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A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

Renaissance and Reformation¹

DAVID STREATER

Introduction

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. (Hebrews 11, 8–10)²

The Writer to the Hebrews in those verses, in describing Abraham's call by God to leave his home city of Ur of the Chaldees and to go to a land which God would show him, is setting out the familiar theme of the Old and the New Testaments of the Exodus of the pilgrim people of God. And that Exodus inevitably leads to hostility and conflict. Alan Stibbs writes:

In the Christian Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments Abraham is a character of unique and outstanding importance. In the story which the Bible records, God's choice and call of Abraham mark the beginning of His special dealings with men after man's fall into sin; a beginning which was consummated in Abraham's descendants, his 'seed' or his 'posterity'. This consummation is seen first, in the emergence of the Israelites as God's chosen people, and finally, in the coming of Christ as the Saviour of the World.³

From this history, two inter-relating facts emerge which are significant for us. The first is that God, having chosen Abraham, called him to leave the civilized and sophisticated city of Ur of the Chaldees, which was highly idolatrous. But secondly, God called Abraham to go to a city which was his by promise and that means that he had left Ur, a symbol of the World in opposition to God and therefore the city of man, doomed to despair, disappointment, disillusion and destruction in order to go to the city founded by God which is eternal. Abraham's experience is that of all the people of God, for Abraham is the 'father of the faithful'.

The title of our Conference, 'The Tale of Two Cities', was borrowed unashamedly from Charles Dickens and this should be acknowledged immediately. It was borrowed because it is particularly and peculiarly apt to describe the struggle, not between the unbelieving world in rebellion outside the Church of God, but rather the struggle with the world in the Church itself. Alan Stibbs again wrote these perceptive words regarding

Abraham's story concerning the enmity between Ishmael and Isaac:

Finally, knowing what we do from the biblical record of the subsequent history of Hagar's son, Ishmael, and his descendants, we cannot shut our eyes to the sobering fact that Abraham's one wrong step had far-reaching evil effects. It introduced permanent and persistent features of discord, enmity and strife into Abraham's household, and among his descendants. What is more, in his Epistle to the Galatians, St. Paul recognises that, in principle, the same kind of strife is still with us in Christian churches and for the same reason. 'But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now'.⁴

Martin Luther writing upon this verse from Galatians 4:29, comments:

Whosoever are born and live in Christ, and rejoice in this birth and inheritance of God have Ishmael for their enemy and persecutor. This we learn at this day by experience . . . This persecution always remaineth in the Church, especially when the doctrine of the gospel flourisheth.⁵

The full history of the two cities is written large in the Old Testament, where Israel's constant and continuing disobedience eventually led the majority of the Jewish people to reject the Messiah. It was the remnant which remained faithful looking for the 'consolation of Israel'. With the coming of the Holy Spirit based on the finished work of Christ in His obedience to death on the Cross and His resurrection and ascension, the Church takes on its international and world-wide rôle.

But once again it is a fact that the true is ever mixed with the false. Simon Magus, Ananias and Sapphira, Alexander the coppersmith, Diotrephes and Demas gave themselves away by their actions, so that we can see that in the midst of the professing Church there are those who are false. And the false ever seek to take over the Church. Rushdoony says trenchantly in his commentary on Revelation:

. . . false religion which serves human culture and whose Messiah is human culture rather than Jesus Christ. It is false religion whose kingdom is this world, and whose salvation is secular and social. It appears to the world like a lamb, like a Christian church, but its voice is the voice of the dragon, of Satan . . . The false Christianity sees as its enemy all true Christianity and seeks to force its conformity to a man-centred doctrine, to a faith centred on the fulfilment of Adam's ideal, the self-deification of man, on all men . . . Those who refuse to participate in the worship of man, . . . are increasingly branded as aliens.⁶

The tale of two cities is therefore the struggle between the true and the false, between truth and error, and between Christ and his chosen seed and the seed of his serpent. The history of the Church is the story of that continuing struggle. The outcome is sure because of the victory of Christ at Calvary, confirmed by the resurrection, but the conflict is real, not imagi-

nary, and there will be many casualties.

