



F.A.C.S. REPORT

"A Monthly Newsletter on the Relevance of the Christian Faith"

Vol. 19, No. 2

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February, 2000

What's Inside:

"The great Reformation principle of justification by faith in Christ has been treasured by the Church for centuries. It was this truth that spawned the Reformation. It was this doctrine that gave rise to the great Creeds of the Church. Yet, it is this very doctrine that evangelical anti-nomianism attacks.

What must be understood is that both aspects of our salvation dealt solely with the Law of God.

The sad reality is that all traditional theological positions have taken a step to the left.

Christ was righteous because He kept the Law. We must imitate Him. If we do not, then we are no better than the Pharisees."

OF EVANGELICALISM AND ANTINOMIAN TENDENCIES

by Murray McLeod-Boyle

LANGUAGE IS a wonderful thing. It is a very liberating feeling to have a good command of language and to be able to articulate your particular case. An extensive vocabulary is always a helpful tool. So it is that you will never find St. Angus of Garvoc far from his Roget's Thesaurus. However, words by themselves are useless. Even language is a complete and utter impossibility if one aspect is removed. Imagine you were to learn the French alphabet. You know how to pronounce each consonant. All the vowel sounds are at your command. On top of this you have a good idea of syntax and grammatical structure. Could we then say that you could read French? Yes, we could. You would have absolutely no problem reading the daily paper or a book, as long as it was written in French. If we asked, do you know the language? The answer

would be a resounding, no! Why? What is missing? The aspect missing is that of *definition*. You have learnt enough to be able to say words, if they have been written for you. However, you have absolutely no concept of the definitions that are attached to each word. In such a state, language and true communication are not at your command.

This illustration is necessary to help us understand the plight of the Church today. We live in a day where language is turned on its head by associating different definitions with a word. This is always done negatively and usually has a liberal slant to it. Consider the following. Cool is a degree of temperature, but to the modern generation it means exciting. 'Wicked' is now translated as 'good', and the homosexuals have destroyed the word 'gay'.

Other examples are words such as awesome and fabulous. Awe is a very strong sense of fear and reverence, yet it is used today in the sense of exciting or large. 'Fabulous' means, of or pertaining to a fable. Today, there are a lot of ministers who have fabulous sermons, and if you were to say this to them they would thank you for the compliment.

If this were true only of the world, it may be a bearable phenomenon. Unfortunately, it is not. The lack of definition and precision in the Church is leading to error and controversy. No greater example exists than the issue of grace and law. As an example, imagine for a moment that you are the proverbial, 'fly on the wall.' You are listening to a conversation between two people. One asserts that salvation is of grace. His

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exalt grace. The evangelical antinomians have had a field day with Paul's letters, to such an extent that they have subtly influenced the Church at large. This has happened precisely because no one has stopped to define the term Law, or ask serious questions about the orthodoxy of those peddling the grace only doctrine.

If we examine Paul's writings, we will see that he uses the term 'law' in at least three different ways. It is used to refer to God's law negatively;¹ God's law positively;² and to the concoction of the Pharisees and Saducees.³ In other words, Paul does not regard God's Law as the problem. What he rails against is the pharisaical contrivances by which they seek to declare themselves righteous and, therefore, acceptable to God. Next we need to understand that when Paul speaks of the weakness of the Law he is really referring to our weakness. It is because of man's inadequacy, his sinful nature, that the Law is unable to justify him. Man's inability is the problem. Not the Law. The Law told us what was right and true and good, but we could not obey it. The only weakness of the Law was that it could never provide a propitiation for those under its curse. This again, however, is due to our sin, not an inherent fault in the Law. God's Law is perfect and just and is esteemed by Jesus, Paul and the other New Testament writers (Psalm 19:7-10).

