

From Jesus to Religion

*How Forms of Mediation Have
Subverted the Christian Faith*

**By
Lyle R. Duell**

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this book to my wife, Liz, who has been such a blessing to me in my life and helped with this book in so many ways.

Recognition

I would like to thank Susan Pillsbury, Mitzi Horne, and Frank Lichorobiec for their suggestions, compiling, and editing work.

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Introduction

This book is a study about the phenomena we call religion. It is a study in contrast, for throughout this study we will be contrasting religion in its many forms with the revelation of God we see in Christ and His teachings. For some, this will be confusing and even unsettling because of the many presuppositions people may hold. Some Christians have never looked at their religion in contrast to Christ. They have taken it for granted that the revelation of God in Christ and the Christian religion were one and the same. For those who have made that assumption, I hope this book will serve as a catalyst to further study and reflection.

It is also my hope that this essay will be read widely by the various sects of Christendom who have taken their religion so seriously that they are judging one another as unworthy of the kingdom. In reading this, I hope that one will come to realize that religion must decrease if Christ is to increase. It is my prayer that these sects will come to see religion is the middle wall of hostility that keeps believers in Christ divided and in seeing this, they will begin to discern the difference between religion and faith in Christ.

For many, the hardest thing to do will be to draw a clear distinction between faith in Christ and religion. The line between faith and religion is often ambiguous. However, I believe with

honest reflection, the distinction will be seen by those willing to face the consequence of knowing the difference. Some will reject the difference because they sense the anxiety that comes from trying to live without religion. It is much easier to walk by religion than revelation. Religion has the tendency of taking all ambiguity and uncertainty out of life, and even out of God. Living without the mediation of religion is to live in a state of constant anxiety and uncertainty. Therefore, needless to say, a life without religion has the propensity to help one to trust more in God.

The difference between faith and religion has always been noted by some of the best thinkers in and outside of Christianity. Karl Barth, speaking about the Christian religion said, “This religion, too, stands under the judgment that religion is unbelief... This judgment means that all this Christianity of ours, and all the details of it are not as much what they ought to be and pretend to be a work of faith, and therefore of obedience to the divine revelation [Jesus]. What we have here is in its own way—a different way from that of other religions, but no less seriously-unbelief, i.e. opposition to the divine revelation, and therefore active idolatry and self righteousness.” *Church Dogmatics* (1.2 page 327)

The renowned atheist Nietzsche, in speaking about modern Christianity, said,

“One should not confuse Christianity as a historical reality with that one root that its name calls to mind: the other roots from which it has grown up have been far more powerful. It is an unexampled misuse of words when such manifestations of decay and abor-

tions as “Christian church,” “Christian faith” and “Christian life” label themselves with that holy name. What did Christ deny? Everything that is today called Christian. The entire Christian teaching as to what shall be believed, the entire Christian “truth,” is idle falsehood and deception: and precisely the opposite of what inspired the Christian movement in the beginning.

Precisely that which is Christian in the ecclesiastical sense is anti-Christian in essence: things and people instead of symbols; history instead of eternal facts; forms, rites, dogmas instead of a way of life. Utter indifference to dogmas, cults, priests, church, and theology is Christian.” *The Will to Power* (page 98)

We may not be able to understand everything that Nietzsche is inferring, but we can see that he is clearly making a distinction between Christianity and the revelation of God in Christ.

Next, let us look at what Soren Kierkegaard, a Danish Christian philosopher has to say about modern Christianity, which he refers to as Christendom,

“Christendom is an effort of the human race to go back to walking on all fours, to get rid of Christianity, to do it knavishly under the pretext that this is Christianity, claiming that it is Christianity perfected. The Christianity of

Christendom takes away from Christianity the offense, the paradox, etc., and instead of that introduces probability, the plainly comprehensible. That is, it transforms Christianity into something entirely different from what it is in the New Testament, yea, into exactly the opposite; and this is the Christianity of Christendom, of us men. *The Instant* (5,2).

A modern day disciple of Kierkegaard, Jacques Ellul, adds these provocative thoughts:

“How has it come about that the development of Christianity and the church has given birth to a society, a civilization, a culture that are completely opposite to what we read in the Bible, to what is indisputably the text of the law, the prophets, Jesus, and Paul? I say advisedly “completely opposite.” There is not just contradiction on one point but on all points. On the one hand, Christianity has been accused of a whole list of faults, crimes, and deceptions that are nowhere to be found in the original text and inspiration. On the other hand, revelation has been progressively modeled and reinterpreted according to the practice of Christianity and the church. Critics have been unwilling to consider anything but this practice, this concrete reality, absolutely refusing to refer to the truth of what is said. There is not just deviation but radical and essential contradiction, or real subver-

sion.” *The Subversion of Christianity* (page 1)

“Gandhi could discern the tension between Jesus and Christianity more clearly than Christians. On one occasion a missionary inquired, ‘Mr. Gandhi, what is the greatest enemy of Christ in India today?’ Without a moment’s hesitation Gandhi gave the answer, ‘Christianity!’” *Verdict* (1987 essay 31)

With such a great cloud of witnesses who seem to be saying that the faith of Christ is something other than modern Christianity, it would seem wise for us to at least give this some consideration and put our own faith to the acid test of truth. In writing on the subject of religion, there is a problem with the term itself. “Any discussion of religion in its plurality of forms is inevitably beset by problems of terminology... Accordingly we have to improvise, sometimes using words in stretched senses to cover two or more related ideas-and thereby risking the wrath of those who can see the semantic stretching but not the communicational need that it serves.” John Hick, “An Interpretation of Religion” (page 9). It would be impossible to give the reader a definition of how we will use the term religion in this study. The study itself defines the term for it is a study in contrast.

It is my belief that this intensive study is of an utmost importance for the Christian movement. In the West, our world views are changing at a rapid pace, and traditional institutions that support the established world views are being questioned and put to the test. Much of traditional Christianity and its institutions, when weighed in the balance, will be found wanting. For this we should praise God, for they never truly reflected the revelation of God in Christ. The only regret is that it is not Christians who can

take the credit for their demise. But Christians can look on this time as an opportunity to share with people the revelation of Christ. This is the time to free the living Christ from the wrappings of worn out old religious forms and traditions. It is the time to turn from our lifeless creeds and theology to the living Christ. It is time to hold out to the world the true and living revelation of God. However, this will be impossible unless we can make a clear distinction between revelation and the worn out forms of religion. We hope that this study will help in making this needed distinction.

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Chapter 1

Distancing Through Symbols of Mediation

“For there is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus” (I Tim. 2:5).

In this chapter, we will be studying the subversion of the Christian faith and the corresponding distancing of people from God and their ordinary experiences of life. I will attempt to trace this distancing by noting the symbols that people have placed between them and God by organized religion. I understand that this concept may be hard for many to conceptualize. Therefore, I will attempt with the following diagrams to illustrate the process of distancing.

To begin with, I want to stress the fact that distancing is what we might refer to as a group dynamic. Often the individual or the community cannot detect this easily. The reason for this lack of perception, on the part of the individual and community, is because of the amount of time involved in the process of distancing. This process seldom takes place in one generation, but usually takes three to four generations before

change becomes noticeable. It is also obvious that this dynamic change affects some individuals and groups more than others and in different ways. However, it would be very difficult to be part of a religious community and not experience in some way the effects of the symbols of mediation and corresponding distancing of God from the everyday experiences of life.

Even after the changes are noticed in a movement, there is very little chance for reformation. The reason for this inability to reform is, by the time the distancing is noticed, the leadership in a movement is benefiting so greatly from the system that has evolved, to change would be unthinkable. It would mean institutional suicide. Therefore, it becomes extremely difficult, if not impossible, to reform the existing structures from within. Most reformers end up going outside the existing structures and forming new ones. The Lord Himself said, "You cannot put new wine into old wine skins."

In Diagram I, I show what this study of distancing seems to be indicating. It shows that the distance between God and man is always equal and the same for the distance between man and his brother. Therefore, the symbols of mediation that distance us from God also distance us from our brother. The symbols that distance us from our brother also distance us equally from God. If you want to know your relationship or standing before God, just look at the standing and relationship that you have with your brother. By brother, I do not mean a little closed community that one has created in his own image, but the entire body of Christ. That would include all those who believe and have been baptized into Christ. Moreover, if you want to know if there are any mediators

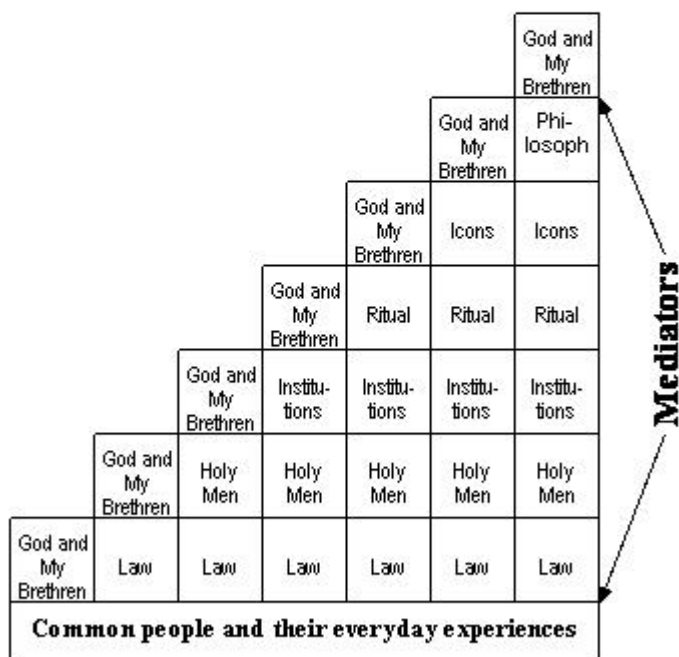
between you and God, just look at your relationship with your brother. Whatever mediates between you and your brother also stands between you and God. This idea is based on the fact that my Christian brother is the image of God with God's Spirit dwelling in him. In this, he is a living symbol of God. Therefore, how I relate to my brother is the way I relate to God. The true test of my relationship with God is not based on the degree of my religiosity or the correctness of my belief system, but rather on my relationship with my brother. God is as far away as your brother. Read the following New Testament passages: (James 3:9, I John. 2:9-11, 3:14, 23-24, Matt. 5:23-24, 6:14, 25:31-46).

In Diagram I, the foundation block represents the relationship of the believer to God and his brother when all the symbols of mediation are destroyed and broken down by a full relationship with Jesus (Eph. 2:14). This relationship is an at-oneness with God and one's brother. This at-oneness with God took place when Christ atoned for our sin. The proof that one's sins have been forgiven is an at-oneness with one's brothers in Christ. Without this at-oneness with one's brothers in Christ, there is no evidence that one's sins have been forgiven. In fact, the lack of at-oneness with the Christian community is a sign that one's sins have not been forgiven (Matt. 5:23-24, 1 John 3:16-24).

Distance between God and Man

Diagram I

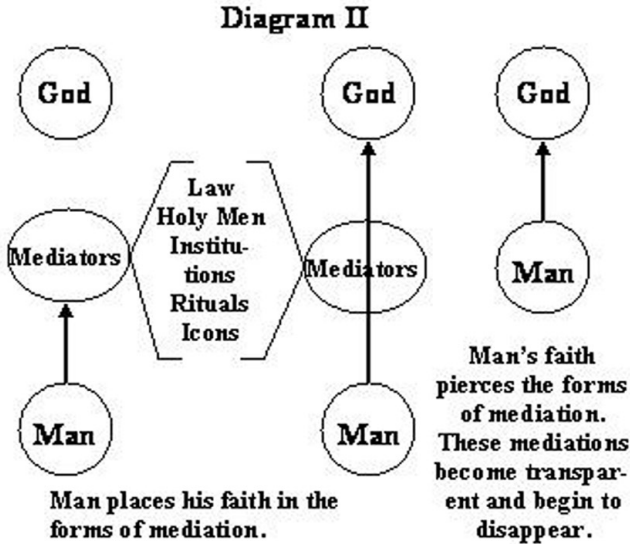
The more mediators a system has the harder it is for the common people to have a personal relationship with God and his brother.



Note: The same mediators that distance us from God, distance us from our brothers in Christ.

Each column and block in Diagram I represents additional forms of distancing or of mediation that stand between God and man and between man and his fellow man. The more mediators that are placed between God and the people, the further God is removed from their everyday experience and the harder it becomes for them to have a personal relationship with Him or their brother. As pointed out above, the effect of mediators varies from person to person depending on the environment and a number of personal characteristics. However, it would be hard to deny that it is quite difficult for the average person not to come to some degree under the spell of the different forms of mediation. The forms of mediation in our diagram will also help us to understand the misdirected faith of so many religious people today. Their faith simply does not penetrate the forms of mediation to reach God, but rather is misplaced in the mediators themselves (see Diagram II, below). In this, men place their faith in the body-religious, law, Holy men, institutions, icons, or rituals, etc., which are nothing more than their own good works and idols created by their own hands.

These diagrams can also help us to understand the division in the Christian movement. It is easy to see that as the church adds mediators, it is building a system that would foster alienation and discord among its ranks. It is simply a matter of time before some of its members will begin to reject the different forms of mediation. I believe that much of the system was built to protect the unity of the institution by controlling an unregenerate membership. However, all such systems eventually become self-serving and oppressive. When this happens, it is just a matter of time before some in the group will revolt in an effort to free themselves from the tyrannical system and its mediators.



Vertical Dimension

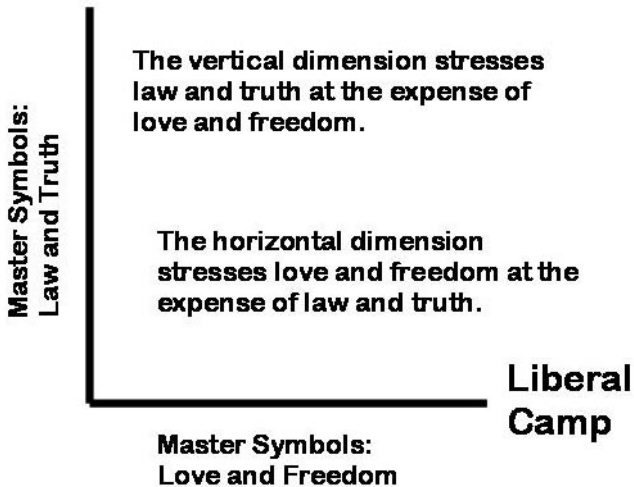
The institutionalized churches use what we might call the vertical dimension to justify their alienation and division toward their brothers (note Diagram III). The vertical dimension makes a hard and fast distinction between one's relationship with God and one's relationship with one's brother. It then places the emphasis on one's relationship with God or

truth, saying you must be right with God before you can be right with your brother. Of course, in keeping one's relationship with God, a brother might be totally ignored or even crucified in the name of truth or God's Law.

Transition point from one camp to another

Diagram III

Conservative Camp



This one-dimensional view of one's relationship with God and man is attacked by the Lord Jesus in a number of places in the New Testament and is shown to be a grotesque error of religious people. For example, there is the story of the Good Samaritan in which the religionists were too busy with the things of God to be concerned with their neighbor. Then there is the story of the disciples picking grain and eating it on the Sabbath day. The Pharisees who lived in the vertical dimension reacted to this by criticizing Jesus and the disciples for breaking the Sabbath day law. In this, they showed they had more concern for the Law than for the needs of their brother. In their eyes the most important thing was the law or truth; not their brother's needs (Matt. 12:1-13). In the parable of the Lost Son, we see both the horizontal man who takes too much license with God's will and the vertical dimensional man who makes the Law the absolute instead of the well-being of his brother. Both of these brothers in the story were outside the Father's will. Here we must ask a soul-searching question, "Could the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees be living in and from the vertical and horizontal dimensions?" (Matt. 16:5-12)

Most Christians would agree that there is nothing more important than worshiping God, but few seem to understand that the first and highest form of worship is love for one's brother. "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples" (John. 15:8). In the context of this passage, the fruit that glorifies (worships) the Father is the fruit of Christian love and service to one another (Heb. 13:16). No one can truly worship in a vertical dimension until he has come through the horizontal dimension of first loving, forgiving, and accepting his brothers. "There-

fore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift” (Matt. 5:23-24). “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God” (Rom. 15:7).

The vertical dimension itself is a dimension of division, for it divides things that, from God’s point of view, cannot be divided. It was from the vertical dimension that an expert in the law asked Jesus what the greatest commandment was. Jesus answered the question by uniting the vertical and horizontal dimension knowing that they are wholly dependent on one another and cannot be separated (Matt. 22:37-40). However, those who live in a vertical dimension do divide the dimensions and in turn put the stress on the vertical. When this happens they can and do justify any behavior toward their brother in the name of serving God or in the name of truth. On the other hand, there are those who live only from the horizontal dimension who are as far out of balance as those who live solely from the vertical. These are people who practice freedom at the expense of truth. The goal of the Christian should be to live in a third dimension which we might call a Christ-centered dimension, for it is in Christ that God and man becomes one, uniting all the dimensions of life.

The question arises; can we not just overlook the mediators in our brother’s system and be one big happy family? Unfortunately, the answer is no. This is because mediators are not just the things of one’s tradition or culture, which by all means should just be overlooked, but are rather things that are inimical to the cause of Christ and actually distance

men not only from their brothers, but from God. Therefore, God's people should never accept any mediator that men place between them and God. If we do accept the mediators of our brother, we then fall into the error of living solely from the horizontal position instead of a Christ-centered position. However, rejecting a mediator that a brother's faith has not pierced or outgrown is a far cry from rejecting a brother. If we begin to reject people because of the mediators in their belief system, we ourselves revert back to the vertical dimension, which Christ had freed us from. Here it is important to note that a person may still be a part of a system that has forms of mediation and yet has a faith that has pierced the forms of mediation and is acceptable to God. Mediators who are pierced by faith soon become transparent and then vanish away. However, this is a gradual process, and we should show the utmost patience with those who are struggling to see through the mediators of organized religion (Diagram II).

Those who choose to live in a Christ-centered dimension will soon find those who live in the vertical or horizontal dimensions often misunderstand them. You will find it is quite hard to reject people's forms of mediation without leaving the impression that you are rejecting them. You will also find that those living in the vertical dimension usually react in a hostile way toward those who reject their forms of mediation. They will probably call you liberal and most likely charge you with compromising the faith. In turn, those living in the horizontal dimension will usually label anything that stands between them and their fellow Christians as legalistic and will also withdraw their fellowship, of course in a more civilized way than those who are in the vertical dimension. One of the laws of liberalism is that you must always be nice. In liberal-

ism, openness becomes nothing more than another form of law or mediation. It is obvious that it is not easy to live outside the vertical or horizontal dimension without mediators. If you do not agree, just look at what those who endorse the vertical and horizontal viewpoint did to the only complete God-centered man (Jesus). They crucified Him in the name of God and justified it by appealing to the vertical and horizontal dimensions. Both liberals and conservatives use Christ to support a value center of law and truth or love and freedom. The Christ-centered person has Christ as the center. Christ embodies the concepts of law, truth, love, and freedom. To be in Christ means to stand in all of these concepts at once. Only in Christ can these things be kept in balance. If Christ is not the center, one of the other concepts will invariably be the center.

The Way of the Cross

It is time for those wishing to truly follow Jesus to leave behind the vertical and horizontal dimensions and enter into the new and living dimension of being in Christ and viewing all things anew (2 Cor. 5:16). “Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore” (Heb. 13:13). Yes, let us go outside the liberal and conservative camps to a new way of thinking and living in relationship to one another. The good news of the gospel is that we need not divide up into the liberal or conservative camps like this world, nor do we have to live in the vertical or horizontal dimensions. We can now live in Christ. To my brothers in the conservative and liberal camps, I would plead with you to consider that there is a Christ-centered way of looking at all things which does not

align with either the liberal or conservative camp. There is the way of Christ.

To those in the Protestant and Catholic camps, I would also beseech you in the name of Christ, to consider that there is another way of viewing things beside the way of your parties. There is the way of Christ, which is to have the mind of Christ. If all those who believed in Christ had His mind, we all know there would be no division among us. In view of the fact there is division, it seems quite obvious many do not have His mind. Let us all seek the mind of Christ and the unity that would come to His church if we all had His mind. We can begin by examining ourselves and by looking at the mediators we have placed between our brothers and ourselves. We must do this for Christ to increase in the world. For Christ cannot increase until these mediators decrease.

Chapter 2

A Forest of Symbols

“ Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden ” (Gen. 3:8-10).

One of the main linguistic tools we will be using in our study of the contrast between religion and revelation is that of the symbol. In recent years, scholars have come to understand the importance of language in all areas of life. Language is the key that unlocks the door to what it means to be truly human. Along with this increased interest and understanding of language, there has been a corresponding increased interest and understanding of the importance of the uses of symbols in human communications. Increasingly, many scholars are coming to believe that symbols are not only the key to understanding much of the human language, but also the key to understanding the whole of the human enterprise. The importance of symbols can be seen in the statement of one author when he says, “To live is to live symbolically.” He said this because he realized humans live in a forest of symbols. In fact, he believes they are symbols themselves. Our very con-

sciousness and identity are created and shaped by the symbols of our culture. Bernard Cooke adds to our understanding of the importance of symbols when he says,

“For it is now becoming clearer that symbol is not something that humans use occasionally and for the most part aesthetically, even artificially. Rather, symbol is of the essence of all thought and all language. Even more basically, the very model of existing, which is distinctive of humans is symbolic; we are more than ‘symbol-making beings’ as Cassirer and Langer have insisted, We exist symbolically because the spiritual dimension of our being ‘speaks’ itself-though never with complete satisfaction-in our bodily-ness.”

“All this impinges strongly on the study of symbols, for inner consciousness, even on the level of the subconscious, is shaped and animated by symbols. More than that, the entire process of consciousness being translated into communication as a basis for society is a process of symbolizing. And conversely, the shaping influence of culture and society upon an individual’s inner existence is exerted through symbols of one sort or another.” *The Distancing of God* by Bernard J. Cooke (page 296, 299)

From Cooke, we can gather somewhat the importance of symbols, but we have yet to define a symbol. A sym-

bol may be defined as “a word or object or thing or action or event or pattern or person or concrete particular...Representing or suggesting or signifying or veiling...Something greater or transcendent or ultimate: a meaning, a reality, an ideal, a value, an achievement, a belief, a community, a concept, an institution, a state of affairs.” *The Power of Symbols in Religion and Culture* F.W. Dillistone (page 13)

In the same section, Dillistone goes on to point out that the function of a symbol is to bridge the gulf between the world of the abstract and the concrete. In religion, the symbol is used to bridge or bring together physical facts and metaphysical truth without compromising either. Therefore, symbols are used to explain the unexplainable, yet never completely. Thus, the symbol always involves mystery, wonder, and paradoxes. This may help us to understand why God’s final and complete revelation of Himself is a person—in other words, a living symbol and not a written law. This could also be the reason why the New Testament witness has come to us in the form of story and not law as the Old Testament Torah. The God of Heaven and Earth could never reveal Himself through propositional truth. We cannot reduce God to a logic syllogism or lock Him in the narrow chambers of human reason and imagination. The only way one will come to know God is through reflecting on the symbol that mediates His image and presence, that is, His Son Jesus Christ.

