

CREATION, FALL, AND WHAT?

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We Christian academics hope to engage a culture that describes itself as post-modern, post-industrial, deconstructive, post-empirical, post-patriarchal, or post-Christian, depending on the faction being addressed. These are fair descriptions of the habits of mind and heart of our secular colleagues; without a transcendent point of reference, their discourse can rarely be described positively or actively, and is best defined passively as "the world that came after the other ones." It is a land of weightless waiting, of spaces without windows, of sketches without perspective.

If we are to engage this post-Christian academy, it is essential that we frame up Christian thinking in categories that resist our intellectual peer pressures. It has become popular to categorize the distinctives of the Christian worldview by pointing to the theologies of Creation, Fall, and Redemption. This is more than a fad, and well on its way to becoming a new orthodoxy.

The discussion usually proceeds as follows: All the universe was good when created by God, and was created subject to His law, His intentions for the ordering and disclosure of the creation. The Fall, the moral rebellion of humans, has "bent" all of this well-created structure somewhat, deforming it into directions that do not conform to God's intent. The work of Christ and His followers is to redeem the creation, to be actively involved in every facet of the fallen world, bending it back to conform to God's good

ways. Thus individuals need to be redeemed, but by our efforts so do such things as political institutions, economic systems, and academic enterprises.

These three categories—creation, fall, and redemption—may have served well when the Christian academic's chief concern was to distinguish his thought from that of other, more "dualistic" Christian academics, although I have my doubts about even this. All of the Anabaptists I know would agree that alcohol was created good, and is now subject to the curse of the Fall. The disagreement enters only when discussing whether alcohol is best redeemed by putting it in one's veins or one's gas tank.

In any event, the Christian mind's primary battle in our day will not be against sisters and brothers in the Lord, but against a thoroughly secularized majority of academic colleagues. I have already hinted at the weakness in the Creation-Fall-Redemption scheme for meeting this challenge: It maintains the Christian distinctives about origins and sin, but it condenses too many issues into the rubric of "redemption." This single category is left with a burden it cannot bear, in a way that primes us for compromise with the secular motifs of our day.

For if our puny, fallen, human efforts at bending the wills of the principalities and powers around us are considered "redemption," if they enter my thought in the same category that contains Christ's absolutely unique work of atoning, prophesying and Lording, then, I will argue, I am primed to think that my works carry salvific significance. There is then no category of intellect to restrain me from wholesale promotion of thinly frosted secular movements as heralds of the coming of God's kingdom on earth; I am biased away from seeing any distinctive functions for church, state, family or school in these "last days," and biased toward elevating one of these institutions to monolithic power above the rest; I am inclined toward being triumphalist, arrogant and totalitarian, while risking a turn away from observing the necessity of the salvation and sanctification of persons by God himself; in short, I am poised to become a loyal subscriber to the

twentieth-century mind. And, as pointed out two paragraphs ago, I risk all of these things without providing a compelling rationale against "dualistic" believers who may think of God's work as a purely personal, individualistic operation.

Let me suggest that we proceed by splitting the "redemption" category into sub-categories, set up in ways that create some tension and space between us and the secular folk we hope to engage. Try these: Creation, Fall, Justification, Office, and Consummation.

Justification

Redemption, whether in "particular" salvation of persons or in "common grace" movements to restrain sin and promote righteousness in the world, is entirely of God's initiative and work. We might be tempted to say we're "redeeming" something of these that are actually His work, but I don't think we would be silly enough to say we are capable of "justification of" or "atonement for" these things, yet these are what are required by both individual sin and the corruption of social structures. Using "justification" as a category of thought would put a brake on our era's high claims for human volition and sufficiency and (corresponding) low place for transcendence. Otherwise our traditions may carry us for another generation or so, but the absence of a bulwark for the mind will result in the gradual erosion and loss of our distinctiveness.

