



# PIRSpective

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## Baptist Connections: Episode One

By Michael A. Carling

There were three documentary television series in 1978, 1994 and 1997 respectively entitled *Connections*. They were developed and narrated by historian James Burke. What I found interesting about these series was how Mr. Burke made reasonable conclusions or 'connections' based on the interconnections of men, industry, and the development of technology. He pieced together seemingly unrelated events and ideas and showed how they came together to form the practical technologies we enjoy today.

In a similar sense, one may find in church history many 'connections' that can be made between certain individuals, the times in which they lived, and of course, the providence of God. Using this idea of association, my desire is to present from time to time certain men, circumstances, associations and the providence of God that helped develop an aspect of baptist history. After presenting certain facts and personalities, I will then, Lord willing, make the link between them. The component parts of my first connection are the Second Great Awakening, Asahel Nettleton, Union College and their respective influence upon the Baptist Francis Wayland.

### THE SECOND GREAT AWAKENING

According to Dr. W. R. Downing in his book, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, the second 'Great Awakening,'

'...was the most extensive and extended time of revival and spiritual awakening ever witnessed in America. It consisted of a series of revivals or awakenings in various parts of New England, spreading down through the states and onto the frontier.'<sup>1</sup>

Downing gives the time frame of this awakening from 1793-1840. Some would assert that it technically ended in 1808, but its afterglow lasted well into the 1830's. The year of 1821 has been noted by many as the peak year of that 'afterglow.'

### ASAHEL NETTLETON

Evangelist Asahel Nettleton was born to this world in Killingworth, Connecticut on April 21, 1783. He was the son of a farmer and remained on the farm through his formative years. In 1801 at the age of 18, Asahel was born into the kingdom of God. His conversion was a manifestation of a revival that broke out in Killingworth under the preaching of Josiah B. Andrews of the Missionary Society of Connecticut. Since his father died in the same year, Asahel remained on the farm to take care of his family. According to Bennet Tyler's

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memoir of Nettleton,

'As he was the oldest son, the care of the family, and the management of the farm devolved upon him. It had been his expectation to spend his days in agricultural pursuits; but God had designed him for a different course of life.

...he became exceedingly interested in the short accounts which were published in the Connecticut Evangelical Magazine, of the operations of the London Missionary Society, and of the Baptist Missionary Society in England. These awakened in his breast a strong desire to become a missionary to the heathen; and he decided to devote his life to the missionary service, if God in his Providence, should prepare the way.'<sup>2</sup>

With this desire before him, Asahel pursued an education. This was no easy task according to Tyler,

'In acquiring a collegiate education, he had many difficulties and discouragements to encounter. His pecuniary means were entirely inadequate; and in those days, there were no Education societies, and no funds for the support of indigent students. Such also, were the circumstances of the family, recently deprived of its head, as to render his presence and labor at home, apparently indispensable. So strong however, was his desire to become a minister of the gospel, and a

missionary to the heathen, that he resolved to make the attempt to obtain an education. He procured some books, and while laboring on the farm, devoted his leisure moments to study. In the winter he taught school, and spent his evenings in study, occasionally reciting to his pastor. Thus, in the course of two or three years, with very little instruction, and while laboring most of the time on the farm, except when engaged in school-keeping, he mastered the preparatory studies, and entered the Freshman class in Yale College, about the middle of the first term, in the fall of 1805.<sup>3</sup>

Nettleton graduated in 1809 and two years later was licensed to preach by the West Association of New Haven county on May 28, 1811. He was also ordained as an evangelist by the South Consociation of Litchfield county in the summer of 1817. From 1811 to 1822, Asahel Nettleton was greatly used of God by preaching in many areas of New England which afterwards were followed by times of God-sent revival. Why didn't Asahel pursue his great desire to be a missionary?

'Soon after he began to preach, his labors were crowned with signal success. Wherever he went, the Spirit of God seemed to accompany his preaching. His brethren in the ministry, witnessing the success of his labors, were of the opinion that he ought, at least, to delay the execution of his purpose to leave the country. In deference to their opinion, he consented to delay; and as his labors became increasingly successful, his brethren were more and more convinced that God had called him to labor as an evangelist at home. Still, he never entirely abandoned the idea of a foreign mission, until his health failed in 1822.'<sup>4</sup>

Asahel Nettleton became ill in 1822 and never fully recovered. For the rest of his life he remained feeble and unable to labor as he once did. On May 16, 1844, at the age of 61, Asahel Nettleton went to be with the Lord.

### UNION COLLEGE OF SCHENECTADY, NEW YORK

Union College can trace its beginnings to 1779. After Burgoyne's defeat at Saratoga two years before, several hundred residents of northern New York began the first popular demand for higher education in America. These residents pursued that dream for 16 years until, in 1795, Union became the first college chartered by the Regents of the State of New York. Today, Union is one of the oldest nondenominational colleges in the country.<sup>5</sup>

Eliphalet Nott was the president of Union College during the 'afterglow' period of the second Great Awakening. Born on June 25, 1773 on a farm in Ashford, Connecticut, Nott's early education was at the feet of his mother and older brother Samuel. At the age of twenty-one, he persuaded Rhode Island College (later named Brown University) to allow him to take the exit examinations required of seniors for a baccalaureate degree. He passed without difficulty; however, there existed a rule stipulating that he could not be awarded a BA degree without ever having taken any formal course work at the college. The faculty circumvented this rule by awarding him a Master of Arts degree. After additional study, Nott was licensed to preach in 1796. Nott met and befriended