In defining these terms correctly, we see that there is not one shred of evidence for the evangelical antinomianism that is so prevalent today among all denominations. The sad reality is that all traditional theological positions have taken a step to the left. Thus the liberals have become pagans. The broad-evangelicals have become liberals. Evangelicals are now very broad, and the Reformed churches are only just evangelical. There are few denominations

where you would not find the reaction outlined in the 'fly on the wall' scenario above. We will accept the word 'grace' without definition or complaint, even when we suspect that it means or can be acquainted with antinomianism. Yet, at the slightest mention of the word 'law', the term anathema springs to mind.

The great Reformation principle of justification by faith in Christ has been treasured by the Church for centuries. It was this truth that spawned the Reformation. It was this doctrine that gave rise to the great Creeds of the Church. Yet, it is this very doctrine that evangelical antinomianism attacks. Conversely, this doctrine is the greatest corrective to the insipid evangelicalism of today. Those who hold to any form of antinomian teaching, whether explicitly or implicitly, have either forgotten or never bothered to understand the doctrine of justification. Nor is it a coincidence that this teaching comes out of rank Arminianism and a part of the Church whose theological prowess is, at best, dubious. Given this, we cannot help but wonder how this teaching has gained such a foothold and been allowed to paralyse the Church. We suspect it is because the main line Church has lost its stomach for the fight and has thus acquiesced in things she should not have.

Regardless of reason, we must counter this shift. Therefore we must understand the place of the Law in our salvation.

Salvation in Christ

BEFORE CHRIST'S righteousness could be imputed to us, Jesus had to be accepted by God. We had transgressed God's Law and reaped death as a result. For salvation to be possible, through whatever means, God's justice had to be met. In other words, there had to be satisfaction for God's wrath.

friend agrees, but asks, "Does not the Law also have a place in our salvation and sanctification?" To this the immediate retort comes, "Are you saying we must keep the law to be saved?" Before the person has a chance to reply, he is denounced as a legalist, a pharisaic scare-monger, and not least of all, a heretic.

We ask, what happened here? Was not the question of the place of the Law correct? At heart, it is a matter of definition; and one-sided definition at that. Throughout history there have been as many heresies built around works (law) as there have been around grace. However, we live in a day that is, lamentably, governed by those whose theological history is less than respectable. Consequently, their imbalance in definition is propagated everywhere with the result that people have become singularly minded on certain doctrines.

As an example, let us consider the Apostle Paul. His works are appealed to in order to denounce the Law and

- 1 Galatians 2:15-16: We are Jews by nature, and not sinners from among the Gentiles; nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified (NASB).
- 2 Romans 3:31 Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law; 7:7 What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be!; 16 I agree with the Law, confessing that it is good (NASB).
- 3 Galatians 5:2-4, 12: Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.... Would that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves (NASB).

However, this was only half the picture. If someone else paid the penalty for our sin, it left the question of a right standing before God unanswered.

In the Old Testament, the faithful offered a substitutionary atonement. God's wrath was poured out upon the animal offered. This satisfied God's wrath and justice. Nonetheless, it could not stop God's wrath from flaring again. So, whilst provision for wrath was made, there was no provision to remove man's guilt and restore him to pristine condition.

We know that those animal sacrifices pointed forward to Christ. Thus the question is, how will Christ's offering satisfy both aspects. Jesus could have died in our stead and taken our punishment upon Himself, but this would have left us in the position of the Israelites. The second we sinned, God's wrath would have burned against us and we would have been back at square one. Therefore, Jesus sacrifice had to be fuller and more complete. It had to pay for our sins in such a way that it turned God's wrath away forever and elevated our standing so that we could be, as it were, without sin.

