

LAW AND GOSPEL IN THE ANABAPTIST/BAPTIST TRADITION

W. R. ESTEP

INTRODUCTION

THERE are two problems with this topic which must be admitted at the outset. The terms "Law" and "Gospel" do not occur frequently in either Anabaptist works that could be properly termed theological or in Anabaptist confessions of faith. This is also true of Baptist confessions in general and of major theologians among the Baptists in particular.

The second problem relates to the use of the terms Anabaptist and Baptist. While there is an historical connection between Anabaptists at the sixteenth century and the emerging Baptist movement in the seventeenth century, one should not confuse the two movements or fail to distinguish between the two. Even though the relationship is still a matter of debate among church historians, it is generally conceded that the Anabaptists first arose within the context of the Swiss Reformation in the sixteenth century, whereas, the Baptists arose out of the English Puritan-Separatist movements in contact with and under the influence of the Dutch Mennonites.

In spite of these distinctions, it must also be admitted that the Anabaptists and early English Baptists shared a similar theological, ecclesiological, and ethical stance, so much so that the topic can be treated without doing a disservice to scholarship or the differing traditions of Anabaptist and Baptist life. Therefore, we will frequently use the terms "Law" and "Gospel" as apparently both Anabaptists and Baptists used them in a general sense and more narrowly in a particular sense, especially in relationship to the accusatory or revelatory function of the Law.

Emil Brunner in *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption and Revelation and Reason* delineates seven uses of the concept of Law in the Scriptures.¹ Of these, the Anabaptist and Baptist usages

¹Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*, 214-30, and *Revelation and Reason*, 332. Cited by James Leo Garrett, *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990) 500-501.

refer most frequently to the Mosaic Law and less so to the Moral Law. With the Anabaptists, particularly, the term "Law" is frequently subsumed under the Old Testament or the Old Covenant.

In an attempt to seek an understanding of both variations and the commonality of these concepts in Anabaptist/Baptist traditions, we will first look at four representative Anabaptist theologians. Second, we will turn our attention to the use of the concepts Law and Gospel as reflected in major Baptist confessions, and third, as understood by some twentieth century Baptist theologians.

REPRESENTATIVE ANABAPTISTS

Balthasar Hubmaier

Balthasar Hubmaier became the first writing theologian among the Anabaptists. He was educated first in the cathedral school at Augsburg and later received the Bachelor of Arts degree after only one year's study in the university, and his *bacca laureus biblicus* from the University of Freiburg in Breisgau, where he also became the successor of Johannes Eck as rector of the *Pfauenburse*. In October, 1512, he joined Eck at the University of Ingolstadt where he received his doctorate in theology. He eventually became the vice-rector of the university, which position he vacated to become the cathedral preacher at the Cathedral of Regensburg. From Regensburg he went to Waldshut where he became the head priest in a small chapter consisting of ten priests. It was here that he had time to read the Scriptures carefully for the first time. In addition to Latin, he had acquired a knowledge of both Greek and Hebrew. Apparently in 1522, he committed his life to Christ, for he wrote some friends at Regensburg:

Within two years has Christ for the first time come into my heart to thrive. I have never dared to preach him so boldly as now, by the grace of God. I lament before God that I so long lay ill of this sickness. I pray him truly for pardon; I did this unwittingly, wherefore I write this. I wonder if your preachers now will say, I am now of another disposition than formerly, that I confess and condemn all doctrine and preaching, such as were mine among you and elsewhere, that is not grounded in the divine word.²

He attended the second major disputation in Zürich in October, 1523, and later recalled having talked with Zwingli about believers' baptism at that time. By April, 1525, he was baptized by William Reublin, and a week later, Hubmaier baptized most of the members of

²Cited in Henry C. Vedder, *Balthasar Hübmaier: The Leader of the Anabaptists* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1905) 78.

his church. However, before the end of the year, he and his wife were driven from Waldshut by the invading forces of Austria. After being imprisoned and tortured in Zürich, he left Switzerland for Moravia. Here his ministry was blessed by thousands of baptisms but the notoriety gained spelled his doom at the hands of Archduke Ferdinand. After imprisonment and torture in the Kreuzenstein Castle, he was burned to death as a heretic in Vienna on 10 March 1528. However, from 1524 to 1528, he was able to write at least nineteen pamphlets and booklets on various topics. In his work *On the Christian Baptism of Believers*, he briefly discusses the contrast between the Law and the Gospel. In reference to John's ministry he wrote,

So it is with Christ. He has to speak to us, or his messengers in his place; then we are made whole in our souls. Believed forgiveness of sins is the true gospel which cannot be without the Spirit of God, for the Spirit of God makes the Word alive. Faith is a work of God, John 6:29. For by faith the law of sin and of death becomes a law of the Spirit, Romans 8:2. For what was impossible to the law, God has fulfilled through Jesus Christ so that the righteousness demanded by the law might be fulfilled in us who now walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.³

In this quotation, it is interesting to note that the revelatory nature of the "law of sin and death becomes a law of the Spirit." Romans 8:2 is cited. "For what was impossible to the law," Hubmaier says, "God has fulfilled through Jesus Christ," which apparently means that the word of promise in the law has been honored in Christ. Although God has fulfilled the Law through Jesus Christ, this does not, in Hubmaier's opinion, release the Christian to live a wanton life of sin, but, instead, makes possible a righteousness that the Law demands. Or, as Hubmaier says, "might be fulfilled in us who now walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." Therefore, intrinsic in Hubmaier's understanding of the Law is discipleship.

Hans Denck

Hans Denck was one of the most gifted of the early Anabaptist theologians. At the same time he was perhaps the most controversial. He graduated from the University of Ingolstadt in 1519 and soon proved himself an able linguist, proficient in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. For a time he taught in St. Sebald's School in Nuremberg from which he was banished due to his heretical opinions on baptism and the Lord's

³Balthasar Hubmaier, *On the Christian Baptism of Believers*, in *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, trans. and ed. H. Wayne Pipkin and John H. Yoder (Scottsdale, Penn.: Herald Press, 1989) 106.

Supper, as well as a number of other topics. In 1526 he was apparently baptized in Augsburg by Hubmaier who was en route from Zürich to Moravia. His personal acquaintance with Hubmaier probably dated from student days at Ingolstadt or later when Hubmaier returned to Regensburg in 1522, Denck could hardly have avoided hearing him preach from the Gospel of Luke in the Chapel of the Beautiful Maria.

Denck's theological development, although apparently influenced by Hubmaier, was uniquely his own. He had a deep appreciation for the Old Testament and, therefore, he and Ludwig Haetzer made the first translation of the Hebrew prophets into German at Worms in the summer of 1527. In spite of Osiander's attempt to suppress it, the original edition was reprinted ten times and was used by both Zwingli (1529) and Luther (1532).⁴ Denck also attempted to witness to the various Jewish communities in the Rhine River valley. His knowledge of the *Torah* and the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, coupled with his understanding of Christianity as primarily discipleship (*Nachfolge Christi*) led him to address what he considered a Lutheran misconception of the Law in the only major Anabaptist work on the subject. In response to Luther's *De Servo Arbitrio*, Denck wrote his *Vom Gesetz Gottes* with the subtitle *How the Law is Made Void and Yet Must be Brought to Fulfillment*. Doubtless Denck's own experience with the Lutheran establishment in Nuremberg and his observations regarding the failure of the Lutheran movement to produce a transformation of life in its followers, motivated him to deal with the subject in the light of his own understanding of the Law, discipleship, and spirituality.