John Blair Smith, the first president of Union College. Smith was impressed by the young man and encouraged him to consider the pastorate of the First Presbyterian Church of Albany. In 1798 at the age of twenty-five, Nott accepted the invitation and moved his family to Albany. By 1800 Nott had become a trustee of the College and in 1804 was asked to become the fourth president of the nascent college. During his presidency, Nott transformed the curriculum of Union College to include a new, parallel course of study founded in science. This was a radical departure from the traditional "classic course" of study still offered at Union and exclusively at other colleges during this time. The new 'scientific course' of study - which emphasized mathematics, natural history and sciences - caused much consternation among Nott's peers at other institutions. After sixty-two years as president of the College, Nott died on January 29, 1866. Only a fraction of his contributions to and influences upon the College are mentioned here, but it is perhaps fitting that the center piece of the campus - the round, domed building at the symbolic center of campus - was named after him, and still stands today.<sup>6</sup>

### FRANCIS WAYLAND

Francis Wayland was born on March 11, 1796 in New York City. In 1813, at the age of 17, he graduated from Union College of Schenectady, New York and began the study of medicine in Troy, New York. According to Tom Nettles,

'...Wayland came under conviction of the need for regeneration. He set aside days on end when he sought nothing but the salvation of his soul, but he emerged from his secret chambers unchanged...However, upon hearing Luther Rice preach on the subject 'The Glorious Gospel of the Blessed God,' Wayland came to the conclusion that the sentiments of his heart were in harmony with the gospel and that he truly had found salvation through Christ.'<sup>7</sup>

In the last year of his medical studies, Francis Wayland was saved and joined himself to a local Baptist church. Believing that he was called to the ministry, he entered Andover Theological Seminary in the Fall of 1816. At the end of his first year he left the seminary to become a tutor at Union College. He spent four years there teaching various subjects and learning to prepare sermons. In 1821, at the age of 25, Wayland was called to be the pastor of the First Baptist Church in Boston. In 1826 he accepted a professorship at Union College, not intending to leave the pastorate. A few months later he was called to the presidency of Brown University (Rhode Island College) from 1827-1855. Feeling the need for rest, and realizing he could not discharge the duties of president as he should, he resigned as president at the age of 59. Under a sense of duty, Wayland served as pastor of the First Baptist Church in Providence, Rhode Island in 1856, serving as such for a year and a half. On September 30, 1865, Francis Wayland died from an attack of paralysis.

### THE CONNECTION

It was during the 'after glow' of the second Great Awakening, in the years 1811-1822, that Asahel Nettleton came to Union

College on one of his preaching stops. According to Tyler, in 1819,

‘Mr. Nettleton confined his labors principally to Saratoga, occasionally preaching at Malta, till November. He then labored most of the time in Malta, occasionally preaching in the neighboring towns, until the beginning of March [1820], when he went to Schenectady, where he continued till near the close of April. The revival which began at Saratoga, spread into Malta, and thence into all the surrounding region, and into Union College.’<sup>8</sup>

Although there were a number of outstanding faculty members at Union College that caught the revival spirit, such as president Eliphalet Nott, prominent New Yorker Andrew Yates, and a founder of Union Seminary, Thomas McAuley, according to Thornbury,

‘None was more deeply moved or influenced by the revival, or impressed with Nettleton’s preaching, than [the tutor] Francis Wayland.

Wayland’s biographers, his sons H. L. and Francis, affirm that it was divine providence which had wisely and graciously so ordered circumstances that their father should be exposed to the great revival and Nettleton’s preaching.

Said his sons, ‘His spirit received a quickening impulse, whose influence never ceased to be felt, and he gained lessons never to be forgotten in the mode of addressing men on religious subjects.’<sup>9</sup>

According to Wayland, Nettleton was,

‘...among the most effective preachers I have ever known. I never heard logic assume so attractive a form or produce so decisive an effect. When reasoning on any of the great doctrines in Romans, for instance, election, the utter depravity of man, the necessity of regeneration, or the necessity of atonement, his manner was often Socratic.’<sup>10</sup>

The impression that this revival had on Wayland is seen in his response to William B. Sprague concerning his [Wayland’s] personal experience of revival. In his letter dated March 7, 1832, he writes,

‘I believe in the existence of revivals of religion, as much as I believe in any other fact, either physical or moral. By revivals of religion I mean special seasons in which the minds of men, within a certain district, or in a certain congregation, are more than usually susceptible of impression from the exhibition of moral truth. The effects of this special influence are manifested on ministers and hearers, both converted and unconverted.’<sup>11</sup>

The influence of the Great Awakening, Asahel Nettleton, and Union College upon Francis Wayland was a lasting one and no doubt helped to shape his influence on the Baptist denomination. This is seen in the following, and with this I conclude episode one of Baptist Connections,

‘As the president of Brown University from 1827-1855, [Wayland] was ‘Mr. Baptist’ in the United States, from the standpoint of his influence as an educator and writer. Brown was the oldest and most prestigious Baptist College in America, and an intellectual fountain from which flowed

a never-ending stream of ministers and Christian workers to nourish the moral and spiritual climate in the American church. Wayland’s position gave him a highly effective platform from which to promote his views, and brought him into contact with the leading church leaders of the United States and Europe.’<sup>12</sup>

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## Baptist Doctrines and Distinctives (4)

By James A. Billings

### THE MODERN PHENOMENA OF DENYING OUR BAPTIST HERITAGE

The sad trend today in many churches is that they are dropping the name ‘Baptist’ from their church signs because they do not know or understand the great and illustrious history of the past. It is possible that some are willfully ignorant of the history of the Baptists because of their ties to Protestant groups and higher education institutions. It is more probable that the vast majority of those who are turning their back on their Baptist heritage are doing so by sheer pragmatism. That is, they can get more people into their church buildings if they call themselves a ‘Community Church’ or a ‘Bible Church’ or a ‘Christian Center.’

There is also a trend in modern scholarship to denounce those who hold to the antiquity of the Baptists for various and sundry reasons. The slanderous charges of heresies, antinomianism and anarchy have always been leveled at the ancient Christians who held to New Testament principles and practices. But it is important to recognize that these slanderous charges were designed to discredit the glorious testimony our forefathers enjoyed. These slanderous charges are also proof of the long standing history of the Baptists dating back to the time of John the Baptist.

