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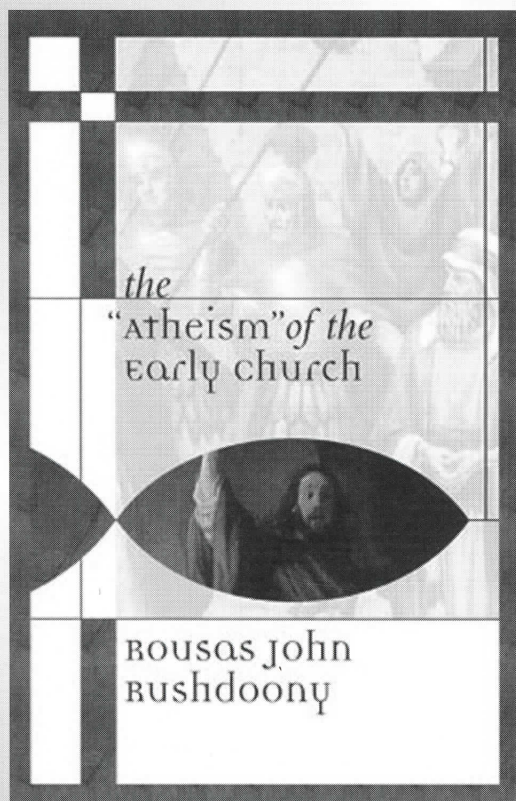
## A CHRISTIAN CHRISTMAS



- R. J. Rushdoony on Biblical Faith and American History: The Present
- P. Andrew Sandlin on Those Long-Lived "Last Days" • Mark R. Rushdoony on The Christian Christmas Tree
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## The "Atheism" of the Early Church

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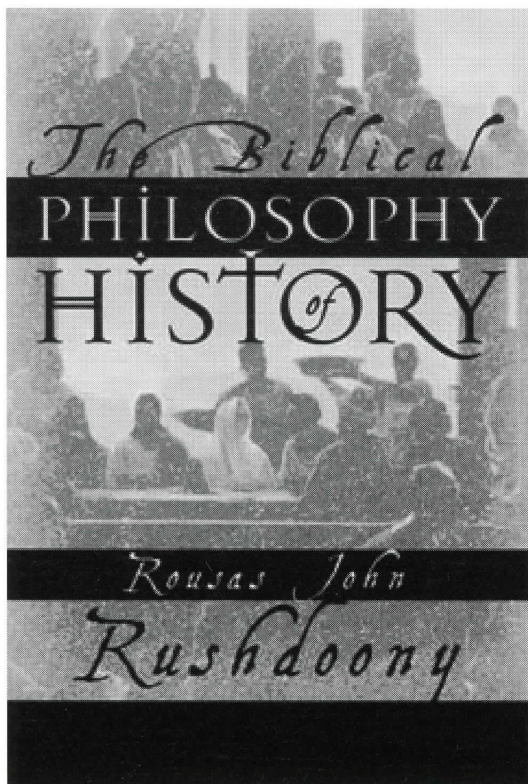
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**A Monthly Report Dealing with the Relationship of Christian Faith to the World**

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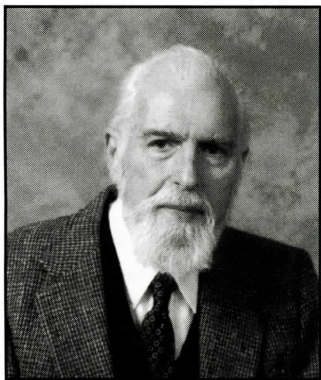
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# Biblical Faith and American History

## Part 2: The Present

*By Rev. R. J. Rushdoony*

**T**he cannot begin to understand the present condition of the United States apart from the decline of the Reformed Faith. The War of Independence was a triumph for Puritan postmillennialism, but it was also a major factor in its decline. The Puritan faith suffered on two counts. *First*, because the war was so closely identified with Puritanism, and especially with Scotch-Irish Presbyterians, all Puritan pastors, of whatever church affiliation, were very active in the chaplainry. The churches suffered to a degree from this loss. *Second*, and more important, many of their churches were destroyed, deliberately burned by the British forces. This constituted a major and devastating loss to an already sometimes impoverished people. From this setback, Puritanism never fully recovered. Instead of facing people in time of peace with a commanding position, Puritanism came through the war with disastrous losses and disorganization.

At the same time as the Augustinian faith in God's decree was declining, an Augustinian despair was flourishing. Instead of the confident hope that Christ's kingdom would prevail, there was now a belief, strengthened by the French Revolution, that man, godless man, rather than Christ, would command the nations. As a result, the medieval idea that the church is man's only hope in this world, and that the church must be a

convent or monastery for Christians to retreat into, captured America. The result was *revivalism*.

### The Scourge of Revivalism

With revivalism, dramatic changes took place. Alexander Hamilton, seeing the drift away from a Christian emphasis, had planned before his death to start a new political entity called the Christian Constitutional Party. With the new monastic spirit, such an idea was impossible. Politics was left to the politicians; Christians were intent upon secularizing the political order. Election sermons and the old Puritan concern with civil government now became obsolete, and even seen as evidence of *worldliness*.

The very term *worldliness* took on a monastic meaning. It did not mean an *ungodly* concern with the world, but *any* genuine concern with the world.

A similar and far-reaching change took place in education. Earlier, *all* education had been Christian; only Christian schools and colleges existed. Within a few years after revivalism began, the move for state control of education was underway. Some revivalists denounced Christian schools as ungodly. It was held that Christian schools substituted knowledge for the revival experience, and nurture for regeneration. A more clean-cut conversion experience could take

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place, it was held, if a person's mind were not cluttered with knowledge of the Scriptures. We should remember that, in the revival movement inaugurated by Charles G. Finney, even Bible reading in revival meetings was held to have a bad and cooling or cold-water effect on those present.

The key term and emphasis was *soul-saving*. But this is not all. The revivalists acted as though there had been virtually no souls saved until they came along, as though all who had preceded them were not pastors or shepherds, but rather wolves. Moreover, the very term *soul-saving* took on a new meaning. *Soul* in Scripture means very commonly *the life of a man*, so that Biblical soul-saving is concerned with the total life and being of a man, and soul-saving means the regeneration of the whole man. Salvation now was by implication limited to one side of a man, his soul or spirit, and salvation had an inner meaning rather than a total and cosmic meaning.

The result was a retreat from the world, and from the whole life of man, into this redefined soul. Jesus Christ as Savior was now limited in His function to being simply a soul-savior. Not surprisingly, by the twentieth century, Rev. Carl McIntire logically insisted on denying the creation mandate, and Bob Jones University denied the Lordship of Jesus prior to the premillennial kingdom. The logic of Arminianism required a surrender of Christ's kingship and a reduction of His role to that of a Savior. Even this role was a diminished one because of the denial of sovereign grace. *Man* was in effect the savior; man chose or denied Christ; man made the decision and the decree. Predestination was transferred from God to man.

## The Scourge of Arminianism

Arminianism thus transferred the government from Christ's shoulders to man's. This means that there is no *Biblical* gospel for society, but only a humanistic or *social* gospel. Modernism was a product of revivalism, and some Arminian scholars are happy to point out that revivalism gave birth to the social gospel. *Arminian fundamentalism and the modernistic social gospel are twins born of a common parentage, the denial of sovereign grace*. Not surprisingly, there is an increasing receptivity of Arminian fundamentalism to the social gospel.

When Pilate told Jesus that His "own nation and chief priests" had delivered Him, their King (*Jn. 19:33-35*), Jesus made clear that He was not a King whose kingship came from men: "My kingdom is not of this world" (*Jn. 19:36*), *i.e.*, it is not derived *from* this world, but is *over* this world, and it is "My kingdom."

Arminianism places Christ's kingdom either in the future (the millennium) or outside this world. The

Barthians, for example, insist on working for a socialist order, but they are emphatic on declaring God to be "the wholly Other," totally beyond and outside this world, so that it has no real relevancy to our world today. The revivalist sees the kingdom as only in the millennium, or in the world beyond the Second Coming.

The results of such a theology are very much with us. In a country where more than half of the people are church members, this convent or monastic attitude with respect to Christ's rule has led to a surrender of the world to man. The real problem in the United States is Arminianism, which is a form of *modified unbelief*. *Arminianism proposes belief in Jesus Christ, but acts on belief in man*. The result of such a profession is exactly what we have in the United States today.

Our *central* problem is thus not open atheism nor open humanism, serious problems though both clearly are. It is false theology, Arminianism. In most Western countries, open humanism is operative, or nominal religion with tacit humanism. In the United States, it is Arminianism; while Arminianism is akin to and of the family of humanism, it is still different, and it presents a Christian façade. It is significant that from the 1950s into the 1970s, the one man in the United States who has continued to be the most significant and highly regarded public figure is the revivalist, the Rev. Billy Graham. During those same years, when a minister received the highest national status in Washington, D.C. ever accorded to any minister, the United States also suffered the most serious moral disintegration. Abortion became legal, the death penalty virtually abolished, the sexual revolution under way, socialism in rapid control, welfarism rampant, and hedonism commonplace.

The coincidence of these two factors is *not* accidental. Where men adopt so organized a surrender of the crown rights of King Jesus over the world, of necessity it must have practical consequences. The surrender of the world coincides with the growth of a false spirituality.

The U. S. Constitution, in its monetary clauses, shows clearly the influence of the Rev. John Witherspoon, whose hard money, gold standard principles have left their mark on America. Today, some pastors *denounce* interest in gold or silver, in economics, as unspiritual. The gap between Witherspoon and the present is very great, and the reason for that gap is Arminianism.

The only remedy, therefore, is the Reformed Faith, the proclamation of the sovereign God, His sovereign grace, and His sovereign law.





# Those Long-Lived “Last Days”

*By Rev. P. Andrew Sandlin*

**I**n recent times, we have heard a lot about “The Last Days.” A large number of non-mainline conservative Christians in this country (“evangelicals”) believe that we are living in the last few years (or even months, or days, or hours) before the “rapture” of the church, which will precede a seven-year tribulation period dominated by a single, sinister figure known as “The Antichrist,” followed by the Second Coming of Christ at which He will establish an earthly, visible, thousand-year reign in Jerusalem. This is classic or “scholastic” dispensational eschatology.<sup>1</sup> Today we witness the queer coincidence of, on the one hand, the refusal of almost any leading conservative seminary in the country to defend classical dispensationalism and, on the other hand, the dramatic revival of dispensational eschatology in the form of the staggering series of best-selling novels in the *Left Behind* phenomenon. What is indefensible in the seminaries is indefatigable in the bookstores.

The notion that in the Bible “The Last Days” denotes the final few years or months before Christ’s Second Advent reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of Biblical eschatology (the doctrine of last things). Proof that this view is mistaken appears in prominent statements like those of Peter in Acts 2, quoting Joel in describing the events of that first post-resurrection Pentecost as inaugurating “The Last Days,” during which “your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams” (v. 17). In his first epistle, John writes (2:18), “Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.” Jude writes similarly in v. 18 of his epistle. And the writer of Hebrews declares (1:1-2):

*God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds....*

Whatever else these statements denote, they certainly indicate that their human authors recognized the days in which they lived as “The Last Days.”