Denck says in *Concerning the Law of God (Vom Gesetz Gottes)* that he has been compelled to write this treatise because of "half-truths" that some had been led to accept for one reason or another.⁵ He charges that the whole world confesses Christ with their lips but deny him with their lives. This, he claims, is based upon the notion that Christ has fulfilled the Law and therefore the Christian is delivered from it. However, he quotes Matthew 5:17 to support his position that even though Christ has fulfilled the Law, this does not mean that Christians are under no obligation to live exemplary lives just as Christ himself lived. That this is needed can be seen, Denck says, because "the whole world is full of such people whose fruit and life were better

⁴Clarence Bauman, *The Spiritual Legacy of Hans Denck: Interpretation and Translation of Key Texts* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991) 16. See also Georg Baring, *Hans Denck Schriften, Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer VI* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1955) 33, 34.

⁵The "half-truth" that both Hubmaier and Denck criticized severely was the idea of cheap "believism" that envisioned that faith (*assensus*) alone was sufficient in the Christian life while ignoring the demands of discipleship, which is the evidence of the new birth that comes about as a result of a faith commitment to Christ as Lord.

before they boasted of faith than thereafter.”⁶ He puts much emphasis upon the dynamics of the new birth, for, Denck points out, the new man in Christ Jesus is under the compulsion of love to live the Christian life.

No one can satisfy the Law who does not truly know and love Christ. Whoever fulfills the Law through him has merit but not credit before God, for all honor belongs to God through whose grace a way is given which [previously] was impossible for the whole world. Therefore, merit does not belong to man but to Christ, through whom everything one has is given by God. But, whoever seeks glory in His merit as if it were his own doing, surely destroys grace through Christ. Whoever says one need not keep the law makes a liar of God, who gave it in order that one should keep it, as all Scriptures testifies.⁷

Denck claims that this rather paradoxical idea of the Christian who is still under the Law while Christ has satisfied its requirements and, therefore, fulfilled the Law, is explained by the work of the Holy Spirit in the Christian's life.

Whoever has received the new covenant of God, that is, in whose heart the Law was written through the Holy Spirit, is truly righteous. Whoever supposes he will accomplish keeping the Law through the book, ascribes to the dead letter what belongs to living Spirit.⁸

In Denck's theology Law and Gospel are both expressions of the grace of God. Just as one proclaims God's wrath he also must proclaim his grace. Denck divides Law into three divisions: commandments, customs, and rights. Commandments are those that flow solely from the love of God and neighbor. Customs are social ordinances which include ceremonies or signs but when without meaning, they simply become a mockery. Rights are civil (legal) laws. One fulfills all three aspects of the Law through love.

But the one who acts contrary to love can excuse himself neither with divine nor human law, for all laws should give way to love since they are for the sake of love and not love for their sake. They are unable to produce love, so they also should not hinder it. Love produces all laws, therefore it can withdraw them all again, each according to its juncture.⁹

Denck writes in one of his more paradoxical statements, “All commandments, customs, and rights, insofar as they are scripturally compiled in

⁶Hans Denck, *Concerning the Law of God*, in *The Spiritual Legacy of Hans Denck*, trans. Clarence Bauman, 131.

⁷*Ibid.*, 141, 143.

⁸*Ibid.*, 145.

⁹*Ibid.*, 155.

the Old and New Testaments, are annulled for the true disciple of Christ, that is, he has inscribed in his heart one word, namely, that he loves God alone."¹⁰ Denck concludes his treatise with these words that approximate Paul's dictum that love is the fulfilling of the Law. "Whoever is born of God will bear witness to the truth. Whoever rejects it will also be rejected by God. Cursed be the one who does not truly love God and does not keep his commandments."¹¹

The antinomianism that Denck saw in Luther's teachings and in what he considered the unreformed lives of Luther's followers, he declared was a perversion of the Gospel due to a misunderstanding of Christ's fulfillment of the requirements of the Law. Bauman summarizes Denck's position when he writes: "Denck holds that the letter of the Law is transcended in that its intention is internalized and becomes the rule of Christ within through the power of the Spirit."¹² And that rule of Christ, I would add, is *agape*.

Pilgram Marpeck

Pilgram Marpeck, an almost forgotten Anabaptist theologian, has been the subject of a number of recent studies. John Kiwiet has written that Marpeck was the only theologian to give Anabaptism a thoroughgoing, systematic theology. Marpeck was not formally trained in theology but had a good education and apparently a knowledge of Latin. However, his voluminous theological works were written in German.

Marpeck was born at Rattenberg on the Inn River in the Tirol of Austria. He apparently was from a wealthy and outstanding family in the area. On February 26, 1520, he and his wife joined a guild of mining workers of Rattenberg. Three years later he was a member of the Lower Council and two years afterwards became a member of the Upper Council. This was the same year in which he was appointed a mining magistrate, whose function was to supervise the mining of silver in the area. He apparently was first attracted to the Reformation through the work of Luther, but along with others in the Inn Valley, he was subsequently drawn to the Anabaptist movement. Leonhard Schiemer, an Anabaptist evangelist, arrived in Rattenberg on November 25, 1527 and a day after his arrival was arrested and later beheaded on January 14, 1528. Two weeks later, Marpeck resigned his position as mining magistrate.¹³ Marpeck's resignation was doubtless due to his

¹⁰Ibid., 153.

¹¹Ibid., 159.

¹²Clarence Bauman, *The Spiritual Legacy of Hans Denck*, 12.

¹³William Klassen and Walter Klaassen, *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, Classics of the Radical Reformation series (Scottsdale, Penn.: Herald Press, 1978) 18. Two different dates are given for Schiemer's death. Page 18 gives it as January 14 and page 20 indicates it was on January 15.

Anabaptist convictions. He had been instructed to apprehend Anabaptists and turn them over to the civil authorities for trial and punishment. This he refused to do. If he had not been such a prominent man he doubtless would have been executed along with many other martyrs in the Inn Valley. As it was, his property was confiscated and the orphan children, that he and his wife had adopted, were taken from him and he became, "a wandering pilgrim under the heavens." He left his native Austria for Strasbourg, a city known for its tolerance of divergent religious views. Here he was employed as a city engineer in the course of which he built a water system for the city and wood-floating flumes in the surrounding valleys which enabled Strasbourg to reap a harvest of wood from the forests along the Kinzig River.¹⁴

In Strasbourg he soon became the leader among the Anabaptists of the city and entered into a running debate with Caspar Schwenckfeld. By 1532 he had become so prominent that Bucer and Capito felt his influence was a threat to the religious monopoly of the city. This led to Marpeck's imprisonment and subsequent prison manuscript, his confession of faith. In this confession he set forth in twenty-nine articles his understanding of the Anabaptist faith in the light of the hermeneutics which he developed in an attempt to understand the relationships of the Old and New Testaments. During the next several years he wrote very little, aside from letters, but apparently was not inactive in sharing his faith with others in Switzerland, Moravia, and elsewhere. From 1545 to 1556, he was employed by the City of Augsburg, where he did for the city what he had done for Strasbourg. He died in 1556 of natural causes.