So how was Christ going to achieve both these aspects? First, as we had transgressed the Law, He had to keep it (Romans 5:12-21). Moreover, He had to do so as our federal head (vicarious atonement). In this manner, all the benefits would flow to His people. Secondly, He had to bear the penalty for sin. Thus Berkhof observes:

It is customary to distinguish between the active and passive *obedience of Christ*. His active obedience consists in all that **He did to observe the law** in behalf of sinners, as a condition of obtaining eternal life; and His passive obedience in all that He suffered in paying the penalty of sin and thus discharging the debt of all His people.... In general it may be said that through His passive obedience He paid the penalty for sin and consequently removed the curse from

man; and that through His active obedience He merited eternal life for the sinner, bringing him to the goal which Adam failed to reach.⁴

"The perfect obedience of Christ to the law of God is not simply an example, but the basis of the redemption of his people who lay condemned by the law (Gal. 4:5). Justification, the central doctrine of the gospel, is nothing but the exposition of salvation in terms of God as King and righteous Lawgiver and man as rebellious subject. False views of justification spring from false views of God's character and God's law. Righteousness must be the basis of justification and *righteousness is perfect obedience to the law.*"⁵

What must be understood is that both aspects of our salvation dealt solely with the Law of God. Christ obeyed the Law and thus purchased us a standing before God—adoption as sons. Similarly, Christ's cursed death on the tree was the punishment, under the Law, that was due to us. Christ died to meet the just requirements of the Law. That is the basis of our salvation.

Let it be stated again, in case some misunderstand. If Christ had not kept the Law, either in life or in death, then we would not have full and complete salvation. Righteousness is full obedience to the Law of God; Christ is righteous; therefore Christ obeyed the Law.

We detect a din, a noisy choir warming up to condemn us for such a statement. They are about to shout, What of grace? Before answering, we would ask this chorus, where is our statement opposed to grace? It is easy to shout, but often one will find it harder to justify their position!

The problem we face, is a simple one of cart and horse. It is a case of method verses means. By method we mean that salvation was not possible apart from the Law being fully obeyed. By means we simply say that salvation is not possible apart

from grace. We had a perfect existence; we had harmony with our Creator. God had given it all to us. We spurned God's free gift of life. We rejected because we thought that we could broker a better offer and gain a higher place. In so doing we broke covenant with God and were cast from His presence to wallow in a hellish type misery. Let me then ask, what did God owe us? Let us be more specific. Did God have to come to us and show favour? No, He did not. He would have been justified in destroying us there and then. That He did not is Grace. That He gave His Law is Grace; That the Law in part contained ceremonies for the expiation of sin is Grace. That He sent His son is Grace. That He applies Christ's work to us is Grace. Nonetheless, Christ's work can only gain merit for us because Jesus first obeyed God's Law.

Jesus' Affirmation

AS CHRIST HIMSELF SAID:

"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished. "Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. "For I say to you, that unless your righteousness surpasses *that* of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:17-20 NASB).

This statement of Jesus is profound, but most today do not stop and contemplate its meaning. It is twisted, mangled and mutilated in order to fit the modern day grace and love theologies. However, if Jesus is allowed to speak we shall be forced to reject the modern theories.

4 Louis Berkhof, *Manual of Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1933), 215-16. Scripture references omitted. Emphasis added.

5 *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, ed. E. F. Harrison (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1960) s.v. "Law." Emphasis added.

Jesus says clearly that He did not come to abolish (katalu'sai) the Law or the Prophets. The stem from which this word is derived has two distinct meanings. One is to tear down, abolish, annul. The other refers to a place of lodging.⁶ In regard to the first usage, this word group is used throughout the gospels in reference to Jesus tearing down the temple. In Acts 5:38-39 Gamaliel uses a related term. In essence he says that if this new phenomenon, or Jesus cult, if you will, is of man it will be "overthrown." If, however, it is of God no one will be able to "overthrow" it. Paul uses the term twice (Romans 14:20; 2 Corinthians 5:1) and in both instances it has the sense of tearing down. Specifically, the word occurs in this same form in three other places. Matthew 26:61 uses in reference to Jesus declaration that He would destroy the temple and build it in three days. In Luke 19:7 it is used of Jesus visiting with Zaccheus. Lastly, in Acts 5:39, as we have seen, it appears on Gamaliel's lips in the sense of overthrow. In light of these usages, it is impossible to say that Christ came to earth on a radical mission to tear down the Law.

