined their children; how men made laws and governments administered justice; how ministers preached the Word — the

impersonal laws of nature and man's power to manipulate those laws governed them all. Man, and his mechanized universe, needed no Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to create and uphold him by the power and counsel of His will. Without a purpose or goal for continued existence, man's world became a desperate, ugly place.

It did not take long for some of the grotesque consequences of rationalism to become apparent. The Enlightenment culture had reduced man and the creation to phenomena completely devoid of beauty and nobility, without personality or purpose. Yet humanism would not give up so easily, and rationality was given a new face.

According to Romanticism, man's intellect was still able to comprehend truths about the physical universe, but it was his will that enabled him to break free from its constraints. Man's experiences gave meaning to reality, and they legitimized his emotions, his creative abilities, and his soul. He was his own God, and the creation only found purpose in his subjective divinations. And while he sought to free society from oppression, families, churches, and governments disintegrated in the meaninglessness of his program. Romantic thought sought to break man free from the chains of intellectual rationalism, but bound him instead by chaos. Neither Enlightenment rationalism nor Romanticism could give purpose or meaning to life, and thus parents who rejected God's order inevitably found themselves teaching their children the same.

Wary Teaching

Enlightenment rationalism and Romanticism have certainly perverted man's understanding of and commitment to teaching our children, and unfortunately this is true even within the Christian family. A parent who teaches his child to love the Lord

with an Enlightenment bias will emphasize "head religion," education in doctrine or theology, as the primary way to grow in knowledge of God. And a parent with a Romantic bias will instead emphasize "heart religion," emotion and experiencing Christ. Some parents even emphasize both, as if the goal of the Christian life was a balancing act between the two. But Scripture does not tolerate any views that put man in the place of God.

So how then do parents reorient their thinking so that they may teach their children faithfully? Paul describes that we are transformed by the renewing of our minds, and that as our lives are transformed we will prove that God's commands are perfect (*Rom. 12:2*). We parents first learn God's ways and laws. As Deuteronomy 6:1 indicates, Moses was to *lamad*, or teach, the Israelites the Lord's commands so that they would obey them throughout the generations. The Hebrew word *lamad* literally means "to exercise in, learn," and this illustrates the essential connection between teaching, learning, and obeying. Matthew Henry describes the process of teaching our children as "frequently repeat[ing] these things to them, try[ing] all ways of instilling them into their minds, and making them pierce into their hearts; as, in whetting a knife, it is turned first on this side and that."

The promises for faithfulness are great, but our problems are also great. An enemy has sown weeds amongst the field we have cultivated (*Mt. 13:24-30*), and it is difficult to avoid the rationalistic and Romantic spirits of our age. Jesus commanded, "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves" (*Mt. 10:16*). Parents must continually be on guard to teach their children that while Christians

may share similar goals with some humanists (for example, secular conservatives), their commitments are never the same. Abortion arguments are a good example.

The secular pro-life argument — that all life is inherently valuable, and the pain that a fetus feels is evidence of that value — is a modern stepchild of Romanticism. Christian parents must teach their children that not all life is equally valuable; otherwise we could not uphold the death penalty. And while we may weep for the unborn child, experiences do not give value to existence. Christian parents must be wise to easy sounding arguments to help their children grow in love for the Lord.

As we learn God's laws and ways, we should expect not only that the content of our teaching will change, but also that we will see and think in new ways (*Rom. 12:2*; *2 Tim 3:16, 17*), and even in the ways we think about our children. For example, some parents, upon seeing their child's first steps, build themselves up with the knowledge that his DNA contained the code that caused his body to build the skeletal, muscular, and neurological systems that enabled him to walk — all mechanisms described by man's knowledge, impersonal and purposeless.

The Romantic reaction is just as bad: A child's innocence is thought to be so precious that watching his first steps becomes a nearly divine experience. As innocence departs into adulthood, parents mourn their "little baby's growing up." Christians should be on guard against these tempting tendencies. We should stand in awe that the same God who is preparing all of creation to receive Him fully in glory, is preparing their children, bodies included, for that same purpose. And at each new milestone, their chil-

dren reveal the image of God with greater fullness for His glory.