Unfortunately, sometimes this one true symbol of God gets lost in a forest of religious symbols that we humans have made. I would like to think that man has done this out of ignorance. However, both Old and New Testaments bear witness to the fact that man has knavishly and knowingly sub-

verted the symbols of God. The reason for this is obvious; man does not want to live in the presence of God nor in the presence of the pristine revelation of Jesus Christ. The simple truth is that man does not love the truth. He loves darkness instead of the light. "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil" (John. 3:19). In this passage, light stands for revelation, and Jesus confirms the fact that the majority do not want to live in the presence of revelation. So what does man do? He hides from it in a forest of religion and its symbols. We see this rejection of revelation in the story of Adam. When Adam sinned, he also hid in the forest from God. In this act, Adam prefigures the entire human race that would hide from God in its religious systems and symbols.

However, man's hide-and-seek game with God has far-reaching consequences. For the forest he hides in, not only hides him from God, but also from his fellow man and his very self. The forest divides men religiously, politically, and culturally. When the apostle Paul speaks about the dividing wall of hostility (Eph. 2:14), he was making reference to the forest of religious symbols that separated Jews and Gentiles. He points out to his readers that this forest of symbols has been done away with in Christ. In Christ, God has cut down the forest of religious symbols that keeps people divided religiously. He did this by replacing, or in many cases, subverting the existing symbols by changing one or more of their levels of meaning. All the symbols in the old order that spoke of the presence of God or symbolized His presence were subverted to point toward Christ as their fulfillment and their end. The master symbols of religion that fit this category are the symbols of mediation such as sacred laws, places, times, and

priesthood. Before the coming of Christ, these religious symbols stood for or symbolized the presence of God and the unity of His people. However, after Jesus' coming, they stood for the absence of God and division, which is the very antithesis of God. These religious symbols still stand as a dividing wall of hostility between religious people.

In the fore mentioned case of the hostility between Jews and Gentiles, it was the sacred "master" symbols of Law, sacred days, priesthood, and sacred places that formed the dividing wall of hostility. Jews could easily accept these symbols. However, Gentiles could not easily accept them for they had no inherent meaning to them because these symbols were tied directly to the history of the Jewish people. But now that God had invited the world to become His people, the symbols of God's acceptance and presence would have to change.

The new master symbols would be Christ Himself and His spirit-filled people. In order to do this, God would have to create a new history with new symbols. This He did by raising His Son from the dead. In this mighty act, God created a new world and a new humanity. He invites all of humanity to join His Son in a new exodus out of the old order into the new; an exodus out of religion into Christ. This exodus will be completed when His Son returns from on high to lead His people into the glorious freedom of the children of God. "But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John. 3:2).

When Israel left Egypt in the first exodus of God's people, there were many who were intimidated by their new

freedom. Thus, they wanted to return to the security of bondage in Egypt. If you remember, this happened when Moses went up on the mountain to receive the Ten Commandments. Because he tarried too long, the people longed to return to Egypt and its gods. Was this not a foreshadowing of what would happen in the Christian movement? When Jesus was raised from the dead and ascended to the Father, he inaugurated a new exodus, an exodus out of religion. However, like the Hebrews, we find the people (Christians) were intimidated by the freedom they had in Christ and grew anxious over the fact that their Lord had tarried longer than they had expected. So many of them went back to religion and to the making of religious symbols, very similar to how the Hebrews had made the golden calf. God's call today is for our generation of Christians to take up where the first generation of Christian left off: that is, in an exodus out of religion into the freedom of the children of God.

As we look anew at God's new master symbols, we find that both of these, Christ and His people, are what we might call living symbols which are the most powerful symbols, for they are flexible and can fit into any cultural venue. This flexibility should be expected, seeing that God has invited the world to join His history. God's history is no longer a history of a people, but rather a history of one man who now represents the new humanity that has been created by His resurrection from the dead. God now invites all to join in the history of His Son, which He is taking on to perfection in Christ.

Moreover, these living symbols of Christ and His people have the power to impart life, which other symbols do

not have. "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing" (John. 6:63). No symbol, even the sub-symbols of baptism and the Lord's Supper, have any life in themselves but rather point to the work of Christ and His life giving Spirit. Only Christ and the Spirit have the power to impart life. Even the symbol of the Bible apart from the Spirit has no power to convey life (2 Cor. 3:6). Regrettably, the church has often eclipsed the quickening symbols of Christ and His Spirit with the lifeless lesser symbols of ritual and form, at the same time claiming that this is Christianity perfected.

The implications of all this are incredible. The symbol of Christ among His people symbolizes that God is among His people. Not only is He among His people, but also He has accepted them in their sin, forgiven them and has given them the Spirit to deliver them from the bondage of sin and religion. This was all enacted and symbolized in the life of Jesus when He ate and fellowshiped at the table with sinners. Therefore, the symbol of Jesus in the world is symbolizing that the world has become a theater of God being with man and for man. Moreover, the symbol of Jesus as the God-man symbolizes and foreshadows the unity of God and man in the new humanity; Jesus Himself being the first fruits of that new humanity (1 Cor. 15:22). Therefore, in the resurrection of Jesus we have a promise and a preview of where God is taking humanity. "For we shall be like him" (1 John. 3:2).

Another incredible implication is that man no longer has to hide from God in a forest of religious symbols, for he no longer has to try to justify himself before God or man. For in Christ, God has accepted him and forgiven him, not because of his religiosity, but because of God's grace and the

work of Christ. Because God has delivered him from the need to be religious, He in the same act has broken down the religious wall that separates man. Therefore, man has been reconciled not only to God through Jesus, but also to one another. Consequently, we must conclude that the division in the Christian church is an indication of just how far religion is from God. The Christian church, especially in America, is the direct opposite of revelation and its division is a symbol to all the world of its disobedience and its distance from God.

Here we need to ask this question. If Christ has removed the symbols of religion that divide men, what would be the consequence of reinstating the old symbols or symbols like them? The answer is obvious: division. When men have symbols in their belief system, other than divinely authorized ones, there will be division. For people will insist that others acknowledge their symbols in order for them to be acceptable. This is why the reinstating of unauthorized religious symbols is condemned so strongly in the New Testament. In the book of Galatians we find a group of Christians contemplating reinstating the symbol of Law into the Christian movement. In turn, the apostle Paul warns them, "You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace" (Gal. 5:4). Not only does Paul give this astringent rebuke, he goes on to reinforce the fact that the main symbol in the Christian faith is Jesus Christ. "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor un-circumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love" (Gal 5:4-6). In this text we find that the only authorized symbols in the Christian movement are Christ, faith, and love. The symbol of circumcision, which is the symbol of the Law, has been negated in Christ. Law is never an

authorized Christian symbol, unless it is used as a symbol of Christ Himself, for He is the new Torah.

All other symbols of law must be rejected. Symbols like creeds, human traditions, and theological systems must not be imposed on believers as law. Even the New Testament Scripture must not be symbolized as law, for it is pure grace when mixed with a spirit of faith. Those who symbolize or image the New Testament Scripture as law will find it very difficult not to lapse into legalism. For the power of the symbol will negate and overcome any verbal effect to proclaim freedom from law. The symbol of law is one of the most powerful religious symbols because it has a cosmic counterpart behind it and is linked with the spiritual powers of sin and death (Rom. 7:7-25, 8:2, 2 Cor. 3:6-18, 1 Cor. 15:56,57, Col 2:13-15). Therefore, the symbol of law should be dealt with thoughtfully in the Christian movement, lest we crucify the Lord anew and insult the Spirit of grace (Heb. 6:4-6, 10:29).

There also are some psychological consequences to reinstating religious symbols into the faith of Christ. The most obvious would be that the more religious symbols a man has in his belief system, the more exclusive and rigid his religion will be. The danger is that this forest of religious symbols will become so thick that it will blind him to all new truth. Most religious people, especially those that are exclusionist, have layers of religious symbols that protect them from revelation and separate them from their fellow man. The religious man fears revelation because it will strip away all the false symbols that he has trusted. It leaves him naked before God, stripped of all his self-righteousness. In this context, self-righteousness could be defined as all the religious symbols that men hide in,

such as symbols that allow them to feel secure and righteous. The traditionalists hide behind the symbols of ritual. The fundamentalists hide behind the multi-level symbol of the Bible and the true church. Nevertheless, no matter how hard the religious man may try, he cannot hide his humanness behind these symbols because God is continually destroying them and exposing man's nakedness. It is here, in his nakedness, that the religious man has the possibility of coming to faith and being clothed by God in the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. However, nothing hinders authentic faith more than religion. In a true sense, religion is a vaccination against revelation.

In our quest for a better understanding of the distinction between religion and revelation, the symbol will help us immensely, for it will allow us to look at things from a different perspective. Most importantly for our study, the symbol will help us trace the evolution of the revelation of Christ from a simple way of life into a complex religious system. We can do this by noting when and why new symbols were introduced into the Christian movement. Through analyzing the introduction and meaning of new symbols added to the movement, we will be able to see the subtle shift in theology away from revelation to religion. We will begin that study in our next chapter.

Chapter 3

From Jesus to Religion

“The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons” (1Tim 4:1-2).

Our title reflects the movement of history - the history of the Jesus movement and how a movement that began with the revelation of God in His Son Jesus Christ could grow into a religion that represents the very opposite of what the original revelation represented. In this chapter, we will observe this movement from revelation to religion by tracing the addition of foreign symbols, as well as noting the changes in the original symbols and their meanings.

We begin with the master or central symbol of the Christian movement. This symbol, of course, is Jesus Himself. Jesus not only lived physically, but He also lived symbolically (Luke 2:34). He was the symbol of God amongst us. Karl Rahner said, “The Logos is the symbol of the Father.” We might say that He is the self-revelation or self-expression of God Himself. Therefore, the very nature of God is expressed symbolically in and through Jesus.

In his book, *The Power of Symbols in Religion and Culture*, F.W. Dillstone points to Christ as a central symbol of the Christian faith.

“In my view it is both fitting and true to the witness of New Testament writers to confess Jesus as the central symbol of God. ‘Centre’ is a category which has played a dual role in human affairs. Both in a circle and in a straight line, the centre is a point of major significance; society is normally ordered from a central place: a covenant or agreement between two parties also finds its guarantee through joint assent and signature at a central place. Jesus, as symbol, becomes the centre in both ways. It is the confession of Christians of all ages that Jesus Himself, revealed through the words and life-patterns of His followers and interpreted to successive generations by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, was the central symbol, potentially uniting the whole of humanity to God Himself.”

The Immediacy of God

It is also important for us to understand the basic meaning of the symbolism of Jesus’ life. Jesus’ presence in the world was a symbol that God Himself was now present in the world of men. This is not to say that God was not actually present in Christ, but is a way to look beyond the physical

presence to the spiritual meaning. Matthew captures the very essence of the symbolic meaning of Jesus when he records the announcement of the angel to Joseph. "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" - which means, 'God with us'" (Matt. 1:23).

The implications of God being among us are staggering, for it implies that all the symbols that mediated a transcended God are no longer needed. The God of the other world has come into the world of men in the person of His son. Therefore, the religious symbols that mediate His presence in the past are no longer needed. The coming of God among His people in the person of Jesus has rendered all the mediating symbolism of religions obsolete, old, and destined to vanish away (Heb. 8:13). Thus, God's people now have direct access and fellowship with the Father in Jesus Christ. Hence, all symbols of the Christian faith must symbolize the presence of God among His people in their ordinary and everyday experiences. Any symbol that does not must be viewed suspiciously as a possible subversion of the faith and a distancing of God from His people. All such symbols are questionable and should be scrutinized to see if they belong in the Christian movement. These symbols surely should never be bound on other believers as symbols of God's acceptance or symbols of acceptable fellowship that mediates between believers.

In view of this, the entire enterprise of religion itself, along with its sacred symbols of mediation might be brought into question. At the very least, we must begin to view religion with a suspicion that it may not be everything it seems to be. In fact, if we are right, it is the very opposite of what it ap-

pears to be. It appears, at least to the majority, to be a symbol of the presence of God. However, in reality it is a symbol of the absence and negation of the true God, who no longer dwells in the sacred or holy, but rather in the everyday and ordinary. Keeping with this line of thought, we could say that religion itself is a symbol and it is a symbol that speaks. When it speaks, it speaks of a God who is out there somewhere in another world, a God who is wholly other and removed from the world of men; a God who is distant from His people and who must be approached in and through the sacred. Yet, when we turn to revelation, we find that God is no longer to be found in the sacred symbols of religion, but rather in the symbols of His one and only Son Jesus Christ and His Spirit that abides with and in His Spirit-filled people. In these two living symbols, God has drawn near to His people in the everyday for everyone. There is no longer a need for believers to approach God through the sacred symbols of religion. Though religious symbols may induce feelings of other-worldliness, they cannot and do not draw us closer to God. In the end, all religious symbols other than Jesus and the Spirit, will distance people from God. For in the end, at least for the majority of men, all religious symbolism slips into idolatry.

When the apostle John saw the New Jerusalem, the city of God, coming down out of heaven, he proclaimed, "I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the lamb are its temple" (Rev. 21:22). John's words become pregnant with meaning, when one understands that for the Jews, the temple was the master or central symbol of their religion and mediated the presence of God. One implication of this is that in the city of God there are no religious symbols that mediate the presence of God. For in that city,

there is no need for religion as a mediator for God, because God is present in the person of His Son. That city is now represented on earth by the body of Christ (Gal. 4:26). The temple or sacred place has now been replaced with the symbol of Jesus and His Spirit-filled body (1 Cor. 3:16, 2 Cor. 6:14-18). Hence, the symbols of religion have no place in the city of God or the Christian movement. Today the church as the body of Christ, created by the Word, imbibed with the Spirit is now the master symbol of the living God's presence. However, the church can only be this symbol as long as it is walking in the power of the Spirit and is enlivened by the life of its Lord. When a church loses the Spirit of Jesus, it becomes nothing more than a lifeless symbol that relies on ritual and form, which are nothing more than hollow and empty symbols of religion. When the church loses the Spirit, it becomes a lifeless institution that tries to invoke the grace of God through its ritual and its ostentatiousness. In this, it does not hear God nor does it see God in the ordinary and everyday. In its lifelessness, it becomes nothing more than a mute idol that neither sees nor hears.

In addition to Christ and the Spirit representing the real presence of God among His people, these living symbols also represent the unity and oneness of God and man. In Christ, God and man have become one. The implication of this is, if God and man are one in Christ, this oneness should overflow into the relationship that man has with his fellowman. Consequently, Christ is not only the symbol of the presence of God but also of reconciliation between men and the Old Testament idea of shalom. "He is our peace (shalom) who...has broken down the dividing wall of hostility...that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two" (Eph. 2:14-

15). In view of this, we might state the following axiom: Any symbol or an interpretation of a symbol that promotes or stands for division has been misinterpreted or is an unauthorized addition to the Christian faith. All authorized symbols rightly interpreted will point to Christ and promote the unity of the Spirit.

Moreover, any symbol that diverts attention away from the center symbol of Jesus must also be rejected. Even the symbol of the Spirit must point to the central symbol of Jesus Christ. Any theology that makes the Spirit or anything else the center must be rejected as a subversion of the faith. It is only when men have focused on something other than Jesus that division can creep into the Christian movement. In fact, all the sects of Christendom propagate them-selves by focusing on one or more symbols other than Christ. If these symbols are removed, there remains no reason for the existence of the sect. Therefore, we find that the membership of most sects have become propagators and protectors of religious symbols instead of proclaiming faith in Christ. In doing this, they have caused unprecedented division. However, in doing this, they end up diverting attention away from the central symbol of Christ to lesser symbols or they relegate the symbol of Christ to the same level of a lesser symbol. Though they vehemently deny this, their actions speak symbolically louder than their words. They separate and divide over symbols other than Jesus. They spend more time talking and studying about lesser symbols than Jesus. If Jesus is the central symbol, why do the churches spend so much of their time talking about the lesser symbols of the Bible, such as men, creeds, morality, prophecy, and the like, often without even showing how they relate to Jesus? Without Jesus being the center, people will

soon find themselves living from the flesh [law], filled with division and strife. Only when a group has Jesus as the center, will it become a sign and a symbol of the Spirit of Christ and unity in the Christian community.

The Distancing and Subversion of God

In view of what has been said, I think it is fair to say that religion is like a veil of symbols, which creates a darkness that hides God and shields the people from His presence. In other words, religion removes God from the everyday and distances Him from His people. He is then no longer viewed as being among His people, but rather in some distant heaven. His only presence on earth is seen in religion and its sacred symbols of mediation. We can gather from the popularity of religion that many men do not want to live in an unmediated state in the presence of the true God. So they lock Him away in their sacred boxes of sacred places, people, times, and books. For if they can put God back into the sacred, then they can live with the illusion that He does not know what they are doing in the everyday. This allows them to live in two worlds - the sacred and the secular while living by two different standards. However, any god who can be put into our little religious boxes is not the God you read about in the Scriptures and surely is not a God, who can help us in time of need. The god in the box, the God of all religion, becomes an idol; an idol, which Christ came to destroy.

I have charged the Christian religion with the heinous crime of subverting the revelation of God. I have also established the motive. That is, man does not want to live in the presence of revelation. For he does not want to conform to

its norms, nor does he want to continually stand under its judgment. "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light (revelation) because their deeds were evil" (John. 3:19). Though men hate revelation and refuse to conform to it, at the same time, they know that they cannot live without it, for then they would have no hope. So man finds himself in a paradox where he cannot live with or without revelation. How does he solve the problem? He solves the problem by watering down, changing, and subverting revelation to where it feels comfortable to live with. These changes usually take the form of changes in the meaning of symbols or the addition of unauthorized symbols. In adding unauthorized symbols man sets himself up as the judge of revelation instead of allowing revelation to sit in judgment of him. In addition, he usurps the authority of God Himself and in actuality, sits in judgment of God. In this, man commits the religious sin of playing god before God. Needless to say, God is not impressed with this parody. It is here that the atheist shows himself more righteous than the religious man. For the atheist openly rejects revelation, while the religious man knavishly subverts it in the name of God.

We will now begin to trace this subversion of revelation by observing the changes and additions in the symbols found in the Christian movement. As we trace this subversion, we need to remember that these changes did not happen overnight. Many of them took decades, even centuries, to creep into the faith and often these changes did not go unchallenged by some of the church fathers. However, the forces behind these changes were too powerful and the majority of the church found itself being swept along by a tidal wave of change and subversion. Even so, there has always remained a group in

the church that has resisted this subversion. These were often the ones labeled radical or even heretical.

Chapter 4

Subversion and Distancing by Law

“For Christ is the end of the law, that everyone who has faith may be justified” (Rom. 10:4). RSV

Our beginning point will be the symbol of the old covenant Law or Scripture. We will begin by making the bold statement that revelation did away with the Old Testament Law (Torah) and Scripture by encompassing its essence and superseding it by personifying it in the living symbol of Jesus. It was the reinstatement of the old and lifeless symbol of Law (written code) that marked the beginning of the subversion of the faith and a return to religion. This is not to say that the Law does not reveal God, for it surely does. Furthermore, the Old Testament Scripture is useful for a number of things. It can aid us in understanding God as long as it is interpreted in light of the more complete revelation of God in Christ. It can also aid us in making ethical choices, though the decisive factor is the Spirit of Christ. Surely, the Scripture with its great stories of faith gives us encouragement (2 Tim. 3:16, Rom. 15:4). However, we need to remember when it comes to revealing God, the Law reveals Him in a hidden or veiled form, giving us only a shadow of His essence. It did this through the sacred symbols of mediation we find in the Old Testament, the old covenant itself being one of the sub-symbols of the Old Testa-

ment Scripture. These symbols were given to point to and foreshadow the final and complete revelation of God, which is Jesus Christ. Therefore, Jesus Christ is the fulfillment and the end (goal) of all Old Testament symbols. For once the reality has come, there is no need for the shadow to remain (Rom. 3:21, 10:4, Heb. 8:3-6, 10:1-4).

The truth that Jesus was the end and fulfillment of the Law was not a truth immediately grasped by the disciples or the early church. However, as time passed (at least 15 years) and the church began to expand into the world of the Gentiles (the people of the world), serious questions began to arise as to the relationship of the Old Testament Law and the Gentiles. Over a decade passed before the Law and its religion would be brought under the scrutiny of revelation and viewed anew through the Christ event. This may help us to understand why some time passed before the church developed a theology regarding the relationship of Law and Gospel. It simply was not an issue until the church began to invite the world to join it in the Christ event. At that time, the church was forced through circumstances to look at its religion and the religion of its fathers, in light of the revelation of Christ. The result of this shook the pillars of the Jewish religion. The conclusion of the Christian movement was that none of the symbols of its religion could be bound on the people of the world. These symbols included the Law itself, holy days, priesthood, circumcision, holy places, etc. (Acts. 15:5-12).

For many today, a similar crisis is dawning. For the primitive church, it was a question of whether their Jewish religion could be separated from their faith in Christ. Some decided it could; others decided it could not be separated

from their faith; the latter ended up either subverting the faith or returning to Judaism. The question today is, can we separate our religious things from our Christ things? Will we listen to the Spirit as many did in the early church or will we revert to law and institutions? Will we allow others the time and freedom to make Christ a part of their culture, or will we impose our institutionalized religion and our mummified traditions on them? Do we dare let the living Christ out of our institutionalized religion as the early church did?

As the result of the early church's decisions, we see in the first century a general and progressive movement away from religion toward a new and radical way of approaching God. It was the way of faith apart from religion. In fact, it was not new, for this was the way it all began with a man named Abraham (Rom. 4). Abraham had a relationship with God apart from the mediation of Law or Scripture - in other words, apart from organized religion. However, shortly after the death of the apostles, we begin to see a movement back toward religion. This movement back to religion began when the church turned back to the old covenant symbol of Law (100 to 200 A.D.). As time went on, the old covenant symbol of Law was expanded to take in all the creeds and traditions of the church and became known as Canon Law. During this earlier period (100 to 200 A.D.) there was some resistance to the reinstatement of Law, but for the most part it was accepted with little resistance. The reason for this ready acceptance of Law probably came as the result of the chaos that had entered the church after the death of the apostles. Because of this, the church began to be filled with wandering charismatics and disorderly members. Therefore, it seemed logical and expedient to return to Law. Besides, there was still a large Jewish element in

the church that exercised a great influence on the entire church. This group had never totally abandoned their religion and would feel comfortable with this movement to reinstate the symbol of Law into the faith. Plus, the Roman culture that the church had moved into was steeped in Law. All this made it all too easy to return to the symbols of Law and religion, thus, subverting the faith and distancing the people through a symbol of mediation (Law or religion).

