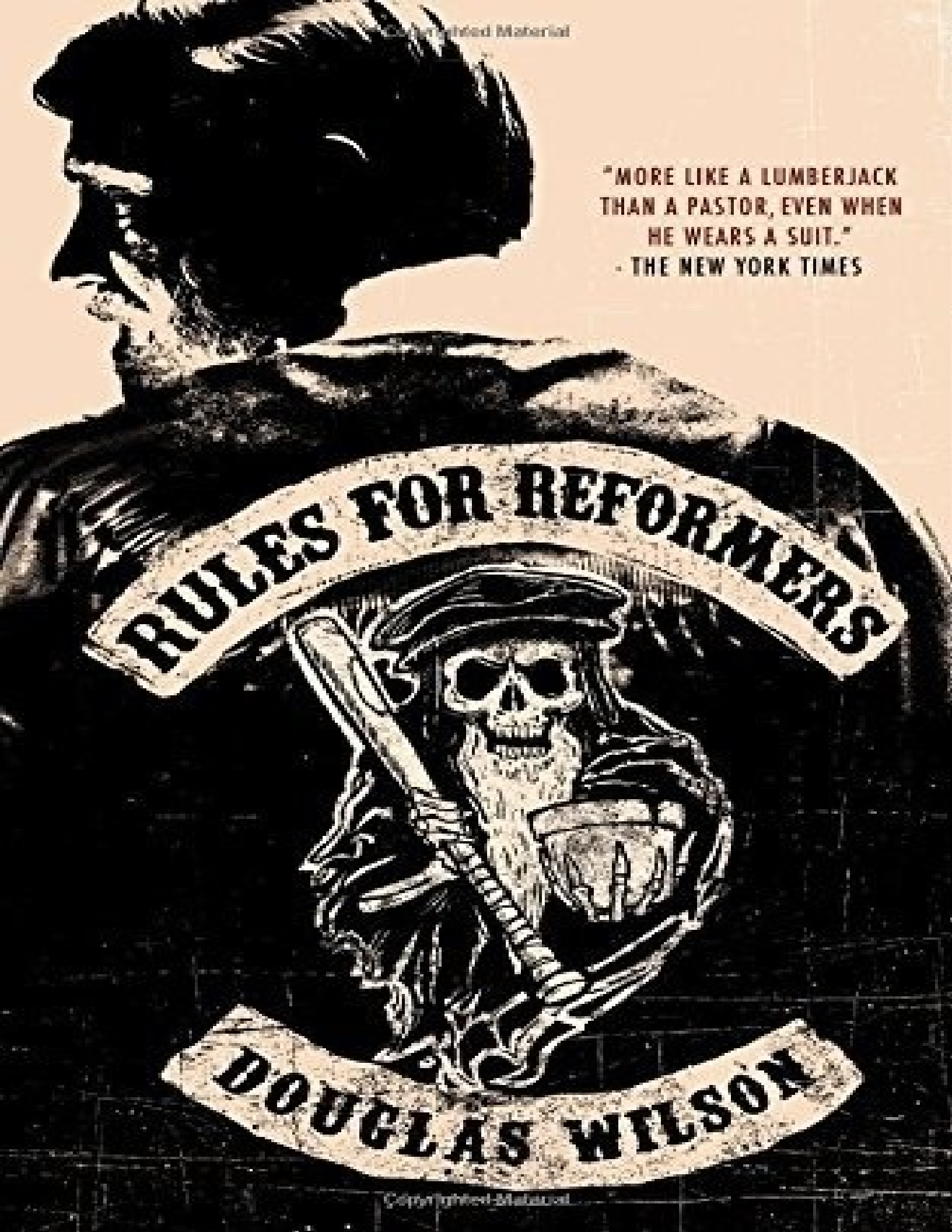
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Rules *for* Reformers

Douglas Wilson

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Rules *for* Reformers

Douglas Wilson

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For David Hoos,
a good man
who made a good suggestion
at a good time

We need not debate about the mere words evolution or progress: personally I prefer to call it reform. For reform implies form. It implies that we are trying to shape the world in a particular image; to make it something that we see already in our minds. Evolution is a metaphor from mere automatic unrolling. Progress is a metaphor from merely walking along a road—very likely the wrong road. But reform is a metaphor for reasonable and determined men: it means that we see a certain thing out of shape and we mean to put it into shape. And we know what shape.

—CHESTERTON, *Orthodoxy*

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Introduction

A generation ago “community organizer” Saul Alinsky famously penned his *Rules for Radicals*, and it is my conviction that those interested in reformation should match his craft and self-awareness without trying to compete at all with the speed and depth of his revolutionary destructo-vision. And, incidentally, if you are interested in the grace of God transforming individuals, families, neighborhoods, churches, communities, cities, cultures, nations, and the world, then you are interested in reformation.

Some revolutionaries are patient and some are not. Gramsci argued for the “long march through the institutions” and Lenin wanted the massive meltdown all at once. Most revolutionaries have what Billingsly described as a “fire in the minds of men,” but some are willing to go for the slow burn. More than just simple patience is required to distinguish a revolutionary from a reformer.

So, what are the basic rules for reformers?

1. Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. Reformation of culture is either a species of salvation or sanctification, and you can’t have either one of those without Jesus. Secular conservatism will sometimes buy you some time, but that is about all it can do—that and lure you into the complacent notion that it can do more than that. Secular conservatism is like trying to use your pocket handkerchief to slow you down after the main chute has failed. This is why individual heart transformation, not legislation, is fundamental to national reformation. The person and work of Jesus is not optional.

2. Always remember the distinction between principles and methods. Say that the principle is to win the war against the enemy—the methods would be navy, artillery, air force, ground troops, etc. Someone enamored of method would think that the war can be won by their branch of the service alone, without any help

from the others. Those who latch on to the methods being employed, without any awareness of the principles being served, are either simple-minded or partisans. The simple need leadership; they can make great foot soldiers, but don't ever make them generals. The partisans need a peculiar kind of leadership, but you have to be careful—they are the ones who are already a tad too gung ho about your leadership. And they think you are as gummed up about particular methods as they are.

3. Reformers are conservatives, which means they must prefer the concrete to the abstract. The past is concrete, just like the future is going to be. The goal is to preserve and defend everything the Spirit has done in history in such a way as to carry it forward into what the Spirit is going to do. Given our time-bound nature, we must conserve some things, and we must progress toward certain things. But what do we conserve, and what do we seek to build? Our duties are always in the present, but we must read the past, as well as the future (albeit more dimly), and we must do so by the performance of concrete duties. Love your neighbor, not mankind. Build an actual school for your children, and do not love the notion of educational "great concepts" in some Euclidean eschaton.

4. Reformers must cultivate a high sense of humor. Reformation involves conflict, as we shall see in a moment, but how you fight makes all the difference. Should you fight like a cavalier, with swift sword play and witticisms, or like a thug with a club and a wart on your nose? The besetting sin of ostensible reformers is the sin of shrillness and officious forms of uplift. We need reformers, not another round of bossy-pantses. We also need someone who knows how to form the plural of bossy-pants.

5. Reformers must be combative. Christians are often uncomfortable with the language of conflict, but being neutral is not an option: "He that is not with Me

is against me, and he that gathers not with Me scatters abroad," says Jesus (Mt. 12:30). There is no way to do any of this without involving yourself in the rough stuff. This means that courage is required. The adversary fights back, and they know how to fight back. Not only that, but because this is a battle between good and evil, and you are fighting for the good (right?), the other side gets to cheat, and you don't get to. You have to fight, and you have to fight clean, and you have to fight fair. When you enlist in the army, you cannot feign surprise when you find yourself in battles.

6. Reformers must play the long game. We are not laboring for a convenience-store reformation, where you buy and consume your "item" before you pull out into traffic, depending on how troublesome the shrink wrap is. If we have Christ, we have all things future, and so we can leave the outcome of our present labors to Him. We don't have to see the larger end to perform our part in that larger end. And our part is now.

7. Reformers must remember always that religion shapes culture, and culture trumps politics. The plug-in ought not to go straight from reformation in the church to legislation. Legislative battles are important in the meantime, but mostly as a defensive measure. The offense won't happen until we make the connection between our faith and culture—the kind of culture that forms apart from laws. Just as you can't fight a naval war without ships, or tank warfare without tanks, *you can't fight a culture war without a culture*. The reformation of the church must occur so that there is a reformation of our subculture, and then our subculture will affect the larger *polis*. Expecting our faith to affect the larger *polis* when it has not yet changed the average shelf at the local Christian book store is expecting something that is not going to happen. With the weird exception of baseball, where the ball is handled entirely by the defense, you

can’t score points until you have the ball. And reformers will not have the ball until they have a culture.

That’ll do for the present.

A Tip *of the* Hat *to* Saul Alinsky

In some respects, this book has been an homage to Saul Alinsky, and in other respects it is an answer. Alinsky was a man of the left, as I am not, and he did not believe in God, as I most heartily do. But his influence was remarkable—he was the father of "community organizing" in Chicago, where a young Barack Obama followed in his footsteps a generation later. A young Hillary Clinton did her senior honors thesis at Wellesley College on Alinsky.

He was an ungodly man, but he was ungodly the same way King David's commanding general Joab was. Joab was a thorough-going man of the world, out for number one, but he was extremely shrewd and he often saw the world more accurately than others who ought to have known better. David was a man after God's own heart, but there were times when Joab would come in and school him properly. When it came to the question of whether to conduct a census of Israel and Judah, Joab was right and David was wrong (2 Sam. 24:1–4). When it came to David's behavior after the death of Absalom, Joab was right and David was wrong (2 Sam. 19:5).

So it is necessary to learn from Alinsky, but it also necessary to remember that as we learn, we must make the necessary adjustments. Some things we must not learn from Joab. This book is part of an attempt to help us understand how to make the necessary distinctions.

Alinsky was confronted with young radicals who had "no illusions about the system, but plenty of illusions about the way to change the world" (*RFR*, p. xiii).1 How many Christians are in the same position? Ditch the illusions. A cultural reformation is no place for daydreaming. Reflecting on a Christian heritage by itself is worthless. A Christian heritage cannot be kept in a box.