Consistent dispensationalism is forced to argue in the light of passages like these that “The Last Days” did in fact begin at Pentecost but were “postponed” when God “withdrew” the offer of the kingdom to unbelieving Jews.<sup>2</sup> There is not a shred of Biblical evidence to support this view, which is maintained only to conform to a preconceived theological system. The ministry of Paul himself was immersed in the kingdom of God (Ac. 20:25; 28:31; 1 Cor. 4:20; Col. 1:13; 4:11). Christ’s earthly kingdom and reign are *not* postponed until the Second Advent. They are events continuous with Jesus Christ’s resurrection (Acts 2:22-36). Christ is *presently* reigning at His Father’s right hand, and we are living in “The Last Days.”

## The “Time Between”

“The Last Days,” in fact, refers to the *entire inter-advental era* — more specifically, to the period between Christ’s *past* bodily resurrection and His *future* bodily return. Why is it termed “The Last Days”? Because it is the last epoch or period of God’s redemptive work in the earth. Paul tells us that when Christ returns, “then cometh the end, when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power” (1 Cor. 15:27). That is, there is no period of redemptive history *subsequent* to Christ’s Second Coming. “The Last Days” is the consummation of redemptive history — when we bask and work within the victory of Christ’s death, resurrection, ascension, and session.

We sometimes speak of A.D. 34-90 or 100 as the “apostolic age”; but in a profound sense, the entire inter-advental era is the apostolic age. It is true that the apostles and their miracles and certain other works seemed unique to their lifetimes.<sup>3</sup> For one thing, the requirements of an apostle cannot be met in the modern era (Ac. 1:21-22). Theirs was, in fact, a unique, unrepeatable era of redemptive history (Heb. 9:26-28).



We must never allow these facts, however, to deter us from recognizing that the *message* of the apostolic era and its *effects* are designed to cover the entire inter-advental age. The *first* days of “The Last Days” were the historical age of the apostles, whose authority and message and power persist into the present and will persist until Christ’s Second Advent. While in the *chronology* of history we are far removed from the first century, in the *theology* of history we are united to that age. In *salvation history*, we are as close to the resurrection of Christ as the first-century apostles were, just as they were as close to the Second Advent as we are today. The first-century Christians did not know when the Lord would return, any more than we do. What they did know — and what we should know — is that the great, decisive event of history is past, not future. The great battle has been won on the Cross and in the empty tomb. Salvation history in Christ is a unit, beginning with His birth and ending with His delivering His kingdom to His Father (*1 Cor. 15:24*). His atoning death and bodily resurrection stand at the center of this history and in fact constitute the gospel (*1 Cor. 15: 1-8*). All of this hangs together as a cluster of events in one overarching history.<sup>4</sup>

## The Eschatological Expectation

This readily explains many of the New Testament writers’ apparent expectation of the Second Coming within their lifetimes. While Christ Himself did not expressly teach this, and in fact implied otherwise (*Mk. 13:32-37; Lk. 12:37-48*), the apostles were dramatically aware, as many of today’s Christians are not, of the basic meaning of “The Last Days” in redemptive history. Their consciousness of the relative nearness of the Second Coming is not equivalent to today’s sort of dispensational date-setting, about which our Lord Himself warned His followers (*Mt. 24:42; Ac. 1:6-8*). They were not aware of the timing of Christ’s Second Coming; and, in fact, it seems that Christ Himself in His incarnate but pre-resurrection state was not aware of the exact time of His coming, having intentionally limited His divine omniscience (*Mk. 13:24-32*). The theologically liberal accusations that the New Testament writers *taught* that Jesus Christ would return in their own lifetimes (thus denying Biblical infallibility)<sup>5</sup> is no less erroneous than is the notion by some conservatives that we must attribute most or all of such texts to the destruction of Jerusalem in A. D. 70 in order to maintain the integrity of the Bible’s infallibility.<sup>6</sup>

Both of these views constitute a critical misunderstanding of the nature of redemptive history. The New Testament writers were not attempting to set forth a “futurist” eschatology.<sup>7</sup> Vos and Gaffin are

correct to assert that for the New Testament writers, eschatology was a *present* reality.<sup>8</sup> In the Person of Jesus Christ, *the future had invaded the present, because the (recent) past had re-shaped all history from beginning to end.*

## Postmillennialism

This is a hefty support for postmillennialism, despite the fact that a lot of amillennialists hold it. The advancement of the kingdom of God that the Old Testament predicts and the New Testament attests to centers in the redemptive-historical work of Jesus Christ. This kingdom, which will overspread the earth and dominate every area of life and thought by means of the preaching and acceptance of the gospel,<sup>9</sup> is a *present* reality, though it is worked out under God’s sovereign hand incrementally in history (*Dan. 2; Mt. 13:31-33*). This advancing kingdom is “The Last Days.” During this period, there is often great opposition to the gospel, but the gospel *will* win out. There will be great depravity (*2 Tim. 3:1*), but all enemies (except death) *will* be vanquished before Christ returns (*1 Cor. 15:22-28*). All of the Old Testament prophecies of a godly earth *will* be fulfilled as a result of the preaching of the gospel and the operation of the Spirit of God. “The Last Days” are *not* the days of anxiety over the decline of the kingdom and the apostasy of the church; they are the days of battle against an already defeated foe — a “mopping up” operation:

*The decisive battle in a war may already have occurred in a relatively early stage of the war, and yet the war still continues. Although the decisive effect of that battle is perhaps not recognized by all, it nevertheless already means victory. But the war must still be carried on for an undefined time, until “Victory Day.” Precisely this is the situation of which the New Testament is conscious.... [T]he event on the cross, together with the resurrection which followed, was the already concluded decisive battle.... The chief point in question, therefore, is not the limitation that the imminent end will come within a generation, although this limitation is actually present in the New Testament. The theologically important point in the preaching of the nearness of the Kingdom of God is not this fact, but rather the implicit assertion that since the coming of Christ we already stand in a new period of time, and that therefore the end has drawn nearer.<sup>10</sup>*

The Second Coming was ever before the eyes of the apostles (just as it should ever be before our eyes), not because they expected to escape from the earth, but precisely because it signals the *dramatic* continuation of



the earth's Christianization secured definitively by the Lordship of Christ, His present rule from the heavens (*Ac. 2:23-36*).

## A Future Alive and Well on Planet Earth

God is intensely interested in this earth as His creation, and He will not abandon it. The Bible, for example, does not teach that all Christians will live together with the Lord eternally in heaven. Rather, it states that the New Jerusalem will *descend* to the earth (a renovated earth [*1 Pet. 3:10-13*]) in which God will dwell with men forever (*Rev. 21:1-3*). In short, *the entire inter-advental era constitutes "The Last Days," God's final period of redemptive accomplishment*. However, it is not God's final era of purifying sanctification for earth. This Christianization consisting of full sanctification will be God's final, enduring work of purification after Christ returns. All enemies but one will be put down *before* the Second Coming. That final enemy to be subordinated is death (*1 Cor. 15:26*). Death — and the sin that fuels it — will survive within "The Last Days"; it will not be defeated with finality until Christ returns to initiate the final resurrection and the final judgment.

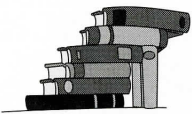
Christians who are aware of redemptive history, therefore, anticipate the Second Coming as a time when they will see their Lord face to face (*Rev. 22:4*), and when the work of worldwide Christianization will receive its final catapult into definitive earthly perfection. The Second Coming is the destination of redemptive history; and the desire for it burns within knowledgeable believers, not because they wish an escape from the world, but precisely because they wish a more Christian world. *The Second Coming introduces a radical discontinuity into history, but it maintains a radical continuity in the Christianization that occurs within that history*. In this sense, the millennium is the period of partial, progressive Christianization that ushers in the full, definitive Christianization of eternity.<sup>11</sup>

"The Last Days" is the time of the great harvest, of Christ's incrementally trampling down His enemies by the power of the gospel. The definitive victory on the Cross gives way to the final "mop-up operation" that will conclude at Christ's Second Coming. "The Last Days" is a time of excitement and ecstasy, of trial and hardship, of temporary defeat and permanent victory, of the worldwide expansion of the kingdom of God. It is a time of the "already/not yet" — the "already" of Christ's universal mediatorial reign within time and history, the "not yet" of remnants of the Second Adam and the sin that war against the incursion of the kingdom of God and the new age (*Rom. 7*).

We are called in "The Last Days" to faithfulness — and to victory in every area of thought, life, and society.

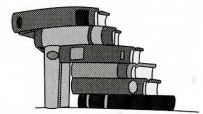
- <sup>1</sup> John F. Walvoord, *The Rapture Question* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979 edition).
- <sup>2</sup> Dwight J. Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958), 463-466.
- <sup>3</sup> But see Ronald A. N. Kydd, *Charismatic Gifts in the Early Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1984). For a competing view, see Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Charismatic Gift of Prophecy* (Memphis: Footstool Publications [1986], 1989).
- <sup>4</sup> Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950), ch. 4.
- <sup>5</sup> Martin Werner, *The Formation of Christian Dogma* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), ch. 1.
- <sup>6</sup> R. C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 202-203.
- <sup>7</sup> G. C. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), ch. 3.
- <sup>8</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed [1930], 1986), ch. 2, and Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *Resurrection and Redemption* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed [1978], 1987), 82 and *passim*. While the redemptive-historical school represented by Vos and Gaffin stresses the climactic effects of the future (clustered around Christ's Second Coming) as they protrude back into the past, the salvation-historical school epitomized by Cullmann accents the climactic effects of the past (clustered around Christ's first coming) as they protrude forward into the present and future. See Oscar Cullmann, *Salvation in History* (New York and Evanston: Harper and Row, 1967).
- <sup>9</sup> Loraine Boettner, *The Millennium* (no loc.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1957).
- <sup>10</sup> Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, 84, 87, emphasis in original. The New Testament writers were unaware of the timing of the Second Coming, just as Old Testament writers were unclear about details concerning Christ's *first* coming (*1 Pet. 1:10-12*). See also Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 489.
- <sup>11</sup> On the impetus behind Christian culture, see Christopher Dawson, "Religion and Life," in *Enquiries into Religion and Culture* (London and New York: Sheed and Ward, 1933), 292-310.





## Books and Things No. 10

By Rev. P. Andrew Sandlin



**1** Samuel P. Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), already a bestseller, has gained additional attention after the attacks of September 11, 2001. Huntington's thesis is that the great wars of the future will not be between nation-states as such, but between different civilizations; and, significantly, he recognizes that the root of all civilizations is religion. He lists nine main civilizations between which there may be great conflict: Western, Latin American, African, Islamic, Sinic, Hindu, Orthodox, Buddhist, and Japanese. His thesis is summarized on page 34: "In the post-Cold War World, states increasingly define their interests in civilizational terms. They cooperate with and align themselves with states with similar or common culture and are more often in conflict with countries of different culture. States define threats in terms of the intentions of other states, and those intentions and how they are perceived are powerfully shaped by cultural considerations. Publics and statesmen are less likely to see threats emerging from people they feel they understand and can trust because of shared language, religion, values, institutions, and culture. They are much more likely to see threats coming from states whose societies have different cultures and hence which they do not understand and feel they cannot trust." This work is worthy of careful consideration.