It is not surprising that the Baptists of old were slandered. Remember that our Lord was called a drunk, a glutton, a

demon and that He commiserated with criminals. John the Baptist was also charged with demon possession.

It is also not surprising that Protestant historians would slander the Baptists. This comes with the territory and is to be expected. Daniel Neal wrote, 'The advocates of this doctrine were, for the most part, of the meanest of the people; their preachers were generally illiterate, and went about the countries making proselytes of all that would submit to their immersion, without due regard to their acquaintance with the principles of religion, or their moral character.'<sup>1</sup>

J.A. Wyle, in his celebrated, remarkable and momentous work *The History of Protestantism*<sup>2</sup> slandered the Swiss Baptists unmercifully. He stated, '...they claimed a release from every personal virtue and all social obligations. They dealt the same way with the Bible. Some of them threw the Book in the fire saying, 'the letter killeth.' The freaks and excesses in which they began to indulge were very extraordinary, and resembled those of men whose wits are disordered.'

### THE MODERN PHENOMENA OF BAPTIST SCHOLARS DENYING THE ANTIQUITY OF THE BAPTISTS

What is surprising and comes as completely unexpected is that some Southern Baptists and Reformed Baptists also take the view of their Protestant counterparts. Leon McBeth<sup>3</sup> denies any orthodox sects opposed Rome prior to the Reformation. He states, 'The Baptist denomination, as it is known today, emerged by way of the English Separatist Movement. The best historical evidence confirms this origin, and no major scholar has arisen this half of the century to challenge it.'<sup>4</sup> 'Who are these people called 'Anabaptist'? This group refers to a community of rebels during the Reformation period; they were considered to be a radical wing of the Reformation.... They actually took on the form of a cult, holding to an extreme mystical experiential view and believing their leaders to be prophets (future tellers). They were also quick to use violence to get their way.'<sup>5</sup> 'Thus, what we must see is that the Baptist denomination started out of the Reformation, specifically the Separatists in England. With this in mind, we are a Protestant group who must reflect our traditional Reformed background...'<sup>6</sup>

Michael A.G. Haykin, in his article, *British Particular Baptist Biography* states, 'Now, the British Particular Baptist community is a direct product of the Reformation...The argument that there have always been Baptist churches for the last two thousand years, though, is a product of wishful thinking than solid historical research...What is absolutely clear from the historical record about Baptist origins is this: they emerged from the womb of English Puritanism in the early to mid-seventeenth century... It was among these Separatists, as they became known, that believer's baptism was rediscovered, and Baptist congregations subsequently formed in the first half of the seventeenth-century.'<sup>7</sup>

Heritage Reformed Baptist Church stated in their church information tract, 'Our purpose was to hold tight to the precious truths of the Word of God which had been recaptured by our Protestant forefathers. This heritage... forms the basis

by our Protestant forefathers. This heritage... forms the basis for who we are as a church family.'<sup>8</sup> The booklet also states, 'So over the centuries, one could speak of 'evangelical' Lutherans, Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians and know that they were members of those denominations who believed in the Bible...'<sup>9</sup> They go on to write, '*Reformed* refers to the heritage of the teachings of our Lord and His Apostles which were recaptured at the time of the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century by such men as Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Knox.'<sup>10</sup>

This article will stress that it is hardly 'wishful thinking' that these assertions be challenged and proven erroneous. In point of fact this article will challenge the Protestant assertions from our Baptist friends by quoting Protestant and Roman Catholic authors.

### QUOTES FROM PROTESTANT AND ROMAN CATHOLIC HISTORIANS ACKNOWLEDGING THE PERPETUITY OF THE BAPTISTS

'Were it not that the Baptists have been grievously tormented and cut off with the knife during the past twelve hundred years, they would swarm in greater numbers today than all the Reformers.'

–Cardinal Stanilaus Hosius<sup>11</sup>

'The Baptists are the only body of known Christians that have never symbolized with Rome.'

– Sir Isaac Newton

'Before the rise of Luther and Calvin, there lay secreted in almost all the countries of Europe persons who adhered tenaciously to the principles of modern Dutch Baptists.'

–Mosheim (Lutheran)

'The first century was a history of the Baptists'

– Mosheim<sup>12</sup>

'We know that at the time of the birth of the hybrid that there were already people who were called 'anabaptists.'

–Leonard Verduin (Christian Reformed)

'They [Baptists] practice adult baptism, refuse to bear civil office or swear oaths, believe in the celestial flesh of Christ, and insist on all things being common.'

–Henry VIII

'...Churches in England, Scotland, and France, retained the ancient purity of doctrine and worship much longer than many others. In every age of this dark time, there appeared particular persons in all parts of Christendom who bore a testimony against the corruptions and tyranny of the Church of Rome.... and it pleaded for the ancient purity of doctrine and worship. God was pleased to maintain an uninterrupted succession of many witnesses through the whole time, in Germany, France, Britain, and other countries; private persons and ministers, some magistrates and persons of great distinction. And there were numbers in every age who were persecuted and put to death for this testimony.'

–Jonathan Edwards<sup>13</sup>

'I should not readily admit there was a Baptist church as far back as A.D. 100, though without doubt, there were Baptists then, as all Christians then were Baptists.'

–John C. Ridpath (Methodist)<sup>14</sup>

'From the apostolic age to the present time the sentiments of Baptists and their practice of baptism have had a continued chain of advocates, and public monuments of their existence in every century can be produced.'

–Alexander Campbell<sup>15</sup>

'The Baptist denomination in all ages and in all countries has been, as a body, the constant asserters of the rights of man and the liberty of conscience.'