“Power is not static; it cannot be frozen and preserved like food; it must grow or die” (*RFR*, p. 149).

Alinsky knew that culture precedes politics. Revolution “must be preceded by reformation. To assume that a political revolution can survive without the supporting base of a popular reformation is to ask for the impossible in politics” (*RFR*, p. xxi).

“Change means movement. Movement means friction” (*RFR*, p. 21). This means that reformers should expect resistance and conflict. A reformer does not walk onto the stage to polite applause. “The job of the organizer is to maneuver and bait the establishment so that it will publicly attack him as a ‘dangerous enemy’” (*RFR*, p. 100). When you are attacked by the powers that be, this is not a sign that something has gone dangerously wrong. There is no distinction to be made between working for reformation and picking a fight. “When those prominent in the status quo turn and label you an ‘agitator’ they are completely correct, for that is, in one word, your function—to agitate to the point of conflict” (*RFR*, p. 117). This is a prerequisite to another key truth. “*No one can negotiate without the power to compel negotiation*” (*RFR*, p. 119, emphasis his).

While Alinsky had no clue about the ground and foundation of humor (he thought humor and absolute truth to be inconsistent), he nevertheless knew all about its *tactical* value. “Humor is essential to a successful tactician, for the most potent weapons known to mankind are satire and ridicule” (*RFR*, p. 75).

Then there was his version of the KISS principle (Keep it Simple, Stupid). “Issues must be able to be communicated. It is essential that they can be communicated. It is essential that they be simple enough to be grasped as rallying or battle cries” (*RFR*, p. 96). *National Review* illustrated this nicely

years ago with a fine joke, and terrible rallying cry, when they settled on the T-shirt slogan, “Don’t let them immanentize the eschaton!”

Alinsky outlines thirteen basic rules of power tactics. I will simply list them here, and conclude with a brief comment that contextualizes it all for us.2

1. “*Power is not only what you have but what the enemy thinks you have.*”

2. “*Never go outside the experience of your people.”*

3. “*Whenever possible go outside the experience of the enemy.”*

4. “*Make the enemy live up to their own book of rules.”*

5. “Ridicule is man’s most potent weapon. It is almost impossible to counterattack ridicule.”

6. “*A good tactic is one that your people enjoy.”* Also, “*Organizations need action as an individual needs oxygen People hunger for drama and adventure”* (*RFR*, p. 120).

7. “*A tactic that drags on too long becomes a drag.”*

8. “*Keep the pressure on.”*

9. “*The threat is usually more terrifying than the thing itself.”*

10. “*The major premise for tactics is the development of operations that will maintain a constant pressure upon the opposition.”*

11. “*If you push a negative hard and deep enough it will break through into its counterside.”*

12. “*The price of a successful attack is a constructive alternative.”*

13. “*Pick the target, freeze it, personalize it, and polarize it.”*

Here’s looking at you, Michael Moore!

Saul Alinsky was an ethical relativist, and so he was willing to resort to the ear-biting and eye-gouging right away. “In a fight almost anything goes. It almost reaches the point where you stop to apologize if a chance blow lands *above* the belt” (*RFR*, pp. 129–130). We are not in that unconstrained position, nor do we want to be. But answering to God, remembering the limits placed on us by Scripture, look over that list again. There is no principle there that we cannot use, and use more shrewdly and potently than a lost soul like Alinsky ever could. With this in mind, the following section of this book presents ten “principles of war” we reformers must master if we want to stop the other team from continually running circles around us.

Section 1

Principles First

Principles that govern every form of conflict are constant in all possible scenarios. The need for mobility, surprise, etc., will never fade away. But weapons and tactics are not constant—rocks, bows, guns, triremes, torpedoes, etc. vary from era to era, and war to war. Electronic countermeasures played no role whatever in the battle of Lepanto.

Those who are merely competent in the use of a particular weapon are followers. They may be very competent indeed, but that is not the issue. They are also essential to success of any campaign, but if they are promoted to the level where principled *strategic* thinking is necessary, they will also be essential to the failure of that campaign.

Those who comprehend the principles involved are effective leaders. I would go so far as to say that this is one of the fundamental characteristics of effective leadership. Who is competent to see the dividing line between leaders and would-be leaders? Both kinds of people think they are leaders, but only one truly knows.

In an egalitarian culture, however, true leadership is despised and precedence is frequently given to technicians, bureaucrats, and various kinds of intellectual ground-pounders. This means things can get fearfully skewed—we have generals who do not see the principles involved, and sergeants who do. The distinction between principles and “methods” is an objective one. However, to the one who is not gifted enough to see the distinction, the whole thing will appear to be a Zen exercise.

When the distinctions are observed, the result is military “wisdom.” But principles do not fight by themselves. Principles are always incarnate in a particular method. There is therefore always something there to distract and confuse somebody who isn’t thinking.

This section provides an overview of the principles of war. They were developed on the field of battle, but they apply to any situation where conflict or competition is occurring. Reformers are concerned to win what have come to be called the “culture wars,” and unless we recover an understanding of these principles, and learn to apply them to the conflicts we are in, then such a win will be impossible.

The principles of war are:

1. Objective

2. Offensive

3. Concentration

4. Mobility

5. Security

6. Surprise

7. Cooperation

8. Communication

9. Economy of Force

10. Pursuit

I first learned these principles from a book my father wrote, entitled *Principles of War*.3 I commend that book highly, even though the emphasis there is different. In *Principles of War*, these principles are applied to thinking strategically about evangelism. Here our concern is the task of cultural reformation, which is of course related to evangelism, but not identical with it. But principles being what they are, remember that they apply whenever there is any kind of conflict or competition. These principles can be brought to bear in a

shooting war, in a business competition, in political campaigns, in cultural politics, in a football game, and in evangelism.

They can also be neglected in any of these realms. Because they are principles that have to be enfleshed in a particular method, we also have the prospect of the bad guys following these principles, and the good guys neglecting them. Principles do not apply themselves. They must be studied, understood, grasped, and applied.

The world being the messy kind of place that it is, it is also possible for someone to apply the right principle at the wrong time. The only difference between salad and garbage, the wise man once said, is timing. A man might pursue when he shouldn't pursue. A man might launch a surprise attack at a boneheaded time, and succeed in the surprise part, but fail in the attack part. A man might be really mobile in unproductive ways, as when Jeb Stuart rode around the battle of Gettysburg.

This means it is not enough to say that the second principle is to Maintain the Offensive, point to what you are doing as *being* offensive, and assume that the discussion is over. Everything has its time and place, including these principles. It is not for nothing that Sun Tzu's book was called *The Art of War*. The necessary artistry is never found by applying principles in a clunkity-clunkity way.

So failure to attend to these principles is deadly. Failure to apply them in wisdom is also deadly. And assuming that they will take care of themselves if only you have abundant resources is perhaps the deadliest of all.

For the rest of this first section of *Rules for Reformers*, I'll be giving some commentary on each of the ten principles of war, looking to show how they apply to the cultural struggle we are in. But before we get into that specific

commentary, I'll begin with a discussion of the decisive point, because it is key to understanding the first principle, Establishing the Objective.

THE DECISIVE POINT

One of the first things a reformer has got to get used to is the experience of being despised and unpopular. Societies do awful things (that which needs to be reformed) because they *want* to, and the reformer is the one beckoning them to a state of affairs that they don't much want.

"You shall not fall in with the many to do evil, nor shall you bear witness in a lawsuit, siding with the many, so as to pervert justice, nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his lawsuit" (Ex. 23:2–3, ESV). Notice what this passage requires of us. There are times when the doing of evil is *popular*. Many want to do evil, and they summon you to join them. There are other times when you are being pressured to bear false witness in a lawsuit, siding with the many, in order to pervert justice. And if you didn't trip over the next verse, you weren't paying attention. It prohibits every form of affirmative action, along with all its ugly cousins. The man of integrity decides according to the law, and not according to whether the plaintiff has had a hard life.

A reformer has to be the kind of man who can stand up to the clamor of the mob. This is the vertebrate mentality exhibited by Athanasius when he was informed that "the world" was against him. Well, then, he replied, let it be known that Athanasius is *contra mundum*, against the world. A true reformer gives the PR department fits.

The reformer marches to a different drummer, to not coin a phrase, but when he does this he elicits real hatred. There are two kinds of non-conformity, and only one of them wears hipster glasses. The kind that does wear them is a very

popular form of pretending to be out of the mainstream, in order to be the envy of it, and the other is a radical form of unpopularity, calculated to get you slandered and viciously attacked, on the way to changing the direction of the mainstream. One kind of non-conformity requires courage, while the other kind requires nothing more than vanity and a five dollar cup of fair trade coffee.

The reformer will be attacked by the establishment in the name of a previous generation of reformers. The men who killed the prophets have descendants, and those descendants identify themselves by building memorials to the prophets (Matt. 23:29–31). The men who lionize the prophets, Jesus teaches, are the kind of men who would have tied them to the nearest stake themselves. And the men who are charged with attacking the legacy of the prophets are the true sons of the prophets.

In short, the reformer cannot expect anything worthwhile to happen if all he hears is polite golf applause floating toward him from the establishment.

Jesus teaches us to expect slander, to expect misrepresentation. Further, He teaches us to believe that when this happens, it is a sign that we are gaining on it. In Luke 6:22–23, Jesus tells us to rejoice and leap for joy when we reviled, excluded, shunned, and held in contempt. In Lattimore's translation of that passage, Jesus tells us that we are "to frolic" when this happens.

We are able to do this, Jesus teaches, because we know the outcome of the story. We have the big picture. We know that great is our reward in Heaven. But being heavenly-minded is not an opiate—being heavenly-minded brings real *earthly* perspective.

Conservative activists who are surprised or indignant at the gross lop-sidedness of the whole system are being foolish because they are expecting the

devil to be a gentleman. They are expecting him to fight clean, and to avoid every form of fighting dirty. What makes us think he might do that?

It would be tedious to go through all the available examples of this kind of thing. Just one should suffice. Occupy demonstrations are closely associated with vandalism, drugs, sexual assaults, riots and such, while Tea Party demonstrations are closely associated with middle-aged people in funny hats who pick up after themselves. Which one is the screaming threat to our commonweal? Right.