Thus the idea of the papers is to draw out by comparison and contrast, the twin movements in the Church of Christ and to see some of the conflicts, victories and defeats as God's purpose is worked out in the history of the Church in the World. It is clear that only the Lord knows the precise details of all the conflicts. However, we have selected certain areas in chronological order to demonstrate historically what has happened so that we might learn from the past, and so that we shall not be overcome by surprise that we are in the midst of spiritual warfare.

1. The Biblical View of History

It will be apparent already that the view that we are propounding is based on the belief that the God with whom we are dealing is the Unique Triune God who has spoken in the Christian Scriptures. Rushdoony writes in his commentary on the Book of Daniel:

The offence of Daniel . . . is the offence of all Scripture for here are concentrated basic elements of biblical faith in sharp and compelling terms that admit of no poetic reading but require with a harsh urgency, a submission [to God] intolerable to autonomous man.⁷

Rushdoony goes on to list four areas of conflict. The first is the biblical idea that God is the Sovereign Lord, and by that he means controlling all events in heaven and earth. Because this is so liable to be misunderstood, we quote from the Westminster Confession of Faith's balanced comment at this point:

God from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.⁸

The second area of controversy, which arises logically from the first, is the fact of predictive and fulfilled prophecy. It is clear that if God does control all events in heaven and earth then prophecy in its foretelling mode is neither impossible, nor even improbable. The third area is the truth of miracles by the power of God, and the fourth, the total providence and government of God over creation.

To simplify these points, we can say that because God is the Unique and Sovereign God, he is working all things towards the final consummation when the Lord Jesus Christ returns in glory to judge the living and the dead, and to usher in the new heavens and the new earth of righteousness. For this eschatological event, the true Church waits, occupying until He comes.

But modern man assumes that the universe can be explained by the for-

mula of the impersonal multiplied by indefinite amounts of time, multiplied by random choice. In this, there is no point to which all creation is moving for the present gropes blindly out of the past, without direction for the future. Little wonder that modern philosophy is the philosophy of despair.

By contrast, Nathan R. Wood writes in the *Mystery of the Universe*:

The present comes out of the invisible future. The present perpetually and ever newly embodies the future in visible, audible and livable form and returns again into invisible time in the past.⁹

The past, especially that which is recorded for us in Holy Scripture, is there to influence us in the present, and to guide us in the unknown future. Man is not a stranded alien in a hostile universe with only an evolving God trapped by time and chance. There is a biblical philosophy of hope. History has direction under God and moves to its climax in Christ.

2. The Decline of the Middle Ages

With the biblical view of history and the warning from the Scriptures of conflict, we turn to illustrate from the history of the church the struggle between truth and error, and the fact that the visible church has often striven for the city of man rather than the city of God.

Augustine of Hippo was probably the greatest Christian theologian and philosopher of the early centuries. His works and influence are too wide to summarize, but it would be entirely correct to say that Augustine taught that it was necessary to believe the Holy Scriptures in order to arrive at truth. His understanding was founded on the biblical principles of the Creation-Fall-Re-creation. That there were elements of pagan philosophy remaining in his thought is no doubt true but they were there by default rather than by conscious choice.

Augustine died about the same time as Rome collapsed in the fifth century, Western Europe entered the period of the Dark Ages. The invasions of the Teutonic barbarians brought a time of social, political and intellectual turmoil. What learning was left remained in the Church, especially the Benedictine order. In the monasteries, the old manuscripts were copied and through their efforts, the bible was preserved. However, Schaeffer comments:

. . . the pristine Christianity set forth in the New Testament gradually became distorted. A humanistic element was added. Increasingly, the authority of the Church took precedence over the teaching of the Bible. And there was an ever-growing emphasis on salvation as resting on man's meriting the merit of Christ, instead of on Christ's work alone . . . the humanistic elements were . . . man taking to himself that which belonged to God.¹⁰