**2** Joseph J. Ellis has become one of the nation's great storytellers of the Revolutionary era. His *American Sphinx*, a biography of Jefferson, is a modern-day classic. He has followed this with another insightful, enjoyable work *Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001). This un-politically correct work writes history as it should be written — a broad sweep of the big picture in a thoroughly enjoyable narrative. The book consists of six vignettes relating how the founders related to one another in such a way as to shape the course of the nation's history — including the fateful duel between Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr, the dinner at Thomas Jefferson's house at which it was decided that the United States would assume the debts of the various states in exchange for the nation's capitol being situated on the Potomac, and the tacit agreement for the Revolutionary generation not to address the thorny issue of slavery. This is a delightful book, breezily diffident to ideology, in which heroes like George Washington are not without flaw and villains like Aaron Burr are not without virtue.

**3** Keith A. Mathison has written some excellent works lately, notably his book on postmillennialism I mentioned in an earlier "Books and Things." Canon

Press (Moscow, Idaho, 2001), has published his *The Shape of Sola Scriptura*. Mathison's burden is to rediscover and dust off for a new generation the Protestant view of the sufficiency of Scripture. He correctly argues that historic Protestantism avoids the traditionalism of Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy on the Right as well as the anti-traditionalism of Anabaptism and radicalism on the Left. It sees Scripture as the final authority but recognizes the value of ecclesiastical consensus in shaping doctrinal understanding, notably in the church's creeds and confessions. In a day of massive theological confusion, in which evangelicals are, on the one hand, defecting to Rome and Byzantium and some, on the other, are repudiating any form of confession-alism, this book strikes the right note.

**4** It was good to see that Baker has reprinted Henry R. Van Til's classic *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture* (Grand Rapids [1959], 2001). This book can properly be termed *neo-Calvinistic* in that it follows in the revisionist strain of Kuyper and Schilder in supplementing the earlier confessional Calvinism. It does this mostly by exploring the deep cultural implications of the theology of that Calvinism. Van Til discusses the concept of culture and its relationship to religion. He then deals with particular views of Christian culture in church history, notably Augustine, Calvin, Kuyper, and Schilder. He then moves forward to a prescriptive section, showing just how Christianity (of a Calvinist perspective!) should shape modern culture.

**5** Let me mention an older book especially relevant in the post-9-11 world. It is Christopher Dawson's *The Judgment of the Nations* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1942), a clarion call for a revival of Christian culture written amid the ravages of World War II. The author recognizes (like Huntington in the more recent work mentioned earlier) that it was orthodox Christianity which underlay the unity of modern Europe (and the United States), a Christianity largely eviscerated by secularization in Dawson's day. He despises not only the horrors of Marxist and Nazi totalitarianism, but also the "benevolent" secularism of Western democracies. All are united in a materialism that strangles the life from any robust civilization and thus all secularisms, both totalitarian and Western, are doomed to failure. Dawson is optimistic, however: "The new [Christian] world and the new humanity [Christians] exist as a leaven under the surface of the present order — the order which Christians call the world. We believe that it is destined to transform it, that the time will come when the kingdoms of this world become the Kingdom of Christ and when all things will be made new" (p. 132). Dawson's powerful writings deserve a renewed prominence in this hour.





# Student Worldview Conferences

*By Rev. P. Andrew Sandlin*

**Y**ou've probably heard by now — at least you *should* have heard by now — about the Christian Worldview Student Conference (CWSC) — held every summer at Christopher Newport University in Newport News, Virginia. In recent years, over four hundred Reformed (and other Christian) young people converge on the University, surrendering a week of their exciting sun-splashed summer for an even *more* exciting week of instruction in relevant, Christian truth by some of America's leading Reformed speakers. The CWSC is sponsored by Calvary Reformed Presbyterian Church in Newport News, Virginia. Humanly speaking, this conference is such a remarkable success because of the unflagging efforts of Rev. Byron Snapp, conference director, and host pastor, Rev. Pete Hurst. This past year's conference was held July 9-14. The speakers were John Hodges, Peter Leithart, Joseph Morecraft, Herb Titus, and Steve Wilkins. Other speakers in recent years have included Gary DeMar, Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., George Grant, James Nickel, Howard Phillips, Tom Rose, R. J. Rushdoony, P. Andrew Sandlin, Steve Schlissel, Steve Wilkins, and Douglas Wilson.

Next year's conference will be held July 8-13, 2002. Scheduled speakers are Cal Biesner, George Grant, Steve Wilkins, and Gene Veith. This is often a life-transforming conference for Christian young people. I urge you to send them. For additional

information, including registration materials, contact Byron Snapp at [crpc@visi.net](mailto:crpc@visi.net). He wants to remind everyone that there was a waiting list of those who desired to attend this year's conference, but were unable to do so due to limited space. So, if you are interested in attending the 2002 conference, be sure to register early once you receive the conference information.

Inspired by the teaching and fellowship of the CWSC, friends on the West Coast organized the West Coast Worldview Conference (WCWC). The WCWC is sponsored by Reformed Heritage Church, San Jose, California, with Zachariah Rousas Wagner as executive director. The conference was held this past summer, August 6-10, on the campus of Menlo College in Menlo Park, California, near Stanford. Speakers were Brian M. Abshire, Randy Booth, Gary DeMar, Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., and P. Andrew Sandlin. The topics ranged from presuppositional apologetics, to postmillennialism, to preparation for the gospel ministry, to financing a college education, to six-day creation, to godly leadership, to Biblical activism. Next year's conference will be held August 4-9 at a location to be announced. For information, contact Zachariah Wagner at [RousasWgnr@aol.com](mailto:RousasWgnr@aol.com).

I judge these conferences to be vital instruments in the cause of godly reformation in the family, in the church, and in the wider society. Please support them, and send your young people.

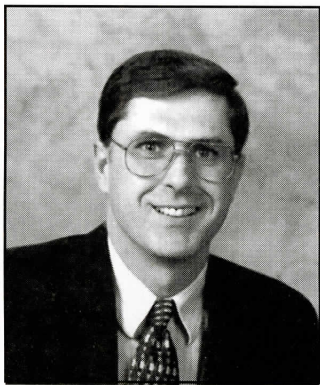




*Speakers from left to right:  
Gary Demar  
Randy Booth  
Brian M. Abshire  
P. Andrew Sandlin*







# The Christian Christmas Tree

*By Rev. Mark R. Rushdoony*

**S**ome Christians shun the Christmas tree as inappropriate or even ungodly because of its long association with pagan usage. This writer sees the Christmas tree as a Biblically sound tradition that represents a significant victory for Christendom over paganism.

The origins of many of our traditions are often obscured by centuries or millennia of customs from a multitude of sources. There is usually not one history of such practices, but rather a complex set of many histories that blend into a modern usage. The Christmas tree is one such custom. Some believe it to be a very pagan symbol inappropriate for a Christian celebration. Others see it as an important part of Christmas celebration. Both views, in fact, can be correct. The tree has a long history of use in both pagan and Christian representations of life. These conflicting representations are, in fact, represented in Scripture itself.

## Godly Symbolism

God represented the great eternal and moral issues before Adam and Eve by means of two trees. One tree was called the "tree of life" and was in the midst of the Garden of Eden. In a manner decreed by God that we cannot understand, this tree physically gave life to Adam and Eve and was fully accessible to them. It was, in effect, a sign of God's covenant of life with Adam and Eve. The only other named tree was called "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." This was the only tree forbidden to our first parents.

To understand the meaning of "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil," we must understand that God gave life to both Adam and Eve and gave them the prominent tree of life as a gracious gift. Moreover, God spoke to them, apparently on a regular basis. Their understanding of good and evil could come from one of two sources. They could learn in faith from their gracious God and Creator, or they could disobey and seek their knowledge from the forbidden tree. Satan, for all his deception, presented the sin of disobedience as a clear choice. His temptation to Eve was to play god, to elevate

herself to God's level and make her own ethical decision about what is right or wrong. This was the desire behind her choice, to "be as gods, knowing [that is, determining for herself] good and evil" (*Gen. 3:5*). Adam, we are told, was "with her" (Eve) and he "did eat." There is no reason to believe he was ignorantly fed the forbidden fruit; he fully shared Eve's presumption. Our first parents thus chose to seek knowledge of good and evil from Satan's perspective rather than God's. They thus plunged themselves and mankind into sin. God then barred them from the tree of life as an act of grace (*Gen. 3:22-24*). The tree of life would not have reversed the fall, but it would have given our first parents life in depravity. God's grace was in barring them from this end, having already promised them a Savior (*3:15*).

The association of trees with life has continued. Even today we call needle-bearing trees that do not go through a period of dormancy *evergreens*, and California's famous coastal redwoods are known by the species name *sempervirens*, or "always living." In the Old Testament, there is a recurring reference to "groves" in the pagan culture that influenced and corrupted the Hebrews. These "groves" have been interpreted in different ways. Some think at least some of the references are to statues of gods, perhaps placed under landmark trees. Many cultures have worshipped the tree as a natural symbol of life. Assyrian reliefs make clear that culture's custom. Altars were also often placed outdoors under the belief that gods could not be confined. Placing them in groves of trees also hid the vulgarities of pagan worship from the eyes of all but the participants. Altars within such literal groves of trees is the apparent reference in both Jeremiah 17:2 and Ezekiel 20:28.

Nebuchadnezzar's dream, recorded in Daniel 4, was of a tree in the "midst of the earth" which "reached unto heaven, and the sight thereof to the end of the all the earth...." This tree gave shade and protection to the creatures of the earth and "all flesh was fed of it." Nebuchadnezzar's dream was one of himself as a tree of life. He reached as mediator from earth to heaven, as a living link between the two.



Such magnified views of monarchy were common to the ancient world. The state was represented in the person of the ruler, who was divine, or at least a mediating priest-king. Such regimes were more than statist; they were claims to messianic divinity. They desired to be “as gods, knowing good and evil” with absolute rule and armies. Any challenge to the ruler was both heresy and treason. With such men claiming to be the tree of life, it is not surprising that liberty as we understand it did not yet exist; liberty was a product of the rise of Christendom.

Nebuchadnezzar’s vision of himself as a tree of life was, however, only a dream. His own dream belied its reality, for his tree of life was shaken until its leaves fell and its fruit was scattered. Then it was cut down so that all men could see was its stump and roots, not in heaven, but “in the earth.” Nebuchadnezzar’s dream was destroyed and then he was personally humbled so that all would “know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men...” (R.J. Rushdoony, *Thy Kingdom Come* [Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, 2001], 28-32).