—Alexander Campbell<sup>16</sup>

'The Mennonites are descended from the tolerably pure evangelical Waldenses, who were driven by persecution into various countries; and who during the latter part of the twelfth century fled into Flanders; and into the provinces of the Holland and Zealand, where they lived simple and exemplary lives, in the villages as farmers, in the towns by trades, free from the charge of any gross immoralities, and professing the most pure and simple principles, which they exemplified in a holy conversation. They were, therefore, in existence long before the Reformed Church of the Netherlands.'

We have now seen that the Baptists, who were formerly called Anabaptists, and in later times Mennonites, were the original Waldenses, and who have long in the history of the church received the honor of the origin. On this account the Baptists may be considered as the only Christian community which has stood since the days of the apostles, and as a Christian society which has preserved pure the doctrines of the Gospel through all ages. The perfectly correct external economy of the Baptist denomination tends to confirm the truth, disputed by the Romish Church, that the Reformation brought about in the sixteenth century was in the highest degree necessary, and at the same time goes to refute the erroneous notion of the Catholics, that their denomination is the most ancient.'

—Dr. Ypeij, Professor of Theology in Gronigen  
—Rev. J.J. Dermout, Chaplin to the King of the Netherlands<sup>17</sup>

'Where was the Reformed [Calvinistic or Evangelical] church prior to Zwingli, Luther, and Calvin? Answer: First of all, the true church remains steadfast by reason of her durability—a durability which does not fluctuate. True doctrine is an infallible distinguishing mark of the church...Wherever true doctrine resides...there also is the church...prior to Luther this church existed wherever this true doctrine, which never ceased to be, was to be found.'

'...The church existed in several independent churches which maintained separation from popery...Such churches existed since early times in the southern parts of France, as well as in some parts of England, Scotland, Bohemia, and also in Piedmont. Against these churches popes have initiated many persecutions, but they continue to exist until this day...prior to the time of Zwingli and Luther there had been very many who adhered to the same doctrine...and that Zwingli, Luther, and Calvin had by renewal brought this doctrine to light...'

—Wilhelmus a Brakel<sup>18</sup>

'Among all sects that either are or have been, there is none more detrimental to the Roman Catholic Church than that of the Leonists (that is, the poor men of Lyons—the Waldenses)...it is the sect that is of the longest standing of any; for some say it has existed since the time of the apostles...it is the most general of all sects; for scarcely is there any country to be found where this sect has not been embraced...this sect has a great appearance of godliness, since they live righteously before all men, believe all that God has said, and maintain all the articles contained in the sybolum (the twelve articles of faith)...'

—Reynerius (the Inquisition)

'The Waldenses originate from a religious man named Leo, who lived during the time of the first Christian Emperor, Constantine the Great [313 A.D.]'

—Archbishop Sessellius

'Such is the witness of these parties. Do you yet ask whether the Reformed [Calvinistic or Evangelical] Church existed prior

to Luther? To this I reply that she was to be found among those whom we have just mentioned; that is, those residing in Piedmont among the Waldenses.'

—Welhelmus a Brakel<sup>19</sup>

## OPINIONS CONCERNING THE ANCIENT WALDENSES BY THEIR ENEMIES

The word, 'Waldenses' derived from the Italian, 'Valdese,' or 'Waldesi' meaning valley. This is based on the fact they lived in the valleys of the Piedmont.

Edberhard de Bethune, in 1160 A.D. stated, 'Some of them called themselves Vallenses because they lived in the vale of the sorrow of tears.'<sup>20</sup>

Bernard—Abbot of the Monastery of the Remonstrants stated in 1209 A.D., 'they were called Waldenses, that is, from a dark valley, because they are involved in its deep thick darkness of errors.'<sup>21</sup>

Concerning the Waldenses, the monk, Egbert, stated concerning the 'heretics' during the twelfth century, 'These are they who are commonly called Cathari or Puritans (the pure ones). They are armed with all those passages of Scripture, which in any degree seem to favor their views; with these they know how to defend themselves, and to oppose the catholick truth.... They are increased to great multitudes throughout all countries, their words spread like cancer. In Germany we call them Cathari, in Flanders, they call them Piphles, in France, Tisserands.'<sup>22</sup>

Rainerio Sacchoni, a Dominican priest with the title, 'Inquisitor of Lombardy,' stated in 1260 A.D., 'Among the sects, there is no one more pernicious to the church than that of the Leonists (Waldenses), for three reasons: 1. Because it is the most ancient: for some say it dates back to the time of Sylvester (325 A.D.), others to the time of the apostles. 2. Because it is so widespread. There is hardly a country where it does not exist. 3. Because... the Leonists possess a great outward appearance of piety. As a matter of fact they lead irreproachable lives before men and as regards their faith and the articles of their creed, they are orthodox. Their one fault is, that they blaspheme against the church and the clergy.'<sup>23</sup>

Henry II convened a council at Oxford in 1166 A.D. to examine the heretics called Publicani. The council declared, 'Very probably they were disciples of the Waldenses.... They were Christians, and followers of the Apostles... Their creed was very orthodox concerning the Trinity and the incarnation... When they are threatened with death, in order to oblige them to renounce their tenants, they only said, *blessed are they who suffer for righteousness' sake.*<sup>24</sup>

During the great persecution of the Waldenses in 1540 A.D., the Bishop of Cavaillon sent a learned monk to the valleys of the Piedmont (Merindal and Provence) to convince the Anabaptists of the error of their ways. The monk returned to declare that he had never learned so much concerning the Scriptures in his whole life as he had during those few days with the 'heretics.' The Bishop then sent several young doctors of theology, who studied at Paris, to confound the enemies of Rome. One man came back and declared, 'He

had understood more of the doctrine of salvation from the answers of the little children in their catechism, than all the disputations, which he had ever learned.<sup>25</sup>

### IN CONCLUSION

There is no disagreement surrounding the fact that the Particular Baptist churches arose from the Independent Churches of the Puritan Separatist movement. The modern controversy is the re-writing of history concerning the antiquity of the Baptists. The British Particular Baptists did not believe they were born out of the Reformation, and then found their roots through the English Separatist movement, as many believe in our day. It is without controversy that the Particular Baptists of England understood their lineage and aligned themselves with the faithful who went before them. These men professed their heritage in writing which will be dealt with in a subsequent paper.