This declension can be traced in the attitude of Christians to the pagan

classical authors. The question of whether or not these authors should be read and used was answered differently by the various fathers of the church. Tertullian (d. 240) and Cyprian (d. 258) strongly disapproved of their use. Ambrose (d. 397), Jerome (d. 419) and as we have seen, Augustine (d. 430) all utilized classical learning, combining it with a robust biblical faith. As the understanding and correct interpretation of the Scriptures declined, so the use of the pagan philosophers became increasingly widespread.

i) The Rise of Scholasticism

Scholasticism was the name given to a revival of learning in the Church after the period of the Dark Ages. Simply put, it was the 'application of reason to theology in order to systematise and prove existing traditional beliefs'.¹¹ It began with the return of learning in the time of Charlemagne (d. 814) although there was little original work at this time. The problem was not the use of learning but a wrong method which gradually prevailed.

Anselm

We can see in Anselm (d. 1109), who is often described as the 'father of scholasticism' the better features of learning. His very logical mind, based on Platonic principles (Plato d. circa BC 347) as an extreme 'realist' is clearly seen in his work *Cur Deus Homo*. In this work, Anselm dismissed the current theological notion that Christ by his sacrifice paid a ransom to the devil and that the work of Christ was satisfaction to the injured Holiness of God. Anselm's motivation can be summed up in the Latin maxim *Credo ut intelligam* [I believe in order that I might understand].

Anselm laid down the guide-lines for Scholasticism and there is little doubt that he was motivated by the highest principles. Indeed, it could be argued that such guide-lines could be traced back to Augustine of Hippo who believed that *fides quaerit intellectum* [faith seeks understanding].

Abelard

Peter Abelard (d. 1142) by contrast had a brilliant mind, but was not well-balanced biblically. His motivation was that nothing should be believed before it was first understood: *nihil credendum nisi prius intellectum*. In this his view of reason over-rode the mystery of revelation to the point of rationalism. The logical outcome of this view would be to call into question the doctrine of the Trinity, to deny original sin, and to reject the idea of the atonement as being satisfaction to God for sin.

His view of the Trinity was that God manifested Himself in different ways, the Father in creation, the Son in salvation and the Spirit in sanctification. He opposed Augustine's view of original sin and held a view closer to the Pelagians; the idea of the atonement was that it was an example of God's love only. This made it entirely subjective. That there is a subjective element should not be denied, but the objective nature of the atonement is

clearly taught in Scripture. In his theology, Abelard demonstrates some of the worst features of rationalism.

Aquinas

By the end of the twelfth century, the first period of Scholasticism was passing. The greater part of Aristotle's works (d. BC 322) was now available to Western scholars. The 'golden age' of Scholasticism was beginning and reached its zenith in Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274). Aquinas was a Dominican. He had studied at the Universities of Paris and Naples and was the outstanding theologian of his time. Aquinas' thought is still dominant today in the Roman Catholic Church. Schaeffer writes of him:

Aquinas' . . . view of man demands our attention. Aquinas held that man had revolted against God and thus was fallen, but Aquinas had an incomplete view of the Fall. He thought that the Fall did not affect man as a whole but only in part. In his view the will was fallen or corrupted but the intellect was not affected. Thus people could rely on their own human wisdom, and this meant people were free to mix the teachings of the bible within the teachings of the non-Christian philosophers.¹²

And Aquinas relied very heavily on Aristotle's work, indeed, he was instrumental in overcoming a papal ban by Urban IV on this Greek philosopher. Aristotle, a pupil of Plato, took his starting point from the 'particulars' whereas Plato's position was the 'absolutes'. In simple terms, Plato began with the eternal idea, whereas Aristotle commenced with the temporal things around us.

The problem of the two pagan philosophers was that their understanding arose from their reason, and not from revelation. The two-fold aspect of the eternal on the one hand, and the temporal on the other cannot be synthesized philosophically by human reason. From the biblical perspective, that is God's revelation, the problem is solved in the transcendence and the immanence of the Triune God who is both a Unity and also a Diversity. This means that the creation is real and has real meaning because it focuses in the created will of the eternal God with its real absolutes.