The consequences of reinstating the symbol of Law in the Christian movement were many. One of the major consequences was the impression that man not only had to believe in Christ for salvation, but he had to also practice the right religion in order to be saved. In other words, one would have to conform to human beliefs and traditions. It is to this that the apostle Paul spoke when he said, “But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy” (Titus. 3:4-5). Some have interpreted the phrase “righteous things” to mean good deeds in general, but it is obvious from the context Paul is talking about the practice of religion and the attitude that religion is going to somehow save you. This self-righteous attitude of right religion has now been translated into the “right church” mentality that is so prevalent in the Christian church today. Religion may have a number of practical benefits, but it will never save anyone. Good religion may lead one to revelation and therefore salvation, but one will never find salvation in religion. Salvation is only in revelation (Jesus).

It would be safe to say there is good religion and bad religion. Good religion is whatever we do or believe that brings

us closer to God. Bad religion is whatever we do or believe that distances us from God. If I had my choice, I would hope that I would choose good religion. However, good religion will not save anyone and bad religion will not condemn anyone, unless it blinds one to revelation, which it has the propensity to do. The only thing that counts in Christ is faith that works through love (Gal 5:6). Religion counts for nothing. Religion at its best can only be one's interpretation of revelation. Therefore, religion is the private property of the individual and should never be bound on others, and no one should get so serious about his religion that he allows it to separate him from his brothers in Christ. I think we all need a little more practice in distinguishing between religion and revelation - in other words, distinguishing human deduction from the facts of the faith. We need to recognize when people or institutions impose their deductions on others, those deductions become nothing more than human laws and constitute a return to Law (religion).

Here we need to remember to be cautious in interpreting the Scriptures with a Western mindset that sees an ethical meaning in the word Law. In some passages, it does carry an ethical meaning, but in many it simply means religion. Religion, in this context, means the Old Testament Scriptures and the system of ritual that grew out of them. One can be saved without religion, but one cannot be saved without ethics. We are not saved by our ethics, but we are saved unto an ethical life in Christ. When one has a right relationship with God, one will begin to live like Jesus. Anyone who does not live the ethical life of Jesus cannot be a Christian (1 John 1:6). The ethical life of the Christian centers on Jesus and is embodied in love for his brothers in Christ. However, being saved

does not necessitate one being religious. In fact, you could say for the Christian, that Christ is our only ethic and our religion. For those wishing to study further the relationship of law and religion, I would recommend the following: *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* by E.P. Sanders and *Jesus, Paul, and the Law* by James D.G. Dunn.

The Mediation of the Law

The Law is both a symbol of mediation and actually a mediator between God and man. In other words, the Law stands between God and man, increasing the distance between the two. However, when we turn to the New Testament, we find that it is clearly stated, “There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5). In Christ, the lifeless mediator of Law has been replaced by the living and life-giving mediator, Jesus Christ. It is in the one mediator, Jesus Christ, God and man are united. In fact, all of humanity is potentially united in this one symbol of unity and peace. When the symbol of Law is added, it shatters this oneness, distancing God from man and dividing mankind. In view of the division in the Christian church, we would have to conclude that the symbol of Law is still very much a part of the mentality of the majority of Christians. This becomes even more obvious when you consider that creeds and theological systems, when accepted as absolutes, are nothing more than laws, whether verbal or written.

In view of what has been said about the Old Testament symbols of Law and Scripture, one would expect to find a great deal of information on this subject in the writings

of the New Testament. In fact, this is the case. The New Testament is filled with teachings that address the relationship between the Law and revelation (Christ). In keeping with the flow of thought, I feel one of the best texts in the New Testament for our study would be one that uses the analogy between a veil and religion. It may surprise some to learn that the apostle Paul used this analogy in a very similar way to our usage. He does this in 2 Corinthians, the third chapter, where he makes a contrast between the old way (Jewish religion) and the new way of faith in Christ.

Paul said; “Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.” Paul here affirms that believers do not just read the Bible about the work of God. Like their Lord, they *are* the word and work of God. Through the power of the Spirit, they are becoming the word and are experiencing the work of God in their own lives. In fact, all men can see God at work in them as He transforms them into the image of His Son. In truth, they are becoming living Scripture. In other words, they are becoming living symbols of the will and presence of God. Therefore, the Church is thus not only receiver of the Word of revelation, but is itself revelation and Word of God. Only in so far as it is itself Word of God, can it understand the Word of God. Revelation can be understood only on the basis of revelation. The Word is in the Church in so far as the Church is the recipient of revelation. But the Word is also itself Church, in so far as the Church

itself is revelation and the Word wishes to have the form of a created body. (*Christ The Center*, Bonhoeffer, pages 58-59)

The apostle Paul goes on to say, “Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. Not that we are competent to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant - not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor. 3:1-5). If we approach this passage using symbolism as our mindset, we find Paul contrasting the effectiveness and meaning of certain symbols. The contrast is between the old covenant or Law, which to the Jews was a symbol of God’s presence and acceptance, and the new covenant symbol of God’s Spirit-filled people, which also symbolized God’s presence and acceptance. In this, Paul is pointing out that the very presence of the Christian community is in itself a symbol of God’s presence, acceptance, and in this case, a witness to Paul’s own ministry. In making this contrast, Paul is pointing out that the new covenant along with its symbolism is superior to the old. He also tells us why it is superior. The reason is the old is based on the symbol of Law (letter) and the new on the symbol of Spirit. He infers in this, the Spirit is greater than the Law (letter) for without the Spirit, the letter is powerless and ineffective. For the law (written code) is in itself a lifeless symbol that has no power to impart life; therefore, he characterizes law (religion alone with its sacred books) as leading to death, for the law has no life in itself. Thus, it cannot impart life. However, the Spirit is life-giving because it is alive and imparts life to all who receive it through faith in Christ. In Paul’s thinking, it seems life must come from life and death comes from death or the

lifeless. Therefore, one receives either life or death from one's absolute. In this context, Paul is telling his readers if they choose as their absolute the lifeless symbol of Law [religion], they will die, for there is no life in that symbol. In saying this, his plea is for them to put their faith in the quickening symbols of Christ and His Spirit and not in the lifeless symbols of religion.

Beginning with verse seven of the text, Paul begins to sharpen the contrast between the ministry of the new covenant which he says imparts the Spirit and life, and the old covenant which is a ministry of the letter (Law) and imparts death. (Also note Galatians 4:1-4). Under the old covenant, Moses and the Law were symbols of mediation that stood between God and the people. Under the new covenant, Christ and the Spirit are the only mediators between God and His people. Paul goes on to say,

“Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. And if what was fading away came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts” (2 Cor. 3:7-11).

In this section, Paul reminds his readers that when Moses came down from the mountain after receiving the Law (Ten Commandments), his face was reflecting the image or glory of God. Then upon returning, we find Moses putting a veil over his face so the people could not look directly at the image of God being reflected by his face. In this act, Moses was symbolizing what God was doing in the act of giving the Law. God was in this act veiling Himself in the Law and putting the Law and Moses as mediators between Himself and the people. Thus, the people were limited in having a personal relationship with God. However, under the new covenant, which is Christ, the veil has been lifted and believers can know God and have a personal relationship with Him in and through the God-man Jesus Christ. Unlike the new covenant, the old covenant was founded on the principle of human mediation. Therefore, it could not impart life, because no human has life in himself or herself to impart to another. Thus, Moses and the Levitical priesthood could only impart Law, which is as powerless to impart life as the human mediator who gives it. Thus, law can only be a symbol of the distancing of God from the people. In contrast, the new covenant, which is Christ, is founded on the principle of Spirit and because the Spirit has life in itself, it has the power to impart the Spirit (life) that leads to oneness with God and a sense of God's immediacy. The Spirit then reveals God in the believer, which in turn allows and helps the believer to understand the true intent or spirit of the law. Therefore, the new covenant surpasses the old in glory, for through it, the Spirit is imparted and remains in the believer by faith in Jesus (Gal. 3:2-5). Thus, under the new covenant, the believer begins with faith and abides by faith and that leaves no room for religion (Law) and its works

of righteousness (Titus. 3:5). In addition, the new covenant through the power of the Spirit reveals God to the believer and through the believer to the world, something that the old did not have the power to do.

Furthermore, from observing verse seven of this section (2 Cor. 3:7-11), we see the ministry of Moses, which included the Ten Commandments, is referred to as a ministry that brought death. The Ten Commandments formed the basis or the foundation of the entire old covenant. It was when Moses received the Ten Commandments from God that his face began to reflect the glory of God. But gradually, that glory faded away. Paul here uses this fading glory in the face of Moses to illustrate what was happening in the transitional period he and the early church lived in. In this period, the superior ministry of the Spirit had come and the ministry of Moses and the Law [religion] was fading away (v.11). There was a time when Moses and the Law did reflect God, though in a veiled way, but now God was being reflected in a much fuller way by His Son and in the believers through the Spirit that dwells in them. Under the old covenant the cry was to the Law and to the testimony (Isa. 8:20), but under the new, it is to Christ and the Spirit. To the believer, Jesus is the only Law and the only testimony.

From the overall context of 2 Corinthians, chapter three, we can then infer that the written code is no longer a symbol of the presence of God, nor is it able to impart life for it has no life in and of itself. Therefore, neither the Law nor Scripture can symbolize or mediate the presence or acceptance of God. At their very best they can only be viewed as witnesses who point us to Christ; who is the Living Word that

gives life to all who come to Him through the word of His testimony, which imparts the Spirit. In Christ, all Christians, like the Corinthians are becoming the embodiment of Scripture through the power of the Spirit even as the Lord Himself was the embodiment of the Old Testament Torah. It is in the believers' hearts and lives that the Word of God is effective and becomes living and active and is read by all men. Some may not read the written Scriptures, but they cannot help but read and see God personified in the lives of His people even as He was in His Son.

It is the Christian community, filled with the Spirit that is now becoming living Scriptures that are read by all men. It is through this living Word of God, that is, God's people, that the veil of religion is lifted allowing man to see and seek God.

“We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away. But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to do this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:13-18).

In the above, Paul continues to build the contrast between the two covenants by pointing out that Christians are not like Moses who veiled the glory of God, but rather they reflect God's glory by reflecting the glory or image of Christ who is the image of God. When men looked at Moses, who symbolizes the revelation of God, they could not see a clear image of God because of the veil (religion, Law) he had over his face. Paul likens this to people reading the old covenant. He says that when they read it apart from Christ, their minds are darkened. Is this not the case today, when men try to understand God through the system and greed of the Christian religion? Only in and through the symbol of Christ alone can one have a clear understanding of God's nature or glory. In view of this, the Old Testament should always be interpreted in light of the Christ event and the New Testament Scripture. Therefore, the New Covenant, with its symbols of Christ and His Spirit-filled people supersedes the symbols of Moses and the old covenant Scripture. In other words, revelation supersedes all religion. In a very true sense, the Word of God is God embodied in His Son and His people. Today, in this New Testament period, God's glory or image is being powerfully reflected in the face of Christ and His people, which are the living symbols of the new covenant.

From the above we can understand that God revealed Himself in a veiled form in and through the old covenant (Law or religion) and its symbols of mediations. In contrast, He now reveals Himself fully (to those seeking Him) in and through His Son and His Spirit-filled people. It is now the work of the Spirit to first reveal Christ *in* His people and then reveal Christ to the world *through* His people. The gospel, which is the

bearer of the Spirit, is embodied in all believers and is in their mouths and in their hearts and is heard and read (seen) by all men (Rom. 10:7-18). It is through the living Scriptures of His Spirit-filled people that God now draws near to man. When the symbol of Law is added, God is distanced from the people and the faith is subverted. Moreover, we see in the reinstatement of Law the first step in the evolution of the Jesus movement from a simple faith and way of life, to a religion that has exceeded all others in its complexities and institutionalization.

Chapter 5

Distancing by Holy Men

Jesus said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves” (Luke 22:25-26).

In the previous chapter, we studied how the faith was subverted and how God was distanced from men by the addition or reinstatement of the symbol of Law to the Christian movement. In this chapter, we are going to look at a symbol that always accompanies the symbol of holy Law. This symbol is the symbol of holy men or clergy. For a holy Law must have holy men to enforce and interpret it for the not-so-holy people.

Since the dawn of time, the holy man has been the symbol of mediation and the presence of God in the majority of the religions of the world. Great care is taken by the religious community to set the holy man apart from the rest of the community. This is done through titles, dress, and attributing to them powers that other members of the community do not

have. Of course, these powers are attributed to them because of their superior faith, office, and relationship to God. These men are viewed as having a closer, or at least a different kind of, relationship with God than the others in the community. Therefore, the community's relationship to God resembles a pyramid with the holy man at the top, mediating for the community. As a symbol of mediation, the holy man stands between the people and God, thus adding a step and distancing God from the people.

This pyramid, or hierarchy, of holy men was very much a part of the Jewish religion when Jesus came on the scene. In fact, it seems to be a major characteristic of most organized religions today. However, it would seem that the very presence of Jesus as "God among us" would have negated the need for all spiritual hierarchy and any separate group of holy men that might stand between God and the people. For if our understanding of the New Testament is correct, we find in Christ, man has become a friend of God and no longer needs human mediators to approach Him. Because of the Christ event, all men can now have a personal relationship with God without the aid of a mediator or a holy man. Moreover, after His resurrection, Jesus appointed all His followers as priests (1 Pet. 2:9). In this act, He declared *all* believers to be holy men, washed by His blood, again eliminating all need for a special group of holy men. Could it be that we now have holy men for holy men? In addition, the resurrection of Jesus symbolized that all who believe now have direct access to God apart from all forms of mediation. For in Jesus all believers stand in an at-one-relationship with the living God (Eph. 2:6). This again does away with the need of any form of mediation other than Jesus the Christ. This may help us to understand

why pagans in the first century often referred to Christians as atheists. From a pagan and Jewish perspective, Christians were often seen to be irreligious, for they had no holy men, holy places, or holy times and were often criticized for speaking out against religion (Acts 19:27, 21:28).

In contrast, when we begin to observe modern-day Christendom, we see very little difference between its practices and that of other religions of the world. It has its holy men and hierarchy like all the other religions of the world. In fact, I would dare say that the Christian church on the whole, has more paid professionals than all of the other religions of the world put together. It literally has an army of holy men and woman. In view of this, I find it somewhat ironic to hear the Christians of the church speak of taking the world for Christ by the power of the Spirit. I grant you that the first century church could have made this boast, seeing it was largely made up of the uneducated and slave class type, but from the looks of things, the modern church is trying to reach the world with an army of flesh, or should I say, an army of professionals. We have our professionals, and they had the Spirit. They were, for the most part, a ragtag group of slaves. We, on the other hand, have our powerful institutions and supremely educated clergy. They won the world; we cannot win our neighbors.

Throughout history, Christianity has made attempts to restore to the believers in general, what it refers to as the priesthood of all believers. Its attempts have been on the whole, somewhat of a failure. It is not easy to turn around nineteen hundred years of subversion. Even in groups that have enjoyed some success in this restoration, there seem to quickly rise up charismatic leaders who dominate the ministry, or else

the movements fall prey to institutionalization. In turn, these movements require a highly educated clergy to maintain control over the people and to keep them convinced the organization, in some fashion, represents Christ. One of the chief reasons for this failure to restore the priesthood of all believers is the supposed holy men themselves see no contradiction between their role and the revelation of God in Jesus. Therefore, all iconoclastic movements that have attempted to remove the symbol of holy men from the Christian movement have been met with strong opposition from the holy men or clergy.

The How and Why of Holy Men

If the symbol of holy men was removed by the presence of Jesus and then His Spirit, how did this symbol of clergy, priesthood, and mediation find its way back into the faith? For the answer, we will go to Philip Schaff who is one of the great historians of the church.

“The idea and institution of a special priesthood, distinct from the body of the people, with the accompanying notion of sacrifice and altar, passed imperceptibly from Jewish and heathen reminiscences and analogies into the Christian church. The majority of Jewish converts adhered tenaciously to the Mosaic institutions and rites, and a considerable part never fully attained to the height of spiritual freedom proclaimed by Paul, or soon fell away from it. He opposed legalistic and

ceremonial tendencies in Galatia and Corinth; and although sacerdotalism does not appear among the errors of his Judaizing opponents, the Levitical priesthood with its three ranks of high-priest, priest and Levite, naturally furnished an analogy for the threefold ministry of bishop, priest, and deacon and came to be regarded as typical of it. Still less could the Gentile Christians, as a body, at once emancipate themselves from their traditional notions of priesthood, altar, and sacrifice, on which their former religion was based. Whether we regard the change as an apostasy from a higher position attained, or as a reaction of old ideas never fully abandoned, the change is undeniable and can be traced to the second century. The church could not long occupy the ideal height of the apostolic age and as the Pentecostal illumination passed away with the death of the apostles, the old reminiscences began to reassert themselves.”
History of the Christian Church by Philip Schaff (Vol. 2 page 60)

Hans Kung, a Catholic theologian, explains the development of holy men in the Christian movement with the following:

“Here we come back to the name “priest.” Although the New Testament insists quite unequivocally that there is no longer a priesthood in contrast to an un-priestly laity, but that the whole new people of God has

become a priesthood, the name “priest” has generally been reserved for the leaders of the community in recent centuries, while the idea of the priesthood of all believers has at best, if at all, been commemorated. And yet it is very striking how slow the early Church was to use the name priest for the leader of the community at all. According to the New Testament, although Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross is expressed in the Lord’s Supper, the Lord’s Supper itself is not regarded as a sacrifice on its own, nor even a repetition of the unique sacrificial death of Christ. Thus the Lord’s Supper is never referred to as a sacrifice in the New Testament.... Gradually the Lord’s Supper came to be seen less and less as the communal meal of the entire priestly people, and more and more as a kind of new sacrifice, offered by the leaders of the community on the community’s behalf; a misunderstanding which prepared the way for calling the leaders of the community priests, and as in pagan and Jewish tradition, distinguishing them from the rest of the people; as time went on the ideas and images associated with the priesthood of the Old Testament were increasingly transferred to these New Testament “priests.”

“The rapidly increasing clericalization of the Church meant that it became more and more customary to use the word “priest” ex-

clusively for those who held a particular office in the Church. The idea of the priesthood of all believers gradually came to be almost forgotten by the faithful and by most theologians. As a comment on this development, in the light of the lengthy discussion above, two observations may be made which sum up the whole issue: the fact that the leaders of the community are called “priests” is unexceptionable precisely because of the priesthood of all believers; but the fact that the leaders of the community exclusively are seen as “priest” and become a separate caste, after pagan and Judaic patterns, standing between God and man and barring the direct access to God which the whole priestly people should enjoy. This as we have seen is contrary to the New Testament message: both the message of the one mediator and high priest Jesus Christ and that of the priesthood of all Christians.” *The Church* (pages 489,490)

From the above, it becomes clear as to how the symbol of holy men got into the Christian movement. It was simply introduced or carried over from Judaism and the pagan religions of Rome. We have also seen scholars agree that this addition is a subversion of the pattern set forth in the New Testament. Hans Kung goes so far as to point out that this addition of a clergy distanced the people from God, thus placing a mediator between them and God. Neither Christ nor the apostles authorized this mediator. It is also evident the symbol of holy men could not have been added to the faith until that

faith had already undergone a major change in its thinking about the relationship of law and grace, as well as other major theological changes. We have already witnessed the major change was a return to a system of law and religion. (Note chapter three, "*From Jesus to Religion*"). It seems clericalism and legalism go hand in hand. The more a group of people turn to law, the more they need religious professionals to interpret their law and to enforce it. The preaching of law always leads to a man-centered "legalism." Clericalism and legalism are the Jack and Jill of religion, in that they stand or fall together. Now let us look at what revelation has to say about this addition of the symbol of holy men.

Revelation and Holy Men

When we approach revelation (Jesus), we soon begin to see a contrast between it and religion in regard to the way it views holy men. Revelation tells us that because of the Christ event all men are holy in the eyes of God (Acts 10-11). This means that all men, from the least to the greatest can now approach God directly and must now accept the responsibility that comes from a personal relationship with God. However, in contrast, religion is all about people exalting and setting apart other people to be called holy or saints, in turn exalting them to the place of mediation between themselves and God. When this happens, people are gradually distanced from God and their personal relationship with God, and all is lost or traded for a mediated relationship through holy men. The holy man gladly takes on the responsibility of mediation and begins to live vicariously "for the people." He lives for them before God, he thinks for them, he worships for them,

he organizes their church for them, and he takes care of them as children. This is all in keeping with what religion is about, and that is keeping people eternally children and keeping them in submission. Thus, most religion is dehumanizing and life-negating. Here lies one of the greatest contrasts between religion and revelation. Revelation has as its goal a personal relationship between God and man, with man accepting his personal responsibility before God and thus growing up. In contrast, religion is all about turning one's responsibility over to institutions and their holy men, thus relegating one's self to the status of a child or a slave who must approach God through the mediation of holy men and their institutions. Therefore, we could say that religion has a tendency towards immaturity, while revelation has a will to maturity.

A Classless Kingdom

By setting apart and exalting holy men and women, religion creates classes in a kingdom that was intended to be classless. In protest, revelation tells us that the kingdom of God is classless, and everyone who has put his faith in Jesus is a saint and not just the super-religious people. In fact, revelation teaches that religiosity means nothing to God. The reason for this is that God views all men the same; religious, super-religious, and even nonreligious, "for all have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:9,10). Therefore, all, even the super-religious, stand in need of God's grace, which He freely gives to all who call on Him. In Christ all believers are saints because all believers are sinners. The reason we are called saints is not because we are so good, sinless, or religious, but simply and only because God calls us

saints in Christ (1 Cor. 1:30, Rom. 4:1-6). That is, He has set all Christians apart for Himself and the work of ministry. In New Testament times anything that was set apart for use in service to God was called holy; not because it was different in any way from things of like kind, but rather because it was simply set apart for a special purpose. Therefore, in the New Testament, the word saint does not denote the moral or the religious character of a person or group, as much as the function they perform. In the New Testament “saint” simply means to be set apart to do good works (Eph. 2:10). Here we see another great contrast between revelation and religion. Religion defines one’s relationship with God by what one does not do. In this it becomes preoccupied with sin. In contrast, revelation emphasizes what one should be doing (Rom. 6:11). Thus, it is preoccupied with doing good to its neighbor.