Were this the end of Biblical teachings on the tree of life, we would be well advised to avoid all association of trees with religious symbolism. But the image of the tree of life was, originally, a representation of God’s gift, His covenant of grace to Adam and Eve. We are also presented with the image of the tree of life in Proverbs. There we are told that wisdom is a tree of life (3:18) and that the fruit of righteousness is a tree of life (11:30). The cross of Jesus Christ has been referred to as a tree. This has little to do with its wooden composition. The cross of Jesus Christ represented both our tree of life and, in a sense, our tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Like the former, its product gives life; like the latter, it trains our understanding of good and evil. Revelation thus places the tree of life at the center of the paradise of God, the new Jerusalem (2:7). It is in the midst of the street, or community, and was “for a healing of the nations” (22:2). It was fed by the “water of life” that proceeded from the throne of God and His Lamb, Jesus Christ (22:1). God’s tree of life was a wonderful symbol of true life in His gracious salvation that He did not surrender to pagan usurpations.

## Early Christian Representation

Early Christian art self-consciously used the tree to represent life. Sometimes such art represented life immortal or life as a tree of God’s plenty. Trees were often associated with pictures of the Good Shepherd or representations of the raising of Lazarus (sometimes with the tree springing from the tomb itself). A green tree with flowers and fruit was sometimes contrasted with one that was dry and bare. (Smith and Cheetan,

eds., *A Dictionary of Christian Antiquities* [Hartford: J.B. Burr Publishing Co. (1880), 1996]).

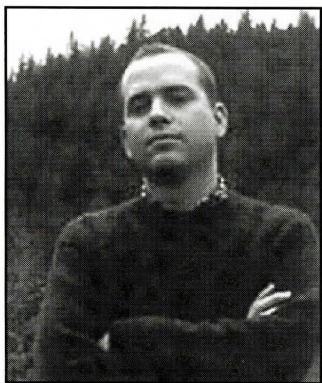
Medieval mystery plays decorated a tree to represent the paradise of Eden. These plays about the fall ended with the promise of the Messiah and were often preformed prior to the Christmas season with its stories of Bethlehem.

The tree is thus a symbol of God’s gift of life from Genesis to Revelation, from Creation to the New Jerusalem. In his sin, man has used God’s symbol of life for his own perverse purposes. The appearance of the tree in the New Jerusalem obviously means the symbol still remains acceptable to God. Certainly no remote medieval European uses of the tree were worse than those of the ancient Middle East. Though secularized, the essential meaning of the Christmas tree is still one of life in terms of the Person and work of Jesus Christ. It is decorated to represent the beauty of God’s gracious gift. Fruits were long used as decorations and represented bountiful blessings that fulfilled men’s basic needs. The star or angel atop the tree represents the miraculous nature of God’s new tree of life — Jesus Christ and His cross.

The tree cannot be rejected as a purely pagan symbol, for God does not so reject it in Scripture. It has a very direct link with God’s providential salvation message. It also has a link with very obscene pagan ritual and even the messianic views of many men, of whom Nebuchadnezzar was only one. We can give up the symbolism of the tree of life (and even wish God would not use it in John’s vision of the new Jerusalem), or we can take back the symbol for our Lord. All of Christmas has been profanely secularized, but it is not the use of the tree that is to blame. Few know its use by pagans of any era. Its long usage as a part of Christmas celebration represents the fact that past generations, following John’s Revelation, reclaimed its use. They took dominion of that symbol for Jesus Christ. The problem with our modern celebration of Christmas is not its close association with the tree of life, but its increasing separation from the new tree of life, Christ incarnate.

God redeems man and regenerates his heart to serve Him. We must then conform our thinking and our customs to His service. If we shed as unholly everything that has been used by evil men, we will be in constant retreat and surrender. We must reclaim our thoughts, our actions, our institutions, and our customs for Christ, because He is Lord of all. Rather than reject the Christmas tree for its past association with paganism, we should glorify God that it has, in the modern mind, been linked exclusively to the celebration of Christmas. Now the church’s work is to reclaim Christmas from its secularization to its true purpose, a celebration of Jesus Christ and His advent.





# Worship: New and Disapproved!

By Joel Miller

**E**very denomination and Christian tradition in America has its scare-words. Baptists start squirming the second “infant baptism” enters the conversation. Watch a scowl descend quicker than an over-inflated tech stock upon the face an Assemblies of God minister when “Calvin” comes into play. And what of us who are Calvinists? What term tyrannizes the minds of us who call ourselves Reformed? I think it might be “contemporary” or “modern.”

Don't believe me? Try walking into your average Reformed church with the suggestion of adding some “modern” music to the worship; likely, the main reason you won't be thrown out on your ear is that the elders can't find such a maneuver in the church order.

The kneejerk reaction against anything contemporary is understandable. The barrel of American Christendom spews out the bunghole with churches seemingly willing to sell their souls for one more member. The so-called “seeker-friendly” and “church-growth” movements have done more to stunt the gospel in America than anything in the last 30 years — all in the name of advancing the gospel.

Tied so tightly as almost to cut off the circulation is American churches' commitment to The Now. Being hip for seeker-friendly churches is right up there with being “non-judgmental” and accepting next to anything so long as rumps stay pew-glued. Taking a page from the gospel of Duke Ellington, church don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing. Instead of trusting God to haul in His elect, too many churches rely on entertainment and excitement (a mammoth local church here actually calls itself “*Adventure Christian Fellowship*”) and give oblation on the altar of The Latest Thing.

Reformed churches rightly recoil at the antics of the First Church of What's Happenin' Now. For too many of us, however, the eschewing of the modern is simply a reflex, and not the product of sound Biblical thinking.

Saying that something is contemporary or modern is merely a statement of chronology. Objecting to

something because it is new is like objecting to calendars because they contain next week. It's the reverse of the “chronological snobbery” C. S. Lewis warned about — now our temporal chauvinism swings toward loathing things because they are new and praising things because they are old. Such a response ignores the fact that the goodness or badness of a thing has nothing to do with when it was minted. Other standards apply.

## Style and Custom

For contemporary worship, the issues really boil down to musical style and theological content. Stylistically, music is always in flux, always developing and changing. Philosopher John Stuart Mill (silly boy) worried as a young man that the world would run out of new music because there are a limited number of notes with which to compose. As Thomas Sowell points out, though, at the time of Mill's concern, neither Brahms nor Tchaikovsky had been born — and blues and jazz were not even figments of the imagination.<sup>1</sup> While human expression is not infinitely variable, musical styles demonstrate how wide the array of innovation truly is.

Admittedly an argument from silence, notice that the Book of Psalms does not contain set tunes. *Nowhere* in Scripture does God tell us specifically how or what to play. Many Psalms do contain notes of direction (*e.g.*, the type of psalm, what instruments to play), but it's not like they come with sheet music. The melodies sung by the congregation in Israel would have been popularly known and might have varied depending on the desire of the music leader. Some had set melodies (Psalm 45 is to be played to the tune of “Lilies”), but we have no clue what these are today.

Now have a look at the blue *Psalter Hymnal*<sup>2</sup> used in many Reformed churches; none of the music was written in 1000 B.C. Instead you see that most hymns were penned in the nineteenth century — musically the products of that period and place.



Tonally, the music is clearly Western, not Eastern, and follows all the compositional rules of Western music. The Psalms, for instance, contain rests, indicated by the word “selah.” This term is not sung; rather it is a point at which the congregation shuts up. Selah indicates a pause — possibly a place to ponder what was just sung. You don’t get that with music written in the 1800s. It’s all in definite meter. If you pause, the piano player will beat you to the end of the bar, and the person in the next pew will give you a dirty look if you try resuming out of sync with the rest.

Musically Eastern, it is likely that the Hebrew Psalms were sung to melodies that used microtones, a definite abrasive on the ears of people accustomed to Western music. Normally, we define musical sounds in terms of notes and halfnotes — the whole “doe-re-me” spiel. Not so on the other side of Byzantium, where they use what Westerners call quarternotes. To the untrained ear, they just sound out of tune, but they’re not flub-ups; the tonal scale is simply different. Consequently, it might prove difficult for an American to get accustomed to singing the Psalms as they were written and played originally. The tonality and meter would throw us for a loop.

But the comparison doesn’t have to be so dramatic to demonstrate that different styles are favored more at different times. Arthur Sullivan’s music to Sabine Baring-Gould’s “Onward, Christian Soldiers” was at first frowned upon as too militant for a hymn, too unsolemn. Likewise, until Dwight Moody, waltzes were rarely if ever heard in church services. Now, Johann Strauss can be found in almost any standard hymnal.<sup>3</sup>

The way praise and worship music is played has changed radically over the years. The Reformed prejudice to look down upon music that seems new is to blink at the fact that at one time all those “timeless classics” we sing in church were wet ink on the paper of some composer and rang fresh and contemporary in the ears and hearts of parishioners.

## By What Standard?

Dismissing the notion that because something is modern it is bad for worship, the only standard of any importance has to go beyond time and place. That can only be God’s everlasting Word (this is especially refreshing to note, considering the church is global, housing multitudinous cultures and customs across millennia and not stuffed into the strictures of nineteenth-century Western hymnody).

Regarding worship, God’s Word points out several ways in which we must approach Him in praise:

- Humbly (*Ps. 10:17, 95:6; Jas. 4:10*)
- Thankfully (*Ps. 147:7; Jn. 2:9*)
- Joyfully (*Ps. 97:12; Phil. 4:4*)
- Reverently (*Ps. 96:9; Rev. 14:7, 15:4*)
- Truthfully (*Jn. 4:24*)

Playing an up-tempo, six-month-old song with a bass guitar and synthesizer does not by itself violate those standards for worship. One can worship God humbly, thankfully, joyfully, reverently, and with theological accuracy with a new song and electric guitar just as easily as with an old classic and piano. If the worship leader tries to direct the praise to his skill and not God’s bountiful grace; if the congregation is hard-hearted and not grateful to the Lord; if the people are emotionless or, worse, sour, rather than rejoicing; and if flippancy or distraction betrays a lack of reverent attention to God, then there is a problem. But those things are just as possible with an old hymnal and organist. Vainglory, ingratitude, displeasure, disrespect, and bad doctrine are not inherent to pop-style rhythms and drum kits; they are inherent to sinners — a condition shared by both hep cats and old dogs who loathe new tricks.

Does this mean that all bets are off, that the choir and pianist should be switched for any amped-up group of twitching guys with guitars and funny hair? Hardly. Saying that a current standard doesn’t cut it is not the same as saying there are no standards.

Church worship is a congregational act. We gather as believers, united in praise of our God, to humble ourselves before Him, to thank Him, to revere Him, to confess the truth of His works. This we do as a body. As such, music that interferes with those reasons for gathering should be eschewed. Music might interfere by being exceptionally novel, by utilizing tone intervals or compositional structures that are too far beyond what the congregation is accustomed to, or by simply being ill-suited for congregational involvement. But music that supports rather than detracts from worship should not be discarded simply for having a recent vintage.