Aquinas' influence, with his emphasis on Aristotle's pagan philosophy, distorted biblical meaning further in the Church as men believed they were able to mix pagan philosophy with Scriptural teaching on the authority of the Church. His teaching on the position of man after the Fall, that man was able to merit the merit of Christ, opened the way for man to regard himself as largely autonomous in salvation and this affects Roman dogma to this day. His teaching gave rise to the 'grace *versus* nature' theology which in essence divides the natural from the super-natural. Another modern problem had emerged.

While scholasticism had begun with the highest motives, and had produced advances for the Church, as the Church departed from biblical truth, so the use of the mind deteriorated into rationalism on the one hand, but

into mysticism on the other. Rationalism essentially denies revelation; mysticism believes in direct revelations. Where traditionalism flourishes, mysticism will not be far behind.

Wycliffe

But it would be wrong to believe that there was no true Christianity during this time. While there was a great darkness in the official teachings of the Church, God had not left Himself without witnesses. There were obviously many faithful individual Christians. And there were reactions against the Roman Church and its teaching by the Waldensians in the North of Italy.

In England, John Wycliffe (d. 1384), the flower of Oxford, was recovering the concept that the Bible was the authority in the Church. Logically, it was essential for the Bible to be translated into the language of the people that they might read and understand it. But it was also necessary for the people to be taught in the Word of God. Hence, the Lollard preachers.

Wycliffe had three major concerns. He taught that the Church is the predestined body of the elect and denied the efficacy of a priestly ministry. In the Eucharist, he logically denied transubstantiation. And as we have already noted, he wished to return to the simplicity of the Scriptures as the final authority in all matters of faith.

The Universities of Oxford and Prague had close connexions in the Middle Ages and we may be reasonably certain that Wycliffe's influence reached Bohemia by this route. John Huss (d. 1415) was influenced by Wycliffe and with others began to speak out against mediaeval abuse. Huss was betrayed and executed but his teaching was continued by his followers. Schaeffer writes:

[The] teachings of Wycliffe and Huss moved away from the humanism which had gradually but increasingly entered the Church. Thus the way was open now for two movements which were to have their influence down into our day: the humanistic elements of the Renaissance and the Scriptural Christianity of the Reformation.¹³

3. The Rebirth of Culture

The movement known as the Renaissance, although it was not so named until 1835, was primarily the revival of the ancient learning of Greece and Rome, which had been lost with the overthrow of the Roman Empire in the West. It began in Italy long before the Turks captured Constantinople in 1453 and was dependent in no small way upon the economic prosperity of the rich commercial families such as the Medicis and the social stability of their city states. As Green states in *Renaissance and Reformation*, "The Renaissance in Italy was made possible by a prosperous urban society which was far more intellectual than the baronial class it replaced."¹⁴

One of the effects of the Renaissance was to create a new and optimistic world-view in contrast to the growing pessimism and weariness of the

Middle Ages. In that way, it liberated great minds to grapple with questions at every level and in every area. Leonardo da Vinci of Milan (d. 1519) the dominant figure of the Italian Renaissance, advocated scientific experimentation and so there began with him, the age of natural science.

Niccolo Machiavelli (d. 1527), disillusioned with the corruption of the Church, sought salvation in the state. In his work, *The Prince*, he set forward the theory of how a ruthless leader could maintain himself in power, by eliminating opponents and keeping the people calm.

In the realm of letters, the best known figure, certainly in Northern Europe, was Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam (d. 1536). Erasmus saw more clearly than most the appalling moral and spiritual state of the Roman Church. As a translator of the Bible and an articulate critic of the state of the Church, Erasmus refused to join Luther's protest. Instead, he launched an attack upon Martin Luther's scriptural doctrine of election which Luther answered in his classic work on the subject, 'On the Bondage of the Will'. A friend and contemporary of Erasmus was Sir Thomas More who was most probably in part responsible for the execution of William Tyndale.