The only thing that is missing in this farce is *our* ability to see how funny it is —and how much God doesn't care that *they* are cheating. In a battle of accusations and counter-accusations, they will always have the advantage. Let them have it. Devils make better accusers, *always*, and we are not in this to create right-wing devils. No, we have a better game to play than that.

I said a moment ago that those who are heavenly-minded have a clear earthly perspective. They keep their heads. They are not thrown off by trash talk, or the mainstream media's inability to report on the trash talk. When they cheat, and we get angry, this is nothing less than us enabling their cheating to *work*, to have its intended effect. The appropriate response is for them to cheat, and for us to grin.

So if we keep our heads, we are still engaged in the conflict, and we are engaged in it because it matters (deeply) to us. But it does not matter deeply to our *ego*, which means that we are in a position to *think* while we fight. This means that while we look at the terrain, and think about what is at stake, we can settle on what is *the decisive point*. A decisive point is a place that is significant enough to matter to the enemy if you successfully take it, and insignificant enough to actually take. This means that the selected target is both *strategic* and

feasible. Thinking nationally, in our culture wars, New York City is strategic, but not feasible. Moose Breath, Idaho is feasible, but not strategic. We could take Moose Breath for Jesus in about three weeks, but when we had, it wouldn't matter all that much. The reason our ministries are located here in the Palouse is that there are two major universities located in these two small towns, eight miles apart. Pullman, Washington is the home of Washington State, and Moscow is the home of the University of Idaho. The small towns make it feasible, and the universities make them strategic. To identify and go after a decisive point is the way to have *a disproportionate impact*.

The example given above concerning New York City was not meant to discourage Christians from ministering there. Of course, many of us should be there. But when we are there, we should know that within a place like New York, there are numerous decisive points *within* the city. With a nation before us, one of the decisive points we have selected is the small town with the big university. With a city before us, there will be the same kind of decisive point available. But we won't see them if we are not aware of the concept, and if we are not thinking about it.

We don't have infinite resources at our disposal—we do serve an infinite God, but He loves to supply our needs on a day-to-day basis. That keeps us trusting Him. That means we must be the stewards of the resources He has already given, and this means we have to be selective. We have a limited number of troops, and so we have to decide where to put them. Joab was not a very good man, but he was a good general—and he divided his troops wisely for the battle (2 Sam. 10:10–12).

To return to the earlier point, understanding the decisive point helps us understand what our objective actually is. If our goal is to advance the kingdom,

then we will be able to think clearly as we meditate on what will actually help to accomplish that. If our goal is personal fame and glory, then we will fail in one of two ways. First, we will be easily distracted when the enemy slanders us and lies about us—because our goal is personal glory, we will react violently and unproductively when that is threatened or besmirched. The other thing that might happen is that we pick a little nothing objective, and capture it with a lot of fanfare, followed by a big awards ceremony. We don't want culture warriors who can be lured by the trappings of victory without any actual victories—the equivalent of big hats, missile parades, and mirrored sunglasses.

In short, finding the decisive point is not something that an ego can easily do.

ONE MORE DISCLAIMER

In physical warfare, the principles are the principles. Mobility means getting your army from here to there, and your navy from there to here. Surprise means that the enemy general says *omigosh* at 3 am when your tank rolls through his tent. Everything is pretty straightforward.

But when these principles are transferred to other arenas, the principles remain, but things aren't always quite so tidy. For example, in a battle of ideas, the fact that we can move our thoughts around the globe at the speed of light is both communication *and* mobility. Depending on the metaphors used, it can also be an example of surprise.

So as we discuss specific principles, this reality puts some demands on the reader: Sometimes the application will be tangible and physical, and other times not so much. But this is all right, because things are tough all over.

PRINCIPLE 1: OBJECTIVE

Now, at last, we can discuss the first principle of war.

When God spoke to the Israelites about their pending invasion of the land of Canaan, their objective was made very clear to them.

> And the Lord spake unto Moses in the plains of Moab by Jordan near Jericho, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye are passed over Jordan into the land of Canaan; Then ye shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, and destroy all their pictures, and destroy all their molten images, and quite pluck down all their high places: And ye shall dispossess the inhabitants of the land, and dwell therein: for I have given you the land to possess it. (Num. 33:50–53)

One of the great advantages of this kind of objective is that you can *tell* when you are done. When your objective has slid into a murky place, and you are not quite sure what you are up to, there is immediate pressure to start pointing to other indicators—indicators that don't have anything to do with victory. Instead of a politician telling us that the program was successful, he tells us how much money was spent on it. Instead of a general telling us that the city was captured, he tells us how many bombs were dropped. When we lose the appropriate measurement of victory, one of the first things that happens is that false measurements appear almost immediately.

So the first principle answers the question—what are we trying to achieve? Now of course, there are objectives and subordinate objectives. For many Reformed types, the phrase "do all to the glory of God" has assumed mantra-like status. After all, does not the Shorter Catechism tell us what the chief end of man is? Yes, it does, and it does so correctly. That is the ultimate objective, and it should be considered as such.

But it is not enough to acknowledge this in a perfunctory way that affirms the ultimate objective while failing to work toward that ultimate objective by means of intelligently ascertained subordinate objectives.

Such subordinate objectives should better be identified as nested within an ascending hierarchy of objectives. Now as noted earlier, every principle must be clothed in a particular method. In the same way, the objective cannot be pursued simply by acknowledging the *rightness* of the objective. The objective must be pursued by particular actions, which must be layered within an ascending hierarchy of objectives. The Allies in World War II had as their objective the capture of Berlin. Subordinate to this, but a necessary first step, was the landing at Normandy. In order for the beachhead at Normandy to be secured, taking Omaha beach was necessary, and so forth down the line.

Thus, whenever something is done, the objective should relate to the ultimate reason it was done, while the thing accomplished (with which we are all pleased) could not justify itself as an ultimate objective. The "clothing" of the action does not reveal the objective: One man may be an activist and another a car mechanic, and share the same objective. Or two men may both be activists and *not* share the same objective. These distinctions cannot be maintained apart from a biblical worldview, and that worldview absolutely requires that the glory of God be the final *telos* of all actions, whether the actions are performed by God or man. Principled thinkers will be able to see how two very different activities serve the ultimate objective.

So what should our objective as reformers be? If we are to understand the times we live in, we have to do a better job understanding them, if you catch my meaning.

The *system*, the Establishment, or the Man, as we used to call it, is a ramshackle, run-down dive of a house, greatly in need of some repairs—let us call it our crack-house culture. All of us live in it, there being no choice in the matter—to live at all is to live *here*. At the same time, the inhabitants of said

house divide into three main groups, distinguished by the different approaches they take to what we should do about this sad reality. Three different groups have three differing objectives.

One group has simply accommodated itself to the way it all is. The house is what it is, and cannot be altered in any significant way. This does not mean that such people cannot labor to improve some things, but their vision for the house as a whole is nonexistent. At the self-serving end, they simply work to feather their own nest, and at the more understandable end, they work to make their immediate surroundings tolerable for those close to them. Who would begrudge someone cleaning up their own bedroom if he had to live in a dump of a house?

The second group belongs to the revolution. They see the problems with the house, and the inequities that have developed (some people have cleaned up their own rooms quite nicely, which naturally makes them the envy of all the others), and so they want to do something about the problem of "the house" as a whole. Because they are revolutionaries, it is an article of faith with them (held with a religious fervor) that the only thing we can do is burn it down and start over. This idea is not simple arson—it is eschatological paganism. Without a Creator God, the father of any order that happens is chaos. And since the process is random, and there are times when chaos throws off some abortion of a world—which has apparently happened in our case—this means there is nothing for it but to destroy it all down to chaos again and let chaos have another throw. Two out of three? Baby needs a new pair of shoes…

But because a lot of us are living in this dive, it is not possible for these people to simply soak all the furniture in gasoline and strike a match. There are too many people in the first group who would say, "Hey! What do you think you are doing?!" Because of this, the radicals have to be duplicitous about their aims,

which is just a fifty cent way of saying they are liars. They have taken to describing the gasoline as “furniture perfume,” and when pressed about it say only that it is “for the children.”

They are after one thing only, and that is power. When they get real power of the sort they want, it will be the power to destroy—and destroy they will. In the meantime, they raise many different “issues,” to confuse those who think they might be sincere, but as their godfather Saul Alinsky taught them, *the issue is never the issue*. The real issue is power, as measured by them in gasoline and matches.

These arsonist revolutionaries have gone under many guises and have had many names. I will simply describe them in one lump as anyone to the left of Chris Christie, and for ease of reference, we will simply call them “commies.” Some of them are dupes, and some are zealots, but all of them smell like gasoline.

The third group, among whom I happily number myself, sees the house as a fixer-upper. This would be a monumental task all by itself, even with no residents present, but we have to do this remodel job while we are all still living in it. We have to do this, we handymen…we few handymen, we happy few… sorry—got distracted.

We have to do this with secular conservatives fighting the improvements we want to make to the house, and at the same time we have to keep the radicals from burning it down. Whenever we have thwarted an arsonist, he will accuse us of being one of “those conservatives,” who do not want anything changed whatever, not even that appalling wallpaper in the foyer. And when we have successfully changed something, making a real improvement, the secular

conservatives will accuse us of being radical revolutionaries, and they will go through our tool chest looking for the gas can.

But the only reason we fight to save the house from burning is so that we might, led by the Spirit of God over the course of generations, subject the house to a different kind of extreme makeover. The only reason we fight those who want to preserve the house just the way it currently droops is because we want to preserve it in restored glory.

Now the way I have stated all this certainly tips my hand. Which option do I think is the Christian one? But we have to be careful here. There are professing Christians who belong to all three groups. There are even sincere Christians—the kind that go to Heaven when they die—who belong to all three groups. There are sincere Christians who think Jesus wants us to help the commies, and there are sincere Christians who are genuinely attached to that wallpaper design in the foyer—I didn't go into it before, but it is covered with American bald eagles, Lincoln's top hat, various *semper fi* designs, and other assorted patriotic detritus. All of this simply goes to show that we really are saved by grace and not by works. If we were to be saved by works, everybody is hosed.