Whether Marpeck was familiar with the Latin language, as Harold Bender held, or whether he only used some Latin phrases in his works as Klassen and Klaassen suppose, there is no doubt that he was an unusually gifted layman and an able theologian in his own right. This is certainly evident in his biblical hermeneutics in which he treats the relationship of the Law and Gospel.

Law and Gospel are discussed within the context of the dichotomy that Marpeck draws between the Old and New Testaments. This, too, is derived from his understanding of the covenants. He holds that God seeks to impart his revelation to man in terms of covenants. The first was the covenant with Adam, the second with Noah, and the third with Abraham. The first with Adam gave what he calls a *schema aller späteren Bundesverhältnisse* (a plan of all later covenant conditions).¹⁵ After the Abrahamic covenant, which was marked by the sign of circumcision, there came the Mosaic law. After Moses, still another covenant was

¹⁴Ibid., 129.

¹⁵Jan J. Kiwiet, *Pilgram Marpeck: Ein Führer in der Täuferbewegung der Reformationszeit* (Kassel: J. G. Oncken Verlag, 1957) 93.

made with David, in which is found the promise of the coming of the Son of God.¹⁶

The advent of Christ ushered in the New Covenant or New Testament. Marpeck holds that there is an *absolute difference* between the Old and the New Testaments. The Old is *äußerlich* (outer) and the New is *innerlich* (inner). He explains the covenant with Adam demanded an external obedience but the New Testament requires an inner obedience which is spiritual. He points out, "*in Christus haben die Kinder Gottes schon die geistliche Auferstehung, auf die die leibliche Auferstehung später folgen wird.*"¹⁷ He sees this new spiritual life as a fulfillment of the prophecy of Jeremiah, where God has promised to write an inner covenant with his people on their hearts. Another contrasting pair of terms in the Old Testament is *zeitlich* (temporal) and the New Covenant is *ewig* (eternal). He explains that the eternal life which belonged to Adam and Eve before the fall was lost but through the resurrection, Christ has brought it back again. While the Old Testament carried with it the necessity of faith and hope, this faith was that of the natural man, that is, unregenerate man. It surely was not a true spiritual faith which comes only through "*die Wiedergeburt vom Heiligen Geist.*"¹⁸ Again, the contrasting terms are *Figur* (type) and *Wesen* (essence). He finds Christ, the church, and the Kingdom of God all prefigured in the Old Testament.¹⁹

The fourth contrast is that of *Knechtschaft* (slavery) and *Kindschaft* (sonship). In the fifth place, the contrast is drawn between sin and forgiveness, death and deliverance. In the discussion of sins and forgiveness, Marpeck introduces his understanding of the role of the Law which brings the knowledge of sin. He says the Law, the ten commandments, the ceremonial commandments, priestly service, and the system of sacrifices, were all necessary because of sin. Sin was a reality from the time of Adam, but when the Law came, the knowledge of sin became a reality. For Moses, mankind had a natural knowledge of good and evil, which is even true today. Through the Law came the consciousness of the nature of sin as transgression against God. This is the beginning of repentance for sin is in one's own heart. Sin and death reigned after Moses until Christ. With the *Bundesvolkes* (the people's covenant) the time of forgiveness and deliverance has come. Marpeck in the sixth place, speaks of the law as a time of *Unwissenheit* (hiddenness) as over against *Offenbarung* (revelation) of God in Christ which made possible a knowledge of God in his eternal essence. This personal knowledge of

¹⁶"Schließlich wurde noch ein Bund mit David errichtet mit der Verheißung des kommenden Gottessohnes." Cited in Kiwiet, *Pilgram Marpeck*, 93.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 96.

¹⁹"Auch das Volk Israel war ein Bild des neuen Gottesvolkes." *Ibid.*, 97.

God is the acceptance by faith of the love of God revealed and offered to us in Christ. This is the knowledge that leads to eternal life.²⁰

In using the term "Law," Marpeck frequently means the Old Testament itself, which is never more than promise which finds its fulfillment only in the New Testament. The Old Testament is yesterday and the New, today. The Old Testament is prologue (*vorbeigegangen*); the New is that which has come. "Therefore, the right order of teaching is that God has allowed the Law to precede Christ in order to show clearly the nature of sin and its fruits."²¹

The primary function of the Mosaic Law was condemnatory, to intensify a consciousness of sin against God. Marpeck also held that the Law not only revealed sin and recalled sin to memory, but provoked sin, and therefore increased the knowledge of sin. This, of course, is the action of a gracious God. Hence, the Law should be understood as the "first grace."²² Like Luther, Marpeck held that the Law must first bring conviction for sin before the Gospel can bring its forgiveness and healing.²³ Before the coming of Christ, Marpeck held, man could not experience full forgiveness of sins. He could only be comforted by using the ceremonies that God had ordained for that purpose in the Old Covenant.

In summary, Marpeck held the Law was necessary to bring a consciousness of sin as transgression against God. But the Law was not salvific. However, it did serve the purpose of pointing mankind to Christ. The final covenant of God with his people, was a covenant sealed with the blood of the incarnate Christ, who alone is the full and final revelation of God. In Marpeck we see covenants in ascending circles, from Adam to Christ. This is in a sense a progressive, holy history of God's dealings with mankind, of which the Law was an integral part, and necessary to bring an acute awareness of the nature and depth of man's sin. It was not simply sin in the abstract or an inherited sinful nature, the sin uncovered by the Law *as sin against God*. For this, there is only one hope, and that is Jesus Christ, "the living power of God," who fulfilled the Law and made possible the new birth.²⁴

²⁰Ibid., 101.

²¹Klassen and Klaassen, *Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 123.

²²The first grace, which is the Old Testament, has brought knowledge of sin; that is, the law was given through Moses, grace and truth through Christ. The first grace of the Old Testament, through which man received only knowledge of sin, also comes through Christ. And this first grace, as has been shown, was promised to Adam and Eve. Thus, from His fullness, we have all received grace and more grace, which is also a complete comfort to the godliness of faith, namely, the remission and forgiveness of sin. (Klassen and Klaassen, *Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 123.)

²³Ibid., 121.

²⁴For those who have been baptized by Christ with fire and Spirit know Christ and His people differently from the others. They know, to begin with, that Christ is the living

In the abstract of the Confession of 1532, Marpeck links the Law and the Gospel very closely in articles 14 and 15.