Strong Teaching

We parents must teach our children when we sit at home, when we walk about town, when we go to bed, and when we get up in the morning. Instruction literally takes on every form possible, from the monumental to the mundane. And yet some opportunities for teaching our young ones are so essential that to miss those opportunities would leave our children to the wolves of the world. Catechizing is one of those opportunities. No catechism is infallible, or completely comprehends the Word of God (*Rom. 11:33*). Yet the Reformed catechisms are excellent tools for inscribing in our children's hearts the doctrines of Scripture.

Both Westminster catechisms, and the Heidelberg Catechism, begin with questions that not only establish the child's purpose and meaning, but also remind him of the glorious blessings of his identity in Christ. If we treat doctrine as a synonym of faith, then Enlightenment rationalism has become a welcome guest in our households. However, if we teach our children right doctrine as a necessary ingredient for loving obedience, then catechizing them will nourish our children's love for the Lord.

Family worship is another important way for parents to teach their children. Even a small child can tell if Scripture is read with delight, and reading to them in that manner lays a foundation of knowledge that works against worldly ideas. Frequent prayer teaches children that theirs is the living God, who works every moment in love for the good of His loved ones and His glory. And as we bring the events of the day and of the world to the foot of the cross, we help our children to examine them in the light of Scripture

and God's purposes. Singing psalms and hymns in worship teaches children that truth is never dry or cranky, but full of joy and beauty, and is designed to enlighten our minds and delight our senses. Through family worship we seek to fill our children's minds and hearts with truth, and to show them that obedience to God's commands is the only way to know and love that truth.

Similarly, the covenant community we choose for our families deeply forms the ideas our children have about loving the Lord. A church whose worship bears more resemblance to a funeral than a marriage ceremony, whose sermons are dead orthodoxy and theological systems, will do little to protect the flock from strains of Enlightenment rationalism or from a Romantic backlash. And a church that emphasizes the warmth of being "slain in the Spirit," whose sermons merely warm the heart, will only encourage Romanticism in the hearts of God's people.

However, if our children belong to a church where beauty and glory are manifest in the liturgy (*Ex. 28:2, 40*), the Word is preached faithfully to transform the lives of the community (*Heb. 4:1-3*), and godly tradition serves as a reminder of God's work in history, past, present, and future (*Josh. 4*), they will be nourished in a faith that truly seeks to love the Lord in obedience. The church is Christ's bride, and we must reflect her glory. At the same time, she is our mother (*Gal. 4:26; Rev. 21:9, 10*), and we cannot train our children apart from the glory of His bride or the nurture of our mother.

And These Too Shall Pass

Training our children faithfully to think their thoughts after God, to love His definitions and His commands, will always be a daunting task as long

as sin is in the world. Thankfully, we know that this struggle will not last forever. The Lord of the harvest knows that we and our age are infested with weeds (*Mt. 13:24-30*), and today we walk among the very tall and gnarly weeds of Enlightenment rationalism and Romanticism.

Although we must be wise to the world in order to protect our children from its dangers, at the same time God does not require that each of us spend weary nights studying Enlightenment rationalism and Romanticism in order to root them out of our children's lives. Our calling is to pursue Him so that, in the natural course of events, He will so weaken false ideologies that even learned scholars will barely remember them. If we strive to teach our children to know and love the Lord through obeying Him, and how to teach the same to their children, then in the providence of God, Enlightenment rationalism, Romanticism, and all other false gods will be crushed under the footfall of faithful obedience (*Ps. 110:1*). Praise be to the Lord! 🙌

In addition to Walter's software engineering career and Megan's housewifery career, the Lindsays are assistant editors for the *Chalcedon Report*. They recently moved to Phoenix, Arizona, and are members of Emmanuel Covenant Church. They so far have been blessed with one daughter, Maggie, and another due to come in May.