Said differently, in our modern urgency to "make a difference" for some "cause," we stand in danger of surrendering the Reformation's theology of the cross. We have received some limited revelation of God's glory and righteousness in His works of creation, common grace, and history. But God's clearest self-revelation comes in the person of His Son and in that Son's work on the cross. In the cross, we see God hidden in pain and humiliation, a revelation that, more than the other revelations, cripples our attempts at self-redemption or world-redemption through the refinement of the will or intellect. In Christ's brokenness, our presumptions about our knowledge of God are broken, for this is not a God

we would naturally recognize as a God; in Christ's seeming weakness and foolishness, our illusions about knowing how to "fix the world" and ourselves, even if we are believers, are shown to be weak and foolish; for in Christ's disgraceful, painful revelation we see that God can not be known by those who savor their own natural analysis and knowledge of God. We would not recognize God in Christ, without being given faith by God himself; we are inclined toward every kind of progressive foolishness about our usefulness to the creation, unless we die with Christ and have our confidence shattered; we naturally suffer self-delusions about the grandeur of our subduing and being fruitful and multiplying and filling creation mandates, about our ability to function as if there had been no fall, unless Christ first shows us to be what we are: feeble, forgetful pilgrims, even on our best days. It is in Christ's humiliation, and in our own, that we will be saved and come to know God's ways.

Office

Since a fallen creation cannot redeem itself, fallen humans, even redeemed fallen humans, have not been put in the position of redeeming the fallen creation. Instead, we are given an office.

The Christian doctrine of election, which is typical of but not unique to Calvinism, presupposes the Christian doctrine of "Office": we are elected to something, a status, an estate, or more precisely a *set of offices* that we hold as God's own people. God has also set *institutions* in particular offices, with responsibilities and restraints peculiar to their offices. These duties and restrictions for people and institutions correspond to God's purposes for His creation, while recognizing mankind's rebellious inclination to obstruct these purposes.

For example, every member of the Body of Christ has a limited participation in the three great Offices Of Christ. Whereas He is the Great High Priest who offered a once-for-all atonement for sin, we are made a "nation of priests" whose access to God allows offerings of worship and service; whereas He rules as Lord of the Universe and His Church, we are

eventually made to reign with Him and share His victory over evil; whereas He is the Anointed Prophet whose teaching supersedes all other prophets, we are the agents through whom God continues to proclaim the Good News of God's Kingdom.

Beyond this general office of all believers, God places specific believers in distinctive offices: Some are apostles, some evangelists, some prophets, some elders, some deacons, some teachers. Persons hold these "offices," or "estates," and carry out their functions, whether they are locally acknowledged as formal "church offices" or not. Those who marry are likewise placed in a special, honorable "estate," or office, within which there are different responsibilities and expectations for behavior than for those who do not bear the office. Parents are also given an office, for which particular behaviors are appropriate. Parents are to retain supervision over their children, for example, even though the state might efficiently provide "better specialists" to nurture our children.

It seems arbitrary to the modern mind that some persons or institutions should be set aside for special responsibilities and restraints upon their freedom. But let me draw an analogy from political life. (This is mere analogy; it does not establish the superiority of any particular political system.) It is somewhat "arbitrary" that the President of the United States is not allowed to compose binding legislation nor manipulate the judicial process through which it is enforced. The president may be just as gifted a writer and legislator as members of Congress, and there might be great efficiencies in condensing the three functions of government into a single office. Yet legislation and enforcement are not considered legitimate components of his "office." This "arbitrariness" in assigning duties is intended to *prevent* a greater arbitrariness and evil: arbitrariness in the use of power. It is an election, not an exercise of the will nor the possession of an ability, that conveys these limited powers to a president and makes their exercise legitimate.

In a similar way, the order of Christian offices may seem arbitrary, but it is not haphazard. Offices reflect both God's

intent for the creation, and the need to continue to restrain sin. So, for example, to some ancients it seemed arbitrary that humans should be restricted to having sexual relations only with other humans (rather than the whole animal kingdom), and be further restricted to intimacy within marriage only. But Scripture attests that the estate of marriage exists both because this was God's intent for human intimacy from the beginning, and in order to restrain the exercise of sin.

Parents are likewise restricted by Scripture to behave within their families in ways that befit their office. Parents who run their families like armies cease to function as parents. Spouses who run their marriages like stock markets cease to function as spouses. Church officers who behave like game-show hosts cease to function as church officers.