This is also reinforced by Jesus using the negative in his opening statement. In Greek, the negative can be used to convey two different ideas. 'May' plus the present imperative means, stop doing an action you have started. 'May' plus the aorist subjunctive means do not begin to undertake an action.⁷ Thus we may reasonably translate Jesus opening words as, "Do not even begin to entertain the idea that I have come to tear down the Law." Again, there is no ambiguity here. Jesus told these people point blank that He had not come as a great source of discontinuity. Rather He was there in relation to the Law and the Prophets.

Similarly, we must seek to understand the term fulfill. Any attempt to see this term as an abrogation is futile. If we understand the term 'fulfill' in the sense that Christ obeyed the law and so abrogated it, we are placing a contradiction in the mouth of Christ. This type of interpretation is also done to death, as we shall see, by the context in which it is given. So we must look for a better explanation.

The term fulfill (playrow'sai) is used in this form three other times in the New Testament. In Matthew 3:15, Jesus insists on being baptised by John so as to "fulfill all righteousness." Paul, in Romans 15:13, asks that the "God of hope fill you with all joy and peace." In Colossians 1:25, Paul says that "I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God" (NKJV).

Whilst this comparison is not so helpful, we do note that there is no idea of annulment or abolition present. To help us we will look to another form of the word derived from the same root. The cognate term (playrowthay) is used approximately 20 times in the New Testament. The majority of these uses, and every use in Matthew's gospel, refer to the fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy. Thus, it seems that Jesus is here declaring that His coming is tied to the Law's expectation of righteousness. What the Law could not do because of our weakness in the flesh, Christ was going to achieve through His obedience. This also seems reasonable in light of the fact that Jesus speaks of the Law and the Prophets. These are not in competition, but in unity they seek the fulfillment of the promise. They look for the Seed; the Son of David; the righteous King who shall rule in

peace; and whose kingdom shall know no end.

The next issue that is presented in Jesus statement is in relation to the heavens and earth. Note how the continuance of the Law and the Prophets is tied to the existence of heaven and earth. Even if this statement refers to this sinful earth, it serves to confirm that the Law and Prophets are relevant today. They shall have force at least until the parousia². Similarly, Jesus goes to great effort to underscore this fact. He is not content to simply say, the Law and the Prophets stands until heaven and earth pass away. No, He adds, that not even an iota or the least stroke shall pass. In Greek the iota was the smallest letter. Iota may be used here in reference to the Hebrew 'yod' which is the smallest letter in that alphabet. The second term refers, in context to a hook on a letter. In essence, then, Jesus is saying that the smallest details shall remain unchanged. Once more, Jesus emphasises the continuing nature of the Law and the Prophets, and there obvious continuity with His ministry.

Why does Jesus say this? As we have seen, righteousness is nothing less than perfect obedience to God's Law. Thus, we as God's people should strive to obey this Law—just as Christ our redeemer did. Consider Jesus emphasis. He speaks of the one who annuls these commands and teaches others to do likewise. Literally, Jesus speaks of the one who looses or dissolves the commands of God. This one shall be called least. In contrast, great shall be the one who *does* and teaches these commands. Here the Scriptural emphasis upon the "doer of the Word" is brought to the fore.⁸ Jesus is setting us a standard to follow. We are to be *imitators* of Christ in every respect—even in Law keeping!⁹

6 In regard to the second usage the gospel writers use it to describe the place where Jesus would hold the Supper and of the fact that Jesus was born in a manger because the inn was full. See Mark 14:14; Luke 2:7; 9:12; 19:7; 22:11. As we can see from those references Luke uses it primarily in the second sense.