14. The Law demands circumcision for the one who believes it is a commandment and Law of God. God has implanted in them the knowledge of sin, death, and hell along with the hope to be saved from it. The patriarchs received this spirit of servitude from God.
15. The Gospel of Christ, even Christ himself, the Messiah, for whom the ancients hoped, and awaited with long-suffering, brings with it, for the one who believes and is baptized, salvation, indulgence, and forgiveness of sin and takes away all fear and imprisonment to sin, death, and hell. And it awakens, comforts and strengthens the broken hearted, giving them strength and power to do the will of God.²⁵

Menno Simons

Menno Simons, like Hubmaier, was a priest before becoming an Anabaptist. He apparently received his theological education in one of the local monasteries. For some nine months he wrestled with the problems that his conversion presented as he attempted to continue his responsibilities as one of the priests serving the church in Witmarsun. Finally, after prayer and increasing conviction that he could no longer continue living a lie, he became an Anabaptist sometime in the year 1536. For twenty-five years, although harassed and hounded as a fugitive from justice, he died of natural causes. His influence was so great that not long after his conversion and call into the ministry, he became the undisputed leader among the Dutch Anabaptists, they became known as Menists, or Menno's people. His numerous works were widely distributed. In his *Reply to Gellius Faber, 1554*, he addresses the role of the Law in one of the few places in his writings in which the subject is discussed. Faber, a Reformed minister, had admonished his people to be "well grounded in the Law and principally in the Holy Gospel." In response to this admonition, Menno writes,

power of God, and the end of the law, for the sanctification of everyone that believes. They have the forgiveness of past sins, a certain comfort, security and rest through faith in Christ. Those who are thus baptized must be persons who have recognized their sin and inability in the law, just as the ancients and those who knew the law, as I have explained earlier, knew that the law is given for those who can know and not for those who cannot (such as children or idiots, for whom there is no law either with man or God). For people who have thus been shattered, beaten, and broken by the law, Christ is the Physician and Savior. All who know and recognize their sin can only then receive comfort and security. To this part of man's recognition and faith belongs the baptism of the apostolic church, and not to young children or the ignorant, who have no law or knowledge of sin even though they are under law and sin (*ibid.*, 127).

²⁵"Pilgram Marpeck's Confession of Faith" in *Anabaptist Beginnings (1523-1533): A Sourcebook*, ed. William R. Estep (Nieuwkoop: B. De Graaf, 1976) 166-67.

This is the real function and end of law: to reveal unto us the will of God, to discover sin unto us, to threaten with the wrath and the punishment of the Lord, to announce death and to point us from it to Christ, so that we, crushed in Spirit, may before the eyes of God die unto sin, and seek and find the only and eternal medicine and remedy for our souls, Jesus Christ.²⁶

Clearly in Anabaptist fashion, Menno's emphasis was not upon the Law, but upon the Gospel. He follows his treatment regarding the function of the Law with one on the Gospel,

So also where the Gospel is preached in true zeal, according to the pleasure of God, and unblamably in the power of the Spirit, so that it penetrates the hearts of the hearers, there we find a converted, changed, and new mind, which joyfully and gratefully gives praises to its God for His inexpressibly great love toward us miserable sinners, in Christ Jesus, and thus it enters into newness of life willingly and voluntarily, by the power of a true faith and a new birth.²⁷

In the next paragraph, it is clear that Menno's interest is in living the Christian life as a true disciple of Christ, which he calls, "entering into newness of life," with its implication of true repentance means that there is a new Law of Christian conduct that characterizes those who are born again.²⁸

Obviously, Menno is not interested in the traditional juxtaposition of Law and Gospel or in making complicated what to him was transparently simple, the new life in Christ which is born of the Spirit.

Summary of the Anabaptist Position on Law and Gospel

Of the Anabaptists, Marpeck is closer to Luther's position although he extends the dichotomy between Law and Gospel to the "*absolute Unterschied*" between the Old and New Testaments. Hubmaier and Menno give very little attention to Law and Gospel as a paradigm or organizing principle of theology. It is Denck whose major concern is to combat what he considered a half truth which would lead to antinomianism. However his final emphasis is upon the law written by the Holy Spirit on the heart of those which expresses itself in the higher law of love.

ENGLISH BAPTIST CONFESSIONS

General Baptists

The first English Baptists arose in contact with the Dutch Anabaptists who became known as Mennonites. An early schism occurred in

²⁶Menno Simons, *Reply to Gellius Faber*, in *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons: c. 1496-1561*, ed. John Christian Wenger (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1956) 718.

²⁷Wenger, *Menno Simons*, 718.

²⁸Ibid.

the "Ancient Church" of Francis Johnson (c. 1595) before he was able to join his congregation in Amsterdam which left England before him. However, there are no confessional statements from this group. The second group of English Separatists to become "Anabaptists" was that led by John Smyth from Gainsborough. After arriving in Amsterdam these new refugees adopted believers' baptism and a year or so later sought to unite with the Waterlander Mennonite Church. In the forefront of this development was John Smyth, an M.A. graduate of Cambridge University and an ordained minister of the Church of England. By 1606, he led in the formation of a Separatist congregation in Gainsborough with a branch at Scrooby of which John Robinson became the pastor. Once in Amsterdam the Smyth-led church underwent some radical changes. Rejecting the covenant upon which basis the church was formed in Gainsborough, the church was reorganized upon the basis of that which they perceived to be the New Testament model of which baptism, upon personal confession of faith in Christ, became the initiatory act. Subsequently, when Smyth sought union with the Waterlander Mennonites, the church drew up its first confession of faith. However this proved unacceptable to the Mennonites, even though it indicates that already Smyth and his congregation had rejected the Calvinism that had characterized their Puritan-Separatist congregation before arriving in the Netherlands.

A second confession of faith was then drawn up apparently in conference with Hans De Ries, a Mennonite pastor who like Smyth practiced medicine. This confession was largely an abbreviated form of the Waterlander Confession of 1580, but without the numerous Scriptural references of the earlier confession. As in the Waterlander Confession, the Old and New Testaments are juxtaposed. In referring to Christ and the Law, Article 10 declares:

In him is fulfilled, and by him is taken away, an intolerable burden of the law of Moses, even all the shadows and figures; as, namely, the priesthood, temple, altar, sacrifice; also the kingly office, kingdom, sword, revenge appointed by the law, battle and whatsoever was a figure of his person or office, so thereof a shadow or representation.²⁹

The eleventh article continues in much the same vein:

And as the true promised Prophet he hath manifested and revealed unto us whatsoever God asketh or requireth of the people of the New Testament; for as God, by Moses and the other prophets, hath spoken and declared his will to the people of the Old Testament; so hath he in those last days, by his Prophet spoken unto us, and revealed unto us the

²⁹John Smyth, *Short Confessions of Faith in XX Articles by John Smyth*, in *Baptist Confessions of Faith* by William L. Lumpkin (Chicago: The Judson Press, 1959) 105.

mystery (concealed from the beginning of the world), and hath now manifested to us whatsoever yet remained to be manifested.³⁰

From these two articles, it is clear that the signers of this confession, which included Smyth, and the forty-one of those who had sought refuge with him in the Netherlands, held that the Mosaic Law was a burden, which Christ had removed and replaced. This much is evident in several articles in the confession but particularly in Article 21 which reads:

Man being thus justified by faith, liveth and worketh by love (which the Holy Ghost sheddeth into the heart) in all good works, in the laws, precepts, ordinances given them by God through Christ; he praiseth and blesseth God, by a holy life, for every benefit, especially of the soul; and so are all such plants of the Lord trees of righteousness, who honor God through good works, and expect a blessed reward.³¹

In this confession it is clear that the law of Moses was replaced by Christ, who fulfilled the Law. It is also quite evident that as with most Anabaptists, the Old Testament no longer had the force of the New Testament for the Christian.