But the third option is the biblical option. I say biblical option, not Christian option, because it might be odd to tag as the Christian option an approach that most Christians don't take. But that is neither here nor there. Christians have been struggling with the relationship of the city of man and the City of God since at least the time of Augustine. It is a tough problem, made tougher by the study conditions in this stupid house. I remember one time picking up a paperback copy of Augustine's great *Civitate Dei*, only to have the back cover copy inform me that Augustine was laboring to teach us all that Rome was the

eternal city, which was of course the photo negative of his thesis. Even editors get these blues. This is too bad, but things are tough all over.

Christians need to cultivate a robust biblical eschatology, which will direct us on what we are supposed to be doing with the house. If we refuse to do this, we will usually drift into an *ad hoc* "brighten the corner where you are" approach, which usually results in us cleaning up our own little evangelical enclaves pretty good, but for no altruistic or biblical reason, which means that we can then be easily guilted by the commies when they show up to indict us for our guilty complicity in the system as a whole.

Now some of us don't want to give the commies the time of day—they slaughtered over 100 million people over the course of the last century, and, looking ahead to the next century, they would be happy to do it all over again. Some don't think *we* should be the ones with the hangdog expression.

All this said, it is not enough to know which group to identify with. If you pick the group with the tools, as I hope you do, it is still necessary to learn how to use them. We need to learn the basic principles; we need to continue to learn the rules for reformers.

Objective Takeaway Point: The objective needs to be clear, and rightly nested within other, larger objectives. When the bugle blows indistinctly, no one gets ready for battle.

PRINCIPLE 2: OFFENSIVE

The last verse of Cowper's great hymn "God Moves in a Mysterious Way" expresses a very biblical truth in an altogether lovely way:

> You fearful saints, fresh courage take;
> The clouds you so much dread
> Are big with mercy and will break

In blessing on your head.

God's deliverances often are given to us in bursts. When David was first establishing himself as the king over a united Israel, his first victory against the Philistines was at Baal-perazim, Lord of the Outburst. After the battle, David said that the Lord broke forth on the Philistines like the breaching of water. Right after this in both Chronicles and 2 Samuel (e.g., 1 Chron. 13:11), the time of this victory is followed by "the breach of Uzza," or Perez-Uzza. This breach was a judgment, but also a mercy. Although Uzza died, the people of Israel were taught to receive back the ark of the covenant in reverence (carried by Levites, as the law required), and not hauled on a cart, the way the Philistines did it.

And David is the descendant of Perez, so named because he "breached" before Zarah, who had been marked and identified by a scarlet cord tied to his wrist (Gen. 38:28–30). Achan, who died for his treachery at Jericho, was descended from Zarah. Rahab, who was the mother of David's great-grandfather Boaz (descended from Perez), completed the breach when she let down a scarlet cord from her window at Jericho. Here is the line of blood-red redemption, found always in the unlikely places! This is the line of the Lord Jesus Christ, and this is the way of the Lord Jesus Christ. What was His death and resurrection but the bursting of death's dam?

After the Lord breaks through, like the breaching of water, He delivers Israel in another unlikely way in David's second battle with them. He tells David to go around behind the Philistines and to wait for the sound of the wind (think of the Spirit) in the tops of the trees. The text says explicitly that the Lord was going before them (v. 24). And then attack, following the Spirit. Never run ahead of the Spirit. Wait in Jerusalem until you receive power from on high. This second

victory over the Philistines was just about a couple miles from where the Spirit was poured out upon the disciples centuries later.

This is how we are to fight giants in the valley of giants. We pray for the Lord to make a breach, like a dam bursting. We pray for the Lord to rush before us, like the wind in the top of the trees.

So the second principle of war is that of the offensive. These principles of war are principles of effective fighting, showing us how to engage in conflict. They are not the same as moral principles. They tell you how to fight effectively; they do not tell you whether you should be fighting. The Germans invaded Belgium, and that was taking the offensive, but that did not make it good. If your cause is good, it is also good to be observing these principles. If not, then not.

Remember the classic Reformed stance on civil resistance, which certainly limits how this principle may be employed when considering the lawfulness of armed resistance. Evil authorities are first to have the word preached to them, and every lawful means of appeal and resistance should be applied. Secondly, it is permissible to flee persecution, what Calvin once called getting the heck out of Dodge. And third, it is permissible to take up arms against a tyrant *defensively*. This last shows a principled neglect of this principle of war. This is what David did when Saul fell into his hands in the cave. He failed to take the offensive, and because of it God blessed him. In failing to take one kind of offensive, he took the offensive on another level entirely.

But prior to that third level, the wise are those *who take the initiative whenever they have the opportunity.* When *we* are making the decisions about what to do, then the adversary has to respond. This is the case even with the second level, the step where we flee from oppression. It might not look very much like an "offensive," but done right, it really can be. Remember, for example, when

Moses led the people of Israel out of Egypt. They were fleeing from oppression, but the initiative was entirely with Moses. He is the one who started the encounters with Pharaoh, he was the one who had a specific set of demands, and he is the one who applied God's sanctions.

Obviously, when one army attacks another, this is an offensive that everyone can see and understand. But some versions of taking the offensive can be harder to identify. Who initiates, and who is put back on his heels? More than one prisoner on a hunger strike has discovered that the possibility of taking initiative does not disappear just because you are locked in prison. A runaway fugitive locked up in a house, surrounded by a SWAT team, does not have the initiative. He is not on the offensive. But when Boris Yeltsin was holed up in his house, surrounded by the forces representing a nuclear power, he *was* on the offensive.

However, if ethical considerations do not prevent one from taking the offensive, all thought and energy should be employed either in taking the offensive, or planning on how to move from defense to offense. Survival should never be the goal, stalemate is not the goal, absence of collision is not the goal.

Considered generally, is the Church today in an offensive or defensive stance? Leave aside the compromised sectors of the church, which are actively causing damage with what they do. Just consider the uncompromised sections of the Church: even there our stance is most emphatically defensive. We think we have won, for example, if we successfully prevent them from establishing homosexual marriage in our state. But that, while a good thing, is not victory at all. You haven't won the war simply because your city makes it another day without collapsing because of the siege.

Offensive Takeaway Point: We should look for a way to stop responding to initiatives of the adversary and start behaving in such a way that they have to

figure out how to respond to us. Take the initiative.

PRINCIPLE 3: CONCENTRATION

Concentration is the tip of the spear.

After David had been made king over a united Israel, he began consolidating his rule by attacking Jerusalem (2 Sam. 5: 1–12). This was the capital city of the Jebusites, a city that (once conquered) would not be part of any tribe—in just the same way that D.C. is not part of any state. At the same time, the city was in the general territory or region of Benjamin, and therefore some consolation to the tribe of Saul, no longer the tribe of the king.

When David came up against them, the Jebusites did a little trash talking from the wall, the precise meaning of which is ambiguous. The best guess is that they were saying that an army of blind men and cripples could defend this place against *you* people (v. 6). But David captured the city anyway (v. 7). This was done by climbing up a steep water tunnel (which archaeologists have found and identified). And that, incidentally, is how David got saddled with Joab (v. 8; 1 Chron. 11:6). That water course was about fifty feet tall, but once the Navy Seals got up it, it was all over for the Jebusites. David then consolidated his rule (v. 9), and God blessed him greatly (v. 10), which David saw clearly (v. 12).

This was an example of concentration because David sent a number of his elite troops against one vulnerable part of the enemy's defenses. And remember what was said earlier about the decisive point. Concentration will be most effective when applied to a decisive point—a place where it is likely that your concentration will work, and where it will matter a great deal to the enemy if it does work.

Concentration means taking coordinated aim—applying an artificial and additional force to create an "outnumbered" situation in one place along the line. Suppose you have two forces lined up against each other, with both bodies of men having 100 men each. You could charge, and have each one of your men fight one of their men. If you won sixty-two of the encounters, you would likely have won the battle—but you would also have neglected the principle of concentration. Concentration is when you take twenty of your men, and drive at their line at a point where they have stationed just three men. That's concentration.

In a football game, when you pull the tackle and the guard from the left side to block for a run on the right side, that is also concentration. As a result, you have four men on their two, with the runner behind.

Of course, concentration may be employed on the tactical level, but let us consider concentration on the strategic level as well. Paul concentrated on the key city of Ephesus for several years in his teaching in the hall of Tyrannus, and all of Asia heard the word of the Lord. The Reformer John Calvin concentrated his efforts in the (relatively) unimportant city of Geneva, and the fact that the city was "taken" permitted hosts of refugees from other places to concentrate there, and from there to influence the continent of Europe. Preachers, books, general mayhem, and trouble were all exported from that place.

But there are two ways to concentrate, and one of them—though popular—is not really effective. In order to be true concentration it must be applied with force to a decisive point in the adversary's line. If you are not doing that, then all you are doing is gathering…or perhaps coagulating. Or fellowshipping.

If you gather numerous Christians in one place, and you don't *do* anything, then what you *are* doing is creating a ghetto. We can gather in Wheaton, or

Colorado Springs, or Grand Rapids, (or Moscow), but this is not sufficient. The principle of concentration is not the same thing as gregariousness, or proving the adage about birds of feather.

If we are gathering in order to concentrate, then more will be happening than what happens in the coffee and donuts time after church. It is more than meeting lots of other evangelicals. When concentration happens, our gatherings will be a hissing and a byword to the unbelievers. They don't mind our ghettos. They do mind it when we gather in the way we were commanded to.

Whenever believers successfully gather, we want to take special care that we do not lapse into a ghetto mentality. The point is to make the concentration in our efforts as potent as it was in Ephesus or Geneva. And that means emphasizing and exporting the antithesis.