As we consider the leading figures of the Renaissance, we can see that there is an essential hostility to the God who has revealed Himself in Scripture, and it would not be wrong to believe that the Western Church through the Inquisition was at least in part responsible by suppressing the advance of knowledge. Man instead of God now became the centre of the universe and this is seen in every field of study. Dr. Lee says pertinently in *A Christian Introduction to the History of Philosophy*:

The Renaissance or the unregenerative rebirth of apostate man and his humanistic philosophy was from one point of view a warm and vital reaction against the cold and moribund stagnation of scholastic thought at the end of the mediaeval period. Yet from another point of view it was a necessary product of the unavoidable disintegration of scholasticism—unavoidable on account of the unresolved dialectical tension between the nature and grace motive. When Aquinas elevated grace above nature, it was only a question of time before men consequently regarded nature as graceless. And in the Renaissance, man would ultimately demonstrate his 'creative' control over nature and 'redemption' from nature without his acknowledgement of God's grace.¹⁵

The rejection of God by autonomous man is worked out in two areas. One area is rationalism. That is not the use of reason itself, but the use of human reason as if it were capable of discovering all things without the aid of God's revelation. The other area is empiricism, by which we mean the teaching that all knowledge comes from experience rather than theory.

But while the men of the Renaissance were wrestling with their insoluble philosophic problems, insoluble because they had left the infinite

Tri-personal God out of their equation, another great movement was beginning in the North of Europe. This was the Reformation.

4. The Restoration of Scripture

If the Renaissance in the south was man-centred, then the Reformation in the north was God-centred. Cunningham says of the reformers in his *magnum opus*, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation*:

The highest honour of the Reformers . . . viewed as public teachers who have exerted an influence upon the state of religious opinion and practice in the world, was that, in point of fact, they did deduce from the Word of God, *the truths or true doctrine* which are there set forth, and that they brought them out, and expounded and enforced them in such a way as led, through God's blessing, to their being extensively received and applied. Christian theology, in some of its most important articles, had for a long period been grossly corrupted by the Church of Rome . . . The Lord was pleased, through the instrumentality of the Reformers, to expose these corruptions, to bring out prominently before the world the true doctrines of His word, in regard to the worship which He required and would accept, the way in which He had provided and was bestowing, and in which sinners were to receive, the salvation of the gospel . . .¹⁶

We have already noted the work of the forerunners of the Reformation, Wycliffe and Huss. Both men sought to return to the teachings of the Bible in contradistinction to the continuing and increasing distortion that was being brought into the church through the use of pagan philosophy and especially the work of Aristotle. We ought not to forget also Savonarola (d. 1498) who although not as clear in his doctrine as Wycliffe and Huss, shared the same concern for truth in the Church and suffered the same condemnation by that Church.

Martin Luther

It was in October 1517 that Luther (d. 1546) nailed his ninety-five Theses to the door of the Church at Wittenberg. This is without doubt the actual beginning of the Reformation: as the Reformation was beginning in the North, the High Renaissance was coming to an end in the South.

Although the two movements had different objects—the Renaissance was the glory of man while the reformation was the glory of God—the reformers were all men who had been trained in humanist studies. And the reformers extracted the best from the scholars of the Renaissance. They learned to study the original biblical languages, to question critically traditional assumptions, and to bring all things to the bar of holy Scripture. In so doing, they took seriously the Bible's own claim for itself that it is the very word of God.

There is no doubt that Luther occupied a very important position and played a key rôle in the work of reformation which came to Western

Europe. Cunningham says of Luther:

The leading service which Luther was qualified and enabled to render to the church, in a theological point of view, was the unfolding and establishing of the great doctrine of justification, which for many ages had been grossly corrupted and perverted, and bringing the truth upon this subject to bear upon the exposure of many of the abuses, both in theory and practice, that prevailed in the Church of Rome.¹⁷

Ulrich Zwingli

The movement of Reform in the German-speaking Swiss cantons began under the leadership of Zwingli. Independently of Luther he had come to the same views by 1516, the year before Luther had published his Theses. It is also clear that Zwingli was an independent thinker who was not afraid to think and act for himself. In this, his character is not unlike Luther's, although much more placid and less given to exaggeration; a fact which at least partially explains why the men quarrelled at the Marburg Colloquy of 1529. Cunningham says poignantly of that Conference:

We do not know that ever on any other occasion in the history of the Church, four such men as Luther and Melancthon, Zwingli and Oecolampadius, met together in one room and sat at the same table discussing the great doctrines of theology. Luther's refusal to shake hands with Zwingli, which led that truly noble and thoroughly brave man to burst into tears, was one of the most deplorable and humiliating . . . exhibitions the world has ever witnessed . . . At this conference, the leading doctrines of Christianity were embodied in fifteen articles and both parties agreed with each other in regard to fourteen and two-thirds of the whole . . .¹⁸

The only question which divided the Reformers was, 'Whether the true body and blood of Christ be corporally present in the bread and wine?' Luther affirmed it in his doctrine of the ubiquity of the Lord's body, but Zwingli denied it. The two positions have been called, the real presence and the real absence.

Zwingli's life was cut short by his death on the battlefield of Kappel in 1531. Although this doctrine severely and wrongly divided the reformers, it is clear that working independently from the Bible different reformers had come to mainly the same conclusions. A spirit of Christian tolerance and love would have graced Martin Luther's attitude but a great deal of harm was done which has not yet been put right.

John Calvin

Calvin was intellectually by far the greatest of the Reformers. While Luther and Zwingli had done much with others in their own situation and circumstances to forward the work of Reformation, there was needed a mind which would be able to grasp Protestant doctrine systematically and

to set it out in a form which would command intellectual acceptance. Above all this was John Calvin's task, a Frenchman from Noyon, with a razor-sharp mind—his fellow students called him the accusative case—and it was undertaken in his *magnum opus*, the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. For Calvin, Scripture is the sole authority in the life of the Church. Wallace, in his work *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament* states categorically that Calvin believed and taught:

[The Scripture] must be given a place of unsurped honour within the Church. It was through the Word that the Church was brought into being; it is through the same Word always being given afresh that the Church is continually renewed in its life and preserved as a Church. We cannot admit the existence of a Church where the Word of God does not so rule . . .¹⁹

For Calvin, the inner witness of the Holy Spirit is the authenticating authority of Holy Scripture, and the reverence which the Church gives to the Scripture is primarily due to the Holy Spirit's influence in giving testimony to the believer that this is the very Word of God.²⁰

Calvin, like Luther and Zwingli, held very clear ideas as to the Scriptural teaching on Justification. Calvin says in Book 3, Chapter 11 of *The Institutes*:

. . . man's only resource for escaping from the curse of the law, and recovering salvation, lies in faith . . . Christ given to us by the kindness of God is apprehended and possessed by means of which we obtain . . . a two-fold benefit: first being reconciled by the righteousness of Christ, God becomes, instead of a Judge, an indulgent Father; and secondly being sanctified by His Spirit, we aspire to integrity and purity of life.²¹

We pause for a moment to consider Calvin's answer to the question of the Lord's Supper which had divided Luther and Zwingli, and which continues to agitate the Church. Calvin invited the Church to go back several centuries and to lay aside the subtleties of scholastic speculations. Luther had tried to modify them rather unsuccessfully and Zwingli had simply denied anything but the symbol.

Calvin's answer which is a scriptural one points out that the New Testament nowhere answers the question: 'How is the body of Christ present in the bread?' To ask the very question is to cause an unscriptural answer. The question that must be asked is the one raised by the New Testament which is: 'How do we partake in the blessings which Christ confers?' The answer to that question is by faith in, and through union with, Christ.

It is therefore neither the real presence, nor the real absence but the true presence of Christ in the heart by faith. And this is the point which Cranmer has enshrined in the 1552 Communion Service, the forerunner of 1662, which returns to the simplicity and profundity at the heart of the

New Testament and presents in liturgical form the doctrine of justification by faith.