## CODA

Playing contemporary worship is not whoring after the world or lurching “seeker-friendly”; it is simply pushing the musical repertoire of God’s people beyond the nineteenth century. Just as we don’t dress in the same fashions as folks of the 1800s, it is absurd to insist we never play music that was not written then as well. There is no Biblical justification for this standard. It does nothing to advance the kingdom and may in fact serve as an impediment



by reaffirming the stereotype that the Reformed are irrationally snobbish for anything antique.

Erecting nonsensical, extrabiblical barriers in the face of unbelievers is *not* how to expand the borders of Christendom. Nor is prohibiting God's people from singing His praises with modern music the proper role of elders governing a church that advances relentlessly through time and history.

While some contemporary worship may overplay its hand as "New and *Improved!*" Reformed believers should not be so quick to scrap it as "New and *Disapproved!*" Such a conclusion is not warranted by Scripture and cramps the worship of God in a box of man's own making — precisely what we should be trying to avoid.

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Sowell, *The Vision of the Anointed* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 69.

<sup>2</sup> *Psalter Hymnal* (Grand Rapids: Christian Reformed Church, 1976).

<sup>3</sup> Ronald B. Allen and Gordon Borrer, *Worship* (Portland: Multnomah, 1982), 168.

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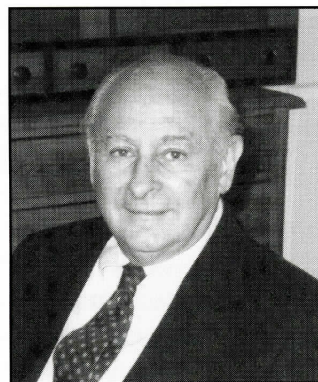
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# The American Revolution Goes On

*By Samuel L. Blumenfeld*



There is much disappointment these days among conservatives who have or haven't expected the new Bush administration and conservatives in Congress to reverse the liberal drive toward socialism and global government. The Jeffords' defection, which turned the Senate over to the Democrats, was like a punch in the stomach. This reliance on politicians to bring about a conservative millennium is not only misplaced but delusional. You have to go outside Congress and the political arena to find where the real freedom revolution is taking place: in the home school movement. There is no other movement in America that has done more to recapture the spirit of American freedom than home schooling.

Home schoolers are, without question, revolutionary. They are making a clean break with the statist institution of government education. It is government-owned and – controlled education which is the very foundation of the secular state that exerts its power by molding the minds of its youngest citizens to serve the mythical state.

The Founding Fathers never created a “state” that had certain mystical powers over its citizens. That kind of state was an idea conceived by the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1830), a pantheist, who saw the state as God on earth. The Germans have long had a rather mystical view of the state and its power over the lives of its people.

## Hegelian America

In America the Hegelian state idea, introduced in this country by Harvard intellectuals and educators, has evolved into something that simply cannot be made compatible with the American idea of government, which is well stated in our Declaration of Independence. That document tells us that the purpose of government is to secure the unalienable rights of the people, rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. This is a philosophy of government more compatible with the Bible than with Hegel. Thus, when American courts speak of a compelling state interest in education without defining the state, or what is meant by compelling,

or education, the assumption is that many Americans now regard the state as some sort of higher godlike power that must be served. The state they are talking about is the mystical Hegelian state.

What we have in America is a government, not a “state” in the Hegelian sense. We have a government run by men who must conform to a Constitution that places limits on what the government can do. There are no limits on what the Hegelian state can do, a fact tragically demonstrated during the Nazi era, when the state became a persecutor and mass murderer of its own citizens.

In addition, we have a constitutional republic, not a democracy. A democracy is simply majority rule. A republic, through its written constitution, limits what the majority can do to the minority. Representatives, elected by the citizenry, are obliged to adhere to the limits placed on them by the Constitution.

Most Americans speak of our government as a democracy. They have virtually no understanding of the profound difference between a democracy and a constitutional republic. This gross lack of understanding is the work of our statist education system, which has a vested interest in keeping Americans ignorant of the true role of limited government. The mystical “will of the people” is now what is considered to be the essence of American democracy. The “will of the people,” often invoked by liberal politicians, has become the sacred mantra of the liberal secular state, as long as the “will of the people” can be manipulated by the liberal-dominated media.

The home school revolution was started by Christians who recognized the implicit conflict that exists between Biblical religion and secular humanism. When it became obvious to them that the government schools had been thoroughly captured by the humanists, these parents had no choice but to remove their children from them. And inasmuch as many private schools have been greatly influenced by humanist philosophy, these Christian parents found it necessary to do the educating themselves. Also, many of them were strongly motivated to follow God's commandments concerning the education of children as given in Deuteronomy 6.



While religion was the primary moving force behind the early home schoolers, they were also well aware of the academic decline within the public schools, which no longer knew how to teach such basic subjects as reading or arithmetic. After all, it was in April 1983 that the National Commission on Excellence in Education issued its now historic report, stating: "If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre education performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. As it stands, we have allowed this to happen to ourselves." Eighteen years later, the public schools are probably worse than they were in 1983.

## Pioneers and Settlers

These early home schoolers were the pioneers in the movement. They were generally well-educated orthodox Christians who understood the political and cultural forces at work and were willing to take the necessary steps to guard their children against the growing moral and academic chaos in the public schools. In those days, they were a tiny minority, and they tended to keep low profiles. However, whenever they were dragged into court by local superintendents, who asserted implicitly that the children were owned by the state, Christian leaders like the late Rev. Rousas J. Rushdoony were called by the parents to defend their God-given right and their God-commanded duty to educate their children at home. It was Rev. Rushdoony's staunch Biblical defense of Christian parental responsibilities that provided moral and spiritual backbone to the Christian home school movement.

Those were the days before the creation of the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA). The pioneers, like the Founding Fathers, tended to be strong people, willing to accept the consequences of their actions, willing to fight for their right to control and minister their own children's education. The law and tradition were basically on their side. There were no federal laws forbidding home schooling. In fact, education was not even mentioned in the U.S. Constitution. Also, most state compulsory school attendance laws provided room for exemptions.

Nevertheless, here and there, local judges, ignoring the Constitution, but backed by the district's education establishment, ordered local police to drag children away from their parents in conformity with the state's supposed compelling interest in education. That's what happened in Plymouth County, Idaho, in 1985. In such cases, the public

and even the liberal media tended to sympathize with the home schoolers. News pictures of perfectly decent children being dragged away from their parents were not good public relations for the school authorities.

Some parents actually went to jail. That was the case with Sharon and Ed Pangelinan, who spent 132 days in jail in Morgan County, Alabama, in 1985, because they had decided to home school their children without the school district's approval and refused to turn their children over to the state authorities when ordered. Again, jailing Christian parents for home schooling did not make good PR for state officials.

Two years later, after the ordeal was over, Sharon Pangelinan was asked why she and her husband didn't take the children and leave Alabama. She wrote:

*That question was asked of us over and over before the trial. (And would continue to be asked during our time in jail, and even after we were released.) We answered the question the same way, over and over again. We don't want to be separated from our children at all. But if we run away, we teach them that courage has no part in liberty. If what you're doing is right, according to Scripture, then you don't run away. Fighting against oppression is indeed Scriptural, especially when it concerns the family.*

That is the kind of courage and spiritual strength that undergirded the pioneers of the home school movement. In 1983, three home schooling lawyers formed the Home School Legal Defense Association, "born out of the need to defend the growing number of home school families in each of our respective communities," writes Michael Farris, former president of the HSLDA, who is also an ordained Baptist minister. Today, thousands of home schoolers from all fifty states are members of the HSLDA, which offers legal services to home schooling families who experience legal difficulties in their communities. The HSLDA has also become a viable lobby in Congress, bringing the home school revolution into the offices of our lawmakers.

In 1999, Michael Farris and his colleagues founded Patrick Henry College, dedicated to educating young Americans in the principles of constitutional government, so that the graduates can pursue careers that honor the ideals of our Founding Fathers. And that is what is needed in government, men and women who understand the limits the Constitution places on lawmakers.

Today, the home school movement is thriving in a manner that would have been inconceivable twenty years ago. State home school organizations now have



to rent large convention centers in which to hold their annual conventions, which draw thousands of parents. What we've learned is that there is more to home schooling than merely removing one's children from the morally corrupt public schools. There is now the sense that the new family lifestyle, which is centered around home education, is highly desirable because of the positive bonding it fosters between parents and children. This is a particular blessing for the Christian family that seeks to live in conformity with Biblical values, which are readily imparted to their children.

While the early home schoolers were the pioneers, the families that followed were the settlers. They created the state organizations, support groups, magazines, books, and curricula that have evolved into what one can call the home school academic and political establishment. While they have a long way to go before they can equal the National Education Association in political clout, the exponential growth of the home school movement assures that its influence will be increasingly felt in the state legislatures and Congress of tomorrow.

## Refugees

Today's newcomers to home schooling are more like refugees, fleeing the failed government schools with their Columbines, academic confusion, moral corruption, and anti-Christian bias. The refugees eagerly seek help from the settlers who are more than happy to provide it. But we should not assume that the struggle for educational freedom is anywhere near completion. The vast majority of Christians still put their children in public schools, thus justifying their continued existence and involuntary support by the taxpayer. Also, many parents are seeking salvation in other statist programs, such as charter schools and government voucher plans. Too many parents still believe that the government should educate their children at no cost to them. Nevertheless, the home school movement as it exists today represents a triumph of parental independence and enterprise. Freedom lovers must do all in their power to support it and help it grow.

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*Samuel L. Blumenfeld has written eight books on education, including Homeschooling: A Parents' Guide to Teaching Children, How to Tutor, and Alpha-Phonics: A Primer for Beginning Readers. Dr. Blumenfeld's books are available on Amazon.com. Also, back issues of his incisive newsletter, The Blumenfeld Education Letter, are now available on line. He can be contacted at slblu@netway.com.*

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# Looking For A Few Good Men

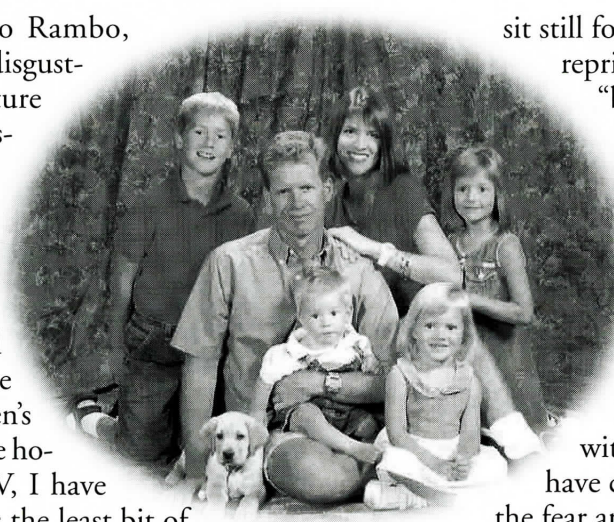
*By Mrs. Michael (Linda) Hoffman*

*Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who delights greatly in His commandments.  
His descendants will be mighty on earth; the generation of the upright will be blessed.  
Psalm 112:1-2*

**F**rom Mister Rogers to Rambo, the media displays a disgusting picture of what our culture believes a man to be. Even disguised as a purple dinosaur, our children are being filled with ideas of what a true man is. What would my sons and daughters be led to believe about men if they sat and watched TV all day? From the feminine men on the children's programs in the morning to the homosexual men on evening TV, I have yet to see a man who deserves the least bit of respect.