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A Christian America: Education and the Founders

By Roger Schultz



Consider the following college mission statement: “Every one shall consider as the main End of his life and studies, to know God and Jesus Christ, which is Eternal life. John 17:3.”¹ Match that statement with the correct school. The choices are: a) Liberty University, b) University of California Berkeley, c) Duke, d) Harvard. The correct answer is Harvard College, and the statement is taken from the college’s first laws of 1646.

Did anyone guess Duke? In 1924, when James Duke transformed Trinity College into the university which bears his name, the bylaws of the act of endowment included the following mission statement: “The Aims of Duke University are to assert a faith in the eternal union of knowledge and religion set forth in the teachings and character of Jesus Christ, the Son of God . . .”² (That 1924 mission statement is still displayed on a monument in front of the beautiful Duke chapel.) As late as the 1920s, American higher education still formally stressed its Christian character.

Liberty University has an excellent doctrinal statement. It affirms the inerrancy of Scripture, a literal six-day creation, justification through faith alone, and the necessity of salvation through Christ. But the doctrinal fidelity that makes Liberty exceptional today was commonplace in early American institutions.

America has a great Christian heritage. Early American education, which was fundamentally Christian, is an excellent example of that heritage. Unfortunately, that commitment to Christ-centered education has been lost and needs to be recaptured.

The Puritans and Crummy Schools

The desire for godly education was a consuming passion for the Puritans. It was one of the reasons for their exodus from England. In his 1629 justification for leaving for New England, John Winthrop points (among other factors) to problems in the schools: “The fountains of learning and religion are so corrupted most children (even the best wits and fairest hopes) are perverted, corrupted, and utterly overthrown, by the multitude of evil examples and the licentious government of those seminaries, where men strain at gnats and swallow camels . . . but suffer all Ruffian-like fashion and disorder in manners to pass uncontrolled.”³ It is worth noting that, in part, the Puritans fled England because of crummy schools!

Colonial higher education reflected this Puritan passion for Christian education. Harvard was chartered in 1636, primarily to train clergymen, and had as its motto “Christ and Church.” Virtually all of the Ivy League schools shared this early commitment to a Christian education. Princeton, the Presbyterian college in the colonies, counted revivalists

Samuel Davies and Jonathan Edwards among its earliest presidents.

The commitment to religious education in the colonial period started with the youngest students. The *New England Primer* was the Puritan book used to teach generations of Americans to read. The Primer taught the ABCs: each letter of the alphabet was associated with a Biblical character or a scriptural lesson, and a corresponding doctrinal truth was anchored in the mind with a rhyme. A was for Adam; there was a woodcut of Adam and Eve; then the rhyme, “In Adam’s fall, we sinned all.” In addition to learning the alphabet children were instructed in sound Augustinian theology. C was for Christ, and with the saying, “Christ crucified for Sinners Dy’d,” children were exposed to Biblical soteriology. There were many reminders of human mortality in the *Primer*. G was for Glass (Hourglass), and “As runs the Glass, Our life does pass.”⁴ Y was for Youth — and then there is a woodcut of a skeleton nailing a little kid with an arrow — “Youth forward slips, Death soonest nips.”

My favorite is U for Uriah (the Hittite). The slogan goes, “Uriah’s beauteous wife made David seek his life.” The attached picture shows King David leering down on the nubile Bathsheba, which was the precursor to his adultery and his conspiracy to murder Uriah.⁵ Sin, death, betrayal, adultery and murder — who needs

TV? It is all in the *Primer*. It is saucy stuff — especially for those of us who grew up with the sanitized and conformist “Dick and Jane” readers. The *Primer* was profoundly philosophical as well. It included theological lessons, prayers, and catechisms. The first question of the Shorter Catechism, for instance, asks, “What is the chief end of man?” That is a heavy teleological question for a five-year old; it asks about purpose in life and the very reason for existence. The answer: “to glorify God and enjoy him forever.”