7 "The aorist subjunctive only with [may] is used to forbid the initiation of an action. (Contrast the present imperative with [may] which is used to stop an action already in progress.) The words "don't ever" may be used in the translation." J. A. Brooks and C. L. Winbery, *Syntax of New Testament Greek*, (Lanham: University Press of America, 1979), 118; "The Aorist Subjunctive forbids the action as a simple event with reference to the action as a whole or to its inception, and is most frequently used when the action has not begun." E. D. Burton, *Syntax of Moods and Tenses in N.T. Greek*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1898), 75.

8 James 1:22: "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves."

This aspect has a very important consequence for our eternal welfare. Many today hiss and boo at any mention of the Law, yet without it we can never be doers of the Word. If we despise it, then we are not being imitators of Christ. If we are not imitating Christ, then we are not being conformed to His image. The impact of this is seen in Jesus concluding remarks:

For I say to you, that **unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.**

Christ was righteous because He kept the Law. We must imitate Him. If we do not, then we are no better than the Pharisees. Remember, Jesus just denounced those who loose or dissolve God's Law. Were the Pharisees guilty of loosing and dissolving? Yes, they were. They had made an art of this. Thus, we should be under no delusion as to how we should esteem and respect the Law and the Prophets. We can esteem them as Christ our redeemer did, or we can treat them in the manner of the Pharisees. One will bring blessing, the other a curse.

In examining this text, evidently Jesus gave His full blessing to the Law and the Prophets. He lived by the Law and appealed to the Prophets. He died under the Law's curse as the Prophets foretold. Christ was not a new phenomenon. He was the fulfillment of all that the Law and the Prophets looked for (1 Peter 1:10-12).

The Reformation Church's Agreement

WE HAVE VIEWED the words of Christ on this matter. From that clear testimony there can be no doubt that the Law and the Prophets still have force today. Now, we shall seek to survey the Church's position

on this matter. As it is our purpose to refute evangelical antinomianism, we aim merely to show that the orthodox (mainline) Church has always believed in the continuing relevance of the Law. By this we mean, that the Reformation Church, through its creeds, has always held a higher view of the Law than that which is common today.

In what follows, the reader will note that some affirmations refer simply to God's "commands." These are included, as it shows that the framers of the article clearly believed that God has spoken and is to be believed. To what extent these statements are to be applied, it is not always clear. However, we reiterate, our purpose is to show that in times past the Church believed that God's commands or Law was something the Christian was to honour. This is in contrast to our day where subjectivism (man's vain imagination) reigns and God's holy Law is trampled under foot.

1547 The Edwardian Homilies:

But the prince, not satisfied herewith, asked farther, Which commandments? The scribes and Pharisees had made so many of their own laws and traditions, to bring men to heaven, besides God's commandments, that this man was in doubt whether he should come to heaven by those laws and traditions, or by the law of God; and therefore he asked Christ, which commandments he meant. *Whereunto Christ made him a plain answer, rehearsing the commandments of God*, saying, Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother, and Love thy neighbour as thyself. *By which words Christ declared, that the laws of God be the very way that doth lead to everlasting life*, and not the traditions and laws of men. So that this is to be taken for a most true lesson taught by Christ's own mouth, that

the works of the moral commandments of God be the very true works of faith, which lead to the blessed life to come....¹⁰

1561¹¹ The Belgic Confession; Article 25:

We believe that the ceremonies and symbols of the law have ended with the coming of Christ, and that all foreshadowings have come to an end, so that the use of them ought to be abolished by Christians. Yet the truth and substance of these things remain for us in Jesus Christ, in whom they have been fulfilled. *Nevertheless, we continue to use the witnesses drawn from the law and the prophets to confirm us in the gospel and to regulate our lives with full integrity for the glory of God, according to His will.*¹²

1563 The Thirty-nine Articles; Article 7:

The Old Testament is not contrary to the New: for both in Old and New Testament life is offered to Mankind by Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and Man, being both God and Man. Wherefore, they are not to be heard, which feign that the old Fathers did look only for transitory promises. Although the Law given from God by Moses, as touching Ceremonies and Rites, do not bind Christian men, nor the Civil precepts thereof ought of necessity to be received in any commonwealth; yet notwithstanding, no Christian man is free from the obedience of the **Commandments** which are called **Moral**.¹³

1563 The Heidelberg Catechism; Q. and A. 91:

What do we do what is good?