Sometimes I have actually been unable to notice the men on television, or even in the grocery store, or at the next table over at a restaurant. As the whining and belittling women sit beside them complaining and nagging, it's easy to miss them. It seems that the men have become the brunt of the joke, treated by the women in their lives as Neanderthals with no inkling of what's happening around them.

How can a man even begin to be respectable if he's teased, laughed at, and scolded throughout the day? Society has also found enjoyment in helping men to find their "feminine side" with the thought that our culture would somehow blend better if the strong male hormone were tamed a bit. This is evident in the classrooms where little boys are told to



sit still for hours like a little lady, and reprimanded or even drugged when "boy-energy" shows through.

I want my daughters to look forward to being given to men in marriage who have those qualities that God intended for men to have.

My prayer is that they each will find a husband who lives to glorify his God as he serves Him; who will cherish his wife

with his life; one who desires to have children and to train them in the fear and admonition of the Lord; a

strong man each will be able to respect daily as she learns more about him; a man who works hard, plays hard, and loves his family with his whole heart. I desire for each of my daughters to marry a man who won't be swayed in his beliefs and convictions, and who finds total joy as the family worships together.

As I see yet another program on television with a man showing his "feminine side," I'm thankful for two things: I can use the off button on my remote, and my daughters have a man in their lives who is the kind of man I pray they will someday marry. And for now, they call him Dad.

*Linda Hoffmann lives with her husband and four children in Bend, Oregon. In addition to her children, she submits articles to various other publications. The Hoffmann's attend Reformed Heritage Church of Bend, OR. She can be reached at Thehoffy6@aol.com.*



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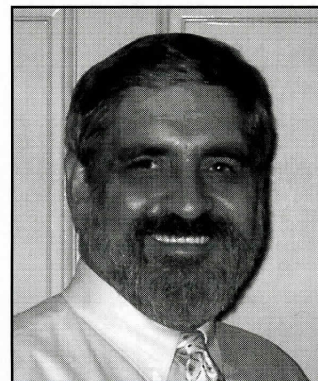
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# Economics and the Bible: The New Idolatry

*By Ian Hodge*



**I**magine what it would be like to be able to write a letter each April to the IRS thanking them for the opportunity to participate in the tax program, but this year you were not going to contribute. And the IRS sent a letter of reply saying they were sorry you were not participating, and that they would be in touch next year to see if you might be willing to pay a new round of assessments.

Voluntary taxation is most certainly not the mark of any nation in the modern era, but we can go back in history to find that taxation at one time had neither the compulsion nor the regularity that are marks of the modern nation-state. The *Magna Carta* was one effort to contain the taxing powers of the king by asserting the priority of individual property rights over the assessments of the king. There could be no confiscation of property, including money, without adequate recompense.

A broad sweep of history allows us to see a window of opportunity that brought dramatic change to some parts of the world. An all-embracing political order, control of the courts, high taxation, slavery, control of money, and human sacrifice were the hallmarks of ancient civilizations. Whether in ancient Egypt, Greece, or Rome, the ideals of economic liberty for individuals always gave way to the high demands of the political order. While commencing with high ideals of republicanism and individual freedom, the Roman world, for example, eventually abandoned these ideals as the rulers extracted more and more wealth from those they ruled.

There is one period in history, however, that remains unique. For this period brought profound changes in the areas identified above as the marks of ancient civilizations. For a time in some parts of the world, there was no all-embracing political order; courts were localized and became centers for the administration of justice rather than the enforcement of political programs; slavery, though not abolished, was certainly reduced; human sacrifice eventually disappeared; and taxation was largely voluntarily.<sup>1</sup>

In theological terms, the ancient civilizations were all marked by the political order as being the highest and all-

embracing law order. This made the political order a god, since it is clear in the Bible that it is God the Creator Who is the Source of all law and authority. Ancient Israel, therefore, stood in stark contrast to those civilizations around it. It had no political order that centralized authority in the same way ancient Persia or Egypt placed power at the top. There was no crime of treason against the political order in ancient Israel, but there was the crime of treason against God. Treason, it should be understood, helps us identify the god of any society.

It is a key function of the god of any civilization to make laws, and we need only determine the source of law to determine the god of that society. From creation to the time of Christ, all civilizations, with the exception of Israel or those around her that were influenced by the Holy Scripture, were identifiable by their idolatry: their refusal to have God, the Maker of heaven and earth, as their source of all law and authority. By having another lawmaking authority, these people were idolatrous, worshipping a false god.

The First Commandment, "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me," is thus the litmus test of orthodox Christianity and the doorway that leads to a proper understanding of the remainder of Christian doctrine. It is also the key to understanding economics and the modern world, consisting of nation-states that are identified by the marks of the ancient world: an all-embracing political order, control of the courts, involuntary taxation at exceedingly high levels, slavery (now debt slavery), control of money, and a new wave of human sacrifice.

## The Implication of Christ's Kingship

In the intervening period, something emerged from the ashes of the collapsing ancient civilizations that brought dramatic change to those who had known nothing except enforced slavery and compulsory taxation. The event that changed everything was the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy concerning the Messiah. This Messiah would be a King, a Prince, a Ruler who would establish God's standards of justice and righteousness to the extent that all the



nations of the world would eventually bow down and recognize Him as Jehovah's anointed. It was with great significance, therefore, that Pilate had nailed on the cross of Jesus the sign "The King of Jews," a point the local Jewish leaders found offensive.

But this King of Jews was not just the King of the Jews only. He was the promised Messiah, the One who would bring about the changes foreshadowed in the Old Testament for the whole world. And almost immediately we see the repercussions. Men refused to obey those in authority who demanded that they stop telling others about this Jesus. Within a short time there were many punished, some with death, for refusing to acknowledge that the political order was god, the source of law and authority. "No," said these early Christians, "we are Christians and we declare that Jesus Christ is the One Who alone has true power and authority to make laws, to delegate authority." To become a Christian is to acknowledge that Christ alone is the only God, and therefore the true source of power and authority. "It is idolatry," they said, "to acknowledge any other power with these attributes." "Besides," they argued, "the political order is made up of mere mortals, and what is mortal, part of the created order, cannot take on the attributes of Divinity, one of which is possessing the true prerogatives of law and authority, the essence of sovereignty."

A similar stand had been taken centuries earlier by some captive Israelites. They refused to acknowledge the authority of the political order and were subsequently put into a fiery furnace for their refusal to acknowledge the self-proclaimed power of the political order. A little later, another Israelite in captivity refused to obey a 30-day ban on praying to any god other than the local ruler for the same reason: It is God alone Who makes rules, and when the political order makes rules contrary to God's rules, then it is necessary to disobey the political order. Ancient Israel didn't need any political order to tell it what to do. It had the Torah, God's rules. And it had many prophets constantly reminding it that it had departed from God's Torah and played the harlot with other gods. In short, it had rejected God's rules in order to adopt someone else's rules. This is the essence and hallmark of idolatry, or, in the words of Scripture, spiritual harlotry.

The early Christians, armed with the same Torah, the same prophets reminding them of their duty, also imbued with the new hope of the risen Christ and the empowering of the Holy Spirit, set about to turn the world upside down. And they did this by declaring that there was another authority in heaven and earth that could make law. And since it was always a function of the lawmaker to save the world from its problems, they declared at the same time there was no other way that men and women

might be saved except by this Person, Jesus. Jesus Christ, they affirmed, is both Lord and Savior.

No wonder the Christians were not welcome in the Roman world. They were, in reality, treasonous to the political order. Another authority demanded and obtained their allegiance, and while at times they might appear to accept the rulings of the political order, they would disobey the political order when so required.

This is the gospel that became increasingly evident in the Roman world. The Roman solution to its problems was to centralize power in the political order, eventually in the Caesar. In order to finance its programs, it had to resort to massive taxation. When the people failed to pay the taxes — which was predictable since the taxes were based on the needs of the government rather than the capacity to pay — the only course of action was to debase the currency. This, in turn, meant government workers, especially the military, were paid in devalued money. Rome lost the support of its soldiers and therefore its capacity to rule. The Barbarians, offering lower taxes, were made welcome.

## After the Fall of Rome

The implementation of Christianity following the collapse of Rome was a remarkable event. The collapse of the Roman world offered people an opportunity for another system of government. Christianity, the City of God, on the ascendancy, was able to provide an alternative to the ancient nation-states, the City of Man. It had no need of a centralized political order, for it was God's prerogative to govern and rule His world. He ruled from heaven and had no need of high taxes, slaves, or human sacrifice. Centralized government was abolished. Taxation became local and, when paid, carried with it reciprocal duties and obligations between rulers and citizens. Justice also became a local affair, and it was rare for a king of the time to have anywhere near the power of the current politicians. They could not tax unless the people, often through their representatives, consented. Taxation, when implemented, was rarely permanent. Slavery and human sacrifice were severely restricted or abolished. Money was stabilized and, in the East, provided economic stability for 1,000 years.

The basis for all this was the Bible, and this is where the people obtained their ideas to rebuild civilization as Rome fell to the invaders. The establishment of a severely limited political order, however, meant that individuals could now have property rights, which form the basis for all economic thought, as von Mises argued so well.<sup>2</sup> If the political order is to have all authority, it must be able to overrule the individual's decisions concerning possessions — *including money!* Now, with property



rights in place, people could reap the rewards of their productive endeavours.<sup>3</sup>

The practical results of this were outstanding. Improvements in agriculture provided improved productivity and a better diet. The water mill, and later the windmill, replaced human labor and gave a considerable increase in productivity. The combination of rotary and reciprocal motion led to the grindstone, grinding tools for wheat, and eventually the motorcar of the modern era. Man's first flight was recorded in the eleventh century, and the principles of flight established at that time. Improvements in medicine, including the use of antiseptics, gave people improved health and longer life.<sup>4</sup>

Taxation, as indicated above, was difficult to implement, as King John found in 1215. Permanent taxation was not re-established in the West until the fifteenth century with the rise of standing armies in France,<sup>5</sup> which helps explain the American hostility to standing armies in its War of Independence with Britain.

Along with the development of standing armies and permanent taxation also came the crime of treason, a Roman concept, not a Biblical one.<sup>6</sup> That, combined with control of the courts, re-established the political order as the new lawmaker, the new god, replacing the God of Christianity.<sup>7</sup> One ingredient was still missing, and that was control of money; and it took a few more centuries before the courts allowed the politicians to abolish property rights in money, severed money from its commodity basis, turned promissory notes into money by an act of parliament, and established fractional reserve banking to allow for the expansion of the money supply without resorting to the printing press.<sup>8</sup>

The ancient world had returned with all its attending characteristics. The Reformation, an attempt to turn back the clock, was too narrowly focused on ecclesiastical reform to notice the real problem: the establishment of the nation-state with the political order as the new god of society, replacing the Christian God as the source of all law and authority. Since this new god was human, it needed resources and power to implement its agenda. The result has been ever-increasing taxation, the gradual abandonment of property rights in most areas, and so many laws that no one can keep abreast of them.