In the nineteenth century the *McGuffey's Readers* largely replaced the *New England Primer*. Between 1836 and 1920, some 120 million copies of the *Readers* were sold, putting it in the class with the Bible and Webster's Dictionary.⁶ McGuffey (1800-1873) was a Presbyterian clergyman, a professor of ancient languages, president of Miami University, and, at the time of his death, the Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Virginia. His *Readers* projected a specifically Christian and largely Calvinistic worldview, although later editions of the *Readers* were less theologically-inclined and more moralistic. The *Readers* included religious lessons (to say your prayers, to be thankful to God, etc.), stories about the natural world and historical figures, and strong endorsements of moral behavior. Children were taught the Golden Rule, the virtue of honesty, and respect for authority. Other stories warned about the cruelty of torturing animals, the evil of being mean to others, or the dangers of becoming a drunkard. (Temperance was an important issue for McGuffey.) These largely religious texts were widely used in public schools.

The first national act to endow public education was the Ordinance of 1785, dealing with western lands.

One section (section 16) in every township — that is, one square mile in every 36 square miles of territory, or roughly 3% of all western land — was set aside to support public schools. The rationale for this endowment was important: “religion, morality, and knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged.”⁷ Let it be noted that the first national educational endowment was specifically to encourage religion and morality.

In the nineteenth century, almost all of the nation's colleges had religious roots and denominational affiliations. Many of those colleges sprang from evangelical bodies that had arisen during the great religious awakenings. In southwest Virginia and northeast Tennessee, for instance, with which I am most familiar, the first colleges had strong ecclesiastical ties. Virginia Intermont College, for example, got its start when Reverend Harrison traveled through southwest Virginia with John the Baptist (the name of his horse) sharing his vision of a Baptist institution of higher education.⁸ But he certainly wasn't unique in combining a passion for education with the Christian faith.

The Loss of Spiritual Vision

Before the twentieth century, Christianity had a natural and critically important role in American education. But then something happened. Schools and colleges lost the spiritual vision and religious commitment which characterized early generations.

What happened? In *The Soul of the American University*, George Marsden points to the sweeping trends of secularization. And he poses this historical question: “Why were the fledgling

universities of the late nineteenth century, despite their founders' expressed commitments to Christianity, designed in a way that would virtually guarantee that they would become subversive of the Christian heritage of learning?”⁹ A good question indeed.

Cultural historian Daniel Boorstin argues that pragmatism and raw economics diluted the religious focus of American colleges. Struggling Christian institutions, to remain solvent, were forced to appeal to the community and attract a broader constituency, a process that muted their theological distinctives. “To make their colleges appeal to everybody,” Boorstin continues, “to people who believe anything or nothing, the denominations themselves became powerful breeders of ‘Nothingarianism,’ which some observers said was the truly dominant American sect.”¹⁰

The nineteenth century Princetonians offered a sharper criticism of the direction of American education. In his 1886 *Evangelical Theology*, A.A. Hodge writes “[I]f every party in the state has the right of excluding from the public school whatever he does not believe to be true, then he that believes the most must give way to him that believes least, and then he that believes least must give way to him that believes absolutely nothing.” He further warns that the proposed scheme of national public education would be “the most efficient and wide instrument for the propagation of atheism which the world has ever seen.” Hodge concludes with this frightfully accurate prediction: “I am as sure as I am of Christ's reign that a compulsory and centralized system of national education, separated from religion... will prove the most appalling enginery for the propagation of anti-Christian and atheistic unbelief, and of anti-social nihilistic ethics,

individual, social, and political, which this sin-rent world has ever seen.”¹¹

Rushdoony notes that education has become a “messianic and utopian movement.” It is an inherently religious part of a statist worldview. “The state has become the saving institution,” he argues, “and the function of the school has been to proclaim a new gospel of salvation.”¹²

Education always reflects our core values, base convictions, and our true religion. The statist education of our age represents a radically new religious vision. Evangelical Christians should flee the “disorderly” and “licentious” educational innovations of their day. And like their Puritan ancestors, they should be committed to establishing Bible-based and Christ-

centered institutions of education — for the glory of Christ and His Church.✠

Dr. Schultz is Chairman of the History Department at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia.