Just as it seems arbitrary to the modern mind that some persons should be set aside for offices with special responsibilities and restraints upon freedom, it seems arbitrary that God may have set aside particular *institutions* to hold distinctive offices within His "economy." Consider, for example, what this might mean for the institutional church and for institutions of higher learning. Why should the Church not, as a church, turn its attention to taking official (a word whose root is "office") positions on social issue policies, as it strives to redeem the creation? Is not the church gifted with members interested in (if not informed about) the relevant issues? Is it not entrusted with much social influence to bring about good, and called to express Christ's lordship over the entire creation? And why should the Christian College not, as a college, function primarily as an advocate for "activism," a trainer of young minds in the "appropriate" ways of advancing God's peace and justice on earth? Does it not have the necessary expertise and resources conveniently gathered in one place? Is there not urgency that the pressing needs of our day be addressed by Christians?

But College and Church might well need to avoid these inclinations if a great deal of evidence indicates that to do otherwise is to act outside the office God has given these institutions, and thereby to gradually cease to function in the

tasks God has given them to do. The institutions would risk losing their legitimacy and purpose.

Some Latin American Universities may make a case-in-point. I understand that, a generation ago, much of the Latin academy turned away from the classic Western curriculum, motivated by the need to be "relevant," to flee the "ivory tower" and "do praxis education," to "prepare students' wills, not merely their minds." As one might anticipate, the new curriculum was built largely on the epistemology of Marx. I have walked the Orwellian campuses of Bolivia's University of La Paz and University of Santa Cruz. You will find in such places entire buildings painted in the likeness of Che Guevara. You will find faculty offices decorated with posters announcing benefits for guerrilla movements of liberation. You will find student union buildings whose walls have become impregnated with the aromas of Chinese tea and clove cigarettes. What you will often not find is the spirit of a university. You will search long and hard for open scholarly reflection and discourse on the direction of thought and action. By abdicating its proper office, a university may cease to function as an institution of higher learning.

The same sort of analysis might be done for the mainline/oldline/sideline churches of the United States. They have generally turned from transcendence to immediacy, from theology to praxis, from equipping the saints to recruiting the cadres. They therefore have few intellectual categories for separating the permanent from the passing, the confessional from the contingent. As a result, they face a sad irony: In the attempt to become more relevant to public life, they have become irrelevant. No one much cares what the National Council of Churches has to say about anything. Even their own church members are disenfranchised, and, by the thousands, are voting with their feet. The churches' uncritical acceptance of The Great Modern Leveling Project has left the world "less level": a smaller number of institutions now exercises more unchecked power, as the institutions of transcendence have, by their own actions, been marginalized.

That the turn away from an understanding of "office" has become so common among believers is very sad, but that these attitudes should be accepted by the *leadership* of our churches and colleges is especially disturbing. It is the offices of elder and teacher that are given the special responsibility of *maintaining the idea and doctrine of office*; if it dies here, it will be difficult to revive elsewhere.

Does this mean that Christian academics should not be involved in social issues, or that church members should keep their beliefs in water-tight separation from their political behavior? Of course not. It only means that we engage in politics primarily in our office as citizens, not in the office of academic or elder. This is not intellectual dualism; our faith obviously should and will influence our political behavior. The doctrine of "office" merely helps us frame our thinking with the finesse and sensitivity about the order of institutions that the creation and our own sin require.

Some of these ideas have been popularized under the title of "sphere sovereignty." I think it is better to think of them under the biblical rubric of "office," for two reasons. Scripture has much to say about "offices," but relatively little about "spheres." If I present an unfounded idea about spheres, it will be difficult for anyone to refute, and so the category of "spheres" fails a major test for usefulness of intellectual categories. But if I say something about "offices," we have a long tradition and some textual sources upon which to draw in evaluating my claims. Said differently, if we move to a "story line" theology (e.g., creation-fall-redemption) instead of a classical theology (organized around topics like God, sin, atonement, church order), while using loose categories like "redemption" and "spheres," it is very likely that our repackaging of the theology will also affect its contents. Using "office" as an element of the story line helps insure that our beliefs are not made to change when we express them differently.

But beyond the need for grounded discourse on the issue, I prefer to think of "offices" rather than spheres because, when we frame our thoughts as a discussion of "spheres," our

attention is immediately directed to "the particulars"; we are drawn toward drawing boundary lines among the artifacts that already exist, trying to decide which "sphere" they belong in. I would rather have the freedom to say that some artifacts that we encounter were never meant to be; they are not appropriate to any office that God has given. I think that a discussion of "spheres" biases us toward accepting too much of the status quo around us and making valiant attempts to redeem it, whereas discussion of "offices" opens more space for judging and rejecting some of the things that surround us.