In a third confession brought out in 1612, the Smyth congregation reflects a further development of the understanding of the Law and its relationship to the Gospel. In Article 33 the confession declared, "for He [Christ] cancelled the handwriting of ordinances, the hatred, the law of commandments in ordinances (Eph. ii. 15; Colos. ii. 14) which was against us (Deut. xxxi. 26); . . ." ³² Echoes of Denck's concern for a consistent moral life is heard in Article 63 which declares that although Christ has fulfilled the Law, the Moral Law is still binding on the Christian.

That the new creature although he be above the law and scriptures, yet he can do nothing against the law or scriptures, but rather all his doings shall serve to the confirming and establishing of the law (Rom iii. 31). Therefore he cannot lie, nor steal, nor commit adultery, nor kill, nor hate any man, or do any other fleshly action, and therefore all fleshly libertinism is contrary to regeneration, detestable, and damnable (John viii. 34; Rom vi. 15, 16, 18; 2 Pet ii. 18, 19; I John v. 18).³³

Previously Article 62 had presented the concept in a slightly different way. It declared that Christ is above the Law and the Christian is also

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid., 108.

³²*Propositions and Conclusions concerning True Christian Religion, containing a Confession of Faith of certain English people, living at Amsterdam*, in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 129.

³³Ibid., 136.

above the law, but he is not to take this to mean that he should live a lawless life, for he is bound by a higher law. Article 68 further delineates the role of Law and Gospel for the Christian:

That faith is a knowledge in the mind of the doctrine of the law and gospel contained in the prophetic, and apostolical scriptures of the Old and New Testament: accompanying repentance with an assurance that God, through Christ, will perform unto us His promises of remission of sins, and mortification, upon the condition of our unfeigned repentance, and amendment of life (Rom x. 13, 14, 15; Acts v. 30–32; and Acts ii. 38, 39; Heb xi. I; Mark i. 15).³⁴

It is not surprising that the General Baptists, as the followers of John Smyth and those of Thomas Helwys, who went back to England in 1612, were eventually known, reflect an essentially Anabaptist understanding of Law and Gospel.

Particular Baptists

Arising out of the Independent Puritan congregation of Henry Jessey in London, there emerged a Calvinistic Baptist movement. In a succession of schisms from the original Puritan conventical in 1633, 1638, and finally in 1642, there were formed three churches which adopted believers' baptism by immersion and because they held that Christ died only for the elect, they became known by the end of the century as Particular Baptists. These three congregations by 1644 had become seven, and issued what is called the First London Confession of Faith. This confession was revised in 1646 and until the Second London Confession, became the most widely distributed confession among Particular Baptists. While these articles lack anything resembling a full treatment of the Law, the implication is that Christ has fulfilled the Law and, therefore, has replaced the Law. Article X, which has a number of scripture references in the margin, reads:

Touching his Office, Jesus Christ onely is made the Mediator of the New Covenant, even the everlasting Covenant of grace between God and Man, to be perfectly and fully the Prophet, Priest and King of the Church of God for evermore.³⁵

Article XXV reflects a very negative view of the Law. It was viewed as unnecessary and therefore irrelevant.

The preaching of the gospel to the conversion of sinners, is absolutely free; no way requiring as absolutely necessary, any qualifications,

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵*The Confession of Faith, Of those Churches which are commonly (though falsly) called Anabaptists, in Lumpkin, Baptist Confessions, 159.*

preparations, or terrors of the law, or preceding ministry of the law, but only and alone the naked soul, a sinner and ungodly, to receive Christ crucified, dead and buried, and risen again; who is made a prince and a Saviour for such sinners as through the gospel shall be brought to believe on Him.³⁶

This article intends to say that the Law, much as the General Baptists said, is a burden and a terror from which the Christian is set free. But it goes on to imply that the purpose of the Law was to reveal the sinful soul, naked in the presence of God, and yet one that could receive Christ, and, therefore, experience new life in Him. This confession also acknowledges in Articles XXVIII and XXIX "Christ as head and King in this new Covenant."³⁷ It is followed by the statement in Article XXX,

All beleevers through the knowledge of that Justification of life given by the Father, and brought forth by the blood of Christ, have this as their great priviledge of the new Covenant, peace with God, and reconciliation, whereby they that were afarre off, were brought nigh by theat blood, and have (as the Scripture speaks) peace passing all understanding, yea, joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom wee have received the Atonement.³⁸

It is evident from these articles that the Particular Baptists gave less attention to the Law and the Gospel than did the General Baptists. In spite of their Calvinistic soteriology, they too identified the Old Covenant with the Law, which is no longer binding, and the New Covenant with Christ, who is the new "Lawgiver" who establishes his law in the heart.³⁹

Article LII brings this first Particular Baptist confession to a close with these memorable words:

And thus wee desire to give unto God that which is Gods, and unto Cesar that which is *Cesars*, and unto all men that which belongeth unto

³⁶*The First London Confession of Faith, 1646 Edition, With an Appendix by Benjamin Cox, 1646* (Rochester, NY: Backus Book Publishers, 1981) 10.

³⁷*Confession of Faith, in Lumpkin, Baptist Confessions, 164.*

³⁸*Ibid.*, 164–65.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 170. "But if God with-hold the Magistrates allowance and furtherance herein; yet we must notwithstanding proceed together in Christian communion, not daring to give place to suspend our practice, but to walk in obedience to Christ in the profession and holding forth this faith before mentioned, even in the midst of all trials and afflictions, not accounting our goods, lands, wives, children, fathers, mothers, brethren, sisters, yea, and our own lives dear unto us, so we mag (*sic*) finish our course with joy: remembering always we ought to obey God rather then men, and grounding upon the commandment, commission and promise of our Lord and master Jesus Christ who as he hath all power in heaven and earth, so also hath promised, if we keep his commandments which he hath given us, to be with us to the end of the world: and when we have finished our course, and kept the faith, to give us the crowne of righteousness, which is laid up for all that love his appearing, and to whom we must give an account of all our actions, no man being able to discharge us of the same."

them, endeavouring our selves to have alwayes a cleare conscience void of offence towards God and towards man. And if any take this that we have said, to be heresie, then doe wee with the Apostle freely confesse, that after the way which they call heresie, worship we the God of our Fathers, beleeving all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets and Apostles, desiring from our soules to disclaime all heresies and opinions which are not after Christ, and to be stedfast, unmoveable, alwayes abounding in the worke of the Lord, as knowing our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.

I Cor. I. 24: *Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith we stand.* [FINIS]⁴⁰

The Second London Confession (1677–1688) was based upon the Westminster Confession of 1647. The Westminster divines drew heavily upon the First and Second Helvetic Confessions. Although Particular Baptists adopted this confession, the revised edition of the First London Confession continued to be popular and more widely distributed in some areas than the Second London Confession. The occasion for the adoption of the Second London Confession was to show substantial agreement with the Presbyterians and Congregationalists during a time of renewed persecution in England. The Clarendon Code, a series of acts passed by Parliament from 1661–1665 designed to suppress dissent, was in the process of renewed enforcement. The Presbyterians, who were numbered among the dissenters after 1660, had successfully resisted the harshest aspects of the new laws. The Baptists and Congregationalists, who had not fared as well, hastened to identify with the Presbyterians. Hence, the Particular Baptists called for an assembly to consider revising the Westminster Confession for this purpose.