So take a hypothetical example on a tactical level, the kind of example that would be typical in one of our culture war encounters. Say that something objectionable is going down in your sleepy little town. (Just suppose.) Suppose further that you have reason to believe that the letters to the editor section of your local newspaper really is a decisive point, and not just the place for venting that it so often is. In your town, things can really change based on what happens in the letters to the editor section. You organize a letter writing campaign, and you time it so that you have three letters running every night for over a month. For every letter applauding the objectionable thing, there are six decrying it. This is concentration (assuming, again, that the decision-makers in your town pay any attention whatever to the letters to the editor).

During a local election campaign, writing a letter to the editor for your candidate may be a fine thing to do, but it is not an example of concentration.

That is because your letter will appear in a small ocean of other letters, remarkably like it. That is not concentration.

Concentration Takeaway Point: Concentration is not to be pursued for the sake of a respite; it is a concentration of *force*, applied in ways the adversary wants you to stop. So don't stop.

PRINCIPLE 4: MOBILITY

The story of David and Goliath is one of the most famous stories in the Bible (1 Sam. 17), and consequently, many of us have a mental image of it taken more from bits and pieces we have heard or from Bible storybooks—instead of from what is actually said in the Scriptures about it.

David rejects Saul's armor as untested, and not because it was too big for him (v. 39). David did not reject the use of Saul's armor in principle, but it is worth noting that without that armor, and with the weapon he chose to use, he was a lot more mobile than he otherwise would have been.

Of course, the greatest faith here was David's, but it is worth noting that this was an act of faith on Saul's part also (v. 37). This was a single combat that put all of Israel's army at stake, and Saul gave his blessing to it. And last, it is not often recognized that the five smooth stones represent what later came to be known as the five points of Calvinism. Little joke there.

The slingshot here is not something that a ten-year-old boy would use to plink at bottles on a fence. This was a bona fide weapon of war (Judg. 20:16), and the stones would be about the size of a modern softball. And of course, we should consider the size of Goliath. He was over nine feet tall, and his mail weighed 126 pounds. The Anakim (giants) had been exiled by Joshua to Gaza, Ashdod, and Gath (Josh. 11:21–23), and Goliath was likely descended from them.

David was a giant-killer, and he comes into this story as a glorious type of Christ. Goliath was a giant, but he was also a serpent, a dragon. The Hebrew word for his armor means scales, which made him a gigantic reptile, like a dragon, and David topples him with a wound to the head (Gen. 3:15). David fights him with the same weapons that he would use in fighting wild beasts. When he is done, he takes Goliath's armor and places it in his tent (v. 54).

This is precisely what Jesus does when He came upon the strong man. He attacks, like David did. He is victorious, like David was. He strips the armor (panoply), as David did. He partakes of the spoil after battle (Luke 11:12). Jesus is the greatest of all giant-killers. He gives victory to His people…and He awakens the envy of any who would be great in Israel on their own terms.

David was mobile, going readily into battle. His weapon of choice gave him much greater mobility than Goliath had. Goliath was limited by his sword and spear. He needed to get his hands on David in order to make mincemeat of him. When Goliath began to lumber toward David, David was able to *run* toward the giant (v. 48), and the stone he threw ran even faster.

The fourth principle of war is mobility. Our tendency is to look at a principle like mobility, and immediately translate it into anything that moves rapidly. But with this principle, a confusion between principle and method is likely to happen. For example, in the war of worldviews, in the clash of ideas, someone is likely to immediately think of the Internet as an example of mobility. And it can be used effectively that way. But it can also be a device which displays one's stodginess and *lack* of mobility to the whole world at the speed of light. Mobility, as far as we are concerned, is a state of mind.

If one tactic is not working, and a decision can be made *rapidly* to switch to another, this is an instance of mobility.

Of course, in a physical war mobility has a strong physical component. Either your enemy got there first or you did. Either he was able to strike first, or you were able to. But even here, the ability to move is the result of a certain frame of mind. This frame of mind was evident in the time of preparation, and it is evident at the moment of decision.

Mobility is not demonstrated by itself. A man may be highly energetic and have a lot of stamina, but use it all by running around in tight little circles. This principle is employed in concert with the others. A panicked army in a rout is mobile. A mad dash assaulting the wrong part of the line may be mobile. Mobility is exercised when the right amount of force gets to the right place quickly. A bullet fired in the wrong direction goes just as fast.

I have said that mobility is a state of mind. Let me define this *via negativa*. Mobility is restricted by various traits. One would be laziness. A lazy man is full of excuses, so he is likely to point to factors outside himself which may fall in some of these other categories. But nothing will be accomplished in any realm unless we learn to work like Protestants used to.

Another reason might be cowardice—fear of what might happen at the end of the march often leads some folks to delay or cancel the march. The more mobile you are, the sooner you arrive at the fight. And if you don’t really want to arrive at the fight, this might affect your mobility. Like the lieutenant in Ambrose Bierce’s small story in *The Devil’s Dictionary*, we are concerned that any further display of valor on the part of our troops might bring us into contact with the enemy.

A third reason is uncertainty—a man might be fully willing to do the right thing if only he had epistemic certainty concerning what it was. But he cannot

have this. We have to walk by faith, and there is nothing we can do to keep warfare from being risky.

Another reason is confusion. A man may have great confidence, but mobilize all his resources to do the wrong thing at the wrong place. Or the right thing at the wrong place. Or the wrong thing at the right place.

And last, complacency. A man might not do something because he believes that it is not necessary to do.

Take flash mobs as an example of mobility. With an adroit use of the new media, it is possible to gather a large group of people on short notice. Say that the city council tagged something onto the agenda at the last minute, in the hopes that they would be able to sneak it through without a bunch of public comment. The chambers are nearly empty, but one man in the back row with a smartphone noticed the move. He has the capacity to have the chambers full of peasants with pitchforks in about fifteen minutes. That's mobility.

Mobility Takeaway Point: Mobility remembers that an army is supposed to fight, and it is supposed to fight as quickly as effectively possible.

PRINCIPLE 5: SECURITY

Security has two components. The first is to prevent the enemy from gathering accurate intelligence about you, and the second is to gather intelligence about the enemy. You secure your own position first, and then you look for ways to destabilize his position.

When David fled from Absalom, one of the provisions he made for his resistance effort was in the realm of security. He left Hushai behind as a planted counselor, which we will address further when we get to the principle of pursuit. But Hushai did more than just provide Absalom with deliberately poor counsel.

Hushai also gave intelligence about what had happened to men who got the word to messengers, who then got the word to David (2 Sam. 17:15–21). Good security in this instance meant that Absalom did not know what David was going to do, and David knew what Absalom was going to do.

And so we come to security. Security cannot be a stand-alone principle. Guarding oneself against the possibility of defeat is important, but prudent security is not the same thing as "risk-free" warfare. A war in which there is no possibility of things going wrong is not really a war. At the same time, as Sun Tzu put it, "The good fighters of old first put themselves beyond the possibility of defeat and then waited for an opportunity of defeating the enemy."

We are to live up to what we have already attained, and we are not to let it go. But, to mix the metaphor, this is not to be a talent buried in the ground. This secured ground is to be used as the basis for our attack on the enemy. Thus, "security" must always be married to "offensive" and be thought of as a means to that end.

We are to comport ourselves in such as way that the enemy is either unaware that we are doing anything, or is aware that we are doing something but unaware of what it is. Security can be good because we are (still) marshaling our forces, and the enemy does not know there is an enemy in the field. Or, security can be good because we are not being chatterboxes.

If a pastor is invited into an unbelieving forum should he (as a general rule) want to go? Sure. But if he goes, he should talk like a football coach in a pregame interview. He should say things like "we want to concentrate on moving the ball." He should give absolutely nothing away that he does not want the enemy to know and act upon. If he really revealed something tactically important in the pregame interview, he is a coach on a quest to be fired.

The issue is not to keep absolutely all knowledge away from the enemy. The issue is to keep away from him all the knowledge you don't want him to have, and to freely give him all the knowledge you want him to have. Saul Alinsky put it this way—"If you have organized a vast, mass-based people's organization, you can parade it visibly before the enemy and openly show your power" (*RFR*, p. 126). This is not a breach of security, because under these circumstances this is something you *want* the enemy to know.

The apostle Paul believed that security was very important. "Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked" (Eph. 6:16). *Above all*, he says, take up the shield of faith.

Security means that you are in control of the information that is flowing. You are in control of the information that is flowing to you about the enemy's plans (and that information is accurate), and you are in control of the information that is flowing from you to enemy (which is inaccurate). The information is not a free agent.

When the adversary does not know what you are up to, and he knows you are up to something, a natural human tendency is to guess. If you are doing your job in other areas, keeping pressure on him, he will often guess your plans in a state of panic. This is all to the good because he is likely to guess wrong, and make a move based on that guess. The more he does that, the better you like it.

Jesus tells us to rejoice when we are slandered, because, He says, our reward is great in Heaven. But there is another reason to rejoice. There are many times, particularly with the issues that swirl around in our culture wars, when these slanders arise, not from our enemy's malice, but from their *fears*. Instead of being indignant, we should think about how we can use that sort of thing

If I were to tell them the truth ("No, honestly, if our candidate wins election to the city council, we are not going to make everyone in town buy their toothbrushes at Walmart"), they won't believe me. There are delusions that are like a fixture in the landscape, and a wise general always takes the terrain into account. If accused of such a thing in a public meeting, I might just grin. They won't stop thinking that, and if they double-down in thinking that, they might make a really stupid mistake.

We know how messed up our culture is. We see it in countless ways. But one of the things I have noticed as a result of engaging with atheists with a European background (like Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins) is that *they* think that our country is a hotbed of Puritanism. They are worried about all kinds of things that I don't think they have any reason to worry about. But since they are going to worry about it anyway, we might as well use it. We might as well say *boo!* from time to time.

Security Takeaway Point: Keep your game plan to yourself, but not in a furtive, guilty way. An intelligent adversary should know that there are things you are up to that he knows nothing about.

PRINCIPLE 6: SURPRISE

One of the most famous surprise attacks in history is the one that Gideon launched against the Midianites. He had successfully mustered a sizable army, and then winnowed that army *twice* in order to get it down to fighting trim. He began with a fighting force of 32,000 men, went down to 10,000, and then again down to 300.