To insure that this paper is not based on 'wishful thinking' we will close with a quote from William Kiffin, a founding member of one of the Seven Particular Baptist churches in London. 'It is well known to many, and especially to ourselves, that our congregations as they now are, were erected and framed according to the rule of Christ before we heard of any Reformation, even at the time when Episcopacy was at the height of its vanishing glory.'<sup>26</sup>

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- <sup>3</sup> Professor of Church History at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.
- <sup>4</sup> H. Leon McBeth, *A Primer on Baptist History: The True Baptist Trail (The Baptist Heritage*, Broadman Press; 1987), p. 2.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.
- <sup>7</sup> Michael A.J. Haykin, Editor, *The British Particular Baptists* (Springfield, Missouri: Particular Baptist Press, 1998), Vol. 1, p. 16.
- <sup>8</sup> Heritage Reformed Baptist Church, *Who We Are, What We Believe, & What We Do*, (Fayetteville, GA, 1989), p. 1.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* p. 2.
- <sup>11</sup> President of the Council of Trent-1524. This statement shows that Cardinal Hosius referred to the sixteenth century Anabaptists with the Baptist during the era of Constantine.
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## Essential Texts for a Biblical Approach to Apologetics (4). Romans 1:18-21 continued.

By Paul S. Nelson

**Romans 1:18-21** <sup>18</sup> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; <sup>19</sup> Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed *it* unto them. <sup>20</sup> For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: <sup>21</sup> Because that, when they knew God, they glorified *him* not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

### NATURAL REVELATION AND APOLOGETICS

In our last article, we sought to expound Romans 1:18-21 in relation to the doctrine of natural revelation. We discussed both external and internal aspects of natural revelation, and man's hostile reaction to it. The two subheadings we considered were *Natural Revelation and the Unbeliever's Knowledge of God* and *Natural Revelation and the Unbeliever's Reaction*. Next, we consider *Natural Revelation and Apologetics*.

Natural revelation as described in Romans 1 addresses at least five important elements of presuppositional apologetics: 1) the Creator-creature distinction, 2) the noetic effects of sin, 3) a conflict of worldviews, 4) the myth of neutrality and 5) point-of-contact. All are very important aspects to consider in the enterprise of apologetics. This article will address the Creator-creature distinction.

### THE CREATOR-CREATURE DISTINCTION

When the apostle Paul states in v.20, '*For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made,*' he is asserting the absolute reality of the Creator. '*From the creation of the world*' presupposes God as transcendent to his creation, and preeminent as Creator. This is '*clearly seen*.' The apostle establishes a relationship between God and man, a relation that distinguishes between the Creator and the creature. In another passage (Col. 1:16-17), the apostle describes Christ as the Creator and sustainer of the universe, '*For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him,*

and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.' In the phrase 'all things consist,' the verb 'consist' (συνέστηκεν) means 'to cohere' or 'to be held together.' The perfect tense describes a state of existence wholly dependent upon its Creator. Christ is the absolute Sustainer of the universe. Furthermore, the writer to the Hebrews tells us that he 'upholds all things by the word of his power' (Heb. 1:3). In short, God owns everything in creation; all things were created to serve him and his purposes (especially man). This is the ultimate reality of man's existence.

Therefore the Creator-creature distinction is absolutely essential for a coherent and rational worldview, i.e., a theistic Christian worldview.<sup>1</sup> Only through this critical distinction can the three basic worldview elements of *metaphysics*, *epistemology* and *ethics* be unified. Any worldview that excludes the Creator-creature relationship necessarily becomes incoherent. Let us consider each worldview element individually.

### 1. Metaphysics

Metaphysics deals with the ultimate nature of reality or being. Every person has a theory of being by which he understands himself and the world. Metaphysics seeks to answer such questions as what does it mean to exist? What is real? And what is the nature of the universe? What is the nature of man?

When God revealed himself to Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:14), he revealed himself as the self-existent God, 'I am that I am' (אֲנִי אֲנִי אֲנִי). The 'to be' verb (אֲנִי) is in the imperfect tense denoting a continuing reality. The verb is also repeated in order to emphasize God's eternal existence. Here God is revealed as transcendent, self-existent and absolute. His Being is completely independent of his creation. He alone is self-contained, self-sufficient and dependent upon nothing.

It necessarily follows that all of creation is absolutely dependent upon God for its existence and being. God is the ultimate ground of reality; everything else derives from his creative power. When addressing the philosophers on Mar's Hill, the apostle Paul asserted God the Creator as Lord of heaven and earth, and concluded that 'In him we live, and move and have our being' (Acts 17:28). All things have their meaning in God alone, for it is God alone who defines what reality is.

The Creator-creature distinction is clearly disclosed in natural revelation, yet held in contempt by unregenerate man and habitually suppressed (v.18). Natural man refuses to recognize himself as a creature of God. The Christian engaged in apologetics must be ready to challenge this metaphysical element of the unbeliever's worldview. Unless the unbeliever interprets this world as God-created and God-governed, he cannot know the true meaning of anything. He will end up in futile reasoning as Paul articulates in v.21, they 'became vain in their imaginations' (ματαιώθησαν ἐν τοῖς διαλογισμοῖς).

### 2. Epistemology

Epistemology is the study of the nature of human knowledge.

It asks what we know and how we know it.