Before the assembly convened, William Collins, a pastor in London, had revised the Westminster Confession to express a distinctive Baptist ecclesiology. With some exceptions, the proposed revision was in many places word for word identical with the Westminster document. Therefore, for the first time in any Baptist confession, there is a long section (Chapter 19) devoted to the Law of God. This chapter reproduces verbatim the Westminster Confession, with the exception of the first two clauses. In seven paragraphs the Law of God is further delineated as “moral law,” as set forth in the Ten Commandments, and ceremonial law, “containing several typical ordinances, partly of worship, prefiguring Christ, his graces, actions, sufferings, and benefits; . . .”⁴¹ In the fourth paragraph, it explains that the judicial

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 170–71.

⁴¹*Confession of Faith Put forth by the Elders and Brethren of many Congregations of Christians (baptized upon Profession of their Faith) in London and the Country*, in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 276.

laws which were no longer binding except "their general equity onely, being of moral use."⁴² The remainder of the paragraphs attempt to explain that the "moral law" is still binding for Christians. It states, "Neither doth *Christ* in the Gospel any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation."⁴³ In the sixth paragraph it explains that this does not mean that we who know *Christ* are under a covenant of works, but nevertheless the law provides "a Rule of *life*, informing them of the Will of *God*, and their Duty, it directs and binds them, to walk accordingly discovering also the sinfull pollutions of their Natures, Hearts and Lives; . . ."⁴⁴ The latter part of the paragraph goes to much pains to deny that this is once again putting the Christian under the Law, as it says rather awkwardly,

The Promises of it likewise shew them Gods approbation of Obedience, and what blessings they may expect upon the performance therof, though not as due to them by the Law as a Covenant of Works; so as mans doing Good and refraining from Evil, because the Law encourageth to the one and deterreth from the other, is no Evidence of his being under the Law and not under Grace.⁴⁵

The Confession then reiterates in paragraph seven that while the Christian is bound to obey the moral law, it is still not a covenant of works and not contrary to grace, "but do sweetly comply with it; the *Spirit of Christ* subduing and inabling the Will of man, to do that freely and chearfully, which the will of God revealed in the law, requireth to be done."⁴⁶

Absent from this confession and the Westminster Confession, is any emphasis upon "the burden," or "curse" of the law and the pedagogical function of the law in bringing one to Christ. The emphasis is, however, upon the Moral Law as enunciated by Moses in the decalogue which was held to be still binding upon the Christian, but not necessary for salvation. It appears that the Westminster Confession of Faith attempted to avoid the charge of antinomianism, while maintaining that salvation does not come through works but by grace. The Second London Confession, therefore, represents a greater shift from both the First London Confession of 1644 and 1646 than from the General Baptist Confession of 1612.

Chapter XX of the Westminster Confession proceeds to discuss Christian Liberty and the liberty of conscience. The confession explains that the Christian is free from the ceremonial law and to affirm, "God

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid., 276-77.

⁴⁴Ibid., 277.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid.

alone is Lord of the Conscience, and hath left it free from the Doctrines and Commandments of men which are in any thing contrary to his Word, or beside it in matters of faith or worship."⁴⁷ However, in the next two paragraphs, the confession indicates certain erroneous opinions or, "the manner of publishing or maintaining them," can be cause for intervention by the church and by the "power of the civil magistrate."⁴⁸ At this point the Second London Confession departs from the order of the Westminster to discuss in its Chapter XX, "Of the Gospel, and of the extent of the Grace thereof." It then moves to consider the Gospel as over against the failure of the Law, the first paragraph of which reads,

THE Covenant of Works being broken by Sin, and made unprofitable unto Life; God was pleased to give forth the promise of *Christ*, the Seed of the Woman, as the means of calling the Elect, and begetting in them Faith and Repentance; in this Promise, the Gospel, as to the substance of it, was revealed, and therein Effectual, for the Conversion and Salvation of Sinners.⁴⁹

The fourth paragraph of the Second London Confession indicates that

the Gospel is the only outward means, of revealing *Christ*, and saving Grace; and is, as such, abundantly sufficient thereunto; yet that men who are dead in Trespases, may be born again, Quickened or Regenerated; there is morover necessary, an effectual, insuperable work of the Holy *Spirit*,⁵⁰

Chapter 21 of the Second London Confession then proceeds to discuss Christian liberty and to emphasize in the second paragraph that, "God alone is Lord of the Conscience, and hath left it free from the Doctrines and Commandments of men which are in any thing contrary to his Word, or not contained in it."⁵¹ Significantly the Baptists left out of this chapter any reference to the power of the magistrate or of the church to intervene where apparent erroneous beliefs or actions are engaged in by Christians, which was probably the saving feature of the Westminster Confession (Article 20) as far as parliament was concerned.

There is little doubt that the Second London Confession introduced into Baptist life a robust Reformed understanding of the Bible, election, and the Law, which had never been prominent features of pre-

⁴⁷*The Westminster Confession of Faith, 1647*, in *The Creeds of Christendom Vol. III: The Evangelical Protestant Creeds with Translations* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1969) 644.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 645.

⁴⁹*Confession of Faith Put forth*, in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 278.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 278–79.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 279–80.

vious Baptist confessions. That the Second London Confession never enjoyed the popularity of the First London Confession is evident by the fact that the First London Confession (1646 edition) was still being printed even after the Second London Confession had apparently won the day among the English Particular Baptists. However, the Second London Confession was adopted by the Philadelphia Association in 1742 with two additional articles, and by a few other associations. But, the Separate Baptists, the largest group of Baptists in prewar Colonial America, steadfastly refused until finally in 1783 the Separate General Association of Virginia adopted the Philadelphia Confession with certain reservations, which reads:

To prevent its usurping a tyrannical power over the consciences of any: We do not mean that every person is to be bound to the strict observance of everything therein contained, nor do we mean to make it, in any respect, superior or equal to the scriptures in matters of faith and practice: although we think it the best composition of the kind now extant. . . .⁵²

With the appearance of the New Hampshire Confession of Faith in 1833 with its modified Calvinism, the Philadelphia Confession fell into disuse among Baptists in this country.⁵³

REPRESENTATIVE BAPTIST THEOLOGIANS

In nineteenth century America, Baptists had few formally educated theologians. Although Baptists, like Anabaptists, had an abundance of freelance theologians whose homespun theologies were made up of a number of strains from diverse sources, there were few who were graduates of theological schools. Daniel Parker, whose Two Seed in the Spirit Predestinarian Baptist movement, is illustrative of those whose theologies were developed out of their own creative and innovative genius. Of these, John Leadley Dagg of Virginia, was the most capable and the best known. Through his own efforts he became proficient in Latin, Greek,

⁵²Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 353. See also Robert Baylor Semple, *History of the Baptists in Virginia* (No information supplied, 1894, Revised Edition; reprint, Lafayette, Tenn.: Church History Research and Archives, 1976) 92, 93 (page references are to reprint edition).