We can see from the lives of the three leading reformers that their aim was to return the Church to the teachings of the Bible and to the sound doctrine contained in the apostles' teaching. Dr. J.I. Packer says cogently in his Introduction to Buchanan's work *Justification by Faith*:

Justification by faith has traditionally, and rightly been regarded as one of the two basic and controlling principles of Reformation theology. The authority of Scripture was the formal principle of that theology, determining its method and providing its touchstone of truth; justification by faith was its material principle, determining its substance. In fact, these two principles belong inseparably together, for no theology that simply seeks to follow the Bible can help concerning itself with what is demonstrably the essence of the biblical message.²²

To claim that the Reformers largely succeeded in redirecting the Church away from errors and distortions and thereby put it back on its pilgrimage to the city of God, is not to claim that the sixteenth century was perfect, nor that the reformation was complete. It was the beginning of a battle which must occupy every generation until the Lord returns.

Conclusion

The fact that the people of God are a pilgrim people called to an Exodus does not take away the responsibility to occupy until the Lord comes. The Bible does not sanction the teaching that you should not polish brass on a sinking ship. The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to all those that believe but there are always secondary results in social, economic and political fields.

When the Church follows the path to the city of man in order to re-create a paradise on earth, the end result is decline becoming apostasy and then judgment. The results that it seeks are lost because God is left out of the equation; the basic doctrines of the Bible are lost and man has no basis for moral judgments. Man loses to a great degree the sense of right and wrong and moral chaos ensues.

But when the Church by the grace of God recognizes its pilgrim calling and seeks the city of God by faith, then the Bible is returned to its rightful place and the doctrines of the New Testament are taught and believed. There is a freedom based on agreed absolutes which leads to a moral stability. Schaeffer says in *How Shall We Then Live?*:

In 1860 Jacob Burckhardt (1818–1897) in *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* pointed out a crucial difference between the Renaissance and the Reformation . . . He indicated that freedom was introduced both in the north by the Reformation and in the south by the Renaissance. But in the south it went to license; in the north it did not.²³

But the difference was the biblical teaching.

As we look back over the centuries, we can see that many of our present struggles and conflicts have their origin in the past. This must not surprise us. We have to remember that Christ Jesus has defeated Satan but Satan is not yet dispossessed. The conflict is in the Church of Jesus Christ. So often the Church seems to be working for the city of man but God in His providential grace over-rules and great strides are made towards the city of God. It is truly a tale of two cities.

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NOTES

- 1 This paper was read to the Church Society Conference held at Swanwick 15–17 April, 1993.
- 2 Epistle to the Hebrews 11, 8–10.
- 3 A.M. Stubbs, *God's Friend*, I.V.F., 1964, p. 9.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 48.
- 5 M. Luther, *Commentary on Epistle to the Galatians*, James Clarke, 1961, p. 489.
- 6 R.J. Rushdoony, *Thy Kingdom Come*, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970, p. 175.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 1.
- 8 *Westminster Confession*, Chapter 3, sect. 1, Free Presbyterian, 1967.
- 9 N.R. Wood, cited by R.J. Rushdoony.
- 10 F. Schaeffer, *How Shall We Then Live?*, Fleming H. Revell Co., 1976, p. 32.
- 11 Fisher, *History of Christian Doctrine*, Clarke, 1897.
- 12 F. Schaeffer, *op. cit.*, pp. 51, 52.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 56.
- 14 V.H.H. Green, *Renaissance and Reformation*, Arnold, 1964, p. 36.
- 15 N. Lee, *A Christian Introduction to the History of Philosophy*, Craig Press, 1969, p. 142.
- 16 W. Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation*, Banner of Truth Trust, 1967, p. 6.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 64.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 218.
- 19 R.S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of Word and Sacrament*, Oliver and Boyd, 1953, p. 100.
- 20 J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, MacDonald, Book 3, sect. 11.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 180.
- 22 J.I. Packer, *Introductory Essay to Buchanan's Justification by Faith*, Banner of Truth Trust, 1961, p. 1.
- 23 F. Schaeffer, *op. cit.*, p. 100.