As discussed above, the Creator-creature relationship reveals that there are two levels of existence: God's transcendent existence as absolute and self-contained, and man's existence as derivative and dependent of God's existence. This is especially true in the realm of knowledge. God's knowledge is absolutely comprehensive and self-contained. By virtue of the Creator-creature distinction, man's knowledge is necessarily derivative of God's knowledge. As finite creatures we are absolutely dependent upon God for all truth and meaning.

We live in a God-created and God-defined universe. Every fact is a created fact, pre-interpreted and defined by God. Every fact has its meaning by virtue of its relationship to the Creator. No fact exists independently of God, thus there are no brute facts. When the apostle Paul states in v. 20, 'For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world,' he is presupposing that all created things were pre-conceived and pre-interpreted by God from eternity.

As creatures we are to give the same meaning to everything that the Creator has given to it.<sup>2</sup> This is the basis of true knowledge. Man must replicate God's thinking to truly know something. In other words, we are to *think God's thoughts after him*.<sup>3</sup> Only in the context of the Creator-creature distinction can man gain a true knowledge of who he is and of the universe in which he lives.

Within the Creator-creature relationship, God has infallibly revealed himself to man in his inscripturated Word. Scripture is the absolute standard of truth. Because God is its author, there is no higher authority. It is the ultimate authority for all meaning and interpretation of facts. It is the starting point of all our thinking, and the standard by which we judge all things.<sup>4</sup> It is man's absolute reference point, from which he can know God, and interpret the world he was created in. When man thinks God's thoughts after him, he is submitting to the absolute authority of God's revelation, which is the only possible ground for true knowledge. To think autonomously, i.e., to assume man's ability to reason as ultimate, is immoral and sinful. For it is an attempt to redefine meaning apart from God and his infallible Word.

From the above stated 'revelational epistemology' it is important to understand the relationship between natural revelation and special revelation. The two forms of revelation must be seen as presupposing and supplementing one another.<sup>5</sup> They both come to man with absolute authority. And together they form the complete revelation of God. However natural revelation was never meant to function by itself. It is insufficient without its complement of special revelation. As Bahnsen puts it, 'man reads general revelation through the spectacles of special revelation.'<sup>6</sup>

### 3. Ethics

Ethics concerns man's conduct. It deals with moral standards and man's moral responsibilities.

God has written his moral law in the heart of every person, and their conscience bears witness to it (Rom. 2:14-15). Every person was created with a sense of deity by which

he understands the judgment of God (vv.18, 21, 32). It is an inward witness, in the very constitution of man, which is inescapable. The unbeliever knows he is culpable to God for breaking his law, and is without excuse (v.21). He is confronted with the moral witness of God every time he looks up into the heavens, 'For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.'

The unbeliever will refuse to admit to the Creator-creature relationship for ethical reasons. To admit it, is to make himself accountable to God. There is an ethical motivation for adhering to the philosophies of this world such as evolution. Unregenerate man must adopt presuppositions and a worldview that facilitate the suppression of his knowledge of God (v.18). The unbeliever will abandon his Creator-creature relationship in intellectual defiance, in order to make himself autonomous. He wants to be a law unto himself.

The Creator-creature relationship disclosed in natural revelation brings man face-to-face with God, and establishes an ethical relationship. The Creator has revealed his perfect moral character in his moral law,<sup>7</sup> which is written in the heart and conscience of every man (Rom. 2:14-15). God alone is the absolute moral standard, and he alone defines what is right or wrong. As the image bearer of God, man is obligated to conform to the moral character of his Creator. The reality of this ethical relationship is the source of man's rebellion and hatred of God. He must suppress it at all cost.

### CONCLUSION

This is the essence of the unregenerate's incoherent worldview; man is assumed to be autonomous and epistemologically a law unto himself. Man seeks to be his own ultimate reference point. He believes he can obtain unto genuine knowledge independent of God's revelation. He seeks to interpret the universe without reference to God, making himself the final authority for all interpretation of facts. Arrogantly, he believes he has no need of divine revelation. Therefore, the unbeliever lives in a world of false assumptions and false pretensions. His reasoning ends in futility because he will not admit to the Creator-creature distinction.

On the other hand, the Christian lives in the reality of the triune God as revealed in nature and Scripture. God's revelation is the ultimate authority and standard for all reasoning. God's word is the undisputable and unquestionable starting point. There is no higher criterion, by virtue of the Creator-creature relationship.

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<sup>2</sup> Van Til, Cornelius, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1974), p. 171.

<sup>3</sup> This saying is attributed to the 16<sup>th</sup> century astronomer, Johannes Kepler, who wrote in regards to the mathematical harmony of the planets, 'I was merely thinking God's thoughts after him.'

<sup>4</sup> Bahnsen, Greg L., *Always Ready: Directions for Defending the Faith* (Texarkan, TX: Covenant Media Foundation, 1996), p. 25.

<sup>5</sup> Van Til, C., *Nature and Scripture in God's Infallible Word*. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1974), p. 171.

<sup>6</sup> Bahnsen, Greg L., *Presuppositional Apologetics* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision Press & Nacogdoches, TX: Covenant Media Press, 2008), p. 275.

<sup>7</sup> The moral law of God has been codified and summarized in the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:1-17). It is the expression of his holy and righteous character.

## The Pulpit: The Moral Conscience of the Nation

By William R. Downing

Is the pulpit the moral conscience of the nation? There are Christians, pastors, theologians and religious writers in our day who blame the American pulpit for our present moral crisis. We are told that if ministers had preached the true gospel, declared God's Word and the Moral Law against the increasing evil of the times, we might not be in the sad state we witness today. Can such be substantiated? We believe so.