In his first pass, he allowed any soldier who was afraid to fight to simply go home (Judg. 7:1–3). He lost two thirds of his army that way. God looked at the

remaining 10,000 and thought that the Israelites might still take the credit for themselves if they won, and so He had Gideon test his soldiers by watching them drink.

Those who lifted water to their mouths with a cupped hand were soldiers who were well trained—they didn't drop their weapons and stick their heads in the water as an undisciplined soldier would do. They remained on the alert. Only three hundred men were in that category, and the rest were sent back to their tents—not to their homes, but to their tents. They no doubt joined in the pursuit later, along with men from other tribes, but these three hundred men were the expeditionary force that God determined to use.

The Midianites were in a frame of mind that was troubled, which meant that they were ready to *be* surprised (Judg. 7:13–15). The Midianite force was a gigantic multitude, and the element that was (successfully) used against them here was surprise.

There was also an element of security involved in this move, as Alinsky noted. "If your organization is small in numbers, then do what Gideon did: conceal the members in the dark but raise a din and clamor that will make the listener believe that your organization numbers many more than it does" (*RFR*, p. 126).

Gideon divided his men into three companies, meaning that the Midianites had a fourth direction to flee. Sun Tzu noted many centuries ago that it is often wise to leave this kind of a way out—otherwise, you are simply creating a circumstance where your enemy is prepared to fight to the death, to the last man. If there is a circumstance where your enemy can be completely defeated, but still survive, that is sometimes to be preferred.

Each of the three hundred men had a trumpet, a jar to shatter, a torch inside the jar, and a voice. When Gideon gave the signal, they all blew their trumpets,

shattered the jars, and shouted, “The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon.” The chief weapon here was *surprise*.

This happened in the middle of the night, at the beginning of the watch, and the Midianites were already apparently on edge. They were pitched into battle with one another by blaring trumpets, by the sound of breaking pottery, by the flaring torches, and by three hundred voices shouting.

So the sixth principle of war is surprise. There are many ways to surprise an enemy, but in our current culture wars, I would urge us to strive to surprise the adversary in certain key ways:

One of the best surprises is when we learn how to treat their revolution as the Establishment. They have been telling themselves a long sustained narrative about their place in the world, and they have it completely wrong. Fewer things are funnier than the ritual we have in every election cycle of Washington insiders claiming to be Washington outsiders—unless it is the spectacle of the children of the revolution pretending that they don’t own this joint. They became The Man several centuries ago, and they are highly discomfited whenever anybody sees and comments on it.

When we assume the stance of an optimistic outsider, they don’t know what to do.

To the extent that they have a caricature of us, we should do whatever we can to dismantle that caricature, all at once. Surprise! For example, they want to write off all social conservatives as throwback Puritans, with crabbed, pinched faces, worrying desperately that somewhere, somebody called that number on the bathroom wall, and *is* having a good time. The answer is to cultivate a sunny Calvinism, a Chestertonian Calvinism. Chesterton himself would of course be

annoyed at my appropriation of his great name to serve as an adjective to my soteriology, but we all have our crosses to bear.

Alinsky says that we should make our adversary play by his rulebook. Insisting on this is a great way to surprise people. Feminists demand that women receive equal treatment with the men, and nobody is ever more surprised than feminists whenever it happens. Feminists don't need to be told that they despise men. They generally know that, and even when they don't, they have certainly heard it before. What they haven't heard very much is how much they despise women.

They should constantly be having to put out yet another fire that you started in some unexpected place. And each time should make them think, "what next?" before they guess wrong.

It should be noted that the ability to surprise presupposes that you are on the offensive, that you have the initiative. Before you serve a ball in tennis, your opponent doesn't know where you are going to hit it, and when you do, he is surprised. But if he is serving, you can't surprise him the same way. Surprise assumes that you are the one putting the ball into play.

Or, to extend the metaphor, when he puts the ball into play, your defensive move should be not what he expected at all. If that is successfully accomplished, this could be an opportunity to take the offensive, which you should always be looking to do.

Suppose, for example, you are accused of something particularly heinous in a public forum, One of the key elements in humor is surprise, and this is something that can be used to good effect here. A quick comeback is sometimes worth more than a million dollars. A political showdown of the 18th century produced what some believe to have been the greatest retort of all time. John

Montagu, the Earl of Sandwich, was up against John Wilkes, a reformist politician. Montagu looked at Wilkes in exasperation and said, “Upon my soul, Wilkes, I don’t know whether you’ll die upon the gallows, or of syphilis” The comeback of the ages was, “That will depend, my Lord, on whether I embrace your principles, or your mistress.”

Surprise Takeaway Point: Effective surprise is frequently the result of an effective use of some of the other principles combined (e.g., security and mobility and offensive). And you should want to make all their surprises unpleasant surprises.

PRINCIPLE 7: COOPERATION

The principle of cooperation is one of the most difficult to apply to our circumstances. One of the reasons this is so has to do with the sin of pride, but even supposing that our pride is mortified, it is still difficult at times to know what to do. Nevertheless, the seventh principle of war is still very important.

But first, the principle itself:

> And John answered him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbad him, because he followeth not us. But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is on our part. (Mark 9:38–40)

The disciples were worried about someone who was “with them” without being “with them.” He was casting out devils in the name of Jesus, which was good, but he was not a certified member of their group. Jesus said to let it ride—his *actions* were the fundamental credentials to be examined.

Cooperation is accomplished by means of unity of command. There has to be one supreme commander. No man can serve two masters, and neither can any army. As Christians undertaking our labors in the name of Christ, we have this

unity of command. The Lord Jesus is the Head of the church, and though He is at the right hand of God the Father in Heaven, we nevertheless have the standing orders He left with us. We have our Bibles.

So everything is clear on paper. We usually have worked out the boundaries of our fellowship. If we are Reformed and Presbyterian, would we be willing to have lunch with a Reformed Baptist? Of course. How about a charismatic dispensationalist? Again, of course. That is because the restaurant has a menu, which is a prearranged liturgy for us to use.

The problems arise when we try to *do* something together. The fact that we all oppose something together—say, an abortion clinic—does not mean that we are of one mind about what to do on the sidewalk outside of it. Suppose one person wants to offer free ultra-sounds from a van, somebody else wants to cast out the demons from the building, and someone else wants us all to say the rosary. Now what?

Let me illustrate the problem by describing the optical illusion created by the worship service of the church where I serve as pastor. There are certain doctrines that are very important to me (say, having an optimistic eschatology). But someone could start attending our services, and not find out what my eschatology was for a couple of years. On the other end of things, the kind of metrical psalms we sing is about number 17 in the ranking of things that are important to me, but the visitor would find out about the song selections on the first week. This is because the singing is something we are doing together. And before we *do* something, we have to *agree* to do something. This is the challenge of cooperation.

Because cooperation involves the *doing*, it is one of the most difficult principles to observe.

As with so many other situations, our behavior is directed by what kind of analogies we use. For example, it is obvious that competition between the Army and Navy is unspeakable folly in the face of a common foe. The Army/Navy football game is a lot of fun, but for that competition to remain seething when in a war against an outside foe would be treasonous.

But suppose it is not a matter of two branches of the armed forces, but one of an army and a separated band of mutineers? Now what should we do? Or suppose that a supported regiment is commanded by a blockhead? Should a wise general depend on him or try to work around him?

In order to sort out how we should and should not cooperate, we have to begin by distinguishing allies and co-belligerents. In the Second World War, we were allies with Great Britain—we were fighting the same foe for roughly the same reasons. We were co-belligerents with the Soviet Union, meaning that we were fighting the same foe for completely different reasons.

In addition to this, we have to distinguish both of the above from "false flag" operations—entities that say they are fighting on your side, but are really fighting for the enemy. For example, an abortion clinic bomber is not an "extreme" member of our pro-life organization; he is actually doing the enemy's work.

The Westboro Baptists are another example. They are such an extreme piece of work, well-suited to make all our positions risible, that I wouldn't be a bit surprised to find out that the whole pack of them are on Bill Maher's payroll. They are neither allies nor co-belligerents.

So when we ask whether or not to cooperate with this group or that one, the answer to the question should be settled by whether or not *Christ* is cooperating with them. And always remember the crucial distinction between fellowship and

leadership. We may cooperate with someone in worship, for example, without having to maintain that he is the next John Knox.

The qualifications for fellowship are one thing, and the qualifications for leadership are quite another. So let us make up an example that might come up in the rough and tumble of our culture wars. Suppose that a minister in your denomination was caught in adultery and was appropriately disciplined and defrocked. But rather than receiving it, he moved to another denomination, where he rose through the ranks quickly. All the evangelical churches in your city have gathered together every year for a pro-life rally at the local stadium, and this year, this man was made the chairman of the committee to spear-head the effort. Do you cooperate, or not? The answer is yes, but with qualifications. The apostle Paul had to deal with preachers of the gospel who were preaching for no other reason than to get Paul in trouble. The impurity of their motives did not prevent him from upholding the principle of cooperation (Phil. 1:15–18).

Cooperation Takeaway Point: Strategic differences are not moral differences, but they are still important to the issue of leadership and cooperation. You can believe that someone ought not be a general without breaking fellowship with him, or making it personal.

PRINCIPLE 8: COMMUNICATION

In the modern world, we take a lot of communication technology for granted. We assume that we should be able to talk to anybody in the world any time we want. There are kids in Africa who own a cell phone who have never seen a flush toilet. It has gotten to the point where virtually any story of significance will have some video footage of it, from various cell phones.

In many ways, our communication challenges have to do with the information glut. There is so much information flowing past us that it all sounds like noise. We have techniques for extracting the portion of the noise that we want to make sensible to us.

Our need for communication is as great as it has been for anyone else in history, but we have a harder time seeing our need for it. In the ancient world, when a battle was occurring miles away from where the king or the generals were located, the lack of information was obvious and pressing. That is why they had long-distance runners, trained to deliver messages as rapidly as possible.