The modern boundaries of the nation-states do no more than declare the taxing jurisdictions of the authorities. In return, the people are offered varying levels of defense in the case of military attack, but the price they pay for this is enormous. The boundaries also are used for the establishment of monetary and fiscal policy as well as the administration of public justice and control of the courts. Slavery,

abolished so well after the collapse of Rome, at least in some parts of the world, has returned as financial slavery through debt, and human sacrifice has emerged in the form of abortion. Death of the unborn is used to allow people to pursue what suits their fancy without the burden of children while debt is the mechanism used to finance heaven on earth at the expense of the future.

## Christian Economics

Any reform of economics from a Christian perspective, therefore, must deal with the reality of the nation-state as the true opponent of the Triune God of the Bible. A new Reformation is needed, one that will dismantle the political order and return it to its proper functions. This will require men and women of character and integrity, motivated by a determination to see the kingdom of God triumph on earth as it is in heaven. The result will be a very, very limited political order, a return of the courts to the local community, the abolition of permanent taxation and the return of voluntary taxation, the abolition of fractional reserve banking, the reestablishment of commodity-based money, the abolition of slavery in all forms, including financial, and a return to personal property rights. And that is just the beginning!

That such a reform has started is evident. Parents have been reclaiming their children from the clutches of the political order's educational arm. Churches are refusing to be licensed. One church has even refused to withhold taxes from its employees, refusing to acknowledge the political order's jurisdiction in these matters. Some judges in the United States have even had the audacity to hang the Ten Commandments in their courtrooms, declaring that ultimately it is God Who sets the standards of justice, not the President or Congress, Prime Minister or Parliament. This is the ultimate act of treason in the modern world: to say that our allegiance belongs to another person or entity rather than the nation in which we live.

Economic reform must begin, therefore, with the First Commandment; "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me." Without a return to this proposition there is no solution to the world's problems that, at heart, are a refusal to acknowledge God as the Creator and Source of all life, and therefore the One Who alone is the rightful Lawmaker. And He just happens to have a different way of looking at things than the political rulers past and present.

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, William Carroll Bark, *Origins of the Medieval World* (Stanford, 1958).

<sup>2</sup> Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Chicago, 1966).



<sup>3</sup> Harold J. Berman, *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge, MA, 1983), 322f.

<sup>4</sup> See Lynn White, Jr., *Medieval Technology and Social Change* (Oxford, 1962). I have an expansion of these points in my book *Making Sense of Your Dollars: A Biblical Approach to Wealth* (Vallecito, 1995), Ch. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Hans Delbrück, *History of the Art of War*, Vol. 3 *Medieval Warfare*, trans. Walter J. Renfro, Jr. (Lincoln, NE, 1982), 510.

<sup>6</sup> J.G. Bellamy, *The Law of Treason in England in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1970). See Ch. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph R. Strayer, *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State* (Princeton, 1970).

<sup>8</sup> Mark Skousen, *Economics of a Pure Gold Standard* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Auburn, 1988), 21ff.

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# What Is Islam?

*By Christine Schirrmacher*



**T**he term “Islam” means “submission,” “surrender,” or “dedication” to God. A Moslem is somebody who submits to God and obeys the obligatory Islamic laws and commands. Moslems claim that the term *Islām* has the same roots as *salām* in Arabic (the letters s-l-m), and *salām* means peace, well-being, or salvation. As to the Moslems’ opinion, the Koran has been sent down as an exact copy of the original heavenly revelation. Moslems believe that the angel Gabriel transferred the contents of the Koran to Muhammad. Therefore, the whole text of the Koran has supreme authority. In the Moslems’ opinion, Muhammad is the last prophet in history as well as the most important one, the follower of Adam, Abraham, Moses, and David who was already announced by Jesus Christ. In the Moslems’ eyes, Muhammad (his name means “the praised one”) was God’s messenger, but only a human being. Long after Muhammad’s death in 632 A.D., Moslem theologians developed the doctrine of all prophets of history having been without sin (including Muhammad), although the Koran in more than one instance refers to sins all prophets have committed (with the exception of Jesus). Also Muhammad asked God for forgiveness (Muhammad in surah 110:3 and 48:2; Adam in 7:23; Noah in 11:47; Abraham in 14:41; Moses in 28:16; David in 38:24). This dogma of all prophets being sinless is commonly accepted in today’s Moslem theology.

## The Life of Muhammad

Concerning Muhammad’s life, only very few historically reliable facts have been transferred to us. He was born around 570 A.D. at Mecca, a city of the Arabian Peninsula. He belonged to the tribe of the Quraish and to the lineage of the Banu Hashim. Muhammad became an orphan at the early age of six and was raised by his grandfather, Abd al-Muttalib. Abd al-Muttalib died only a few years later and Muhammad came to live with his uncle Abu Talib.

In the sixth century A. D., the Bedouin tribes of Arabia worshipped a number of gods, deities, and demons. Stones, trees, and fountains were considered to

be the home of gods and deities. Sacrifices and offerings were made on a regular basis. Animals were slaughtered at those holy places and, when the animals’ blood was flowing over the stone, people believed they received forgiveness. At least some of the Arabian tribes worshipped a supreme god, a creator, whose name is believed to have been “the god” or “the goddess” (in Arabic: *al-ilāh* or *al-lāh* = “the god,” “the divinity”).

At about the age of twenty-five, Muhammad became husband of Hadīja bint Huwaylid, a forty-year old trader’s widow. One can rightly say, that Hadīja was Muhammad’s first convert who accepted the new faith of Islam. She did not agree with other people’s opinion who concluded that Muhammad was obsessed by evil spirits or demons. In the beginning, it is said that this was Muhammad’s own perception of what had happened. Hadīja encouraged her husband in the belief that his feelings and strong impressions, which he experienced while meditating in the cave of Hīra, were divine messages. She believed Muhammad should preach and proclaim what God had told him to preach and exhort his fellow countrymen to obey and repent. Muhammad’s message is said to be a warning that the Last Judgement is near to come. Later on — as the Koran and Moslem tradition tell us — Muhammad himself came to the conclusion that he had received a message from God through the angel Gabriel and had been chosen by God to be His prophet. Muhammad from now on should warn his people and present God’s revelation to the Arab nation: “Qara’a” in Arabic means “to read” or “to recite,” so “Koran” is the message being presented or recited. Muhammad in his early messages concentrated on two main issues:

- There is only one almighty God, Creator of heaven and earth.
- Repent and submit to God in order to avoid the threatening judgment.

Moslems believe that Muhammad, until his death in 632 A. D., received many more revelations from



God. It was only many years after Muhammad's death that all texts which were believed to be his "revelations" were summarized and perceived to be the Koran text with 114 surahs (chapters). These 114 surahs were put in a row according to their length. For this reason, we find the longest surahs at the beginning of the Koran and the shortest at its end.

For Moslems the Koran is God's own word, sent down in verbal inspiration, authoritative for all eternity. In the same way Moslem tradition (*hadith*) — stories of what Muhammad and his closest followers had said and decided to do in certain situations — is considered to have the same authority from God as the text of the Koran itself. The whole body of tradition, which Moslems consider to be true traditions, are put together in six extensive *hadith*-collections. Moslem traditions in combination with practices of folk Islam frequently exercise more influence on a Moslem's daily life than does the Koran itself.

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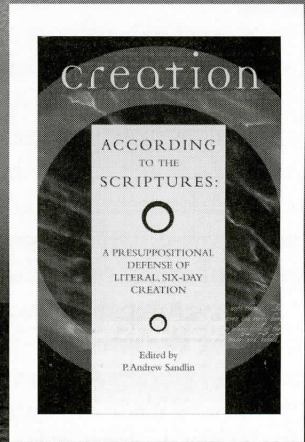


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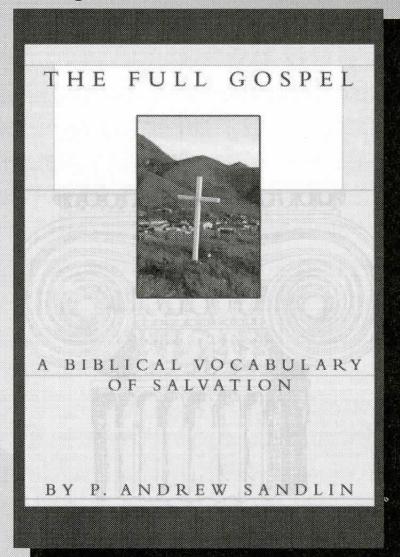


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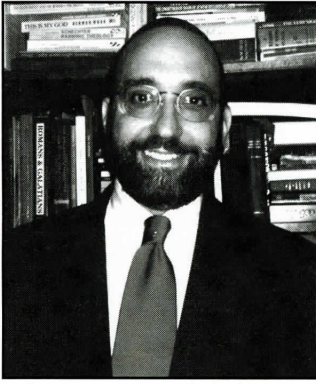
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# Il Fascino di Roma

(The Allure of Rome)

By Rev. Steve M. Schlissel

**I**n 1894, the perspicacious prophet of the Confederacy, Robert Lewis Dabney, aimed his x-ray vision at a subject which troubled him deeply: the defection of large numbers of Protestants to Rome. His essay, “The Attractions of Popery,” which appeared in the April issue of *The Presbyterian Quarterly*, made it clear he was no friend of the trend. Dabney regarded “the popish system of ritual and doctrine” to be “the most skillful and pernicious system of error which the world has ever known.”

Yet in setting about to explain why Protestants were becoming Romanists — a trend he predicted would grow — Dabney at times sounded like an apologist for Rome. This is because his Presbyterian convictions were so firmly rooted, he enjoyed the luxury of giving full credit to all the advantages of his opponent. A review of Dabney’s insights concerning Rome’s allure to Protestants has become, if anything, more relevant as we witness in our own time what seems to be an increase in defections from truth to error.

## Dabney on Rome

1. Of the important advantages which Dabney saw Rome enjoying over “half-corrupted Protestantism” in America, the list-topper was their resistance to Jacobinism, *aka* egalitarianism, what van Prinsterer called “the Revolution.” In fact, Dabney was van Prinsterer’s transatlantic brother-in-arms, a lonely voice in warning that “democratic” principles were merely unbelief dressed to kill. “Jacobinism taught the liberty of license — every man’s natural right to indulge his own absolute will; and it set up this fiendish caricature as the object of sacred worship for mankind.” (Compare the twentieth-century mantra of “making the world safe,” not for the gospel, but “for democracy.”)

As egalitarianism had begun to “bear its natural fruits of license, insubordination, communism and anarchy...this bastard democratic Protestantism [did] not know how to rebuke them. It has recognized the parents; how can it consistently condemn the children?” Against this, Rome held herself forth as “the stable advocate of obedience, order and permanent authority throughout the ages.”