In keeping with the idea of a classless kingdom, the Scriptures tell us in the new order there would be no place for any structure that would resemble the structure of worldly societies or institutions, which always take the form of a pyramid (Mark 10:42,43). The pyramid symbolizes the structure or system where one man has power and authority over another. This is a symbol that has no place in the kingdom of God. Jesus said to His disciples, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:25-28). It is interesting to note what Jesus had to say about this power structure based on the model of a pyramid. He simply said, “Not so with

you.” In this passage Jesus announces to His disciples that in the new order there would be no hierarchy or classes of men. There would only be one class and that class would be a servant class. When men exalt or set themselves apart (which in itself is an act of exalting) from other members of the community by dress, titles, and office, they demonstrate their lack of understanding of the very nature of the new order and the Kingdom of God, a kingdom that is to be totally opposite of the kingdoms of this world, not a reflection of them.

Holy Men Versus a Holy Man

Likewise, the whole of revelation bears witness to the fact there has only been one truly holy man and He died on a cross. All holy men of past ages prefigured and foreshadowed the one great and perfect holy man that would stand with His people at the end of time and lead God’s people into a grand exodus into eternity. The death and resurrection of this one holy man marked the beginning of that exodus, an exodus out of this world and the systems of this world into the freedom of the children of God. Therefore, we see in His death and resurrection the end or the negation of all religious systems that make a distinction between the holy and the profane: in other words, between the clergy and the laity. This is a distinction religious leaders laboriously try to maintain. Try as they may to do this, at the foot of the cross all men stand equal and holy, washed by the blood of Christ. Consequently, when He died, the symbol of holy men died with Him, because in the act of dying He has made all men holy. All men now have direct access to God in Christ (Eph. 2:18, 3:12, Heb. 10:19-25). In Christ the distance between God and man

has been negated forever along with all the symbols of mediation including the symbol of holy men.

Though it is obvious the revelation of God in Christ symbolically stands for the abolition of all mediators including that of holy men, it is also obvious those who wear the name of Christ have found it difficult to get rid of this symbol of religion. The reasons for this difficulty are numerous. They range from the poor self-esteem of the average person that religion reinforces to the cultural and religious conditioning of more than a thousand years. In order for a group to do away with this symbol, it would have to reject a paradigm that has dominated human culture from the beginnings of civilization. The pyramid symbolizes this paradigm, the model of kingship. Needless to say, those on the top of this pyramid see no need to change this paradigm and will do anything to maintain it, even to the point of subverting the teaching of Christ that seems to condemn it (Mark 10:42,45, Matt. 23:8-12). In view of this, one could conclude that the presence of holy men has always symbolized the immaturity and the worldliness of God's people and their refusal to take charge of their own lives. Contrary to the thinking of many, the proliferation of religious professionals that we are witnessing today is not a sign the Christian movement is coming of age, but rather a sign of the very opposite. It is a sign of a digression back into religion. This movement away from the priesthood of all believers back into clericalism, directly opposes the Biblical concept of the priesthood of all believers.

Subversion, Division, and Holy Men

What has been the outcome of reinstating the symbol of holy men into the Christian movement? The foremost result is that it has ripped the Christian movement into pieces, which in itself is nothing more than a complete subversion of revelation (Rom. 2:23,24). It is mainly the symbol of holy men that has and continues to divide Protestants and Catholics. In addition, it has been the symbol of holy men that has been the very foundation of all cults and denominations in the Christian world of today and in the past (1 Cor. 3:21, 4:6,7). Every cult and denomination has its superstar (holy man) that it follows and exalts to a place of mediation. Once established, this symbol of the “superstar” becomes the symbol of mediation between believers. The ones who accept the right superstar of course are mature, knowledgeable, and spiritual. Those who reject him, or in some cases her, are immature, ignorant, unspiritual, and even lost. No matter how one looks at it, the symbol of holy men added to the faith, becomes a symbol of division. Here we affirm again that there is only one symbol one must accept in order to be a Christian: the symbol of Jesus Christ as Lord. Moreover, there is only one symbol that all Christians can unite on: again, the symbol of Jesus. Let’s grow up and stop lining up behind men and the symbols they have created, the symbols that have formed the dividing wall of hostility between believers (Eph. 2:14). Let’s start following Jesus and only Jesus! However, let us be cautious we do not turn the symbols of Jesus and His Spirit into divisive symbols like so many of the charismatic movements have done in the past. Christ is not divided, nor is His Spirit. In other words, Christ and His Spirit do not divide God’s people. The spirit

that divides and separates is the spirit of the world and of the devil, not God's.

I know many will say that they may respect or accept certain holy men and their teachings, but they do not look upon them as mediators. Though a person may sincerely believe this, I find it hard to accept. Even if true, it does not do away with the problem of mediation. It only deals with one aspect of the problem, that being the relationship of God and man. But the problem of mediation is larger than that; it also takes in the relationship man has with his fellow man and other believers. We live in a mediated state where symbols not only mediate between God and man but also between men. Such things as money, sex, race, and religion are all symbols that mediate between men. The best example of this is money. We have all heard the expression "money talks." Well, it does talk. It talks symbolically. It tells you how important a man is in the eyes of his culture and his social standing in his community. Money tells us who is the boss, because it is the mediator between the employer and the employee. When this is understood, one can begin to understand the division in the Christian church. The division comes from men placing symbols of mediation between themselves and other believers. These symbols include men, institutions, and the creeds they have created. We might view these symbols of mediation as demands or expectations one believer or a group of believers put on other believers or groups. Such demands and expectations will go beyond the symbol of Christ. These demands are expressed with phrases like, "you must accept" (*our way*), and "you must believe" (*our way*) in order to be saved or mature in Christ. Some of these demands are symbolized by the following symbols: right prophet, right church, right gov-

ernment, right worship, and even right methods. Where is all this going to end? I believe it has already ended in judgment; that is, the Christian Church has already been turned over to aggressive men (idols of mediation) who have turned God's people into merchandise and made the church contemptuous in the eyes of the world, a world that can no longer believe in witch doctors or holy men. In this unbelief in holy men, the world is closer to God's will than is the church. In their unbelief they demonstrate themselves to be more mature than many Christians. What is the answer? The cure will never come from the clergy, for by and large, they are the problem. They are the symbols that divide. They are the ones who continue to place symbols of mediation between God's people. They are also the ones who maintain the existing symbols that divide, of course in the name of God. (In doing so, they work for God like the devil.)

The solution is the people must reclaim the ministry from the professionals, and these people must destroy the symbols, or idols, of mediation that divide them. The people of these ministries need to remember the one great truth their faith and all others' rest on; that Jesus is Lord and that God has raised Him from the dead (Rom. 10:9,10). Instead of trusting in an arm, or in this case, an army of flesh (professionals), let us renew our faith in the power of the Spirit, a Spirit who glories in using weak and insignificant people to do His will. We need to remember that it is a gospel of a carpenter, spread by fishermen, which shook the pillars of religion and state. Reduced to professionalism, faith becomes nothing more than a lifeless ideology and a mummified institution. God save the church from its holy men!

In our next chapter we will continue our study of the symbols of mediation that have subverted the faith and distanced the people from God and their brothers in Christ by looking at the symbol of institutions.

Chapter 6

Distancing Through Institutions

“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph 6:12-13).

In our study of the subversion of the faith and the distancing of God from the common people and their everyday experiences, we have looked at two of the symbols that have been contributors. These are the symbols of law and of holy men. Very closely connected with these two is the symbol of institution. I propose all three of these symbols of mediation stand as forms of distancing God from man and promote the subverting of the Christian movement.

We need to begin our study of institutions by attempting to discover the meaning of the symbol of institution. When we think of the symbol of institution, the word summons up many sub-symbols that help us to conceptualize the meaning of institution. First and foremost, to have an institution there must be what we might call a symbol of being. This symbol represents an identity or a sense of being which seems to exist

apart from the people who make up the institution. Thus, we can talk about the soul or spirit of an institution, and yet we often talk about institutions as though they were completely separate entities from the people who are a part of them. In other words, there is a sense that institutions have a life apart from the people who constitute the institutions. In ancient times people believed this sense of entity that seemed to be present in an institution and gave it life was a spiritual power that enlivened it, controlled it, and gave it power over men. Many moderns refer to this phenomenon as a group-consciousness. However, this term seems to be more of an observation than an explanation and ends up being as metaphysical as the ancient view.

Another prominent symbol that is closely connected with the symbol of institution is the symbol of law or tradition. In fact, I believe it would be safe to say the symbol of law makes up a large part of the foundation of any institution. For without law, an institution could not exist. Likewise, where you find law and tradition, of a necessity, you will also find the symbol of the professional to perform the traditions, administer, enforce, propagate, and protect the law and the institution. In religion these professionals are represented by the symbol of holy men or clergy. In a true sense, this trinity of law, holy men, and institution cannot be separated because the symbols of holy men and law form the very foundation on which the institution is built. In turn, the institution will invest the holy men and law with the authority and office that is needed to sustain the institution. In fact, it could be the interaction of these three symbols which forms the almost mystical life of an institution: life that is not easily destroyed or changed and life

that seems to exist apart from its members and seems to be more powerful than the sum total of its membership.

This leads to another sub-symbol of the institution, which is the symbol of power. All institutions have power and their power seems to be greater than the sum total of the power of their membership. From this we are forced to conclude that their power comes from some source other than themselves. Of course, religious institutions will claim their power comes from God, but unfortunately for them, the Bible places the power source of religion with the authorities and powers in the heavenly realms that are in rebellion against God (Eph. 6:12). Could it be that Bonhoeffer was right when he charged religion with being disobediences in the form of obediences? We also find not only do institutions have power, but that they tend to use their power to organize and control men through force or manipulation. Some may be thinking, does not the Bible tell us to obey the authorities? The answer is yes. And I might add, those passages have been worn out and abused by religion over and over again as religion tries to justify itself and its beguiling loyalty to the state. For the Christian, any obedience given to any institution is and must be qualified obedience, understanding that the powers that enliven institutions are themselves now in rebellion against God (Acts. 4:19). The Christian obeys them because he believes that bad rule is better than no rule or chaos. The Christian is cautious of any and all institutions, whether religious or secular, recognizing the spiritual powers controlling them in the end stands against God and His Son (Ps. 2:1-30). Surely, no Christian should be so much in love with any institution of this world that he would allow it to stand between him and Jesus. To love the institutions of this world is to love the systems of

this world and the ones who controls them (1 John. 2:15-17, 1 Cor. 4:4).

Institution-A Symbol of Death

Institutions are also dependent on the allegiance of their members. Often this allegiance is a blind allegiance to a mere illusion created by the institution (1 Thess. 2:11, 12). In order to do this, the institution must create a unique body of teachings and traditions that separates and sets itself apart from other similar institutions. Then it must indoctrinate and convince its members that its body of teachings and traditions are the truth and only truth. In order to accomplish this, it must create creeds and educational institutions with the sole purpose of propagating its body of teachings. Without realizing it, in this process, a group or movement becomes an institution and sets its body of truth (human deductions about the truth) and itself up as a mediator between God and the people. As a mediator it drives a wedge between its members and other Christians, as well as distancing the people from God by adding an additional mediator between God and His people. When the process is completed, the members are convinced that to leave the institution or question the institution is to leave God or question God. When this happens, their body of truth, which is nothing more than the embodiment of their human deductions about God, becomes the symbols of God's acceptance and in reality replaces Jesus as the central symbol of their faith. This institutionalization of groups and movements seems to be the fate of all movements that take a physical form in what we call a church. It is here we see one of the paradoxes of life and faith. As life takes its form

in a physical body and thus begins to die, so will group faith when it takes its form. Given adequate time, it will evolve into an institution of religion and when it does, it begins to die. Thus, the symbol of institution becomes a symbol of death and decay.

Faith and Institutions

Institutions are of men. Faith is of God. Therefore, faith is filled with life, mystery, and wonders and will come anew to every generation that is open to it. It does not need our help or the help of the institution we have built. In fact, our children and their children will spend a great deal of their time trying to reform or even destroy the institutions we are erecting today. Each generation must break down the religious symbols of the previous generations that have slipped into idolatry, which is the fate of all religious symbols. In contrast to faith, which is filled with life and comes from God, institutions are of men and represent man's need to set in order his own life and his world. Institutionalism is one of man's highest forms of self-righteousness and self-immortality. Therefore, it represents man's chief form of idolatry. Institutions are memorials or symbols of man's goodness and wisdom before man. However, they stand before God as symbols of egotism, pride, and man's self-independence. Therefore, they are filled with death and are illusions of man's vainglory and the hollow shells of yesterday's faith. We might say that faith is man living from God. In contrast, institutions represent man living from himself. This explains why each generation must find its own faith and not try to live in and from the institutions passed down by its fathers. This is not being disloyal to our fathers' religion,

but rather recognition that faith is a living thing and not a family heirloom.

The Church as an Institution

I know the retort of some will be, “Did not Jesus establish the church, which is an institution?” If we use the modern or current definition of Church, we would have to say that Jesus did not establish a church. The word church has undergone such subversion and evolution that it no longer carries the original meaning. In its original context, it was not a religious word but rather a common word that simply meant a group of people who were called together for a meeting. If used in this way, the answer to the question, “Did Jesus establish a church?” would be yes. He called a group of men to meet in His name. However, this group of men and women who met in His name in the first century could hardly be viewed as an institution as defined above. They had no hierarchy, but rather were led by the Spirit of the living Christ. In contrast to the religions all around them, they had no clergy or holy men except the one true holy man, Jesus Christ. They had no law but Jesus; for to them He was the embodiment of the Law and the prophets. They had no tradition but divine tradition that was lived out by God Himself in the person of Jesus. “For I received from the Lord what I also passed onto you” (1 Cor. 11: 23). The things that they received from the Lord were the only traditions they knew and those traditions, like the law, were embodied in the man Jesus Christ. It is obvious from the gospels that all human traditions were looked upon with a questionable eye (Mark 7:6-8, Mt 15:8, 9). In view of this, we might say Jesus has become for us our law, our tradi-

tion, and our institution. So we must conclude that Jesus did not establish an institution nor did He establish a church as the word is used today.

There has always been and there will always be a tension between the true followers of Jesus and the idea or symbol of institution. The reasons for this tension are many. For one thing, it was the institutions of the status quo and their professional henchmen that crucified Jesus. Jesus warned His disciples to be on their guard in regard to the religious professionals. Moreover, the disciples knew that the very life of Jesus stood opposed to the very essence of what institutions represented. The symbol of institution and the symbol of Jesus are in no way compatible.

CHART OF SYMBOLS:

| OF INSTITUTION | OF JESUS |
|-----------------------|---------------------|
| Authority | * Servant hood |
| Power | * Weakness |
| Structure/Security | * Freedom |
| Law | * Grace /Freedom |
| Office | * Gifts of Ministry |
| Status Quo | * Radical /Fringe |
| Rich/Middle-Class | * Poor/Oppressed |
| Self-Sufficient | * Dependent on God |
| Ostentatious | * Simplistic |

When the wind of the Spirit is blowing among God's people, the fire of Christian freedom will burn up the institutions of religion and reform the institutions of the world. In this we can be confident: when the Spirit of God begins to move among His people, the institutions of the world, both religious

and secular, will gather together to resist it. We see this resistance to God's Spirit first in the rejection and crucifixion of Jesus and then in the institutions' effort to destroy God's people (Rev. 12:1-12). These institutions are symbolically spoken of in the Book of Revelation as the Beast, the Harlot, and the False Prophet. This unholy trinity represents the economy, political, and religious institutions of this world that are attempting to take the place of God in the eyes of man. The institutions of the world both religious and secular are nothing more than the scaffolding man uses in the erection of his towers of Babel. Both Biblical and secular history reflects God's response to all this building of institutions. He grinds them into dust and scatters the people to the four winds. In fact, in our own time we are witnessing the destruction of the idols and towers of Babel that modern man has built and placed his faith in. We are witnessing the undoing of Western civilization and all of its institutions including the kingdom of Christendom. For those who have eyes that see, they have been given the honor of seeing God's Spirit at work in the world in such a clear and powerful fashion that only a man blinded by bias could not see it. The stage is now being set for a tremendous movement of the Spirit of Christ and as always, the corresponding movement of the anti-Christ, which takes its physical form in the institutions of the world. We might be so bold as to say any institution that stands as a mediator, or places a mediator between God and man is anti-Christ. For in doing this, it is seeking to establish that which Christ has abolished.

The institutions of the world always stand in contrast and opposition to the movement of the Spirit. The best example of this can be seen in the history of the Israelites. Under God's rule they were organized very loosely with the heads of

each tribe ruling over the people and the prophets speaking for God as the need arose. When there was a crisis, God would intervene by raising up a judge through whom God would deal with the problem. When the problem was corrected the judge would return to his former calling. In this loosely knit structure, the Israelites demonstrated their faith in the leadership of God and the lack of faith in their own wisdom and power. However, it soon became obvious they were not content with this simple structure and wanted to be more like the nations around them. In short, they wanted the institutional structure of kingship and the security they thought went with it. In asking for kingship, the Israelites were rejecting the leadership of God. When Samuel the prophet asked God about this, God's reply was, "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected as their king, but me" (1 Sam. 8:7). We should not be too hard on the Israelites for in their desire for a king; they were simply reflecting man's obsession with security and structure. However, God goes on to tell them of the high cost of the security of kingship. The cost would be the loss of much of their freedom and in the end the rejection of God.

We find a striking parallel to the above story of the Israelites and the Christian movement. With Israel, everything was fine as long as the people trusted God. God took care of them and spoke when the need arose. However, it seems the Israelites did not like the uncertainty and the ambiguity of this arrangement. So they clamored for a king. In like manner, we see the early church becoming anxious when its Lord did not return as expeditiously as they had believed He would. So we find them turning more and more to the structures that were being created by their own hands, structures that very much

resembled the institutions of the world. In this, they replaced the headship of Jesus and the movement of the Spirit with institutions, traditions, law and, of course, holy men to interpret the law books. In fact, this subversion has been so complete, that the church no longer knows how to listen to the voice of God as He speaks through His prophets. The modern church has done a marvelous job of silencing God by locking Him up in a book or an institution. Some have gone so far as to say God no longer speaks and He no longer has spokesmen on the earth. In this, they have relegated the living God to the status of a dumb idol that neither hears nor speaks. Dead men can only speak through books and institutions; the living Christ can and does speak to His people through His Spirit that He gave to His servants, the prophets. This is not to say the Bible is not the word of God and needful for God's people. God has given us the Bible as a witness to Christ and as a tool for discerning the words of those who claim to speak for God. In saying this, I understand and am fully aware of the terrible abuses of this idea by the fanatics and those who love the pre-eminence. However, I find the opposite view equally alarming, for it reduces the living God to a lifeless god that neither hears nor speaks except in a book, a book that has been staked out for and by the professionals and their institutions. Be assured that such book religion always evolves into clericalism and institutionalism.

The Bible and Institutions

The truth is, God intended the Bible for the average person who has the Spirit of Christ to help him understand the essentials. Moreover, as we have learned more about the Bible, it has become more and more evident the Bible was

never intended to be looked upon as a book of theology or law, but rather it is made up of pastoral letters sent to groups of ordinary people encouraging them and telling them how to live godly lives. In plain English, the Bible was written to and for the average person. However, the Bible is continually being distanced from the average person by the symbols of institutions (seminaries, Bible colleges, etc.,) and highly educated clergymen who spend most of their time arrogating their religious systems and institutions. No matter how hard we try to justify them, these symbols of institutions send a message to the average person that the Bible is hard to understand and in the end is a book for the highly educated. This is great for the religious professional and their institutions, for it makes people more dependent on them. But the problem is, these symbols are subversive in that they symbolically leave the impression that Christianity itself is difficult and is for the educated, which in turn usually means the middle class. In this, the poor and uneducated, for whom Christ died, are becoming less and less a part of the Western church and its leadership. In this, we have subverted the symbols of the Christian movement and have distanced God from the uneducated and the poor. However, we should not think this process we are witnessing is some new phenomenon, for it is not. It parallels what happened to the Jesus movement of the first four centuries. Now, as then, the faith is being subverted and God is being distanced from the people by the unauthorized symbols of law, holy men, and institutions along with all of their sub-symbols.

The criterion for understanding the Bible is not education or the lack of education. It is something that is totally different than the standards of the world. It is called spiritual-

ity and comes through true faith in Christ and comes to both the educated and uneducated alike. True spiritual knowledge comes to us not through the institutions of the world, even those that teach the Bible, but rather through the school of Christ; for only Christ can open our eyes to spiritual things because He alone has the power to give us the Spirit to aid us. "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment: For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:14-16).

We have some in the Jesus movement who believe and arrogate that the institutionalization of Christianity is God's way of perfecting the movement. It does not take a lot of intelligence to guess who would propose such hokum. They are the ones who benefit the most from the institutions. Be assured that they can come up with all kinds of spiritual flim-flam to convince the naive of their views. But the blood of a formally uneducated carpenter who was crucified by the status quo and its religious henchmen cries out against them and their institutions. And be assured that God is able to save people, not because of the splendid bourgeois institutions that men have built, but in spite of them. Moreover, if men think they impress the world with the institutions they are building, think again. They do not impress the world; they are only becoming like them.

Revelation and Institutions

Does revelation have anything directly to say about institution? Yes, unfortunately. However, it does not use that term. If it had, the institutionalization of the Church may have been prevented or at least slowed. When it speaks about the concept of what we call institution, it uses terms and expressions that are foreign to the modern reader. It uses expressions like rulers, powers, authorities, and principalities. These same expressions were used in Biblical times to make reference to the spiritual counterparts of institutions in the unseen world. For the ancient believed every physical embodiment of power or authority had its counterpart in heaven or in the unseen world. So in ancient times, the concept of institution would have been associated with the spiritual powers. Early Christians viewed these powers as being in a state of rebellion against God and His Christ (Eph. 6:12, 2 Cor. 10:4, 5). From this, we would have to gather that the whole of revelation is antagonistic toward worldly power and any structures in which it may be embodied, whether religious or secular. In time, all human structure will become oppressive and enslave man. The spiritual powers are so powerful that they can even use the Bible to oppress and harm mankind (Rom. 7:11-12). I could go so far as to say Biblical writers would view even the concept of the city or even civilization itself suspiciously.