⁵³For an example, article IX on "Election" reads:

[We believe] That Election is the gracious purpose of God, according to which he [graciously] regenerates, sanctifies, and saves sinners; that being perfectly consistent with the free agency of man, it comprehends all the means in connection with the end. (*The New Hampshire Confession* in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 364)

This confession was revised in 1925 and adapted by the Southern Baptist Convention which revised and enlarged it again in 1963.

and Hebrew, as well as higher mathematics. Eventually after serving as pastor of the First Baptist Church of Philadelphia, he was elected president of Haddington College, and later of Mercer University.⁵⁴

The first formally trained theologian of the nineteenth century and also the most influential, was James Petigru Boyce, the founder of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and its first president. Boyce was a graduate of Brown University and of Princeton. At Princeton he became thoroughly captivated by the theology of Charles Hodge. His *Abstract of Systematic Theology*, published in 1887, was widely distributed and doubtless shaped the theology of a number of the early graduates of Southern Seminary. In order to insure the orthodoxy of future generations of teachers, Boyce prepared an *Abstract of Principles* which every professor was asked to sign in which each promised "to teach in accordance with, and not contrary to, . . ." In this work, Law and Gospel are only mentioned in a casual way. They are subsumed under the "covenant of works" and the "covenant of grace." In illustrating what constitutes a covenant, Boyce wrote: "Thus, between a government and its responsible subjects, law becomes a covenant."⁵⁵ He then continues, "Law prescribed by God as lawgiver is admitted to exist together with its sanctions and penalties; and, as in human law, so here, no excuse can be made of want of formal agreement; because of the natural obligation to obey." He continues:

These facts are, however, more fully applicable to the covenant of works, regarded as the general law of obtaining and maintaining spiritual life, given to all mankind, and still held forth to them, than to the transactions under that covenant connected with Adam's fall.⁵⁶

In numerous places where Boyce discusses the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, he refers the reader to Hodge's outline or manuscript lecture. Apparently he found himself virtually in complete agreement with Hodge's version of Calvinism. Therefore, it is only with the twentieth century theologians that an attempt is made to construct a theological system on something other than Protestant scholastic foundations. But in none of them do we find Law and Gospel as an organizing principle. And only in Carl F. H. Henry's *Personal Ethics* do we find an entire chapter given to a discussion of "the Law and the Gospel."

The first of the twentieth century Baptist theologians of note was Augustus Hopkins Strong, former President and Professor of Biblical

⁵⁴Norman Wade Cox, ed., *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1958) s.v. "Dagg, John Leadley," by Malcolm Lester.

⁵⁵James P. Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (Reprint, no information given) 235.

⁵⁶Ibid.

Theology at the Rochester Theological Seminary. In volume 2 of his three volume *Systematic Theology*, there is a relatively brief discussion of the Law of God. In this section, there are several statements that indicate how limited a role is given the Law in his overall theological system.

The law of God is a general expression of God's will, applicable to all moral beings. . . . The law of God, accordingly, is a *partial*, not an exhaustive, expression of God's nature. It constitutes, indeed, a manifestation of that attribute of holiness which is fundamental in God, and which man must possess in order to be in harmony with God. But it does not fully express God's nature in its aspects of personality, sovereignty, helpfulness, mercy. . . . Mere law, therefore, leaves God's nature in these aspects of personality, sovereignty, helpfulness, mercy, to be expressed toward sinners in another way, namely, through the atoning, regenerating, pardoning, sanctifying work of the gospel of Christ. As creation does not exclude miracles, so law does not exclude grace (Rom 8:3—"what the law could not do . . . God" did).⁵⁷

He quotes approvingly from C. H. Murphy:

Law is a transcript of the mind of God as to what man ought to be. But God is not merely law, but love. There is more in his heart than could be wrapped up in the 'ten words.' Not the law, but only Christ, is the perfect image of God (John 1:17—"For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ").⁵⁸

In the fourth place, he writes: "Grace is to be regarded, however, not as abrogating law, but as republishing and enforcing it (Rom 3:31—"we establish the law")."⁵⁹ In the fifth and last place he says "thus the revelation of grace, while it takes up and includes in itself the revelation of law, adds something different in kind, namely, the manifestation of the personal love of the Lawgiver. Without grace, law has only a demanding aspect." His final statement is indicative of his understanding of the function of law. "In fine, grace is that the larger and completer manifestation of the divine nature, of which law constitutes the necessary but preparatory stage."⁶⁰

In E. Y. Mullins' *The Christian Religion in its Doctrinal Expression*, published in 1917, there is even a briefer treatment of the law which is seen in more personal dimensions than that in Strong. Mullins was arguably the most influential, even though not the most creative,

⁵⁷Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1907) 547-48.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 548.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 549.

theologian among Southern Baptists in the twentieth century. His discussion of law is found in a section entitled, "The Biblical Teaching as to Sin." In this section he writes, "Sin has also been defined as a lack of conformity to God's moral law. This also is correct as a partial definition of sin. But lack of conformity to law is not an adequate definition."⁶¹ Further he writes, "Sin manifests itself in many ways but the ruling thought in them all is the departure of the sinner from Jehovah's will. There was indeed transgression of law, but it was Jehovah's law." Once again he discusses sin as a breach of the covenant relation between God and the people. He writes:

God made many covenants with Israel. The Mosaic covenant best expresses the covenant idea. That idea was a nation in religious fellowship with God. Here all the provisions of the law, ceremonial and moral, related to men inside the covenant.⁶²

Therefore, both covenant and law were seen in their personal dimensions in relationship to God, and not so much in a contractual relationship.

W. T. Conner, Professor of Theology for many years at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, in *The Gospel of Redemption*, insists that it is the Gospel which brings the cross and the atoning work of Christ into the center stage of the drama of redemption in which the Law also plays an important part. He points out that the Law brings a knowledge of sin, "this shows," he writes, "that there was an intimate connection between the knowledge of the will of God and sin as an active principle in human life."⁶³ He discusses law in relationship to the revelation of God, the first of which, he says, is in "the revelation of God and nature or the physical world." He continues, "the next stage in the revelation of God as related to sin is his revelation in reason and conscience, or man's rational and moral nature."⁶⁴ He explains: "It seems that Paul is setting forth that the requirements of the law, at least in a general way, are revealed in man's moral consciousness, and that obedience to these requirements of the law as thus made known is virtually obedience to the law."⁶⁵ "A third stage in God's revelation," Conner writes, "may be denoted by the term law. This is Paul's great term when thinking of God's revelation of himself in relation to man as sinful. By this he means primarily the Old Testament or Mosaic law."⁶⁶

⁶¹Edgar Young Mullins, *The Christian Religion in its Doctrinal Expression* (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1917) 288.

⁶²Ibid., 289.

⁶³Walter T. Conner, *The Gospel of Redemption* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1945) 12.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Ibid., 13.

⁶⁶Ibid.

Conner then goes on to define the law in this respect as “the embodiment of the moral requirements of God in published ordinances.”⁶⁷ Conner holds that the function of the Law was not to justify or to save, but rather to bring a consciousness of sin and to underline one’s helplessness and need of a redeemer. Thus it was pedagogic in its effect in order to lead the sinner to Christ. The fourth and final stage of revelation is “the revelation of the grace of God in Christ which saves from sin.”⁶⁸ Conner writes: “but we do not get the complete doctrine of sin until we see the grace of God that saves from sin.”⁶⁹ It is in respect to Christ that Conner sees the Holy Spirit’s work in convicting concerning righteousness which only comes with the revelation of the righteousness in Christ which reveals the nature of sin.