2. Dabney admitted what many Protestants still fear to admit: that the Protestant assertion of liberty of conscience had run amok and become innumerable assertions of true, though contradictory, private judgments. “Rationalistic and skeptical Protestantism now claims, instead of that righteous liberty, license to dogmatize at the bidding of every caprice, every impulse of vanity, every false philosophy.... The result has been a diversity and confusion of pretended creeds and theologies among nominal Protestants which perplexes and frightens sincere, but timid, minds.”

Against this creedal chaos, Rome could come forward to say, “You see what Protestantism leads to? We told you so! Come back to the foundation where infallibility extends from Scripture to history!” When an inquirer decides to be a Roman Catholic, his creedal choices have been reduced. When he decides to become a Protestant, his creedal troubles have just begun.

3. Against the growing theological liberalism of the nineteenth century, Rome had remained quite stable. While European and American Protestants were rejecting the inspiration of Scripture, vicarious atonement, the Trinity, and even the idea of the supernatural, Rome maintained all these.

4. The godliness which had been “the best argument” for the Protestant creed was ceasing. “The wealth begotten by her very virtues of industry, thrift and probity [had] debauched many of her children. ‘Jeshurun has waxen fat, and kicked.’” The warnings of Deuteronomy 8 had begun to fall on deaf ears as Protestant America prospered, and the moral decline had begun in earnest. The attraction of godliness was withering.

5. As church discipline was disappearing from Protestant churches, the confessional, for all its abuses and despite its invitation to spiritual tyranny, nevertheless remained “a strong organ of church discipline, and is employed as such in every Romish chapel.”

6. Rather than the holiness of its members, American Protestantism — under the sway of revivalism which relied “upon all species of vulgar claptrap and sensational artifice...instead of the pure word and spirit of God” — became obsessed with



the *number* of its members. Thus, revivalism, just as is the case with its modern daughter-movement called “church growth,” succeeded in destroying churches by substituting body-count for holiness. Scores of thousands of dead souls were stuffed, by trick and trade, into the churches. “Meantime, Rome gets up no spurious revivals; she works her system with the steadiness and perseverance which used to characterize pastoral effort and family religion among Presbyterians.”

7. This led to a very stark contrast between the character of the Romish service — which appeared sober and reverent — and the character of the American Protestant service, which was often flip-pant, arrogant, proud, and cheap, like a New Orleans whore. This contrast has accelerated over the last 107 years: Rome’s attraction on this score alone is proving irresistible to multitudes. Rather than the beauty of order, God is mocked in American evangelical (and many Reformed!) churches, where every innovation is introduced in an effort to make worship into a live television event, in order to gain audience share. It is nothing less than organized blasphemy. Who can wonder over a movement toward Rome in such an environment?

8. While much could be said against the rote prayers of the papists, the rote prayer of Rome beats the “no prayer” of lapsed Protestantism. While Rome may celebrate too many days, Dabney gave them an advantage over Protestants who did not honor even the Lord’s Day. It’s bad to adore Mary, but it’s worse to adore nothing but self. “The Romanist’s machine prayers and vain repetitions have, at least, this tendency, to sustain in the soul some slight habit of religious reverence, and this is better than mere license of life.”

9. Dabney saw Rome’s insistence upon religious schools, over against secularized state education, as a strong advantage for the pope. By embracing public schools, the “bulk of Protestants in the United States have betrayed themselves...to an attitude concerning the rearing of youth which must ever be preposterous and untenable for sincere Christians,” which must regard secular education as thoroughly wicked and destructive. Had “the statesmen and divines of the Reformation, the Luthers, Calvins, Knoxes, Winthrops, and Mathers...been asked, What think you of a theory of education which should train the understanding without instructing the religious conscience; which should teach young immortal spirits anything and everything except God; which should thus secularize education, a function essentially spiritual, and should take this parental task from the fathers and mothers, on whom God imposed it, to confer it on the earthly organism, expressly secular

and godless? they would have answered with one voice, It is pagan, utterly damnable.”

Against the trend to secularize education, “the chief, the only organized protest heard in America [came] from the Romish Church.” American Protestants who groveled before the state while insisting they were sons of the Reformers, took aim against Rome, which ironically stood alone in being loyal to the very principles of the Reformers! Advantage: Rome.

10. Dabney admitted Rome erred in making marriage a sacrament, but recognized her superiority in maintaining it as a divinely ordered and religious institution, whereas “Protestant laws and debauched Protestant thought tend all over America to degrade it to a mere civil contract.” Compare the ease of divorce in the respective camps.

11. Protestantism increasingly favored the mindset that would limit family size, even to the employment of intrusive measures, while “Romish pastors [stood] almost alone in teaching their people the enormous criminality of those nameless sins against posterity at which fashionable Protestantism connives.... Their houses are peopled with children, while the homes of rich Protestants are too elegant and luxurious for such nuisances.”

Dabney went on to examine other attractions and advantages of Rome, not restricting himself to the favors granted by an increasingly compromising and effete Protestantism. The most dangerous of these may be the human “craving for a more spectacular and ritualistic worship,” a danger which is related to, but not identical with, the entertainment-orientation of modern evangelical “worship.” The latter is merely vapid — it has nothing, offers nothing, yields nothing. The former can be even more deadly because more deceptive.

## The Supper vs. the Word

We see this danger already in the increasing number of communions which are seeking to retool the service of worship so as to find its climax in the Supper, rather than in the Word. Even weekly communionists should regard the Supper as a seal to the Word rather than the climax to the service. For many this has become the first step to a greater reliance on symbolic worship over verbal worship.

The danger here is double: while the lust for ritual *is* distinct from the mere show-business silliness of evangelicalism, both are operating in a post-verbal culture, thus attaining a synergy which threatens to rock whatever remains of soundness, sobriety, and beauty in American, *i.e.*, Western, Christian worship. For we have already produced two television generations that cherish image far above word. And we are seeing the evil fruits which come from peoples not disciplined in “word skills” — listening, reading,



speaking, singing, writing. Kiddie church and ten-minute sermons are only the beginnings of the accommodations to be made. The last accommodation is a move to Rome.

For Westerners are now blithely borne about by image rather than argument. When they tire of the banality of modern evangelicalism, North Americans will become the ripest of prey for Romish ritualism. "Rome provides for that tendency in a way the most adroit possible, for an age nominally Christian but practically unbelieving." Robes, candles, colors, scents, sounds, sight, pomp, ceremony! All this with no spiritual demand. The combination will prove irresistible to a starved Protestantism.

Is there anything that can be done? Yes. And the answer, for those in the Continental Reformed tradition is, interestingly, very little. For the astute reader will have recognized that the grace of God has shielded confessionally *Reformed* churches (Peter Kreeft's crossover, after all, marks an exception and not a trend) from most of the ills which made American Presbyterianism so vulnerable. Though we seem intent, in many quarters, to follow them, we need not. What we need to do — what we must do — is come to a full recognition of the Biblical heritage which has, God be praised, protected us.

Against egalitarianism we have answered, "Covenant." Against private judgments gone crazy we have held our confessions. We have maintained a high view of Scripture and doctrine, of godliness and discipline, of sobriety in worship. We have believed and practiced family devotions, honored the Lord's Day, insisted upon the necessity of Christian education. We have affirmed the honorableness of marriage, and frowned deeply on divorce. And we have been somewhat peculiar in Protestant-land because of the normalcy of large families among us.

Now, only a Pollyanna would fail to admit that all of these things are jeopardized in our day, more or less. What we must be careful not to do is innovate, to be lead astray by the ephemeral. On the other hand, we must not vegetate. We must continually abide in God's Word as we grow in all its implications. But it would be ingratitude of the rankest sort if we failed to recognize *that* God has graciously and largely preserved us from the attractions of popery; and it would be folly if we failed to recognize *how* He did it: by the allure of Himself and His Truth. It abideth still.

*Steve Schlissel has been pastor of Messiah's Congregation in Brooklyn, NY since 1979. He serves as the Overseer of Urban Nations (a mission to the world in a single city) and is the Director of Meantime Ministries (an outreach to women who were sexually abused as children). Steve lives with his wife of 27 years, Jeanne, and their five children. He can be reached at [steve@schlissel.com](mailto:steve@schlissel.com).*

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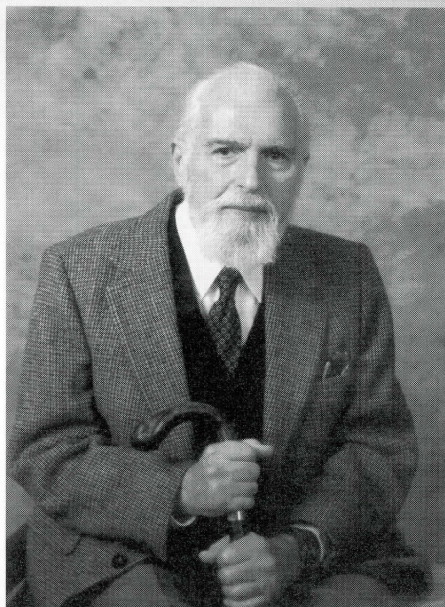
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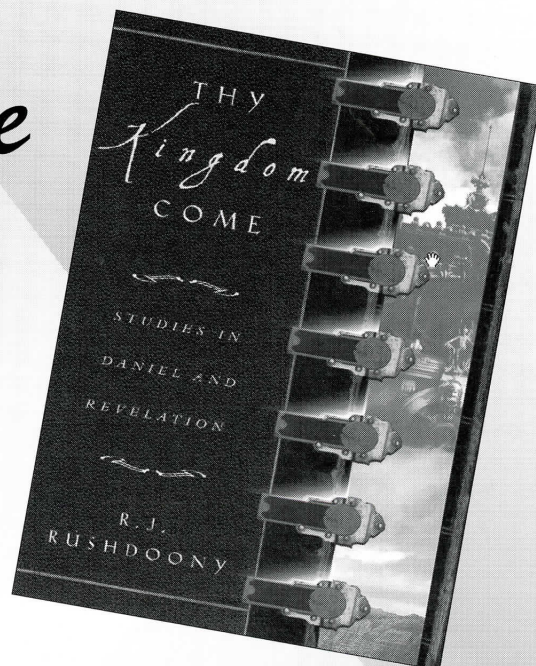
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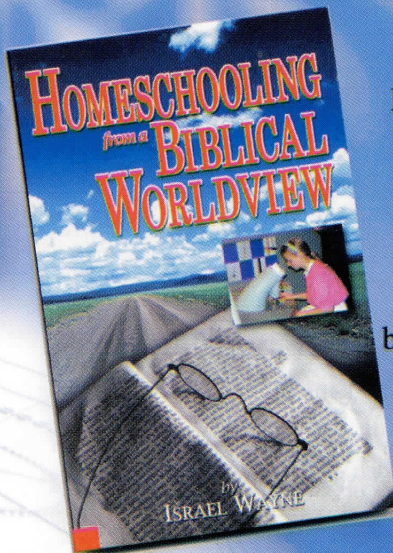
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