In view of this, I find it somewhat ironic to see the Christian church enthusiastic about building institutions. This is especially true when one considers the number of educational institutions that have been built by Christians that have in turn evolved into the most liberal and anti-Christian institutions in our culture. They surely must share the blame for the

destruction of the very culture that gave them birth. I am not saying this to denigrate Christianity or its institutions, but rather simply to point out an apparent contradiction and inconsistency, which seems to be the hallmark of the modern church, along with compromise as well.

To see the contrast between the modern church and revelation, all one needs to do is note the culture paradigms each looks to and is built on. The institutional church or the modern church is built on the institution or kingship paradigm, which is best set forth by the symbol of a pyramid. Under this paradigm, we have one man ruling and the others submitting and serving. This is the paradigm on which all of Western culture is built and has led to oppression of women and working class since the beginning of civilization. The foundation of this system or model is authority and law that is vested in the offices of institutions. It is a system that is dependent on power and might and the submission of the low ones to the high ones. In contrast, the Biblical paradigm is that of the body and is totally dependent on relationships and the life that flows from one life to another. Unlike the institution that draws its life from the powers, the body of Christ draws its life from the living Christ. Institutions can live without relationships, the true body of Christ cannot. In fact, institutions thrive on and promote the lack of relationship because real relationship reduces the need for the institution. In this, we can see the Body of Christ is not an organization or an institution, but rather a living organism totally unlike any institution or organization. Though this view is not new, it is seldom that it has been put into practice. The majority of Christians are still locked into an institutional pattern or model that takes its form in the pas-

toral system in independent churches or the hierarchy system in main line denominations.

I personally cannot believe it was by accident that the apostle Paul used the paradigm of the body in imaging how Christians are to relate to Christ and to each other. It would have been completely natural and far easier for his readers and for him to use the paradigm or model of kingship or institution. However, he chose the paradigm of the body. This was no mere happenstance. He knew, unlike so many moderns, the church must not be imaged as institution. Unlike many moderns, he knew the symbol of institution and the symbol of Christ were totally incompatible with each other. We can gather from his usage and the contexts in his Corinthian correspondence, that he used the paradigm of the body in a polemical fashion against his opponents. In so doing, he showed the contrast between his message, which was a message of the cross and servant hood, and theirs, which was a message of personal power and domination. He tried to point out to the Christians in Corinth that in the end, his opponents' message turned out to be nothing more than an attempt to win them to another worldly system or institution that depended on human tradition and a worldly paradigm of power, instead of Christ (1 Cor. 12: 12-31, 2 Cor. 11:1-21).

Today the Christian movement is facing a crisis. The crisis is that a secular society seems no longer interested in what the Church has to say. In fact, in recent years there has been a host of religious books on the evils of secularism. With few exceptions the authors seem to place the blame for this secularism on everything from Satan to the educational system. There may be some truth in their charges. However, the

real culprit in this mystery of secularism is the Christian religion and its institutionalism. It is the Christian religion that has made the sharp distinction between the sacred and secular; a distinction that was abolished forever when God joined His creation in the person of His Son. It is the Christian religion that has preached for two thousand years that Christians must withdraw from the world. This is done in spite of the fact revelation tells us Christians are to go into the world. If anything, revelation tells us to come out of religion into the world and conquer it for Christ, which is somewhat difficult when we lock ourselves behind the closed doors of our institutions.

In creating the institutions of Christendom, the Christian religion has taken God out of the world and has put Him into the sacred. This becomes very obvious when you realize that the symbol of God in the world is the living symbol of His people. When you take God's people out of the world, you in effect take God out, thus, opening up the world to secularism. It is truly amazing how the Christian religion and most other religions as well, can take God out of the world and in turn blame the world for rejecting God. The truth is, Christians and other religious people have rejected God's world and have judged it profane and unholy even though God has pronounced it holy. "What God has called holy let no man call it unholy." In the act of calling things unholy that God has called holy, the Christian religion has promoted the attitude of "us and them" which is the very antithesis of what the good news is all about.

Moreover, we can hardly blame the world for losing interest in a wholly other God, which is somewhere out there in a place called heaven where things are great and wonder-

ful. He is portrayed as a God that is so distant from the everyday (the real) that He must be mediated to people through the sacred (the unreal). The God of religion or the sacred is a God that is aloof and uninterested in the ordinary and the everyday. To Him the everyday is profane, unholy, and worthless. It's no wonder the people of the world ignore a God like this. If He ignores them, why should they not ignore Him? If this is not the case, why has He moved out? He has moved out of our public schools, colleges, the media, and even our bookstores and has taken up residence in the sacred. Was He kicked out? No, His own people moved Him out. His people who created Christian colleges, Christian schools, Christian bookstores, and a Christian media moved Him out. Is this God of the sacred, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ or is this a god that has been prefabricated by religious men who are afraid of the everyday [the real] and in turn have created a God in their own image? Is it not time for us to start asking some hard questions about all this religion of ours that has institutionalized God right out of the real world? Of course, this should not be surprising, for institutionalized religion has always been about the business of killing God and removing Him from the land of the living (Matt. 21:33-46).

Chapter 7

Distancing Through Ritual

“For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men” (Rom 14: 17-18).

Today’s church is filled with ritual, form, and institutional structure. I believe the presence of all this religion not only distances people from God, but by its very presence is a sign that people have already been distanced from God through the institutional or kingship model of the church. I propose that people could not be involved in ritual and structure to the extent Christianity has become unless it had first been subverted and then institutionalized. I further propose that ritual is a mark of institutionalism and has little or nothing to do with true faith in Christ. In other words, institutions promote rituals for the benefit of the institution. I will show it is ritual and structure that gives the institution power over its membership and helps perpetuate the institution.

When talking about religious ritual, it is hard to predict the imagery that the word ritual might summon up in the reader’s mind. Therefore, for the sake of clarity, I need to

define what I mean by the word ritual. In my usage, ritual is the using of words or actions symbolically in a repetitious way or in a pretentious way believing this will invoke God's favor or bring God closer to the practitioners. The problem becomes immediately evident. Ritual can easily become a way for man to manipulate or at least believe he or another human has the power to manipulate or control the divine. In this, ritual becomes a way for man to hide his finitude in the belief he can order his life through divine manipulation. Or that he can invoke divine favor and blessings through the repetitious or ostentatious acts of some religious practice. Therefore, ritualism becomes nothing more than self-righteousness or disobedience in the form of obedience or religion.

I recognize, of course, there is a difference between mere ritual and acts of faith. Often the only difference is in the attitude of the worshiper. But it is important for the believer to note the forever-present danger of acts of faith slipping into mere ritual. Later in this chapter I will talk more about the differences between what I call mere ritual and acts of faith. I also understand that a certain amount of structure and form is needed in any gathering of people. However, I also see the danger of those who are involved in evangelical or fundamental churches thinking they stand above the question of ritual. I have found that much of the form and structure of these churches has lapsed into nothing more than ritual and is used in the same way as the high churches use their ostentatious ceremonies. In view of this we would have to conclude that even structure or form could become nothing more than a tool for carnal man to delude himself into thinking somehow God is more present because of his manmade structure. In

this thinking, if you do not do it right, God cannot be there and if you do it right, He's got to be there.

The True Reasons for Ritual

(1) To Invoke God's Favor

Religious men often believe that through the practice of certain institutional rituals and ceremonies they can get the Divine's attention, thus His favor. An example of this is the person who believes through fasting, God will be more apt to hear his prayer. Another example would be that of the religious person who believes God will be more likely to hear long repetitious prayer than a short single utterance. Yet the Lord said, "And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him" (Matt. 6:7,8). In this statement, Jesus is simply pointing out to His disciples they need not go through a parody of ritual to receive God's favor for they already have His attention and favor in Jesus Christ.

The reason for this favor is that God is just that kind of God. He loves to give freely to all of mankind and all the religiosity in the world will not invoke more of His favor; "He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matt. 5:46-48, Titus 3:4,5). Jesus spoke these words about the Father because He knew that the religious people believed God loved them more and blessed them more than the nonreligious. In these words we find Jesus saying "not so." Christians are not called

out of the world to receive more physical blessings than worldly people, but rather they are called to be a blessing to the world and to recognize and proclaim the blessings God has given to all men in Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 3:8,9, Gen. 12:2,3). God has given all things to all men. The only difference between men is that some have recognized the gift (Jesus) and the others have not. Of course, the greatest gift of God is to see that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Those who accept the gift of Jesus, live in Him under an open heaven where they continue to receive one spiritual blessing after another (John. 1:16). There are no ostentatious rituals that need to be performed by holy men to invoke these blessings. These are given to us freely, in the Son of His love, apart from all works of religion (Titus 3:4, 5, Eph. 1:3-10).

(2) To Invoke God's Presence

Religious people have been led to believe by organized religion that God is more present in some places than others. Therefore, most religions have their sacred places where the presence of God is felt more than other places. These sacred places form the very foundation of any organized religion for they shape and form the identity of the organization as well as giving it a sense of cohesiveness. Without them, there may be some question as to whether or not an institution could survive. But how does this fit into the reason that religious men practice so much ritual? The answer is that ritual is a part of the visual stimulus that creates in the worshiper a sense of God's presence. (In creating the sense of God's presence, the holy place and the holy man, who usually invokes the presence of God through magical language or ritual, is

confirmed.) All of this strengthens the grip the institution has on the individual.

There are a number of serious problems with this for those who profess Christ.

[1]. It reduces the Christian faith to the same status as the rest of the religions of the world that practice the same kind of manipulation and deceit. The true church does not need manipulation to keep itself together for it has as its bond, the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:3). It is this same Holy Spirit that keeps the true church from using the methods of the world to win and keep people.

[2]. When the Christian faith is reduced to just one among the many, then Jesus Christ is reduced in men's eyes to just one among the many.

[3]. The whole idea of a God who resides only in any given place in this world makes the true God small and can only create a false image of God in people's minds.

[4]. It confuses human feeling with the presence of God, and thus it may give the worshiper a false sense of security about his relationship with the true God. Unfortunately, many religious people are sight or visual oriented and therefore are easily deceived by visual stimuli. Many interpret their feelings, created by outside visual stimuli, as spirituality when, in fact, it is nothing more than emotion created by a visual illusion created by the institution (2 Thess. 2:9-12).

[5]. Probably the greatest problem for the Christian with all of this is the New Testament Scriptures clearly teach that God is not only in any specific place and should not be imaged as living in buildings made by human hands (Acts 17:24-31).

(3) To Be Seen of Men

Unfortunately, the Scripture also points out that some religious men practice religious ritual, not to win the favor of God nor to invoke His presence, but rather to win the praise and favor of men. Jesus said of the teachers of the law and the very religious people of His day, “Everything they do is done for men to see” (Matt. 23:5). In this, the Lord is simply saying that everything these religious people did was to make themselves larger or to increase their status in the eyes of men. The verdict that the Lord made on the religious people of His day can still be pronounced on much of what is called Christian today. For the institutionalized church has had one goal in the world and that is to make itself larger in the eyes of the world. In the building of its edifices, its pompous ceremonies, and even its huge membership, it has been about the business, and I mean business, of winning the praises of men and making itself larger in the eyes of the world.

The Illusion of Ritual

Here we might examine the relationship between ritual and the idea of institution. In the last chapter I showed that institutions are dependent on power. And the source of their power comes from the law and its holy men. Here we must add a third source of power and that is ritual. For ritual gives an illusion of control and power, which is the power to order not only the things of this world, but God Himself. In this, we could say that institutional ritual and structure become a very

subtle form of propaganda influencing the individual on a subconscious level into believing the institution or the group has authority and power. Even the size of the group can be used as a tool for propaganda seeing that large numbers of people are influenced greatly by large groups. All propagandists know that ostentatiousness mixed with larger numbers are two of the chief forms of propaganda. When you mix these two with ritual, you have a powerful trinity that can easily deceive the fleshly man. This trinity of deceit gives the fleshly man a sense of security, which of course is nothing but an illusion that has been created by the institution (2 Thess.2:9-12). Is it not strange that the modern church, for the most part, glories in the devil's chief forms of deception, which is its worldly success, its ostentatiousness, and its structure or ritual? The apostle Paul speaks of these men who glory in the flesh and what is seen; "For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things" (Phil. 3:18, 19).

No New Testament Authority

Some may be surprised to learn nowhere in the New Testament is a single command or injunction given to practice or participate in any form of cultic ritual or worship, that is, religious ritual performed in a sacred place, at a sacred time, by sacred men. The reason for this is early Christians believed that through the act of one man, the favor and grace of God had forever been invoked once and for all by His death on the cross. So, there was no need for any cultic ritual or

worship that would invoke, keep, or increase the favor of God. Early Christians believed that all believers have God's undivided attention in Christ, at all times and in every place. For in Christ, all times and every place have become sacred. The whole of the believer's life has become worship to the Father. Therefore, there are no sacred rituals that can be performed to invoke God's favor, for all of life's activities have become sacred in view of the Christ event. To try to invoke God's grace or favor today through religious ritual reflects a total misunderstanding of Christ and His work.

Ritual, the Loss of the Personal

Religious men however, seem to persist in the idea God is somehow impressed with ritual, form, and ceremony, the official and the pompous show of religion. Kierkegaard gets to the heart of this when he says,

“And that thou canst well understand; for since God is a personal being, thou canst well conceive how abhorrent it is to Him that people want to wipe His mouth with formulas, to wait upon Him with official solemnity, official phrases, etc. Yea, precisely because God is personality in the most eminent sense, sheer personality, precisely for this cause is the official infinitely more loathsome to Him than it is to a woman when she discovers that a man is making love to her... out of a book of etiquette.” *Attack Upon Christendom* (page 153)

Jesus taught His disciples that in Him they had what we might call an Abba relationship with God the Father. The word Abba was the most intimate and personal name for one's father. It was similar to our word dad. When used, it denoted a deeply personal and intimate relationship with one's father. The question is, does the modern church's worship, structure, and ritual reflect or symbolize a personal relationship to the father or more of a slave-master relationship? From the worship of some Christians, it would be hard for an outsider to believe they had a personal loving relationship with the deity they worshiped. Their worship more resembles a funeral or the inauguration of a king than a family celebration. In contrast, in the New Testament, the church's meetings more resembled a celebration or even a wild party. Jesus Himself likened the kingdom of God to a party and on the day of Pentecost when the church had its first birthday party, the apostles were accused of being drunk with new wine. There is not one passage in the New Testament that would indicate that God is impressed with all our form, structure, and ritual. Granted, the apostle Paul did say to do everything in decency and order, a passage that is well worn by religionists. But in this, Paul surely did not mean for men to structure the gatherings to resemble a funeral or an inauguration ceremony. He was simply telling them to keep it down lest the visitors think them mad.

Moreover, we need to remember that early Christians gathered in their homes for their meetings and were surely less obsessed with structure and form than we moderns. Psychologists tell us man's obsession with form and structure comes from his insecurity and the belief that through the structures

and rituals he creates, somehow he has control over his being. That is not a very good reason for Christians to play religion, especially when one understands Christian worship is to be a confession of our finitude and our total dependence on God. Could it be that our worship says more than we would like it to say? Could it be our worship is more of a symbol that speaks of our self-worship rather than our reverence for God?

The True Significance of Ritual

This is not to say that some ritual is not significant for a religious group, for it is through its traditions and rituals that a sense of identity and community is formed. But even here we would have to say ritual is more of an aid to the institution or group's solidarity than it is to true faith. For though ritual may give identity to a group, it can slip all too easily into tradition, then into law, and finally into mere ritual that is empty of all faith. When ritual slips into law or tradition, men then begin to live from their traditions and ritual instead of Christ. In other words, their traditions become law and their law becomes their absolute instead of Christ. It is at this point that people lose the ability to distinguish between matters of faith and matters of opinion, between their ritual and God's will.

When this happens ritual becomes divisive and even sinful. It takes little reflection to see that ritual is often the thing that gives a group an identity, an identity that too often ends up being a wedge of division that keeps it from fellowship with other brothers and sisters in Christ.

Is Ritual Sinful?

In view of the above statements on ritual, one would be tempted to conclude that all ritual is sinful and disobedience to God. However, that would be saying too much. In fact, we humans are so inclined toward ritual we could define man as homo-ritualist, which means, by his very nature, he is prone to practice ritual. So, in view of this, we would be forced to admit ritual in itself is not sinful. But from all that has been said, we must conclude, ritual is dangerous and can easily become a foothold for the devil. Karl Jasper testifies to this danger when he says the following about ritual as symbolism, "Symbolism constantly degenerates into superstition, allegory, aestheticism, dogmatism, or magic. All five of these mutations have appeared in Christian worship and have evoked iconoclastic reaction." I may add here that the history of both Judaism and Christianity bears out the fact ritual not only degenerates into nothingness, but also that its very presence is often a sign of a dead and lifeless faith. In fact, instead of invoking God's presence and favor, it often negates it. Thus, it distances the people from God in the name of God. Though we cannot say ritual in itself is sinful, we can say history and man's very nature seem to bear out the fact that ritual, given adequate time, will become institutionalized and then slips into what I have labeled mere ritual, and mere ritual is always sinful.

Ritual as Faith

In a true sense, ritual only speaks symbolically of true faith when it is the outward form of that faith. But, even here I must add, the outward form of faith that God is looking for

from the Christian is good works directed toward one's brother, not pomp and ceremony of any kind. The true worshiper of God must be aware of our potential problem areas when it comes to ritual. These are:

[1]. **The attitude of the worshiper must be pure.**

By this I mean, what does he expect the religious acts he is performing to accomplish? If in some way he expects it to invoke God's favor or presence, then he is wrong and his act has slipped into a form of self-righteousness and becomes nothing more than what we have called mere ritual. Mere rituals are acts that are void of faith and understanding. In essence, mere ritual becomes symbolic of groups and individuals who have a misunderstanding of the Grace of God and the Christ event.

[2]. **Ritual that is acceptable must be a personal action that is a bodily expression of one's personal faith and one's total life.** For example, if one has a ritual of kneeling before God in prayer, which is a symbol of one's acceptance of God's Lordship over one's life, one better believe in his heart and exemplify in his life-style what is symbolized by the ritual. If someone lifts up his hands to God in prayer, he better make sure his hands that are lifted up are holy and not involved in works of evil. For if they are, lifting them up to God can only bring or invoke a curse.

[3]. **All ritual must be a self-expression of one's relationship to God and the family of believers.** Therefore, acceptable ritual cannot be commanded or institutionalized by men. It must come out of a group or individual's own experience with God and a personal relationship with Him. When ritual is institutionalized or put into some religious struc-

ture, it will slip into mere ritual that will invoke God's judgment on those who practice it.

[4]. **Acceptable ritual must also symbolize a truth and be understood by the one performing it.** Practicing ritual without understanding its meaning is like speaking in a language that one does not understand, which borders on nonsense (1 Cor. 14:9-12). Therefore, the symbolism used in ritual must not only have a correct meaning, but it must be understood by the one performing it. Here someone might raise the question, if all this is believed and done, could such an act still fall into our definition of ritual?

I would like to clarify the expression "acceptable ritual." In the Christian faith, set forth by Jesus and His apostles, ritual can only be viewed two ways. It can be viewed as sinful or just neutral. It can never be viewed as having any real spiritual power apart from faith to please God. "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love...Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation" (Gal. 5:6, 6:15). The most we can say then about the expression "acceptable ritual" is it is a rite that does not have God's judgment on it. However, it could never be said of any rite that it is an expression of pure worship unless it can be shown that it comes from the Father and thus can return to Him as pure worship. When an act falls into this category, of coming from the Father through the Son, it can no longer be looked at as a ritual. Examples of this are seen in Christian baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Here the question could be raised as to whether or not ritual could be the embodiment of faith and be viewed

therefore as faith. The answer is an emphatic yes. In fact, any physical act done in faith could be viewed as the embodiment of faith. We should not make the mistake of many Protestants who believe just because an act is physical it cannot be spiritual. In New Testament times, faith and the outward expression of that faith were not separated. The hard and fast separation between faith and works comes more through Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation than the New Testament. Evidence is beginning to mount showing that the reformers viewed Paul more through their own needs and polemics with Rome than through the eyes of Paul himself. Therefore, their separation of faith and works was somewhat artificial, though serving their need at the time. This separation today creates more problems and confusion than it solves. The artificiality of dividing faith and works becomes even more evident when you consider, by its very nature, Biblical faith always leads to good works. By good works I do not mean religious ritual or rite, but obedience to the commandments of Christ. When Paul talks about not being saved through good works, it is obvious he is talking about the religious rites of Judaism and that his statements have nothing to do with the relationship of the ethical life of the believer and his salvation.

Baptism and Ritual

An example of faith taking on a physical form is Christian baptism. If one is looking for an acceptable meaning of faith, there is no better definition than the symbolic meaning of Christian baptism, which in a true sense is a bodily confession of faith and a statement of the very meaning of the gospel and faith in Jesus. Baptism, as an immersion in water, symbolizes

the immersion of one into the will of God and solidarity with the work and person of Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:1-4, Gal. 3:26,27). However, the act of baptism stands empty if the heart of the one being baptized is not experiencing the thing being expressed outwardly. As one man has said, "Baptism is from the inside out." When the inward is absent, the outward has degenerated into mere ritual. On the other hand, when true faith is present, it will always take its form in the outward or physical and then the outward should be viewed as a purely spiritual thing or as faith itself (Gal. 3:26,27, Acts 2:38, 1 Pet. 3:21). Unfortunately, over a period of time, many acts of faith will be institutionalized by organized religion and degenerate into mere ritual and then slip into idolatry. This is why the Christian movement must always be in a state of reformation and on its guard against mere ritual that empties faith of its meaning.

Ritual as Mediation Between Christians

Still another aspect of the problem of religious ritual is after it becomes institutionalized, it then becomes a symbol of mediation between believers. It was the religious rites of the Jews that formed the dividing wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles in the first century. Today it is often religious rites that form much of the wall of division between Catholics and Protestants. In this, religious ritual becomes just another way for man, as animal, to stake out his religious territory. His rituals become a religious "no trespassing sign" telling others, symbolically, to stay out or conform to his tradition and surrender to his authority. Therefore, man plays the animal before God, distancing himself from God and his brother.

We all need to recognize that we, by our very nature, practice ritual to varying degrees. In fact, most of us practice ritual when we put our socks on every morning. When ritual is practiced in good faith, it becomes the language of faith. Here we are not talking about the pretentiousness of the institutionalized church, but rather simply the way we do things. You see, ritual in a broad sense is simply our way of doing things and in many cases our way of saying things. For language itself in many ways is nothing more than a form of ritual. In the story of the tower of Babel, we find that God confused the language of the people. If language is ritual, we can infer that it was at the tower of Babel that God imposed on mankind different cultures or rituals or a different way of saying and doing things. The differences in speech we call language, and the differences in ritual, we call culture. When we look at these two things, it is obvious that both are main sources of division among men.