There are several considerations: first, there is national judgment for national sin, and often the righteous must suffer with the wicked (Gen. 15:16; Lev. 18:24-28; Dt. 7:1; 18:12; Lam. 1:1-5:22). The nation of Israel serves as an example of a given nation which was judged for its sins. God devastated his own covenant people by bringing upon them various enemies (Judg. 2:11-16; 3:12-14; 4:1-3; 6:1ff; 13:1), and finally, the Assyrians and Chaldeans, nations more wicked and fierce than themselves (Isa. 10:5-15; Lam. 1-3; Hab. 1). Although no other nation was in such a covenant relationship with God as was Israel, yet this moral principle remains applicable to every nation (Psa. 9:17).<sup>1</sup>

History witnesses to the fact that a nation degenerates first spiritually, then morally, and then socially and finally, politically. Political corruption and arbitrary rule are results of national sin, not its cause. Morality by necessity must have a spiritual foundation; otherwise it is based on either tradition or the relativism of mere human consensus. Society, once morally blind and utterly relativistic, will morally and politically bow to the tyranny of the majority. There needs to be a national moral conscience, and this by necessity must be spiritual. What other source than men of God who are called to faithfully proclaim the truth?

Divine judgment has never been averted simply because a nation has considered itself to be in a special relationship with God. The modern American idea of 'God and Country' is presently without sufficient foundation. So is the idea that God will bless America regardless of her national sins. We are officially a secularized society. God and morality have only a token place. A government which refuses to capitally punish murderers (Numb. 35:32-33) or sanctions and even sponsors abortion and homosexuality cannot in any sense be considered immune to Divine judgment. As to the former, man was created in the image of God, and



this image is inseparable from the most elemental human life (Psa. 139:13–16). Abortion is murder. As to the latter, homosexuality is a perversion of the God-ordained order and brings down Divine wrath (Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Rom. 1:21–32). To think that God will bless America despite her national sins is to think that God is devoid of moral character and his Word is irrelevant; it is to believe in the ‘god’ of one’s imagination (Rom. 1:18–25). It is the pulpit’s responsibility to proclaim the one true God and his moral character.

Second, is it legitimate to apply the situation of Israel (2 Chron. 7:14) and the Old Testament prophets, who were to decry Israel’s national sins (Isa. 58:1), to our national history and present situation?<sup>2</sup> On the one hand, we are not a covenant people as was Israel, yet on the other, this nation is unique in history, as it was largely founded on Christian principles which we have utterly abandoned as a secularized society. Although not all of our Founding Fathers were Christians, yet almost every one of them presupposed the moral character of God, and most assumed the veracity of the Bible and the authority of the Moral Law as expressed in the Ten Commandments. Our Founding Fathers knew that this form of government—a constitutional republic—would not be practicable apart from the truth and morality of Christianity. Mark the words of James Madison, fourth President of these United States and ‘Father of the Constitution,’ as he voiced these very truths:

‘We have staked the whole future of American civilization, not upon the power of government, far from it. We have staked the future of all our political institutions upon the capacity of mankind for self-government: upon the capacity of each and all of us to govern ourselves, to control ourselves, to sustain ourselves according to the Ten Commandments of God.’<sup>3</sup>

Surely, such a nation must be judged severely, according to the light it has received!

Third, our Lord describes Christians in general as ‘*the light of the world*’ and ‘*the salt of the earth*’ (Matt. 5:13–14).<sup>4</sup> This certainly implies that as Christians, we are to have a determining effect upon the society in which we live. Further, the behavior of believers toward one another and toward men in general is to have a profound effect upon this world (Matt. 5:14–16; Jn. 13:34–35; Phil. 2:14–15; 1 Pet. 2:11–15). A godly remnant may serve to keep back national judgment upon a given people. Had there been ten righteous men in Sodom, the judgment of God would have been averted (Gen. 18:20–32).

Fourth, the history of the American pulpit has been varied. There have always been men of God who would not compromise the truth of the Bible. The Gospel has been faithfully preached and the Law of God declared so that a biblical morality has been impressed upon many congregations. God has blessed this country with times of revival and spiritual awakening repeatedly, even in the worst of political and economic times. One has only to consider the first and second ‘Great Awakenings’ (1734–50, 1793–1840)

which changed the moral climate of this country and the British Isles, as well as the ‘Great Prayer Revival’ of 1857–58 which came during the great financial crash of 1857, the great revival which occurred during the War Between the States in 1861–65, or the Welsh Revival of 1904, which changed the moral climate of Wales.<sup>5</sup>

But there has also been a slow process of spiritual degeneration and consequent secularization. The frontier Methodist revivals of the early 1800s gave us ‘perfectionist’ teachings which modified the reality of the Christian experience. The ‘New Measures’ of Charles G. Finney began the slide into the ‘easy-believeism’ and ‘decisionism’ of our day with its psychological conversions and unscriptural methodology. Liberalism has enabled unconverted men to occupy influential pulpits. Dispensationalism has added its inherent antinomianism to this admixture, and silenced the preaching of the Moral Law in evangelical thinking. It has also brought into some Christian circles the idea that one should not become involved in the political or even the social process because of the imminent return of the Lord. In this generation, evangelical Christianity has largely become a ‘pop culture’ far removed from godly worship and the faithful preaching of the Word of God. Sin is now almost irrelevant, holiness is optional, worship has largely become entertainment, social programs have become divorced from a gospel motivation, psychology has replaced theology and worship teams have replaced the Gospel preacher.

The fault of such degeneration and departure from the Word of God must be laid at the feet of those whose call it is to faithfully proclaim the Word of God. As goes the pulpit, so goes the pew. The New Testament Gospel Preacher is the successor to the Old Testament prophet. He is to faithfully declare the Word of God to the people in the power of the Holy Spirit (Isa. 58:1; Hos. 6:5; Jn. 16:8–11). The preachers of the New Testament spoke out about public crime (Acts 2:22–23; 3:14–15), the open immorality of national leaders (Mk. 6:16–20) and were not slack to point to the prevalent sins of governors (Acts 24:24–25). That the fault lies with the pulpit may be seen in the following principle: ‘*The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?*’ (Jer. 5:31).