Only that which arises out of true faith, *conforms to God's law*,¹⁴ and is done for His glory; and not that which is based on what we think is right or on established human tradition.¹⁵

9 See: Romans 8:29; 1 Corinthians 11:1; Ephesians 5:1-2.

10 John H. Leith, ed., *Creeds of the Church: A Reader in Christian Doctrine from the Bible to the Present*, 3d ed., (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1983), 263-64. So that the reader does not think this heresy, be assured that in the preceding sections the writer has gone to great lengths to speak of salvation in Christ. This quotation is taken from "The Second Part of the Sermon of Good Works." Emphasis added.

11 This is the year of composition.

12 *The Book of Forms*, (Geelong: Reformed Churches of Australia Publishing House, 1991), 42.

1647 The Westminster Confession of Faith; Article 19, Section 5:

The moral law doth for ever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof; (Rom. 13:8,9, Eph. 6:2, 1 John 2:3-4,7-8) and that, not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator, who gave it. (James 2:10,11) *Neither doth Christ, in the Gospel, any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation.* (Matt. 5:17-19, James 2:8, Rom. 3:31)¹⁶

1784 Articles Of Religion;¹⁷ Article 6:

The Old Testament is not contrary to the New: for both in the Old and New Testament everlasting life is offered to mankind by Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and man, being both God and man. Wherefore they are not to be heard who feign that the old fathers did look only for transitory promises. Although the law given from God by Moses, as touching ceremonies and rites, doth not bind Christians, nor ought the civil precepts thereof of necessity be received in any commonwealth; yet, notwithstanding, *no Christian whatsoever is free from the obedience of the **commandments which are called moral.***¹⁸

1833 The New Hampshire Confession;¹⁹ Article 12:

That the **Law of God** is the eternal and unchangeable rule of his moral government; that it is holy, just, and good; and that the inability which the Scriptures ascribe to fallen men to fulfill it precepts, arises entirely from their love of sin; to deliver them from which, and to restore them through a Mediator to *unfeigned obedience to the holy law*, is one great end of the Gospel, and of the means of grace connected with the establishment of the visible Church.²⁰

1925 Statement Of Faith And Message;²¹ Article 12:

A Church of Christ is a congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the ordinances of Christ, *governed by his law*, and exercising the gifts, rights and privileges invested in them by his word....²²

In what has preceded we have in no way meant to cause the reader tedium. On the contrary, we have sought to open eyes by showing that the Reformation Church was in total agreement with our Lord. As you are very astute readers, you will have noticed an overlap. For example, the Thirty-nine articles and the Articles of Religion are almost identical. This is because Wesley revised the Thirty-nine articles to form a creed for the Methodists. A similar thing can be seen in varying adaptations of the Westminster

Confession. Some agreed with its theology, but not Presbyterian polity, so it was modified and accepted.

Nevertheless, the point we wish to make is this. *All agree concerning the continuing validity of the Law.* Whether Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian or Continental Reformed, they are all in accord.²³ The only dissenters were the Anabaptists and the Radical Reformers, such as the Zwickau prophets.

The Slippery Slope

INTERESTINGLY, MOST OF the creeds denounce these people. They reject their positions as unbiblical and therefore error. Also of interest, is the fact that it is these very denunciations that show how we have moved ground, theologically. As an example we will look to the Belgic confession as adopted by the Reformed Churches of Australia. In regard to article 36, we find the following footnote:

The RCA Synod of 1991 decided, in line with the CRC Synod of 1985, that the following paragraph be taken from the body of the text and placed in a footnote: And on this matter we denounce the Anabaptists, other anarchists, and in general all those who want to reject the authorities of civil officers and to subvert justice by introducing common ownership of goods and corrupting the moral order the God has established among human beings.²⁴