¹ Quoted in George Marsden, *The Soul of the American University* (New York: Oxford, 1994), 41.

² *Ibid.*, 322.

³ John Winthrop, “Reasons to be Considered for Justifying the Plantation in New England,” in *Settlements to Society, 1607-1763*, Ed. Jack Greene (N.Y.: Norton, 1975), 63. Spelling modernized.

⁴ Woodcuts and lessons varied with the editions of the *Primer*. Examples used here come from *The New England Primer* (Boston: 1777; Reprint edition; Alledo, Texas: Wallbuilder Press, 1991.)

⁵ Jerome Reich, *Colonial America*, 2nd edition (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1989), 225.

⁶ John Westerhoff, *McGuffey and His Readers* (Milford, Michigan: Mott Media, 1982), 14.

⁷ Malcolm Rohrbough, *The Trans-Appalachian Frontier* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1978), 48. The purpose statement was added to the 1787 version of the Ordinance.

⁸ Hendrika Schuster, “When John the Baptist Traveled Our Roads: A Tale of Virginia Intermont College,” *Bulletin of the Historical Society of Washington County, Virginia, Series II* (1998) 35:1-6.

⁹ Marsden, *Soul of the American University*, 31.

¹⁰ Daniel Boorstin, *The Americans: The National Experience* (New York: Vintage, 1965), 154.

¹² Rousas John Rushdoony, *The Messianic Character of American Education* (Nutley, N.J.: The Craig Press, 1979), 4.

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A Holistic Missionary and Her Holographic Will

Introducing John Grisham's *The Testament* (N.Y.: Doubleday, 1999)

By Forrest W. Schultz



I have been an avid fan of John Grisham's legal thrillers for a long time. One of my favorites is *The Testament*. Perhaps its most outstanding feature is its refreshingly realistic and edifying portrayal of a lively, devout missionary — a portrayal that avoids both the “plaster saint” hagiography often found in Christian writing and the derogatory depictions frequently penned by mainstream authors.

A Godly Missionary

Missionary Rachel Lane is the illegitimate daughter of eccentric super-rich businessman Troy Phelan — a fact kept secret by him and her until it is dramatically revealed when he leaves the bulk of his eleven billion dollar estate to her in his will. This astonishes everyone and enrages his eight legitimate (but super-degenerate) children, who hire crooked attorneys to contest the will. Phelan's legal firm then dispatches a lawyer — the avid outdoorsman Nate O'Reilly — to find Miss Lane, which he does after a series of adventures in a Brazilian jungle.

Lane is clearly the heroine throughout the story. O'Reilly does not fully become the hero until he responds favorably to the gospel Lane presents to him while seated on a log outside her missionary hut near the Indian tribe to which she is ministering. After returning to America, O'Reilly begins the process of trying to remedy the ravages wrought by his

sins in his own life and in the lives of his children and his two divorced wives, following the guidance and upheld by the prayers of an elderly godly Episcopalian pastor. O'Reilly's response to Lane stands in sharp contrast to that of Phelan, who only sees her as a worthy recipient of his estate — he does not try to discover what made her such an admirable person, and how he could become one himself.

After wrestling for a while with the question of what to do with the money, Lane finally decides to deal with the estate by putting it into a trust fund to be disbursed for missionary, evangelistic, and charitable causes, and also to protect the rights of the indigenous tribes of South America. She names O'Reilly as Executor. Lane is very concerned about the horrendous mistreatment suffered by the South American Indians and their consequent mistrust of “civilized” people, which makes missionary work among them so difficult. From Grisham's portrait of Lane as a person and as a missionary, she could perhaps be most succinctly described as a “holistic” missionary and person.