What is the answer to this division? Well, the answer of the world has always been to try to force everyone to be the same. In fact, it seems one of the chief obsessions of worldly men is to have everyone the same as they are. **However, this obsession to make everyone the same is not limited to the world but seems to be** very much a part of all organized religion as well. Maybe that is why organized religion is so boring. It may be here we can find the answer as to why men seem so involved with war and why the intellectuals in the Christian movement have created an intellectual battle among themselves. Could it be they are simply bored with it all? I think for the answer, we need to go back to the story of the tower. What is God trying to teach us in that story? Is He not

telling us that sameness will never get us into a relationship with Him? It was sameness that caused the people to believe they were the center instead of God. It is remarkable to watch and listen to religious leaders try to obtain religious unity by sameness. It is somewhat fun, though sad, to watch grown men bludgeoning each other over the head with their ideas. When they do accomplish unity like some have by a rigid and ruthless conformity, they have created nothing more than another tower of Babel, which does nothing but add another voice to the gibberish.

What God is telling us in the story of Babel is that unity and relationship with Him will not come through human effort or the sameness of language or ritual. It will only come when men turn to the true bond of peace and unity, which is the man Jesus Christ. Until we realize that unity is through the Spirit of Christ, we will continue to make systems the center and in turn try to force others into our system, which is nothing more than our way of saying and doing things.

The secret of unity is that we must get the horse before the cart. Unity does not lead to Christ, but rather Christ leads to unity. When men make Christ the Center, then and only then, will we have true unity, but it will not be the unity of sameness. It will be the unity of Christ. (If we seek unity in any other thing, that thing will become our center and our tower of Babel.) The question would seem to be, what does the life of Jesus have to say about it? For His life is truly the will of God manifested in bodily form. He is the standard and model of everything called Godly. Therefore, of necessity, we must ask the question, was Jesus a ritualist? The answer is an emphatic no. There is no evidence in the gospels that Jesus

was a ritualist. He lived in constant relationship with His Father and saw no need to invoke God's favor or His recognition through the practice of ritual. He was not a great promoter of public prayer or cultic worship. He often violated the tradition and ritual practices of the more religious people and bordered on being indifferent to all outward religious rites and ceremonies except baptism, which He seemed to do to identify with the people. It seems He even made it a practice of criticizing the religious leaders, which seems to be the closest thing to a ritual He practiced. If anything, He seemed to be antagonistic toward the ostentatiousness⁷ of religion. In fact, we could go so far as to say that the life and teaching of Christ are completely the antithesis of organized religion, even the Christian religion.

The Greatest Problem with Ritual

The greatest problem with ritual, at least when it comes to our theme of the distancing of God from the common people and their everyday experience, is most ritual that is practiced by the institutional church removes God from the ordinary and places Him in the sacred. The long-term effects of this are undeniable; God is distanced from the everyday experiences of the common people. In this, the God who drew near in the person of Jesus Christ is portrayed as some other God, a God of religion who is in some distant place and must be approached through the mediation of religion, that is, through its sacred places, times, people, and ritual. Today believers need to realize the world is no longer impressed with the high churches' pomp and ritual, nor the low churches' form, structure, and entertainment. In fact, the world today is not im-

pressed with any institutions. What the world wants to see is a group of people who practice pure religion. "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (James 2:27). Based on James's definition of true religion, we would say that those who want to worship God in spirit and truth should be more concerned with doing good to their neighbors

We must conclude that the practice of cultic or pretentious religious ritual may be symbolic of a basic misunderstanding of the Christ event. If God has entered into the everyday making it holy by His Word and His very presence, there can no longer be any religious ritual that would invoke the favor of God in any way, nor would there be any ritual that would bring God closer to the worshiper. The Scripture clearly teaches that all of the favor or grace God has for man was given to man in the Christ event and is received through faith apart from all religious ritual. This includes all form and structure of the institutionalized church. Therefore, all ritual has been rendered powerless before God by the Christ event. If this is all true the question must be asked, why do people practice it? I have offered some answers to this question. Much of it is practiced because of a basic misunderstanding of the Christ event. Still others practice ritual to be seen of men, and it is practiced to a large degree for the benefit of the institutional church that is dependent on it for authority over its worldly membership.

Chapter 8

Distancing Through Icons

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation” (Col 1:15).

In the incarnation of the Word (Jesus), we see the divine entering into the level of the ordinary. He entered the world and took His place among the poor (ordinary) people and entered into their experience completely. In this, we see the scandal of His cross-figured in the incarnation. However, the incarnation is unthinkable for the religionist, for His God would never lower Himself to the level of the ordinary or even the physical. Therefore, God must be removed and put in His rightful place, which is the sacred. He must be shrouded in the pretentiousness of the world in all of its glory. He must be taken out of the ordinary and everyday, away from the ordinary people and placed in the hands of the great orators, philosophers, and the artists who can give Him the honor He is due. He must be turned over to those who can express Him adequately in image, word, and thought. In this, He is imaged through sacred art, theology, or philosophy. Moreover, a new language must be created to explain and converse about this

noble god of the sacred. The ordinary language of the common people is no longer adequate. God must be spoken about with the language of the philosopher or theologian. So we have the creation of what I call “God talk.” In all of this, the simplicity of the gospel is lost and the common people are distanced from God. Through icons, philosophy, and God talk, the ordinary person is thrice distanced from God. For God is taken out of their world and put in the world of the sacred, a world that can only be explained and imaged by the highly educated or skilled professionals who have a knowledge of the holy language.

Distancing and Subversion Through Icons

To begin with, we need to raise the question as to what an icon or image is. Is it an idol? But what is an idol? Is it simply a false god of wood and stone who was worshiped by ancient people? In a purely physical sense, an idol is a physical image intended to reflect or symbolize God or some characteristic of the divine. However, we must go beyond the physical to have a clear understanding of icons and idols. We must go to the root of the problem, which is the human heart. The apostle Paul hints at this when he says that all greed is idolatry (Col. 3:5). Idolatry is a problem of the heart that manifests itself in the making of icons and idols. But this still does not tell us what an icon or idol is.

I suggest an idol or icon is a symbol of an ideology, a way of thinking that is contrary to the mind of God. In this, we are saying a physical icon or idol is only a reflection of the true

false god that a group or individual has built in their minds and hearts.

Let me give a few examples of the icons or symbols of an idolatrous mind. In the ideology of communistic materialism, the physical idol or icon is the state or government, which is raised up and given the status of God. One Marxist refers to the state as “God walking on the earth.” In many religious ideologies, the holy man or institution is the physical icon of the body religious. In paganism, which has as its highest value pleasure, the human sex organs become the symbol of their idolatry. All these ideologies and their symbols are a reflection of a mind that hates the true God, a mind which is contrary and hostile to God, a mind that cannot please God. It is only in Jesus Christ that we can see the true and pure mind of God. Therefore, any icon other than Jesus Christ is a symbol of man’s hostility and ignorance of the true God.

Why Idols?

Iconicism is the way certain men reduce the true God to a manageable size. They do this because they cannot tolerate standing before the immensity of the true God, which leaves them with a sense of helplessness. Therefore, they reduce God to an idol. The God of heaven must be brought down to earth by imaging Him with something in the creation, or by putting Him into a system of thought that reduces Him to the opinion of a man or a group of men. In essence, the building of systems is very much like the making of idols; both make God small and mankind larger in their own eyes. When God gave the commandment that His people were not to make

images or to worship them, He also revealed Himself as a jealous God. We gather from this, God is jealous in protecting His true image; very similar to how a man is jealous to protect his own name, which is a symbol of the man. When men make icons or systems, they can only tarnish God's real image, for no icon or system can adequately image the true God. When men deface God's image by making icons and systems, God's wrath is upon them and their idols. His turning them over to their idols and ideologies; this turning over to their false god is a manifestation of the wrath of God upon them. In essence, they become the plaything of their own imagination or the image they have created. They seek life in their image or system, but find only death because there is no life in idols or systems, but only death (Gal. 3:21). Life is only to be found in the true image of God, who is Jesus the Christ. "And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life" (John. 5:11-12). Today's moderns like to think idols were a problem of the ancient and that modern man has outgrown the problems of idols and idolatry. However, this belief comes more from modern man's pride than from any evidence. In fact, the evidence seems to be growing that ancient man was not as primitive in his thinking as today's moderns would like to think. In many areas, ancient man's thinking was superior to ours. For the most part, ancient man did not believe that the icon or image was actually a god, but rather he believed it to be a likeness or symbol of his god, which is not unlike many modern men who claim icons help them focus on the spiritual things behind the icon.

When the Israelites made a golden calf and worshiped it, they understood the image itself was not the God who brought them out of Egypt. They realized it was just an image or an icon of the God of heaven. In making the icon, they were simply attributing to the God of heaven the characteristics of the icon, which was in this case a young bull that symbolized power and strength. From a human point of view, one might think God would be pleased with this honor. However, from the response of Moses, it was obvious God was not pleased with this honoring of His power or strength through a visual image. The reason is that God and His characteristics cannot be symbolized with anything in His creation other than His Son Jesus the Christ. Even here we must hasten to point out that we are not talking about the physical form of Jesus the man, but rather His spiritual and moral character as reflected in His life and resurrection.

The Early Christians' View of Icons

It is known today; like its Jewish roots, primitive Christianity was inimical to all icons, and for that matter, all religion. Bernard J. Cooke, a Catholic theologian, in his book *The Distancing of God* gives two reasons for this hostility. He explains,

“Earliest Christianity had been wary of religious images, influenced no doubt by the Mosaic proscription of graven images. In addition, the overall tendency to accept the basic experience of daily life as the sign of God’s presence in their midst meant that there was no need to seek iconic symbols for the

divine presence. Paul stressed that Christians themselves were the sign of the Spirit's activity in history-and undoubtedly early centuries listened to him" (page 97).

In other words, it was their Jewish roots, as planted in the Ten Commandments, which created their hostility toward icons of all kinds. They simply took the Scripture at face value when they said; "You shall not make for yourself an idol [image] in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below" (Exodus 20:4). The reason for this restriction is that man can never image God with anything physical, and there is nothing tangible that can adequately image any aspect of God's character. When imaging God, the sensible can only be misleading and will always make God small. In view of this, humans should not even attempt to image the true God in their minds for God cannot be imaged by the human mind. Any image of God we have in our mind, at best, can only be an idol or image of a false god we have created with fragments of reality we have pieced together with our human imagination.

Effects of Icons

The subconscious power of symbols and images are just beginning to be understood by psychologists, and the findings are alarming. Modern man is just beginning to realize the power of symbols to shape his beliefs and behavior at a subconscious level without him even being aware of it. This alone should reawaken our concern about the uses of icons in Chris-

tion worship and teaching. We should be very much aware of the danger of the visual for it was the visual that deceived Eve.

I believe we can see the link between the visual and the ethical behavior of many Christians by observing the contrast in their behavior when they are with other Christians or in a sacred place in the secular world. It becomes obvious that many are different people depending on the location and the people they are with. Could there be a link here between their ethical behavior and the visual? What image of God do these people have in their minds? Does their God resemble the God of heaven who is a living, seeing, and omnipresent God, or is their god like a dumb idol locked away in a sacred place that neither sees nor hears? Where did this image of God come from? Does this image operate on the conscience or subconscious level? I suggest it works at the subconscious level and it comes from the visual stimulus that religion uses to deceive men into believing God is present in their sacred places, which on the subconscious level leaves the impression He is not present in the everyday world of the common man. This belief then leads to the idea that what is done in the secular is not seen or heard by the God who is locked up in the sacred. All of this reduces the living God to nothing more than a lifeless idol. So, here we charge religion with reducing the true God to the status of a dumb idol. We include in this indictment the Christian religion.

The Lord Himself pointed out the connection between the visual and the ethical life when He said; "The eye is the lamp of the body, if your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness,

how great is that darkness” (Matt. 6:22-23). In another place He said; “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains” (John 9:41). From the words of Jesus, I suggest that everything we see has a subconscious impact on our very being, and that the visual forms shape our moral and ethical lives. Thus, it is the visual that warps and distorts one’s inner life. Here we can see the danger of pornography of all kinds including icons, which are nothing more than religious pornography and propaganda. I base this radical statement on the fact that the visible can only give a distorted image of the true God.

The Incarnation and Icons

Even a greater deterrent to icons than the ones listed above was the early Christians belief in the incarnation of the Logos in Jesus and His Spirit-filled people. Only God can image God and He did this when He created man in His image as a living soul (Gen. 1:26). Though we see this image being tarnished in the fall, we also see Him completing and perfecting it in Jesus the Christ, who is said in a number of places, to be the image of God (Col. 1:15, Heb. 1:3, 2 Cor. 4:4). In this current age, God is now transforming every Christian into the image of His resurrected Son. Though that image at the present time is hidden in Christians, those who have the Spirit can still see it with an eye of faith. The work of transforming Christians into the image of Christ, who is the image of God, will be completed in the final resurrection when we all share totally in the image of Christ. We must concur with early Christians in the belief that if God is present in the person of His Son and His Spirit-filled people, there is absolutely no

need for icons or images of any kind in the Christian faith. The living symbols of Christ and His people are the only symbols that can image the living God, for they are the only images created by God and they are the only living symbols God has given to man. They, and they alone, have the life of God in them. Any other icons must be viewed as a departure from the faith and a form of distancing of God from the common people and their everyday experiences. Idols and icons are in a sacred place: the living Christ. His body (Christians) is in the entire world and those who are a part of it are alive with the living God inside of them. Therefore, Christ is being reflected by them through the power of the Spirit that lives in them (2 Cor. 3:18).

God's True Icons

When we use the words idol or icon, we usually use them in a negative way, as when we refer to a pagan or false God. However, the words idol and icon basically mean an image that represents something we reverence or worship.

With this in mind, we can refer to the Christ of God as God's icon or idol. The writer of the book of Hebrews borders on this when he says of Christ; "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word" (Heb. 1:3). Of course, the writer is not talking about seeing the Christ with a fleshly eye, but rather he is talking about seeing the Christ with the spiritual eyes of one's heart. When one sees Christ this way, he also sees the Father's mind and heart, for the Father's mind and heart is filled with Christ and Christ's heart and mind

is filled with the Father. Therefore, to see the Son is to see the Father and to know the Son is to know the heart and mind of the Father.

The apostle Paul tells us that Christians are now reflecting the image of Christ to the world and angels (2 Cor. 3:18). In fact, he says we are being transformed into the likeness of His Son. In a sense, we could say that Christians, like their Lord, are God's living icons and are filling the world with the image of God. In fact, they are filling the whole universe with the image and presence of their Lord. When people look at Christians, they are to see a reflection of the Christ, who is the image of the living God. I propose that if God has living icons in the person of His Son and His Spirit-filled people, why in the world does He need dead lifeless icons and images that neither see nor speak?

How Did Icons Get into the Faith?

How then did icons get into the Christian movement and why were they introduced? The answer is, they could not get in until the movement had been subverted and its main or master symbols had been changed. As we have seen in previous chapters, this subversion did not happen overnight, but gradually took place over a number of centuries as the symbols of law, holy men, institution, and rituals were added. However, I believe the addition of these symbols alone could not explain the radical departure and subversion that took place when icons were added to the Christian faith. I believe one can trace the beginning of this subversion to a church that had already been distanced from its radical root and had de-

veloped a lust for respectability. In order to win this respectability, it would have to compromise with the pagan masses, their religions, and with their culture. It found that with some compromising, it could attract the masses and with the multitudes came success and power. This was too much of a temptation for a group that up to that point had experienced nothing but rejection and persecution. So, failing the temptation to a will to power, a temptation that its Lord had rejected, it opened its doors to hordes of unconverted pagans who brought with them numerous superstitions, fetishes, and a lust for images into the church. (Note Cooke, page 98) When the church, in its institutional form, found itself filled with multitudes of unregenerate pagans who were addicted and accustomed to the visual stimulus of pagan images and pretentiousness, it found itself with the problem of how to keep and teach this group of people who did not have the Spirit of Christ, nor a love for the Word spoken or written. The answer was simple; change the menu, but not the diet. In other words, continue to use the visual, but simply change the icons to reflect the story of Christ and the Christian movement. Though their intention may have been good, the outcome was disastrous. The icons soon degenerated into magic and superstitions, further subverting the faith and distancing the common person from the living God. We might say that the institution, along with its mass numbers of unconverted members, opened its doors to symbols, which before this time, would have been an abomination to the Christian faith. Their act not only opened the doors of the church for icons, but also to all forms of visual stimuli that were so common in pagan religions. In this, the lust of the eye was made respectable in the church and remains that way to some degree in much of what is called the Christian church (1 John. 2:16).

A quick inventory of pagan religion, and for that matter, all organized religion, will show that religionists have the propensity for taking God out of the ordinary and placing Him back in the sacred. In order to do this, a sacred place must be created. Then the sense must be created that the deity is somehow present in the sacred place in a way that it is not in the unholy or ordinary. Using the visual to create a sense of other-worldliness does this. This sense of other-worldliness is created through a host of other world symbols: the burning of incense, mystical ritual, mystical language, emotional music [sacred], lighting (usually the lack of it), the ostentatiousness of the structure itself, and, of course, the images or icons of the deity or other heavenly beings. Western Christians easily see all this in pagan religions, but we are not talking about pagan religions. We are talking about that which calls itself Christian. It is quite obvious from just a casual reading of the New Testament that all of this religion has no place in a movement that was started by a carpenter with the help of a few fishermen, amidst a group of ordinary folks with little money or power, a group that gathered mainly in the homes of its members for over two hundred years.

Iconoclastic Movements

We should not be under the impression that the addition of icons to the faith went unchallenged in the earlier centuries of the church. To the contrary, there were numerous men in the church who spoke out boldly against icons. However, they were too few and not powerful enough to keep the will of the masses of unconverted pagans from ruling the day.

In spite of this, God continued to raise up men throughout the history of the church who have spoken out against the use of images in the Christian movement. There also have been a number of iconoclastic movements that rose up in protest against the use of icons. These restoration or reformation movements, by and large, had little or no influence on the institutionalized church. Their call for the church to forsake the visual was generally completely ignored. This is not surprising seeing that the institutionalized church depends on the visual for its very existence, for without the visual it would soon crumble and turn to dust like all idols. Unfortunately, history bears out that iconoclastic movements can and often do degenerate into idolatry themselves. This happens when an iconoclastic movement loses sight of its purpose and subsequently is overcome by the visual and its own lust for success. Then their preaching against icons, images, and the visual takes on a form of legalism, which itself is a form of idolatry. In legalism, an ideology, or a system, becomes the idol replacing the original icons that were being attacked by the movement.

Most of these movements begin in protest to the institutionalization that has grown up in the mainstream church: in other words, to the form, structure, and institutions of religion. But given enough time and success, they seem to mutate into what they were originally trying to destroy. Those involved in iconoclastic movements should remember what Nietzsche said in *Beyond Good and Evil*: “Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster. And when you look long into an abyss, the abyss also looks into you.”

Once a movement has turned into what it was trying to reform, it becomes an impossible situation to correct. For the only course to correct it is institutional suicide. Though this may be possible, it is not likely. Institutions do not die easily. It is very unlikely that the infrastructure of any organization would allow the institution benefiting it to die, much less participate in destroying it. This is why a clerical system is the first warning sign of a subversion of an iconoclastic movement. Clergymen are symbols of institutionalism and are more protectors of the institution than proclaimers of the faith. The infrastructure of religious institutions is usually made up of seminaries, Bible schools, and colleges that train the professional religionist for the institution. These in turn become guardians of the institution; of course to the astute, this represents nothing more than a highly structured form of censorship that would hit right at the pocketbooks of all dissenters.

Here may lay the obsession with the religious professionals being so highly educated or the most educated in a given group. Their education represents or is a symbol of their power over the group. This power is desperately needed by the institution in order to survive. Seeing that our culture will no longer accept an *ex cathedra* power, the institution must impose a new form of authority and power. Like most institutions of the last few centuries, the church has turned to the power of the knower. Even though the knower has the power in this situation, the institution reserves the right to determine who the knower will be. Of course, all institutions have determined that the true knower is the one who will accept and teach everything that the institution wants him to teach. All this is done in the name of protecting the truth. The truth is, it is done to protect the authority and infrastructure of the institu-

tion with the bottom line being financial as much as a love for the truth. Unfortunately, many good men are caught up in this system of the world without even being aware of it.

Icons: A Wall of Hostility

There is also another problem with icons that has never really been given the consideration it should have, and that being the mediating effects icons have among believers and even between the believers and unbelievers. Since the introduction of icons into the Christian movement, they have represented a dividing wall or a mediator between believers in Christ. They have also hindered any dialogue between Christians and the rest of the seed of Abraham, namely Jews and Moslems, who simply refuse to accept any religious icons. In fact, both Jews and Moslems view the uses of icons as nothing more than a form of pagan idolatry. It would seem in view of this, that Christians who love Jesus Christ and share the mind of Christ, who wants all men to be saved, would be willing to refrain from the use of icons for the sake of Christian fellowship, so that others who are of the seed of Abraham might be saved.

Icons as a form of mediation are also distancing Christ and the Christian movement from the general populace, who because of modern science, have in themselves become iconoclastic in their thinking. Most educated people, even though they are not Christian, now view all icons as superstition. I find it somewhat ironic that it is now pagans who are breaking down the idols of Christians instead of Christians

breaking down the idols of pagans. This is not to say that non-Christians do not have their own idols. They are just more clever at hiding them. However, I do feel that the humanists stand justified in their criticism of Christians for their religious icons and their ostentatiousness, which is more of a model taken from paganism than from the Man from Galilee.

Idols Today

The majority of people today, both Christian and non-Christian, believe idols were a problem in Biblical times but are no longer a problem for modern man. However, this is only true when one uses the term idol or icon in their most restrictive sense as an image made with human hands. In its broader sense, an idol could be anything that is exalted to a place of being one's absolute or anything that would form or shape one's values (Col. 3:5). In his book, *Radical Monotheism and Western Civilization*, H. Richard Niebuhr points out that our true God is the thing that forms our center of value and holds our loyalty. Our faith in these gods then takes two basic and dominant forms according to Niebuhr, "a pluralism that has many objects of devotion and a social faith that has one object, which is, however, only one among many" (page 18). By the expression "social faith," he means that one has put his faith in a group or society of people making them the center of one's values and making them the absolute of his loyalty. Social faith can be directed toward a family, tribe, nation, or a religious group. This social faith turns these groups into his absolute or his god. When this happens, men have created their idol. Probably the most obvious examples of a

social faith is the faith of a member of a cult, or political party whose faith, though not recognized by the individual, is centered in the group and not God.