We mean by this that the cross shows that God saves us on principles of righteousness. The cross makes it clear that in saving man God did not compromise with sin. The cross of Christ is the most uncompromising condemnation of human sin to be found in either history or experience. Human selfishness and sin stand utterly condemned before that cross as nowhere else in God’s world.⁷⁰

In the final analysis, Conner argues that Christ has taken the curse of the Law from us which was not deliverance from a legalistic system but death.

The curse was the curse of death. That curse comes on us because of our sin. The law pronounced that curse of death upon us because of our failure to live up to its requirements. Christ redeemed us from that curse by taking the curse of death upon himself.⁷¹

In Conner, therefore, we see law as a part of the revelatory process in that it revealed man in his sin in the light of the righteousness of God which brought with it the curse of death which only Christ, in his redemptive act of sacrificial death, could remove.

Perhaps the best known contemporary theologian among Baptists today is Carl F. H. Henry. In his *Christian Personal Ethics*, he devotes an entire chapter to the Law and the Gospel. The thrust of this chapter, as he fences with Brunner and Barth, and the contemporary advocates of existential ethics (the new morality), and the Roman Catholics, is that the Moral Law has not been abrogated. He argues persuasively that the Mosaic Law preceded the prophetic tradition and it states in

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Ibid., 14.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Ibid., 92.

⁷¹Ibid., 103.

certain propositions that which was intrinsic and an expression of God's eternal moral will, the Law of God. While the ceremonial laws are no longer binding upon those who have committed themselves to Christ, the Moral Law has never been abolished.

The Law tells what the eternally righteous Creator and Lord requires of his creatures. Since it is based on the nature and purpose of the changeless God, the Law can never be abolished, but remains forever. Not even Christ abrogates the Law taken in this sense, nor is the Divine salvation of the sinners by grace accomplished in violation of the moral law or in disregard to justice.⁷²

Again he writes, "the eternal moral law of God is binding on believer and unbeliever alike."⁷³ After discussing the various aspects of the purpose of the law, he continues the insistence that the Law still is in effect. "It is a pedagogue that brings men to Christ." Then he insists "the Law therefore becomes a means of grace, disclosing the actual nature of sin and man's need for redemption."⁷⁴ Henry tries to avoid antinomianism while giving adequate attention to the Gospel. He reconciles his strong insistence that the Moral Law is binding forever with the new strength a Christian has to live according to Mosaic precepts.

The Christian is no longer in hopeless bondage to a moral law he cannot fulfill, binding his conscience to a scheme of behavior beyond his reach as a sinner, and exhibiting him as a slave mastered by sin. Now the law's power against him is broken. God's free grace to the sinner has shattered the condemning power of the law and his inspired moral endeavor with the liberty and assurance of spiritual life.⁷⁵

In this vein he continues to point out the relationship between Law and Gospel for the Christian life. "In the context of salvation by grace, the Law serves as the external criterion of virtue, as the rule of moral good and evil for the believer's walk and conversation. It sets forth the will of God in terms of what ought to be accomplished and avoided."⁷⁶ Though, Henry argues that the Law does not lose its force against the Christian because it is inferior to the Gospel, or faulty form of "ethical demand," but "because its requirements have been fully met for him by Christ."⁷⁷

⁷²Carl F. H. Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957) 350.

⁷³*Ibid.*, 353.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 355.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 354.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 356.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 357.

There is more Law than Gospel in this chapter. As compared with Conner, who finds the fullest revelation by God in the Gospel and in the love which that Gospel engenders in Christian life, it is a little difficult to see that Henry has grasped anything like the significance of the Gospel and specifically the cross as a fuller—even ultimate—revelation of God. Perhaps because his chapter is essentially a polemic against what he considers modern distortions of ethics, it appears to short change the Gospel.

Another contemporary Baptist theologian, James Leo Garrett, has just recently brought out the first volume of his two volume *Systematic Theology*. In contrast with Henry, Garrett has genuine appreciation for certain aspects of Brunner's delineation of the relationship of Law and Gospel. He also shows a greater awareness of the radical difference between the Mosaic law and the *kerygma*. Garrett is closer to Conner when he insists that "under the gospel of Christ, or under the gospel of grace, the law has a revelatory or convictive function." Like Conner, Garrett also holds that the Gospel in its power brings greater conviction for sin than the Law could ever bring.

The deepest revelation of the nature and awfulness of sin is not in the conscience of human beings or through the law of God but in the message centered in the death of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. His cross was not only a revelation of God's love for sinful humankind, but also an unmasking of the very nature and awfulness of sin: the rejection of Jesus' interiorizing of the law, the refusal of God's greatest gift to humanity, the violent putting to death by creaturely humans of the Creator's Son, and the spurning of that very self-giving love (*agapē*) by which God chose to redeem humankind. "It is a strong paradox that part of the 'good news' is the revelation of the true meaning of sin."⁷⁸

Garrett reflects the influence of W. T. Conner who emphasized the absolute necessity of the gospel for both its convicting power and its transforming grace. From this study, it appears that Conner and Garrett are closer to the Anabaptists' and early English Baptists' insistence upon the uniqueness of the Gospel as fulfillment of the Law, and also as a final and complete revelation of God, than any of the other Baptist theologians discussed here.

Conclusion

It is readily apparent that both Anabaptists and Baptists have historically understood the Law and the Gospel in a variety of different theological formulations. There is, however, a rather consistent understanding

⁷⁸James Leo Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990) 502.

of the relationship of Law and Gospel in both Anabaptist treatments of the subject and Baptist understanding. The first major deviation from this commonality was that which was inserted into Baptist life with the adoption of the major features of the Westminster Confession, and particularly its long chapter on the Law. By this means Protestant Scholasticism, characteristic of Calvinism as expressed in the Second Helvetic Confession of Faith, was inserted into the life of a people whose own understanding was quite different from this theological formulation. Since that event, Boyce and Henry reflect more the influence of this approach to Law and Gospel than do Mullins, Conner, and Garrett.

Yet, there are several elements in the Anabaptist and Baptist understanding of Law and Gospel that are fairly evident. The Moral Law is identified with the Mosaic decalogue. Other aspects of the ceremonial law and judicial law in the Old Testament are not held binding on the Christian. The purpose of the Law was revelatory—to reveal the righteous nature of God and to bring conviction for sin, helping mankind to realize the helplessness of its sinful condition before a righteous God. Thus, it was preparatory and to a certain extent an incomplete revelation of God. The Gospel, on the other hand, focused on the person, life, teaching, death, and resurrection of Christ, constituting the ultimate revelation of God, and by the same token the ultimate condemnation of sin. This did not mean in the final analysis that those who had committed their lives to Christ were now free from moral obligations, but rather the new life which was made possible by the Holy Spirit's miracle of the new birth gives one the opportunity to live a life of victory over sin. For the Law is internalized by the Spirit and the Christian is therefore empowered to live a qualitatively different kind of life because of this new relationship to Christ. Therefore, while being justified by faith, the twice born is not thereby automatically antinomian, but rather seeks to live a life of discipleship in obedience to Christ that finds its highest expression in the Law of love as exemplified in the crucified Lord.