We stand more in need of revival and spiritual awakening in this day than at any previous time of our national history. The truth of God must be declared from the pulpit; it is our great responsibility—and from the pulpit to the people of God, and from the people of God to society.

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<sup>1</sup> Psa. 9:17. Heb: כָּל-אֲרָצוֹת; LXX: πάντα τὰ ἔθνη. The text designates all nations, making this a universal principle in the Divinely-ordained moral order.

<sup>2</sup> See James Stalker, *The Preacher and His Models*, Vestavia Hills (AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2003), Chapter Three, ‘The Preacher as a Patriot,’ for the rationale of preaching against national sins.

<sup>3</sup> James Madison, as quoted in *First Principles in Morality and Ethics* (South Holland, IL: Progressive Calvinism League, 1959), IV, p. 31.

<sup>4</sup> Matt. 5:13–14. References to believers as ‘light’ and ‘salt’ implies that Christianity is to be a preserving and illuminating, exposing element within society. They are to make a discernable moral difference.

<sup>5</sup> Tracy, Joseph, *The Great Awakening* (Boston: Tappan and Dennet, 1842), 433 pp.; Gaustad, Edwin S., *The Great Awakening in New England* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1965), 173 pp.; Prime, Samuel I., *The Power of Prayer*. (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1991), reprint of 1859 ed. 265 pp.; Orr, J. Edwin, *The Event of the Century: The 1857–1858 Awakening* (Wheaton: The International Awakening Press, 1989), 383 pp.; Bennett, W. W., *The Great Revival in the Southern Armies* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, reprint of 1876 ed.), 427 pp.; Jones, J. William, *Christ in the Camp* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, reprint of 1887 ed.), 624 pp.; Evans, Effion, *The Welsh Revival of 1904* (London: Evangelical Press, 1974), 213 pp.; Jones, R. B., *Rent Heavens: The Revival of 1904* (London: Stanley Martin & Co., Ltd., 1930), 118 pp.

## Thoughts on Sin

By William R. Downing

### A SINFUL SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

**Gen. 3:10.** “And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.”

Notice that the verb ‘was’ is italicized in our English Bible. The Hebrew literally reads: ‘*because naked I am!*’ God answers him in verse 11, ‘*Who told thee that naked you are...?*’ Although Adam had done what he could to hide his nakedness, indicative of his sinful self-consciousness, all was to no avail. He was still very conscious that, before God, he was ‘naked’. There is here, from the literal, a spiritual principle which is just as true and penetrating. ‘*...all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.*’ (Heb. 4:13). God sees and knows all. Nothing is hidden from him, be it the body or the soul. The history of man-made religion is the story of man’s attempts to cover his nakedness before God, to attempt, not with fig leaves, but with his own works, to hide his spiritual nakedness from the eyes of omniscience. This was, is and ever shall be absolutely futile. The only covering for and cleansing from sin is found in blood atonement. The history of animal sacrifices found its fulfillment in the blood of the ‘*Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world*’ (Jn. 1:29).

### MAN A THREE-FOLD SINNER

**Genesis 5:3** And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in his own likeness, after his image; and called his name Seth:

Adam was made in the image and likeness of God; Seth was born in the image and likeness of Adam—fallen Adam. The sinfulness of the human race is an inescapable reality. We are sinners by immediate imputation, or original sin. The transgression of Adam as Representative Man is reckoned to every subsequent member of our race. The inheritance of Adam’s sinful nature, as noted in our text, is termed ‘mediate imputation.’ Further, as sinners, we inescapably sin in our own right in thought, word and deed. The sinful nature inherited from Adam—‘bringing forth after his kind’—

necessarily expresses itself in personal sins. Thus, man is a three-fold sinner before God: a sinner by imputation, from his sinful nature inherited from Adam, and by his own personal transgressions.

As believers were once identified in Adam, they are now by grace identified with the Lord Jesus. The glorious realities of justification and sanctification by virtue of our union with Christ become the reverse of our condition in Adam.

### SINS IN OLD BELIEVERS

**Genesis 9:20-21** And Noah began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard: And he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent.

What a strange and sad incident in the life of Noah, especially after the many years of faithful obedience in building the ark, the great deliverance, and the awful judgment of God upon a sinful world! How could this be? Yet it was so. In answer, we must remind ourselves that we constantly need the sustaining grace of God. Our hearts are no repositories of grace. We cannot store up grace, as it were, but need it daily as did the Israelites the manna for their daily food. No great experience of Divine deliverance, no past faithfulness can substitute for our daily need of Divine grace! We dare not let the reigns of our life hang loosely. The world that then was, perished in the flood, but the devil did not perish! He remained alive as ever, waiting his time to once again alienate man from God through sin, or to cause even such a righteous man as Noah to stumble and fall. ‘*Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation.*’

### LITTLE SINS

**Genesis 19:20** Behold now, this city is near to flee unto, and it is a little one: Oh, let me escape thither, (is it not a little one?) and my soul shall live.

Lot had been delivered out of Sodom with his two remaining daughters. His wife had perished by looking back to the Divine destruction. Her heart was in Sodom. He was commanded to flee to the mountains by the destroying angels. Rather than obey, he pled to go to a neighboring town, a ‘little’ city, lest he be overtaken by some evil. He pled with the angels that it was a little city, and so was relatively safe. In Lot, we see both partial obedience and delayed obedience, for when he finally reached the mountain, his remaining family was taken with incest. Little sins are often more dangerous than overt, great sins. Lot and his daughters had left Sodom, but Sodom had not left them! Their hearts, minds and lives had been forever tainted with the immorality and wickedness of that evil place. So, one little sin may fell a great saint and humble a godly believer.