As in all his novels, Grisham draws upon his experiences as a lawyer, and he presents us with interesting, vividly depicted characters and actions, and powerful (often witty) indictments of the deplorable features of modern life. In *The Testament* he also draws upon the missiologistical knowledge he acquired from his friend Carl King, a Baptist missionary, and from

the ecological knowledge gained from the tour King gave him of the Pantanel region of Brazil, where Grisham locates Lane's mission field.

Grisham's novels provide a legal education of sorts. In *The Testament* Grisham uses a legal term I had never heard before, and may be confusing. Both Phelan's will and Lane's will are said by Grisham to be “holographic.” Grisham does not define the term for the reader, Tormont Webster's dictionary, says that it is “a document written wholly in the handwriting of the person whose signature it bears.” So, a holographic will is one written not by the testator's lawyer but by the testator himself. Because a will is such a highly personal matter and because both Phelan and Lane were such strong personalities, it is perhaps fitting that their testaments were written by themselves in their own handwriting.

Since Lane and Phelan are such strong personalities, Grisham is able to use them dramatically to portray the contrast between godliness and wickedness. Lane exemplified godliness through her dedicated humble service to a remote people far from the comforts of civilization, subsisting on a salary far below what she could earn as a medical doctor in America. Phelan exemplified wickedness through his nastiness, his greed, and his neglect of his wives and children. Phelan provides an apt depiction of the worship of Mammon because he uses almost all the

money he earns to make more money and to build an ever-larger business empire. Money is an end in itself (and thus an idol) rather than a means toward other ends. In contrast, Lane puts the money she inherits into a fund to be used to help others in a God-honoring way.

Wealth Into Righteous Hands

Further indications of Lane's godliness are seen in her humble willingness to accede to O'Reilly's counsel to accept the inheritance, so it could be used for godly purposes. At first Lane told O'Reilly that she did not want the money. O'Reilly responds by arguing that if she does not accept the money (and use it wisely), that it will probably end up in the hands of the degenerate children, who will use it foolishly. After O'Reilly leaves, Lane devotes time to thought and prayer about it and finally concludes that O'Reilly is right. Lane's thinking moves her away from a pietistic aversion to money and power toward seeing money as a God-given resource for glorifying Him. Her concluding position is, of course, also in line with her matur-

ing, ever more consistent holistic outlook, in which she becomes concerned about all the aspects of life because God Himself is concerned about all aspects of life. In short, the first indication that Lane's final decision is godly is that she chooses the godly path. The second indication of Lane's godliness here is the humility involved in her willingness to accept the counsel of O'Reilly, who is a mere babe in Christ (and her convert, no less!), while she has been a Christian for many years and a recipient of much Christian education and training.

It appears that Grisham may also be providing a contemporary example of the Biblical principle that (either in the long or short run, and in this case the short run) the wealth of the wicked ends up passing into the hands of the righteous. Here again Grisham is dramatic in his portrayal: suddenly eleven billion dollars goes from a wicked person to a righteous person. Not only is the wicked person exceedingly wicked and the righteous person exceedingly righteous, but the amount of money passing from the wicked to the righteous one

is exceedingly large. Almost all churches and other Christian organizations today complain about insufficient funds. But suppose we were suddenly to have at our disposal a windfall like Phelan's eleven billion dollars. How many are there among us who would have enough wisdom to know what to do with it? Perhaps this is why Grisham ends his story shortly after the creation of the fund with only hints of how it would specifically be used. The specifics of the fund's disbursement and the reasons behind them would be so complex as to warrant an entirely separate book or series of books.

Forrest W. Schultz has a B. S. in Chemical Engineering from Drexel University and a Th.M. in Systematic Theology from Westminster Theological Seminary. He is an active member of the Coweta Writers Group, serving as its Delegate to the Newnan-Coweta Arts Council. He has had for many years a strong interest in the aesthetic aspect of God and man (beauty, artistry, creativity, "interestingness") and its relationship with science and technology.

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