13 Leith, *Creeds*, 269.

14 The Catechism appends to this statement the following texts: Leviticus 18:4; 1 Samuel 15:22; and Ephesians 2:10.

15 *The Book of Forms*, 98. To this last section, dealing with the "what we think," and with "human tradition," the Catechism appends texts such as Deuteronomy 12:32 and Ezekiel 20:18-19. This is important as it sets forth a standard that helps us understand the Catechism. If the Old Testament is irrelevant, why quote from it? If this is not perceived to be God's law, why mention it?

16 Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1995. Emphasis added.

17 John Wesley's revision of the Thirty-nine articles "adopted by the Methodist Conference in Baltimore in 1784." Leith, *Creeds*, 353.

18 Leith, *Creeds*, 355. Emphasis added.

19 "The New Hampshire Baptist Convention appointed a committee on June 24, 1830, to prepare a statement of faith, which was published by the Board of Convention in 1833." Leith, *Creeds*, 334. Emphasis added.

20 Leith, *Creeds*, 338. Emphasis added.

21 Southern Baptist Convention 1925. This is a modified version of the New Hampshire Confession. Article 12, here quoted, is a modified version of article 13 in the New Hampshire Confession. The shift we are trying to illustrate can be seen at this point. Article 12 of the New Hampshire Confession, titled "Harmony of the Law and the Gospel," which we have inserted above, is left out of this 1925 revision.

22 Leith, *Creeds*, 348. This is a weakened form, however, we cannot differentiate between Christ's law and God's law. Emphasis added.

23 The Lutheran Creeds do not seem to canvass this area directly. Nevertheless, as Luther's "small Catechism" begins with an exposition of the Ten Commandments, it would be reasonable to believe that he saw the law as intrinsic to Christianity.

24 *The Book of Forms*, 57 n.80.

At this point we see the paradigm shift. No longer is the denomination willing to treat error as error and reject it outright. Note well, that this paragraph does more than reject the Anabaptists. It rejects anarchism, Marxism, and Socialism. Yet for the sake of seeming a little more tolerant, the whole paragraph is removed and the other teachings along with it.

Now let us make it clear that the RCA are not the only denomination to have added and deleted from creedal statements. Our concern is that this usually happens because we are embarrassed about something our fathers said. As a result, the offence is removed and our doctrinal purity takes a little slip. If the Anabaptists were wrong when the Belgic Confession was written, then they are wrong today. If they are not wrong today it can only be for two reasons. Either, the framers of the confession were wrong, or the Anabaptists have seen the error of their ways and repented. We fear that neither of these is correct. We go so far as to say that the Anabaptist theology has infiltrated mainstream Christianity and wreaked havoc. The Anabaptists rejected the Law of God. They set themselves to live in a Christian freedom that was purely subjective. Hear their words:

We are agreed as follows concerning the sword: The sword is ordained of God *outside the perfection of Christ*. It punishes and puts to death the wicked, and guards and protects the good. In the Law the sword was ordained for the punishment of the wicked and for their death, and the same [sword] is [now] ordained to be used by the *worldly magistrates*. In the perfection of Christ, however, only the ban is used for a warning and for the excommunication of the one who has sinned....Now it will be asked by many who do not recognize [this as] the will of Christ for us, whether a Christian may ... employ the sword ... for the defence

and protection of the good, or for the sake of love.

Our reply is unanimously as follows: Christ teaches and commands us to learn of Him, for He is meek and lowly.... Also Christ says to the heathenish women who was taken in adultery, not that one should stone her according to the law of His Father ..., but in mercy and forgiveness, and warning, to sin no more.... Secondly, it will be asked concerning the sword, whether a Christian shall pass sentence in *worldly* disputes.... Christ did not wish to.... Therefore we should do likewise.²⁵

Thirdly, it will be asked concerning the sword, Shall one be a magistrate if one should be chosen as such? The answer is as follows: They wished to make Christ king, but He fled.... Thus shall we do as He did, and ... *not walk in darkness*. For.... *He Himself forbids [employment of] the force of the sword*, saying the worldly princes lord it over them, etc., but not so shall it be with you.