> And the watchman cried, and told the king. And the king said, If he be alone, there is tidings in his mouth. And he came apace, and drew near. And the watchman saw another man running: and the watchman called unto the porter, and said, Behold another man running alone. And the king said, He also bringeth tidings. And the watchman said, Me thinketh the running of the foremost is like the running of Ahimaaz the son of Zadok. And the king said, He is a good man, and cometh with good tidings. (2 Sam. 18:25–28)

This same practice gave us our modern marathon. After the Greeks prevailed over the Persians at the battle of Marathon, a runner took the news to Athens (which was just over 26 miles away). And so that is why we run that distance and call it a marathon. This illustrates how much the ancients knew that they needed information. We need it just as much, but we feel that we have way too much information already. They simply had to figure out how to transmit what they needed to know. We transmit everything, including Facebook updates of our lunch menu, and then have to figure out how to winnow through what we have transmitted in order to get the key information.

So communication is a key principle of war. When the principle of communication is being considered it is very important for us to begin with the headship of Jesus Christ over His body, the Church. The right hand does not communicate with the left hand, but rather with the head. When this happens, the

right and left hand cooperate. When it does not, the body functions (to whatever extent it does function) in a spastic fashion. We are told that if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another (1 John 1:7). Communication with the Head will result in natural communication with one another. It will also (incidentally) contribute to our cooperation, another principle of war.

God speaks to us in Scripture. We must have a high view of the authority of the Word, and we must have a hermeneutic that does justice to this view. With regard to the former, the classical Protestant view of *sola Scriptura* is that the Bible is the only infallible and ultimate rule for faith and practice. With regard to the latter, we must reject all forms of modernity (arrogant epistemology) and postmodernity (arrogant skepticism).

This will enable us to communicate with God in corporate worship. Public worship is far more important than private or family worship. The latter is crucial, but one of the main blessings of it is found in the impact it has on public worship. We also communicate with the Head in our private prayers, in our private devotions. We are instructed to pray without ceasing, be devoted to prayer, etc.

If we do this, then helpful communication horizontally will occur. When close communication with God is occurring, it is safe to maintain close ties with like-minded believers elsewhere.

For those in a leadership position, it is important to communicate clearly with those who need to know what is being required of them. The apostle Paul points to this reality with a military metaphor: “For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?” (1 Cor. 14:8). If the signalman gets his flags all jumbled up, what good is it?

When you are communicating with a large number of people (like an army), it is important not to say too much. The point is to communicate what needs to be done, and to motivate everyone to do it. The point is not to explain everything in excruciating detail.

Another important form of communicating with a large number of people is something that wise leaders understand very well, but which many moderns would be tempted to dismiss as a mere "photo op." King David gives several good examples of this. When he lamented how he wished he could drink water from the well at Bethlehem, some of his men responded by sneaking into enemy-held territory and bringing some of that water back to him. David responded (wisely) by pouring the water out as an offering to the Lord (2 Sam. 23:14–17). This was not just a matter of personal conscience—he was *communicating* with all of his troops, telling them through a symbolic action that their lives were valuable to him.

After Joab murdered Abner, David disapproved of the murder and went to great symbolic lengths to communicate that (2 Sam. 3:31–39). David was a master of this kind of thing. One of the key features of a gifted leader is his natural ability to communicate well.

Communication Takeaway Point: Security and communication must be balanced. Communication must be restricted enough that the adversary has no access to it, and open enough that everyone who needs to know does know.

PRINCIPLE 9: ECONOMY OF FORCE

We already considered Gideon's attack on the Midianites with 300 men an example of surprise—which it was. But it was also an instance of economy of force, the ninth principle of war.

Waste doesn't help anybody do anything, and this includes conflict. When Gideon took 300 men on his midnight attack, he was taking just the right amount. He knew this beforehand on two counts. One, God had given him the means for settling on his troops, and two, God gave him the opportunity to sneak down into the Midianite camp to hear someone's account of his dream about Gideon.

Then we come to economy of force. Armies fight, and mobs fight. But a mob has no notion of precision. Mobs try to kill an ant with a baseball bat. Economy of force is not a stand-alone principle. It is the result of numerous other principles coming together in the right way, and at the right time. Economy of force is the result of an elegant combination of other principles. Economy of force combines—in an artistic way—objective, offensive, security, surprise, mobility, concentration, and cooperation. The only one it does not utilize is pursuit, because that happens after the economy-of-force blow lands.

An emphasis on economy of force is opposite a "shock and awe" approach. The operation should be as surgical as we can make it. Economy of force is the pursuit of efficiency in war. Efficient warfare keeps the conflict from spiraling out of control.

The key here is that we must be motivated by obedience, not by personal vendettas or malice. Someone who hates may fight enthusiastically, but necessarily without wisdom. We do not strike because it is "fun" or simply because it would make the adversary mad. If making the enemy mad or irrational is part of the strategy, fine, but if it is because *we* are being irrational, that is not fine.

In our culture wars, the unbelieving world is enormous. We must not assume we must attack all along the front with everything we have. This would neglect

concentration, as well as deplete our resources, violating economy of force. In other words, pick your battles carefully and then use the force it takes at that point of battle. The point is not to fight, the point is to fight and win that particular field. What will it take to do that?

In addition, fighting everywhere, all the time, is likely to distort God's redemptive intention for the world. As we look at the unbelieving world, we should see it as that which the war is over, and not simply those whom we are fighting with. Who are we fighting *against*, and who are we fighting *for*? This is a war of liberation. We are fighting with the slave-masters over their slaves.

Our chief adversary is not flesh and blood. Our chief adversary is made up of principalities and powers, and is a world system that holds millions captive. If we get sucked down into the sin of personal malice, then we have actually been taken captive by the other side. We are not overcoming their ways of accusation, we are surrendering to them.

One of the reasons why economy of force is neglected is because it is difficult. It involves craft and artistry, and high levels of intelligence. A simple display of force doesn't cut it. Any tin-pot Asiatic lord can hold a missile parade and stand on the reviewing stand with a big hat and mirrored sunglasses.

The Lord once spoke of a great opportunity, and few ready to take advantage of it: "Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly *is* great, but the laborers *are* few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest" (Luke 10:2). This prayer presupposes economy of force. There is a great need, a great opportunity. We should not pray for a huge host of laborers to be raised up, and then sent off to the wrong fields. We do not want to hire them, and then have them do nothing.

The goal is to get the right number of workers to the right place at the right time.

Great forces can be wasted, and often have been. Neglect of this principle is why our nation is in the shape it is in. We are privileged to live in a time when millions of evangelical Christians serve God in our nation. I am not here speaking of nominal Christians. We have countless churches, radio stations, publishing houses, colleges, seminaries, magazines, and astonishing wealth. At the very same time, we are being out-maneuvered by adversaries who have nothing close to our *distinct* infrastructure.

What we lack is the grace to bring it all together in a concerted fashion, When the bugle blows indistinctly, no one prepares for battle, and that would describe us.

But like cooperation (and dependent, like cooperation, on unity of command), economy of force requests communication with the Head. This, in its turn, requires a return to an absolute faith in Scripture, and a return to the worship of God in churches that share that faith. This faith must not be kept locked up in a box, but released (by teaching) into the lives of the worshipers.

This will require that we repent of the various theologies that have allowed us to think that the Scriptures shouldn't be applied, here, now, by us, in the places where we live. We need to reject the various dualisms that we have adopted, those which allow us to think that the Bible is for "spiritual" truths, the kind that will get us into Heaven when we die, and which will do precious little else. When this happens, the resources are already in place. They are just not being used with economy of force.

Economy of Force Takeaway Point: Economy of force means that we steer away from a "shock and awe" approach. The point is to be effective, and not to

show off. The American military is not the first massively strong military to think that such strength can be substituted for principled thinking.

PRINCIPLE 10: PURSUIT

The tenth and last principle of war is pursuit.

In the revolt against David led by his son Absalom, David was caught flat-footed and had to flee from Jerusalem. One of the men involved in the conspiracy against David was Ahithophel, a counselor of great wisdom. We don't know his full story, but his willingness to betray David was quite possibly related to his relationship to Bathsheba. Ahithophel was the father of Eliam, one of David's "Thirty" (2 Sam. 23:34). And Bathsheba was in turn the daughter of Eliam (2 Sam. 11:3), the granddaughter of Ahithophel. Whether or not what had happened to Ahithophel's grandson-in-law was the cause of the bad blood, the raw material was certainly there.

But once David had fled, Ahithophel gave Absalom some shrewd advice. He advised that Absalom remember this principle of war—pursuit.

> Moreover Ahithophel said unto Absalom, Let me now choose out twelve thousand men, and I will arise and pursue after David this night: And I will come upon him while he is weary and weak handed, and will make him afraid: and all the people that are with him shall flee; and I will smite the king only. (2 Sam. 17:1–2)

But David had left behind a double agent in Jerusalem, another wise counselor named Hushai (2 Sam. 17:7). Hushai comes up with reasons for rejecting Ahithophel's counsel "this time," but his entire purpose is to stall the pursuit. This is because Ahithophel's counsel was sound and good, and Hushai knew it.

When the decision went against him, Ahithophel went home, put his house in order, and then committed suicide. Some might think that this was because his pride was wounded, simply because Absalom had gone with Hushai's advice. I

am much more inclined to believe that Ahithophel knew that this particular failure to pursue was going to mean the failure of the whole conspiracy. If that happened, he would be treated as the traitor he was. He was sure enough now that the revolt was going to fail that he took the time he had to get his affairs in order. If Absalom doesn't know enough to reject glaringly bad advice like that, then he is certainly not going to make it to the throne.

And perhaps, if we might take one speculative step further, Ahithophel may have known that the advice was so bad that someone as smart as Hushai wouldn't have given it unless he was a double agent. It was time to go home and have his lawyer review his will.

This would indicate—as I believe it does—that pursuit is a crucial principle, one that reveals our understanding of what all the other principles were actually *for*.

Failure to pursue frequently reveals that the objective in the campaign was not victory, but rather some version of the "upper hand." Once we have fought to the point where we might be left alone for a while, we stop. This often happens because Christians are peace-loving people, and this sometimes gets them into trouble. Too often we drag a problem out and make the whole thing last ten times longer than it has to last. But when the principle of pursuit is employed, it is clear that *victory* is the objective.