It is here that we find the icons or idols of the contemporary church. The modern church has made itself into an idol in that it has exalted itself in the eyes of many to the point it has become their absolute. In exalting itself and making itself larger in the eyes of its members, it has made Christ small and has distanced people from God. In this, the church itself has become a symbol of mediation, an idol that distances people from the true God. This happens whenever the church takes an institutional form and sets itself apart as the absolute authority (God) in the eyes of the people. In doing this, it confuses the body with the head and exalts the body to the place of the head. In an institutional form, the only way the church, if it can still be called the church, can keep its members is by making itself the absolute and setting itself up as the mediator between God and man. Once this is done the institution has tremendous power over its members, for to leave or disobey the institution is to leave or disobey God, for the institution is God.

Of course, Christians are not the only ones who are guilty of making a group or movement their absolute. There are all kinds of systems, causes, and movements that men have made their absolutes and in turn given their loyalty to in various degrees. Probably the most common one outside the religious realm is nationalism. Nationalism is making an absolute out of one's nation or society; in other words, making one's nation and culture the highest authority and the measurement of all things. It is here we find the idolatry of the

Western church, and especially those who claim to be evangelical and fundamentalist. The betrayal of this idolatry is seen in the presence of the American flag in many of their places of worship along with the Christian flag. How can two nations that are completely antithetical to one another, as symbolized by their symbols (flags), one being an eagle and the other a slain lamb, be reconciled? The truth is they cannot be except by reducing the God which is above the many to a God who is just one among the many.

A Land Filled with Idols

There are so many systems, causes, and movements today, that hardly a day can go by without someone soliciting one's loyalty and support for some cause or ideology. These range from Americanism to Communism and have so cluttered the landscape of people's minds that it has become difficult for many to sort it all out. However, the landscape today is not unlike the landscape that the early church encountered when it entered the world for the first time with the gospel of Christ for the very purpose of breaking down the idols of the world and turning people to the living God. The reason the early church was so successful was that it carried with it no idols of its own. Here lies the terrible failure of the modern church. We cannot call the world to turn from its idols when we have our own to deal with first. Let us take the log out of our own eye before we try to take the speck out of our brother's eye. Let us destroy the idols in the Christian movement before we try to destroy the idols of the world.

It is my opinion that the Christian Church, for the most part, has failed so miserably in breaking down the idols of the modern world that God has actually had to raise up some secular disciplines to break them down. There is little doubt in my mind that God is using many worldly disciplines to destroy that part of His church that has slipped into idolatry. This should not be surprising for God has frequently used pagans to do His will even though they were not aware of it at the time. Like many of our secular disciplines, they often went too far, and God in turn ends up destroying them (Isa. 10:5-11). Before the church sends its white knights out of the city to slay the dragons of secularism, maybe it should have them stay at home inside the city of God and kill its own dragons. I really believe God is fully able to take care of our secular friends and all their twaddle (1 Cor. 5:12). It is enough for us to simply become a light on a hill. If we can accomplish that, God will be well pleased and the church will again become the light of the world. However, this cannot be accomplished until Christ is made the center of the church's faith. In order to make Him the center, all this religion along with its idols and systems must be removed from the center so that Christ might be all and all.

In all of this, God is calling us to be a people who are to live without idols until our Lord returns from on high. This is not an easy task when you consider that our culture and even the religions of that culture are persistently making idols of all kinds. We must remember that faith by its very nature is iconoclastic. When it ceases to be iconoclastic, it is no longer the faith of Christ. Therefore, let us prepare our minds for the battle against the idols of this world and the icons of the church. Let us cast down the religious, political, and cultural ideology

that stands opposed to God. Let us throw them down and grind them into dust as Moses did with the golden calf. Let the world begin to fear and hate those who have the power to destroy idols (Rev. 11:1-6). “Dear children, keep yourselves from idols” (1John.5:21). Amen.

Chapter 9

Distancing Through Philosophy

“See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ” (Col 2:8).

In our study, we have been noting concepts that have distanced God from the ordinary man and his everyday experiences. I have done this by showing these concepts as symbols of mediation that hinder a personal relationship, or what we have called an Abba (personal) relationship, with God. It is my contention that much of what is called the Christian religion in the West, falls into this category of distancing symbols. In other words, they are symbols that tend to remove God from the everyday experiences of the common man. In our study we have noted some of the chief or master symbols of religion that have distanced God. So far in this study, we have looked at the symbols of law, holy men, institutions, ritual, and icons. In this chapter, we are going to look at a symbol that is closely linked with the symbol of law and institution, that is, the symbol of philosophy or human wisdom.

I will begin by giving a definition of how I will be using the term philosophy. In our study we will use the term to apply to a discipline that seems to have as its goal, a systematic explanation of the world and in some cases, even God, which is based on human observation and human logic. In ancient times, this discipline was more theistic than in modern times and was one of the important factors that influenced the worldviews of both Christians and pagans. In fact, it is commonly accepted today that much of Western Christianity can trace at least one of its many roots to the philosophy of Aristotle.

The early church engaged in Greek and Roman philosophy when it began to take the gospel of Christ into the world of the Gentiles. The early church engaged these disciplines with great caution, a caution that was later thrown to the wind as the church became more worldly and institutionalized. However, the question is, how did the church get sidetracked into a quest for human wisdom, a quest that would move it away from its center, Jesus Christ and the everyday experiences of the common people? There is no simple answer I can give as to why the church got entangled in the wisdom of this world, other than to point out it lost connection with its Head, Jesus Christ. Of course, if you lose your head it can be a very serious problem. But we still come back to the question as to what caused it to move away from Christ.

There is no doubt that one of the greatest factors in this movement away from a simple faith toward worldly philosophy came out of the polemics that early Christians had with pagan intellectuals. The first century church proclaimed Christ in a style that we might call affirmation, affirming that Jesus was the Christ and then proving it from the Scripture

and the personal testimony of those who had witnessed the resurrection. However, as time went on the church found itself in polemics with some of the great thinkers of the world and felt that it must engage these men on their own ground. In order to do this, the church would have to synthesize the world of the philosopher with the world of Christ. This all began with a noble effort to wrap the gospel in a language that could be understood by everyone, even the educated. In fact, we see this very thing in many of the New Testament writings. Most writers of the New Testament tried to use language that their readers were familiar with and could easily be understood by everyone. However, there is one great difference between New Testament writers and those of later generations and that is the former knowingly subverted the words and concepts of the world making them point to Christ, while the latter subverted the teachings of Christ with worldly wisdom in order to remake the gospel. Their motives for this were many, but one of the foremost was their desire to attract the intellectuals of the age and make it easier for the carnal-minded masses to accept the gospel. Of course, this remade gospel often reflected the spirit of the age more than Christ.

Religion of the Educated

When it was seen that philosophy could be integrated with this new faith (though it completely subverted it) the faith became attractive to many of the highly educated. We need then only to note that the highly educated have, by their very nature, a will to power and would rise to leadership in the church. We then gradually see Christianity become the religion of the educated and the scholar. In a matter of a few

centuries, a movement that was started by a carpenter and a group of fishermen filled with the Spirit, had become an institution controlled by the highly educated and the elite of society. When this happens, it becomes very hard for the poor and uneducated to maintain their place. So we can see that Christianity became a religion of the head instead of a religion of the heart. In this, the common people were once again distanced from God, as the knowers and their body of knowledge were placed between God and the common people. As the body of knowledge grew, it continued to distance the uneducated, poor, and the common man from God while at the same time it continued to give more and more authority and status to the highly educated clergy and their institutions. This gave them the leisure to study and write. Without their awareness, the church, in fighting the philosophies of the world was itself becoming the very thing it was fighting.

The Lust of the Knowers

There is little denying that another factor in this subversion was the lust that intellectuals have for recognition by their peers. It seems that Christian intellectuals have always had the propensity to feel they must justify their beliefs to the worldly knowers. In order to do this, they seem to believe they must take the latest secular theories and synthesize them with the faith, not realizing or maybe not caring, that most of these theories have paganism as their root. This lust for intellectual respectability, coupled with man's tendency to build systems of beliefs, all add up to radical subversion of the gospel and the distancing of the common man from the true Christian gospel.

Roy A. Clouser has written an excellent book pointing out how irreconcilable most human theories are to a Christian worldview. His book is entitled *The Myth of Religious Neutrality: An Essay on the Hidden Role of Religious Belief in Theories*, (University of Notre Dame Press). In his book, Clouser shows how all theories have as their foundation, a religious belief making many of them totally irreconcilable to a Christian worldview. This book is long overdue, and I highly recommend it.

Love Affair with Human Reason

In the exaltation of the knowers in the Christian community, I also see the beginning of the church's love affair with human wisdom and reason. The immediate effect of this love affair was that the church began to interpret knowing God as a cognitive function instead of a relationship that was based on man hearing and obeying the Word of God. Instead of hearing and obeying, the church began to think that its major purpose was to analyze God and Scripture under the microscope of human reason. Of course, this in essence sets human reason up as the judge of God's Word instead of God's Word judging human reason. The devastating effects of this love affair with human reason would not be totally realized for over a thousand years, until the time of the Enlightenment, when human reason would be deified and revelation totally rejected. This was because it could not be squeezed into a naturalistic paradigm of the Age of the Enlightenment.

This love affair with human reason also contributed to the greatest hindrance of true faith. That is the belief that correct knowledge or theology is true faith and everyone who does not have the right theology or knowledge is lost. It is evident from the Gospels that this was not the view of faith held by Jesus. To Jesus, true faith trusted Him and His relationship to the Father. This is seen in Jesus ascribing true faith, sometimes great faith, to a Samaritan, a syrophenician woman, and a Gentile centurion. None of these people had the right knowledge of God or what we might call today an orthodox theology, but who would argue that they were not saved by faith? When faith is reduced to knowing the right ideas or doctrines then it is subverted. Through this subversion, faith is reduced to a work of man, which can be produced by one man teaching another. However, Jesus pointed out to one religious leader that the true faith is a work of God and comes from above (John 3:1-5). Human effort can produce church members and members of a sect, but it will never produce true Christians, a lesson that our church growth friends have yet to learn.

Devastating Effects of Success

Needless to say, all this could not have happened in isolation from other factors that were happening at the same time in the church and in the cultures it was entering. Its very success was one, if not the chief factor, that opened its doors to worldly philosophy. As Christianity grew in popularity, its social status grew as well. It soon found more and more educated and upper class people entering its ranks. These educated and social elite who had entered the church found it

very difficult to reconcile their interests, ambitions, and life styles with the simple faith proclaimed by Jesus. Most of these people were accustomed to the showiness of pagan religion and culture that found Christianity somewhat plain and drab for their taste. How could the pretentiousness of pagan religion and society be synthesized with the Jesus of the Gospels? Of course, the answer was to turn to the philosophers, who by this time had become the theologians of their time. It became the job of the theologians to put together two things that were the direct opposite of one another and totally inimical to one another, which is the radical teaching of Jesus Christ and the life style and beliefs of the pagan masses. This endeavor would take a highly educated type eager to please the status quo and the institutions that provided them the leisure to study and write—institutions that were controlled by the rich and highly educated.

It is only recently that theologians have been willing to point out the inconsistency between human cultures, the church, and the teachings of Jesus Christ. The reason for this new-found bravery is not a renewed desire for the truth, but rather most of these men now work for a university that is no longer controlled by the churches. Thus, there is no longer fear of the loss of one's position. However, the lower clergy still vehemently maintain the status quo of their sects, culture, and their institutions against the plain and radical teachings of Jesus.

In order to maintain this synthesis between the world and the teachings of Christ, the church would have to also create institutions that could socialize the lower clergy whose main function is and was the socialization of the unconverted masses who had entered the church. In this, the church be-

came a major player in the general socialization of Western culture, a role the Lord never intended it to take on, but one that it has laboriously tried to maintain. In this role the church was reduced to the handmaiden of Western culture. As long as it maintains this role it will continue to compromise the radical teachings of Jesus in order to stay in the favor of Western culture. It must do this out of necessity, for the masses that comprise this group are not willing, nor do they have the power, to conform to the teachings of Jesus. In this hybrid form, the church will continue to compromise until it recognizes that it cannot institutionalize Jesus, nor can it teach the ethics of Christ to those who do not have the Spirit of Christ. Unfortunately, the church is in such a deplorable spiritual state that it can no longer discern who has the Spirit and who does not.

A New Reformation

In order for the church to experience a new reformation, it must be willing to forsake the model of the philosopher (the knower) and again assume the model of the hearer and receiver as it relearns how to listen to the voice of God. It must humble itself and recognize that the Spirit and knowledge of Christ is not imparted like worldly knowledge. The true knowledge of Christ can only come through the work of the Spirit and is a supernatural working of God that cannot be reproduced by man, nor analyzed by man, much less reproduced by some formula, even a Biblical one. You see, God refuses to be systemized and one will never invoke God's favor by submitting to a system or a formula of salvation. God is not in a formula. He is in Jesus Christ and can only be found by those who earnestly seek Him through a true faith that is

expressed through love and obedience to Christ. This faith is a simple faith and is available to all who call on God out of a pure heart.

All of this is not to say that God does not use educated men to proclaim and do His will. Through the centuries God has always used both educated and uneducated to proclaim and fulfill His eternal purpose. However, the danger of human wisdom or knowledge is expressed numerous times in the Scripture. The apostle Paul gives us this warning, “See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ” (Col. 2:8). We need to take note of the fact that in this text the apostle does not condemn all philosophy, but rather is warning his readers of a philosophy or religion that does not have Christ as its center and foundation. Philosophy in itself is not wrong, but when people start with an ideology that is founded on something other than Christ, it can only lead to the moving of Christians away from their first love. Christians must be cautious whenever they touch the world, but especially careful when they touch the secular, religious ideologies and philosophies of the world, because these things have demonic powers to move the unstable and immature away from Christ. However, this gives rise to a real problem, which is, that the knowers among us never view themselves as unstable and immature, for to know, in their thinking, is equal to maturity and spirituality.

Faith and Knowledge

The basic difference between the Christian system and that of worldly philosophies is the former is based on faith while the latter on logic and knowledge that has been gathered through observation and human learning. Thus, philosophy has at its foundation, observation and human deductions about the observations. This is equally true in much of Western theology where deductions are drawn from the observations of others, which are often generations removed from the first witnesses. In contrast, faith is based on revelation or illumination. No one will ever find the true God purely by human observation or learning, for God is a God who hides Himself from the eyes of men who do not have the Spirit to seek Him through simple faith. If you recall, it was the knowers who did not know Jesus. I could go so far as to ask the question, does a belief that is founded on observation and human logic really constitute a Biblical faith? Can human knowledge of any kind ever add anything to true faith or is theology simply faith trying to understand itself? Did a faith founded on observing the miracles of Jesus survive the test of true faith? We can gather faith that is based on evidence or human deductions alone is not faith, but rather knowledge, and knowledge that is based on empirical evidence is not faith, but is rather a certain kind of knowledge. It is a soulless knowledge that has very little to do with what we would call true faith. This may help us to understand why Christians are called believers instead of knowers. Of course, the knowers among us hate to hear this kind of talk because this puts them on the same level as us common folks who must depend on simple faith and the working of God.

Two Kinds of Faith

We need to look at the word “faith” anew. For many, the word seems to carry a vagueness and uncertainty about the thing that is in view. However, when the word is used in the Bible for the faith of a Christian, there seems to be a certainty involved (Heb. 11:1). I propose that faith for the Christian is an imputed faith which carries with it all the certainty of any other form of knowledge. In other words, faith is just another way of knowing. But it is surely a different way of knowing.

In the Scriptures we can find the word faith used in a number of ways. It is used to describe the weak and often uncertain human emotion which is very similar to a wish that contains a certain amount of doubt and lack of trust. It is also used to denote a purely intellectual recognition. Both of these kinds of faith seem to be based on human observation and empirical evidence and are spoken of as something less than saving faith (John 12:42, James 2:19). This kind of faith might be compared with a theory in the natural sciences. It is based on evidence, but is not yet proven beyond a doubt. Therefore, it cannot be viewed as absolute knowledge. However, when the evidence gets strong enough, the theory then is spoken about as fact even if it has not been absolutely proven. Why should we expect anything different in the area of faith? If faith is just another way of knowing, should we not expect it to reach a point of absolute knowledge? However, this is not a Biblical faith. For this faith is still the work of man and lives with the fear that new evidence might overthrow it. Therefore, it is constantly trying to prove itself and defend itself from new knowledge or theories.

We could go so far as to say, a faith that is based on facts, evidence, and human deductions about the facts, can never be certain. Therefore, it cannot be called knowing. Yet the Bible says Christians can know through the Holy Spirit (1Tim. 2:20-27). It cannot be denied that God uses facts, evidence, and human reason to communicate to humans. However, the certainty of this knowledge only can come through the Holy Spirit. We hasten to point out that this knowledge that comes from the Spirit is limited to confirming and knowing that Jesus is the Christ (John. 14:21). It does not guarantee infallibility on every religious subject under the heavens. What it does guarantee us is that Christ will be formed in the hearts of the true believers and they will be transformed into His likeness by the power of the Spirit. It also confirms our inheritance as God's children (Rom. 8:16).

It is obvious from just a casual reading of the New Testament that there are two kinds of faith exemplified in the disciples' experience of faith. We see them placing their faith in Christ early in His ministry. This faith was based on the mighty acts that they saw Him perform (John 2:11). However, it was not a faith that was void of doubt and uncertainty. This kind of faith we might call a worldly faith, for it is the kind of faith of the carnal Christian or earthly man. But who would contend this was the same kind of faith that these men had after they received the divine life of Christ to live in them? After the giving of the Spirit to these men, they never seemed to have any doubt or uncertainty in their faith. Some may respond by saying it was the resurrection that gave them this assurance. Yes, but only in the sense it was the event that enabled the Lord Jesus to give the Spirit. Absolute faith does

not come from empirical evidence. If it did, the disciples would have had it before the resurrection. No group of people in the history of the earth had as much empirical evidence as the disciples. Yet they doubted. What changed their faith? Was it more empirical evidence in the form of resurrection? No, it was the divine life, which carried with it the faith of Christ that changed them and gave them an absolute faith that was not really theirs, but the faith of their Lord (Gal. 2:20 KJV). This kind of faith we could call the faith of the heavenly man, for it is the faith of Christ and is supernatural because it comes from above (John 3:1-5).

All true Christians who have the Spirit of God in them, have at some time, experienced this absolute faith to some degree. However, for many it is a fleeting experience, for their flesh soon drives it out. This happens when they decide to walk in the flesh instead of the Spirit. When a man is living in the Spirit, he is living in and by the divine life God has put in him, and by the faith of Christ, which is a part of that divine life of the Father. "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live BY THE FAITH OF THE SON OF GOD, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20, KJV). When a man is living by the faith of Christ in him, then he will have a certainty of faith and the assurance of salvation (1 John. 5:13).

One great thinker of the Christian faith found the secret of true faith one night when he was alone with God. He wrote of his experience with God on a small piece of paper and carried it in his coat pocket. A friend found it after his death. The note read:

“In The year of Grace, 1654, on Monday, 23rd of November, Feast of St. Clement, Pope and Martyr, and of others in the Martyrology, Vigil of Saint Chrysogonus, martyr and others, from about half past ten in the evening until about half past twelve in the evening FIRE, God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob not of the philosophers and scholars. Certitude. Certitude. Feeling. Joy. Peace.”

This was written and experienced by the father of modern physics, Blaise Pascal. You can see he found the secret of true faith.

Faith and Love, the Handmaidens of Knowledge

When the church reduced faith and love to the handmaidens of knowledge, it began to believe that faith could be captured and put into systems that are at the command of the knowers. Then it is assumed that if you can find the right system, you can make sons of God or restore the church by simply imparting the right knowledge or system. When this happens, the faith becomes subject to man, his reasoning, and his methods instead of man being in subjection to faith. Time and time again, I have watched preachers run carnal men (sometime small children) through what I call the Christian machine (their systems) thinking that they were producing Christians, only to find a different kind of carnal man coming

out on the other end of their machine. Thus we have only a carnal man who then has all the self-righteous and moral biases of a religious man added to his other carnal ones. They go in as carnal men who believe that they are lost sinners and come out carnal men who believe they are righteous and saved and, of course, proud members of a sect. In this experience they receive their first vaccination against Christ and true faith. When this happens the masses are Christianized, and Christianity is paganized. In essence, we have just drawn a picture of the church growth movement with all of its methods, programs, and systems. When knowledge is exalted, we also begin to see a subtle shift from sin being the problem of mankind to ignorance being the problem. This amounts to a tremendous shift in emphasis, for the sickness will determine the cure. If the problem is ignorance, then men have some control over the problem. However, if the problem is personal sin and spiritual powers outside of man, then mankind has no control over the problem and must face his finitude, which is the very thing that the knower refuses to do. On the other hand, if sin is the problem, it would seem that the cure would be an emphasis on prayer and confession of one's finitude, which are symbols of man's dependence on God.

Philosophy and Division

Another problem that the church has experienced from a philosophical mindset is that it wants to analyze and divide things which should not be analyzed or divided. In short, it seeks to understand things by breaking a thing down to its basic elements and then attempting to analyze the pieces, believing that when it understands the pieces, it will have a better

explanation of the whole. Though this method may be fine for science and philosophy as human disciplines, when it is applied to the things of God; it opens the door for a legion of demons to enter the faith. One of these demons is that men seem to easily lose sight of the whole and in turn become preoccupied with the pieces.

When this happens, people begin to lose sight that the whole is Jesus Christ and they drift in all directions, often focusing more on spiritual subjects than on Christ. Then the intellectual war begins as each person and group tries to bind their fragmented human deductions on each other as though they were God's Word.

I use the word fragmented because all human knowledge is fragmented. It is very unlikely that any human being, or even a group of humans, could ever hope to gather all the information on any given topic, and even if they could, what would guarantee that their logic would be inerrant in interpreting the information? Here, some fall back on the promise of Jesus that the Holy Spirit would teach His disciples all truth. However, when these promises are viewed in their contexts, it becomes obvious Jesus is not promising His disciples that they would know the truth on every possible subject under the religious sun. This would reduce the Holy Spirit to a crystal ball. I believe these passages teach that the Spirit would teach them and show them that Jesus is the Christ and the implication of that knowledge for the believer's life. If this be the case, the work of the Spirit would be to get our attention off all the subjects of religion and back on the center of our faith, which is Jesus the Christ. This includes getting our attention off the Spirit onto Christ. The work of the Spirit is like the

work of John the Baptist, to point men to Christ. Making the Spirit larger or emphasizing any other subject, does not bring glory to Christ or the Spirit, but can only lead into the radical errors of dogmatism, mysticism, and Gnosticism.