Finally it will be observed that *it is not appropriate for a Christian to serve as a magistrate* because of these points: *The government magistracy is according to the flesh*, but the Christians' is according to the Spirit; their houses and dwelling remain in this world, but the Christians' are in heaven; their citizenship is in this world, but the Christians' citizenship is in heaven; the weapons of their conflict and war are carnal and against the flesh only, but the Christians' weapons are spiritual, against the fortification of the devil. The worldlings are armed with steel and iron, but the Christians are armed with the armour of God, with truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation and the Word of God.²⁶

Upon reading this, we hope that the reader is left with a sense of *déjà vu*. This was written in 1527, yet it would aptly describe the majority view of the Church in the year 2000. This document exhibits a radical

dualism in which secular and sacred are torn apart. It imposes upon Christ a disposition which He never evidenced when He walked among us. The Christian is warned-off taking part in any "worldly" vocation because it is filthy and sinful. It is, in the language of king Jim, a "superfluity of naughtiness." Everything is spiritualised and other-worldly, which comes very close to the Gnostic heresy. In this view we become spiritual monks, confined to our holy cloisters and cowering in the corner away from the mess and mass of sin. There is no great commission, no taking of every thought captive, or of destroying worldly philosophies. There is no caring for the widow, the orphan and the alien. Simply put, there is no justice. The lights have withdrawn to their cloister, each one to contemplate his own navel. They have placed an embargo on salt and now wait contented for death or rapture. In short, they have left the world to be run by darkness. On still nights they can be heard chanting their "woe is us" dirges. Occasionally they break forth in song and make a joyous noise, but the black-out curtains are always firmly in place. They have made a pact that no light shall fall from the hallowed windows of their cloister and cast light upon the earth.

In Christian circles today, sadly, you would not have to travel far to find these very same errors and situations being expounded and instituted. Our fathers new well where these teachings would lead. Consequently they taught us that God's Law is our only rule for living a holy and sanctified life. To reinforce this, they also denounced those who propagated error contrary to God's eternal Word. In our wisdom we have denounced both God's Law and the counsel of our fathers. We have insisted that it is tactless and poor form to denounce error strongly. Rather, we must cuddle up to it. Befriend it. Woo it. Then maybe it will listen to our

25 See well that this does not answer the question. Can we use the sword in self defence? Obviously not, according to this statement. Rather, it seems that as you are being strangled or stabbed, you should muster enough strength to bid this person, 'go and sin no more.' Maybe in his repentant state he may also ring for an ambulance on his way out. These affirmations are a slight on the very justice of God. Our fathers were right to denounce these people as heretics.

26 Article 6 of the Schleithem Confession (1527). Leith, *Creeeds*, 287-89. Brackets original. Emphasis added.

reasonable and politically correct arguments. Yet because we have forsaken the righteous truth of God's Law, we begin to listen to error. We court her smooth words. We enjoy the warmth of being close, and find it hard to remember why it was that we did not like her in the first place. Like the simple ones of Proverbs, we are enticed into her bed. Her lips are sweet, but her path leads to death and destruction.²⁷

Conclusion

CHRISTIAN, OUR FATHERS were right when they afforded reverence to God's Law as our only rule for a holy and sanctified life. Further, they were right when they denounced the heresy of the Anabaptists. Because God's Law has been esteemed little, the errors of man have been esteemed much. The only way forward is to reverse this trend.

Let us not endure the petty and trite words of those who would have us lie down in the bed called heresy. Instead, bid them be gone. Let us always cling to what Christ has taught, what our fathers taught, and rejoice in standing with the great cloud of witnesses (Hebrews 12:1-3).