There are, of course, some scriptural examples of people acting outside of their office. For example, David ate of the priestly bread (though this may have been an action *within* his office of ancestor of the Messiah). These examples generally crop up under truly urgent, extreme situations, often during eras in which the legitimate officeholders were remiss in their duties. Our own situation is just the opposite. Each time the college or the church steps farther out of its office, the action becomes precedent for a wider departure in the future. It has all become so common that we have by-and-large forgotten how to act otherwise, and it is this very behavior that is leading to disfunction in our institutions.

Consummation

Finally, we need to affirm two truths about the consummation of all things: The rule of Christ will not be fully manifest until He returns, and His rule involves judgment as well as redemption.

Just as the leaders of the Reformation rejected the doctrine of *individual* "perfectionism," we need to reject the popular modern tendency toward *social* perfectionism. Put in its most crass form, this is the notion we are somehow "bringing in the Kingdom on earth" by our efforts on behalf of peace and justice. Christians do need to work, but they also need to wait: We need to expect that, while we will win the battles God gives us to win, efforts to change our own actions or our social structures will often not bring about a justice or peace that would meet any pure, abstract definitions of these terms.

We should expect tares to grow up with our wheat. We should expect that our best efforts will yield negative side-effects and new opportunities for sin.

Said differently, the doctrine of consummation leads us to be humble. It reaches us to refuse to think that we have nailed down "the Christian answer" well enough that others should either eagerly accept it or be subjected to it by force. It moves us to distinguish the confessional from the contingent, to cling to the first and be tentative about the second. It leads us to evaluate social change not only according to the egalitarian justice it promises, but also according to its ability to restrain sin.

If we fail in this humility, we risk raising to creedal status our favorite policy options, for which our expertise is weak and passing, and thus risk choking off inquiry and ultimately embarrassing the Gospel. Without Consummation as a category of thought, we are drawn toward the political ushering of God's kingdom through a theology of context and praxis; we look to immediate human need and history for truth and, with such a fallen source, are pulled apart into neo-orthodox/theonomist/feminist/ bourgeois/liberation/pop-psychology/gay/health-and-wealth/ pantheistic/you-name-it fragments—a process that gradually kills all categories of thought. Without Consummation as a hope, we risk condensing "redemption" into a vague renewal of the earth and its "sacramental" character, neglecting the personal atonement so clearly articulated by the personal, self-revealing Lord Over History; we risk thinking of Christ as merely one who has bonded with the world, who dislikes violations of its harmonies, rather than as the Transcendent Lord who has atoned for sin by the shedding of His blood.

Consummation also involves judgment. Living as a Christian involves more than conferring "redeemed" status on clever mutations of secular ideas. Some things are fit only for a Lake of Fire. They must be rejected. We must separate ourselves from them, just as we attach ourselves to things that will eventually be consummated as good.

May God be with us as we seek together to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM AND THE BIBLE COLLEGE

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Bible college faculty face a problem that colleagues in Christian Liberal Arts colleges may not have to the same degree, although it would certainly be present in the latter. The problem is that of anti-intellectualism. It is held by many ministerial and Bible majors and manifests itself in certain ways.

This attitude is seen in the contention of some that a person should listen to the heart and not the head. The mind is believed to be evil and the intellect will lead one astray if it is followed. Of course the same standard is not applied to one's emotions and feelings. While Paul warns the Corinthians not to let their minds be led astray from the simplicity that is in Christ (2 Corinthians 11:3), it is Jeremiah who states that the heart is more deceitful than all else, being desperately sick and beyond understanding (Jeremiah 17:9). The basic problem here is an unbiblical dichotomy between the mind and the heart since the Hebrew concept of a person is one entity. The mind, the spirit, the emotions and the body are all man, not parts to be separated and put in opposition to each other. It is the way God has created people.

Another way this attitude can be observed is the contempt some students have for "secular" courses. Subjects like sociology and accounting are deemed irrelevant while psychology is seen as downright evil.

It is the contention of this writer that the prevalent anti-