Faith as Philosophy

Still another problem that arises from turning the faith over to a philosophical mindset is that men begin to look at it and treat it as a philosophy—in other words, something to think about and talk about rather than something to be obeyed. It is here that the clergy and orthodoxy are the guiltiest. They seem to spend much of their time engaged in eternal twaddle. They study, study, study and nothing ever seems to change. They are mere talkers, philosophers always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth by obedience to it (2 Tim. 3:7, Titus 1:10). The philosophical mentality always leads to a people who sit around and analyze the Scripture, not for the purpose of obeying it, but rather to satisfy the craving of the mind for the knowledge of good and evil, an endeavor that might be highly questionable for Christians. My friends, we need to understand that knowing the Bible does not mean that one has God's approval. All it means is that one will be judged more harshly. The man who is approved and known of God is the man who obeys and loves God and his fellow-man (1 Cor. 8:1-3). We have seen that philosophy has subverted the faith by making a synthesis between paganism and Christianity. However, we must go beyond subversion to our further theme of the distancing of God from the common people and their everyday experience through forms of mediation. How can philosophy distance God from the common people? I believe it is obvious that the common man and woman do

not think of themselves as philosophers or as having the ability or even the desire to engage in the discipline of philosophy. It is the common belief among average people that philosophy is a discipline for intellectuals and not the common folk. Therefore, when Christianity is imaged as a philosophy, the average person is immediately distanced from it.

Increasingly, at the encouragement of the knowers among them, the church of the common folk has given over its divine right and responsibility of teaching Christ to the knowers and the institutions of higher learning created by them. This has left the impression that if one really want to know Christ and be a leader in the church, one must go to a Christian college, Bible school, or seminar, which by the way, are all symbols of the knower. This in turn leaves the impression that those who attend an institution are somehow more qualified than those who do not. Does this not leave the impression it is the knowledge given by the institution that prepares one for the ministry or Christian service? What about the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit? Where do they come into all this so-called educating? I grant you that all this strengthens the grip of the main institutions (churches) and also the sub-institutions (schools), but how does it make Christ larger? In fact, some churches have found that the tail is now wagging the dog instead of the dog wagging the tail. By this I mean, some churches are finding that they no longer control their schools, but rather the schools now control them. In this, we again see the tremendous control that the knowers have over the Christian movement.

In light of this, it may be time to ask some hard questions about the wisdom of building all these institutions in the

name of Christ. Where do these institutions get the right to preach and proclaim Christ? Where is the proof that these institutions have really promoted the cause of Christ? In view of the horrible state of the churches and Western culture, I personally find it somewhat hard to see any overwhelming evidence where the Christian schools, that are so profuse in our land, have done much to save the churches or our culture. Could it be that all of these institutions are just another broken reed that man has put his trust in? Could it be that the institutions we are building, in themselves, are becoming symbols that distance the common people from God? Is not the building of institutions just another form of secularism that reflects the spirit of this and past ages? When did Christ give an institution the divine right to teach the word of God? When the church turns teaching the gospel over to a profane organization, does it not profane the Word of God by putting it in the same category as science and math? Is it not often the very students, who have not the Spirit, in turn use their carnal knowledge of the Bible to attack and belittle the Scriptures and the whole Christian movement? How can you force someone to study the Bible for a degree and not profane the living Word of God in the process?

Let me close this chapter by pointing out that our goal as Christians is not to know, but rather love God and to be known by God. “We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. But the man who loves God is known by God” (1 Cor. 8:1-3). Amen.

Chapter 10

The Goal of Religion

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26).

Religion is man's attempt, through his own efforts, to close the gap between himself and the transcended. In a sense, religion itself is evidence of a vague remembrance of a lost relationship. Therefore, we might conclude that the goal of all religion is to unite God and man, or what we might call the "at-oneness" of God and man. In religion man tries to bridge the chasm between himself and his God. The idea to bind back or to bind together is inherent in the root word from which we derive the word religion. Although the goal of religion is a worthwhile one, we will see that it is not achievable.

Mankind's efforts to bind himself back to God have taken many forms throughout the history of the world. Usually these forms are nothing more than the projection of man's wishes or a reflection of his own culture that he projects into heaven. In other words, man creates God in his own image.

Therefore, it is not surprising that most tribal gods resemble and validate the society they ruled over. They are nothing more than a reflection of the culture that created them. In fact, this is not like Western Christianity that has subverted the teachings of Jesus to justify its capitalistic system and the brutal wars it has fought to support it. Though man is and was self-deceived and often self-justified in creating these gods in his own image, he was not self-satisfied. There still remained a nagging awareness that there was something more than the dumb idols that he had created in his own image. There also remained this terrible sense of alienation that his tribal gods could not deal with. So there were a few men who began to seek the true God apart from religion.

Salvation Without Religion

The greatest example of this in Biblical history was the man named Abraham. Abraham did not seem to be an overly religious man, at least according to our standards. Yet he left his father's home and his tribal gods to seek a new land and the true God. We are told he found God, or should we say, God found him outside of any organized religion. Not only did God find him outside of religion, but God also saved him outside and without any religion. We might say God saved him in the place where God put him, but that place was not organized religion. Though God has often used religious men to proclaim His will, when it comes to a paradigm, or model of faith and salvation, God used a non-religious Abraham. This is not to say that Abraham never practiced religion. For after God chose Abraham, we find him proclaiming his faith by making an altar to God. However, this simple proclama-

tion of faith is a far cry from the cultic worship of organized religion.

From the story of Abraham, we come to understand that it was God's intent from the beginning to save all men apart from religion, through a personal relationship with Him through faith. His goal was to have such an intimate relationship with His people that they would be called the friends of God. This was to be even as their father Abraham was called the friend of God (James 2:23). His method of achieving this was to create a new being or a new humanity that would relate to Him not through the mediation of religion, but directly, friend to friend. This was fulfilled when we see Jesus (God among us) calling His disciples friends (John 15:15). God's intent to create a new humanity or new being did not start with the coming of Christ. No, it actually began in eternity and took its first form with Adam. It was revealed in a fuller degree in the man Abraham and later revealed completely in His resurrected Son, Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:12 ff).

Thus in the story of the exodus we see God bringing the family of Abraham, which by that time had become a nation, out of Egypt to Mt. Sinai. Here they were to enter into a faith relationship with Him, the kind of relationship He had with their father Abraham. However, the people chose not to have a faith relationship with Him. Instead, they chose to have a mediated relationship with Him through the mediation of religion. Therefore, God gave them a religion, with the idea that the religion might mature them, or at least give them enough time to mature to the point where they could have a true faith relationship with Him in Christ (Gal. 3:25-27). He did this not because of anything He saw in them as a people,

but because of the promises He had made with their father Abraham (Deut. 7:7-9). He also promised them that He would send someone in the future who would lead them into this faith relationship He had with their father Abraham (Deut. 18:17). We see this promise fulfilled in the coming of Jesus the Christ.

There is Biblical evidence to show that God, at the time He was developing a relationship with Abraham, was also in a relationship with other men of faith. For example, there was at the time, Melchizedek, king of Salem, who is referred to as a priest of the Most High God. Later on there was Balaam, the prophet of Pethor, who was outside of the covenant, yet had a relationship with the true God. In this, we might gather that God never had an exclusive people. In fact, the nation of Israel was called to be a servant and a blessing as it mediated God's presence to all of mankind. So how can anyone interpret his or her calling as condemnation for the rest of the world? From the very beginning, the nation of Israel was a symbol that God not only loved them, but also the world. Today the body of Christ has inherited this role of being the symbol of God's love for man. Wherever Christians go in the world, they are to proclaim God's love in word and deed. Thus they become living symbols of God's love for all of mankind (John. 3:16).

The Making of Religion

Though God had developed a faith relationship with a few men in recorded history, the majority of men continued to manufacture their gods and their religions. We moderns

should not be too hard on ancient man. For the only difference between them and us is the number of gods we have created. They had their tribal gods, and we have our personal gods. They created their gods in the likeness of their culture, and we create ours in the likeness of the individual self. It could be a toss-up as to which is more primitive. They used their religions and gods to validate their culture, and we do the same. They used their religions to restrain and to justify their brutality, and we do the same. It seems from all of this, religion is both a blessing and a curse. The apostle Paul came to this conclusion and saw this paradox of religion when he cried out, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God-through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 7:24-25). God rescues us from the body-religious by judging it in Jesus as weak and unprofitable, nailing it to the cross with His Son, thus putting it to death (Heb. 7:18-19, Col 2:14).

The Paradox of Religion

The paradox of religion is by all human standards, it should work. Religion's chief tool in binding man back to God is law, and we all know that law is good therefore religion should work. The truth is that law is good when it is used lawfully. It is here that religion fails, for it neglects to see that law is not the way for man to be at one with God, nor can man bind himself back to God through obedience to a law or through the practice of religious ritual (Gal. 3:21-22). Therefore, it is not lawful to use law (religion) as a mediator or a bridge between God and man. The lawful use and purpose of the law would be to view it as a schoolmaster or a tutor who

was put over mankind until men had enough self-knowledge and God-knowledge to seek God through faith. When men become of age, they no longer need religion. The Scripture tells us that a man becomes of age when he realizes that he cannot approach God through religion, but must come through simple faith in Jesus Christ.

In other words, religion and its laws are not for the spiritually mature, but rather for those who are still spiritually immature and in need of external rules and regulations to control them. In the book of Colossians, Paul addresses the subject of religion and its rules.

“Since you die with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch? These are all destined to perish with use because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence” (Col. 2:20-23).

Paul’s list of don’ts sounds a lot like many modern preachers of religion as they wail against the social sins of their congregations. To the spiritually immature, this appears to be God’s will, when in reality it reduces God to a tribal god. This tribal god is used to support one brand of morality and culture. This god is usually the kind that is chosen by and

benefits the ruling class and the clergy. Preaching against social sins also show a profound misunderstanding of the nature and degree of the problem of sin.

The True Bridge to God

God intended the law (religion) to be used as a sign to point the way to the true bridge to God (Gal 2:19). It points to Christ who is the true bridge to God. In this, the law pointed to its own end or goal (Rom. 10:4). With this in mind, we might look at John the Baptist as the final embodiment of the law and prophets. He was the forerunner who was to point the way to the perfect revelation of God, which is Christ. In speaking about his mission he said, "A voice of one calling in the desert, prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him" (Matt. 3:3). In this act of preparing the way for Jesus, John symbolized the law (religion) and its divine purpose of pointing man to Jesus. Unlike many modern Christians, John understood the temporal nature of his ministry and the law (religion). This can be seen in his statement, "He must become greater; I must become less" (John 3:30). In other words, religion must decrease in order for Christ to increase.

In contrast to the law (religion), we might say that the true bridge to God is the way of grace (promise) and that the promise has been embodied in the man we call Jesus. The pinnacle of this promise is seen in the death and resurrection of Jesus. For it is there that we see a preview of what God is going to do for and to all men on the final day. Therefore, in the Christ event we see judgment and promise. We see judg-

ment on death and sin. Sin being death in the form of life is completely negated along with death. Moreover, in the resurrection we see God foreshadowing the fulfillment of all of His promises. In the resurrection of Christ, God is promising a life with Him that is beyond anything we can imagine (Eph. 3:11).

It is here that we see Jesus as the true end and fulfillment of all religion. If you remember, I said the goal of all religion was the oneness of God and man. It is in the resurrection of Jesus that God foreshadows the oneness He will have with His people in the final resurrection of the dead: a relationship that we now have by faith in our new place, which is in Christ, a faith that believes that whatever God did in His Son He will also do in all of His people. What did God do in His Son? He formed a new creature, a new kind of being—a being that never existed before Christ took on flesh. In the mighty acts of the incarnation and resurrection, God became man, and man became God. Thus in Jesus we have a God-man being (for a lack of a better term) who is the prototype of the new creation of God. In this new creation we see God and man coming together in the person of Jesus Christ and forming the new being. In the Christ event, God shares with man a preview of where He is taking humanity. So in Jesus Christ, we see the goal and destiny of the new humanity. Thus we see God's eternal purpose of becoming one with humanity in and through the new being, Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:10, 3:11-2). He became like us, that we might become like Him (1 John 3:2, 1 Cor. 15:49).

Death, Resurrection, and Atonement

In much of traditional Christian theology, the atonement of Christ is said to have taken place on the cross through His death. However, I believe that this view of the atonement is too narrow. It does not give to the resurrection of Christ the importance it rightly deserves. I believe it is the entire Christ event that makes up the atonement. This would include the incarnation, His life, death, and resurrection, and in a sense, even His second coming. In a very real sense, Jesus Himself is the atonement. Each of the events in His life makes up a part of the whole story of how God has made man at-one with Himself through His Son. To use only the metaphors of death, sacrifice, and law to understand the atonement is too limited and tends to fragment the gospel. This limitation destroys its unity and causes the neglect of some aspects and undue emphasis on others.

I also propose that the idea of atonement is a prophetic metaphor that prefigures what will happen to all believers in the resurrection. In fact, it already has begun to happen in the new humanity. For Jesus, as the head of this new humanity, now stands in the presence of God as the one new and complete man that represents the entire race of men. The new humanity is being created in Him and in His likeness. In this one perfect and complete God-man, figuratively stands all of the new humanity in an at-one relationship with God. So we see that it was the resurrection that sealed the atonement and becomes a promise and a foreshadowing of the future resurrection and at-oneness with God. In this, Jesus is the first one of the new humanity to enter into the heavens to experience an at-one relationship with the Father. In solidar-

ity with Him, we now experience that relationship through faith (Eph. 2:4-6).

Moreover, in Jesus the final resurrection has already begun and because of our faith-union with Him, our resurrection is therefore guaranteed (Rom. 6:1-11). It is on this promise, the apostle Paul bases his argument in his letter to the Corinthians that it is in the resurrection of Jesus that we see the beginning of the general resurrection: "But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised" (1 Cor. 15:12-13). Paul can argue like this because he saw the resurrection of Christ as the beginning of the end-time resurrection. For Paul to deny the general resurrection is to deny the resurrection of Christ Himself. If this is the case, how can a Christian believe in the doctrine of reincarnation? Christians believe in resurrection.

Paul adds further strength to this idea when, in the same chapter, he refers to Christ as the "firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:20). The word *firstfruits* in this expression is our particular concern. There, with few exceptions, firstfruits have a specifically cultic significance. It refers to the firstfruits offerings of grain, wine, cattle and the like, appointed by Moses. The point of these sacrifices is that they are not offered up for their own sake, as it were, but as representative of the total harvest, the entire flock, and so forth. They are a token expression of recognition and thanksgiving that the whole has been given by God. Firstfruits express the notion of organic connection and unity, the insepa-

rability of the initial quantity from the whole. It is particularly this aspect that gives these sacrifices their significance.

“These ideas of representation and organic unity, apart from the specifically cultic connotations of the Septuagint usage, find expression in the use of firstfruits in 1 Corinthians 15:20. The word is not simply an indication of temporal priority; rather it brings into view Christ’s resurrection as the firstfruits of the resurrection-harvest, the initial portion of the whole. His resurrection is the representative beginning of the resurrection of believers. In other words, the term seems deliberately chosen to make evident the organic connection between the two resurrections. His resurrection is not simply a guarantee; it is a pledge in the sense that it is the actual beginning of the general event. In fact, on the basis of this verse, it can be said that Paul views the two resurrections not so much as two events, but as two episodes of the same event. At the same time, however, he clearly maintains a temporal distinction between them. *Then* (v.23) makes this apparent.” (*Resurrection and Redemption* by Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.)

Resurrection, the Goal of all Religion

In light of the above, we might say that the goal of religion and all of life is resurrection. Not just the resurrection of any man, but of God's one and only Son. Here, it is important for us to understand that the expression "one and only Son" and "only begotten Son" are used in the Scripture mainly to denote uniqueness and authority and not order of origin. Jesus is the unique Son of God because he is one of a kind. He is the prototype of the new creation or new humanity that has been in the plan of God since the beginning of time. In Scripture we see the ongoing history of God's creative acts as He is creating this new humanity. All of God's mighty acts were parts of a single and progressive creative act that finds its completion in Christ.

Much of man's emptiness and his corresponding need for religion comes from his vague consciousness of being incomplete, and much of his sense of alienation is a longing to be made whole or complete. This alienation is heightened when men try to bring themselves to completion without God. No man will find completion in anything outside of God's plan. God's plan for completing man is man's bodily resurrection in the likeness of Jesus. You might say that much of human anxiety comes from the fact that mankind is only partially created as he progressively moves to his completion in the resurrection (2 Cor. 3:18). Therefore, believers should look suspiciously on any teaching or movement that promises completeness or liberation before the Parousia (second coming). We miss the mark when we try to find fulfillment or completeness in anything in this life; this includes religion, even the Christian religion. In fact, religion is one of the easiest ways to miss the

mark, for it gives its practitioners a false sense of completeness. No one will find completeness and wholeness until God is finished with him. He is not finished with believers until their bodies are resurrected in the likeness of God's Son (Rom. 8:22-30).

In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ we see in capsulated form the entire history of God's creative acts and eternal purpose. All of God's dealing with mankind is summed up in Jesus. We might say that Jesus was God's epitome of His creative history. Therefore, we find Jesus being referred to as the new Adam, the new Israel, the new creation, the new exodus, new Torah, etc. All of these things point to the final and complete creative act of God, which is Jesus Christ raised from the dead. This helps us to understand why such emphasis is placed on the death and resurrection of Christ. These two events are viewed in Scripture as two parts of one event and mark the coming together and completion of God's plan for a new humanity that has been truly created in His image. The death and resurrection marked the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose in creating the new being (Eph. 3:11).

The mystery of the new being is that His body is made of many members (Eph. 3:6). Hence, we see in the death of Christ, the death of the old humanity, and in His resurrection, the creation of the new humanity. In fact, the whole thrust of Romans chapter six is that if you are really a part of this new humanity, your life will reflect it. In this chapter, Paul points to Christian baptism as a sign, promise, and a seal on God's part that one has been united with Christ and will share in His resurrection. On man's part it is a sign, promise, and seal that

one has entered into solidarity with Jesus and His people. Our baptism into Christ is a proclamation that we have entered the history of the one representative man, sharing not only in His history and suffering (cross), but also His future (Gal. 3:26-27). In the Christ event, the history of God and the story of man merge into one story and one history, forming one new creation, a new creation where there is no need for religion (mediator) for God is present in the person of His Son (Rev. 21:1-4, 22-27).

We have seen that the goal of all religion is the oneness of God and man. We have also seen that only Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of that goal, for it is in Him that man is bound back to God in an eternal oneness. If this is the case, the Christ event marked the death or end of all religion (Rom. 10:4). As it did two thousand years ago, the death and resurrection of Christ still demands a radical way of looking at all things anew. In fact, it brings into question many aspects of the very religion that now wears the name of the crucified one. At the very least, it demands that we reflect anew on the meaning of the Christ event. For a generation, which is so close to the coming of its Lord, does not the resurrection of Christ demand that we see Him at the door at all times? Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Conclusion

“They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, ‘Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die’” (Ex 20:18-19).

In our study, we have seen how the symbols of mediation have separated and distanced people from God. There is nothing new in this book; it all has been said before in various ways and at different times in the history of the Christian movement. I have simply tried to put it in a fresh way that might help some to understand the extent of our finite and fallen state and how much we depend on the grace of God for our salvation.

I am sure some would like to know what we could do in regard to the forms of mediation. Of course, we can be vigilant in our lives and in our ministries to minimize the effects of these mediators. John Philpot Curran’s said, “The condition upon which God hath given liberty to man is eternal vigilance; which condition if he break, servitude is at once the consequence of his crime and the punishment of his guilt.” We do need to be constantly aware that our struggle is not with flesh and blood, but with powers that are spiritual and often unseen. These powers can only be discerned by the spiritually matured and those who are willing to recognize the terri-

fyng and helpless state that we live in. To know reality is to know terror. If it were not for the mediation of our Lord, we would all be consumed by the very image of the reality. It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb 10:31). In the present mediated state, the majority have been deluded into believing that they are reality's master, which demonstrates the degree of their blindness and hubris. All this simply means is the first thing that we need to do is to see, and I hope the material in this book has helped you to do that. The Lord said a man had to be born again to see the kingdom of God, and we might add, a man must be born again to see the kingdom of darkness. Pointing out the forms of mediation is, I hope, a way that will help people to be able to see.

Due to the very nature of the powers that are arrayed against us, few will see the forms of mediation that distort their vision. The reason for this blindness is they cannot live with the tension of being in an unmediated state. Most will continue living under and from the forms of mediation found in religion and their culture. As the Scripture says, "They have eyes but do not see." They will continue to live from the doctrines and commandments of men, which will justify themselves in their own eyes and the eye's of others.

We can see in the early Christian movement the difficulty of trying to live in an unmediated state. The first Christians were called atheists because they questioned and refused to accept the religious and cultural forms of mediation. We saw after the death of the apostles, the Light seemed to be dimmed and the church returning to the old forms of mediation that were found in Judaism and paganism. To this day, the church is still fighting over many of these forms of media-

tion, even though they were never a part of the revelation of God in Christ. The Lord has said, “You cannot put new wine into old wine skins.” Therefore, any large-scale movement to remove the forms of mediation will surely fail. In fact, mass movements are one of the problems. In order to win the masses, one would have to reintroduce forms of mediation that would take the tension out of the true faith. When you do it, you no longer have the faith, but rather a feel-good religion filled with forms of mediation, or even worse, a legalistic oppressive religion like Calvinism or the Muslim religion.

It would seem the best we can do until the coming of the Christ is to try our personal best to live emancipated from all forms of mediators except Christ and attempt to raise up small groups of people who can live free of the forms of mediation by focusing on the true mediator, Jesus Christ. We should not have any lofty expectation that large groups or the masses will embrace living in an unmediated state, or that the groups we create will continue for long. Remember, Jesus said only a few will be saved (Matt 7:13-4). According to God’s design, all living things are born, mature, and then die. They seem to have a very short life expectancy. If they do remain, they do not continue as living organisms but rather lifeless monuments or fossils (institutions). We can only hope those organisms that do survive will give life to the men and woman who will be faithful to the message and pass it on to others so the truth will not be lost or hidden in a forest of mediators and idols.

“Dear children, keep yourselves from idols” (I John 5:21).

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To live in an unmediated state, you must be lifted up to a new state of being.

The laymen must become a priest.

The worker must become the owner.

The student must become the teacher.

The disciple must become the master.

The one under authority must become the authority.

The student must become the seer.

The child must become an adult.

'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty (Zech 4:6).

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