When Saul defeated the Amalekites, he stopped fighting too soon, much to Samuel's displeasure. And so it was that Agag came out, thinking, "Surely the time of bitterness is past." But it wasn't past. We are not to fight to the point of predominance, we are to fight to the point of complete victory.

We have looked at Gideon often in this section, and it is only right, because he was one of the great generals of the Old Testament. We see him excel in his

application of this principle as well.

“And Gideon came to Jordan, and passed over, he, and the three hundred men that were with him, faint, yet pursuing them” (Jdg. 8:4).

The previous verses make it plain that the general forces of Israel had risen up in the demolition of Midian, but in this verse it is striking that Gideon is still with his 300. They were the vanguard of the initial attack, and they were still the tip of the spear in the pursuit. When there has been a complete rout of the enemy, the pressure is enormous to stop and just call it good. But Gideon didn’t do that—he still pursued.

Pursuit is the principle neglected by the currently strong. Many wars have been prolonged because the victorious army did not press its advantage in the immediate aftermath of a critical battle. This is what happened in the Union victory at Gettysburg—failure to pursue lengthened the war by a couple of years.

So what might pursuit look like in our efforts for reformation? Because the goal of many Christian organizations is a limited goal—“a place at the table”—and because they only fight back when they are about to be exiled from their place at the table, their understanding of the objective is skewed.

Think of it this way. If we are in a compromised position that was arranged in the first place so that the secularists could double-cross us, what sense does it make to fight—once the double-cross is apparent—for the *status quo ante*? Why do we want to get back into that position of vulnerability again? As Joe Sobran once put it, “Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me. Fool me three times…

I’m a Republican!”

Willingness to pursue when pursuit is a possibility reveals, like nothing else reveals, what the true objective was. An unwillingness to pursue is equally

revelatory. For example, many conservative politicians have railed against our tax system, and the IRS, and all that stuff, for years. But when the IRS scandals of early 2013 erupted, making the pursuit of genuine tax reform feasible, many ostensibly conservative politicians revealed themselves as secret admirers of the old order. They liked having that whipping boy, and they were therefore secret defenders of the system they pretended to oppose. How was this revealed? Failure to pursue.

Pursuit Takeaway Point: The *complete* victory is not as close as it appears.

ALINSKY REDUX

As we continue to think about the things that must be done in the pursuit of cultural reformation, we must make yet another distinction between the levels of strategic thinking and tactical thinking. And now that we have the general principles of war under our belts, we are ready to discuss some specific tactics.

There will be times when the strategic application and the tactical application line up perfectly—as when, during an assault by the entire army, one platoon is also participating in the assault. The whole army is attacking, and so part of it also is. But there are also instances when the larger strategy requires one thing, but, on a tactical level, the opposite is required. Take for example the principle of war which we have called taking the offensive. When the Israelite army attacked the city of Ai the second time, the larger strategic plan was an offensive attack. But a smaller part of this was the tactical retreat on the part of the forces that had come up to the front of the city. They feigned a retreat so that the soldiers of Ai would think they were doing the same thing they had done the first time, which was to run away. They were the retreating bait so that the offensive trap could be sprung.

So sometimes tactical applications are exactly the same as the larger strategic applications, adjusted for scale, and sometimes they are not. Saul Alinsky gave his followers thirteen rules for power tactics (see pages 10–11 for the list). And I am about to close this section with a list of tactical rules for Christian resistance. Some of them are tactical versions of larger principles, some are Christian restatements of Alinsky's tactics, and some are just free information from somewhere else. There are twenty-one of them, way better than Alinsky's paltry thirteen.

Think of these as exhortations to sergeants in the culture war—local Christian leaders, pastors, bands, writers, activists. You will never be invited to a summit meeting that has the word *geopolitical* anywhere on the agenda, but you still want to be faithful in the station where God has assigned you. What can you do tactically?

1. Think cosmically, act locally. This is of course a rip-off of the progressive bumper sticker which urges us to think globally, act locally. What they mean by that is *think in gauzy abstractions, act irrationally in the moment*. What we mean by it is that Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father, and that all authority in Heaven and on earth has been given to Him, and that therefore we must spend our time discipling all the nations of men, teaching them how to honor and follow Him.

2. Cultivate personal loyalty. Your only absolute loyalty is to God and His Word, but because of this, He has required that you love your wife, love your neighbor, and love your enemy. Everybody you meet will be at least one of those. Not only so, but God has defined for us in His Word what love and loyalty look like in each one of those instances. Your love for God, your loyalty to Him, must be constant. Because it is the one constant, your love and loyalty to your

family and companions, and to adversaries, can look very different at different times. But it must be the same constant thing, *looking* different, not different things, falling apart.

3. Relate everything to the lordship of Jesus Christ. This will help you break down the walls of arbitrary dualisms in your head. Think in such a way that you learn to relate your opposition to gun control, your support of free markets, your love of mercy ministry, your embrace of new media, and so on, to the lordship of Jesus Christ. Doing this makes you a biblical *Christian*, and not a Republican or a right-winger. People will call you that—except for the secular Republicans, who will consider you a dangerous hazard to all their hopes and dreams.

4. Exhibit courage on the individual and family level. Courage is the testing point of every virtue, and the point of every conflict is always local. So, be sure to love and encourage your wife so that she is *with* you in it. Be sure to love and teach your children so that they grow up in such a way as to stand with you in the city gates. Do not neglect your family for the sake of "the cause." Your family is part of the

cause…an essential part. One of John Knox's daughters was named Elizabeth, and she married a great preacher, a man named John Welch. He was exiled to France for many years, until his doctors told him that he would have to return to England for his health. So Elizabeth (Knox) Welch came to the court of King James to seek for permission for him to return. She was told by the king that he could return to England if he would submit to the bishops. She lifted up her apron and said, "Please your majesty, I'd rather kep [receive] his head there." She was on board.

5. Don't be a jerk. Don't let the martial spirit overtake you in such a way as to justify all your personal failings. Of course, if no one ever complains about you,

you aren't doing your job. But it does not follow from this that if people are complaining about you, you *are* doing it.

6. Worship God every Lord's Day. Confess your sins. Sing psalms. Listen to sermons that are preached out of the Bible. Confess your faith. Take the Lord's Supper. Between worship services, read your Bible daily. Pray without ceasing. Read books. Prepare for next Sunday.

7. Provide your children with the best Christian education you can find. There is no excuse for Christians giving their children over to the enemy for their education. There is no sense in giving them over for education in "the neutral parts," for there are no neutral parts. Christian children *must* have a Christian education.

8. Defend free markets at every opportunity. It is not possible to understand the gospel of free grace intelligently if it does not lead to a love for free markets. Free grace creates free men, and free men trade in free markets. If you have a biblical worldview, you cannot be a libertarian. But if you have a biblical worldview, you will be *accused* of being one.

9. Understand the important role of civil disobedience. Do not assume that government regulators have the authority to tell you what the true meaning of Romans 13 is. We *are* to submit to the governing authorities, but not in everything, and not in the ways stipulated by them. Realize that civil disobedience can occur in areas other than worship or gospel preaching. Gideon was threshing in the wine vat because he was hiding from the tax man. The apostle Paul ran a road block at Damascus. David spent a good deal of time in the wilderness evading a man whom he acknowledged to be the Lord's anointed.

10. Do not accept any sexual bribes. Chesterton once noted that free love is the first and most obvious bribe to be offered to a slave.

11. Love and encourage your wife and children constantly. What the world needs first is gospel, and your family is the best place to showcase the gospel to a lost and wandering culture. The gospel must be preached by anointed evangelists, but what we desperately need is a chorus of *amens* coming from families that live out this gospel.

12. Do whatever you can with whatever you have.

13. Utilize social media, but not in a way that identifies you as a vapid waster-of-time on the one hand, or a certifiable crank on the other. If you are the kind of person who sends Instagrams of your breakfast, lunch, and dinner, along with updates on your periodic potty breaks, you are wasting a precious resource. But on the other hand, if you are in deadly earnest all the time and will tweet nothing not found in Leviticus, then we all hope that the concerned furrows on your brow don't stick that way.

14. Cultivate a robust sense of humor. Use irony, satire, and ridicule, as appropriate. Whether or not it is appropriate should not be determined by the target. The target never likes it.

15. Make your adversary live up to his own rules. Turn in papers that act on the assumption of absolute relativism taught in the class. Apply for affirmative action scholarships because of your Scottish descent. Your clan was persecuted in the 14th century, and you are still dealing with it. Have your son try out for the girl's shot put event. Make *them* say, "No, girls are different."

16. Don't fall for abstract calls to repentance, and don't use abstractions to make you look like you are a courageous denouncer of sin. Call for "Repentance! Broadly considered!" and lots of people will call you The Thunderer. But call for repentance for homosexuality, or porn use, or

confiscatory taxation, and people will suddenly say you have become “too political.” You have left off preaching and got to “meddling.”

17. Keep the pressure on, wherever you are on the line. Do not spend your time worrying about how you are going to put out the fires that the adversary sets. Wake up in the morning thinking about the fires you can set. Let *them* be the fire department.

18. Enjoy yourself. God is in control. Jesus is on the throne.

19. *Keep your weapons sharp.* Read. Study. Reflect. Grow.

20. Conflict is always personal, so don’t be shy about keeping it personal. As Alinsky stated in his thirteenth, we are to pick the target, freeze it, personalize it, and polarize it. But there is a caveat. This is a valuable principle, but we have to understand it in a Christian context. Because of the cross of Christ, it is possible to distinguish a sinner and his sin. This means that your adversary might wind up repenting, as Saul of Tarsus did, and if you have trouble with that possibility, you are being vindictive instead of being principled.

21. Accept and acknowledge our ultimate goal: the reestablishment of a mere Christendom. We do not insist on the whole thing now—we *are* incrementalists, and this is a long war—but we know what the point of our labor is. We must know the objective, and that objective, assigned in the Great Commission, is for every tribe and nation to confess the name of Jesus and bow down to Him. We do not believe we have to conquer Canaan in the next ten minutes, but we also don’t believe that we have the right to settle down and make peace treaties with Amorites.

Section 2

Cases *of* Conscience

The metaphor of war can be quite helpful in motivating people to action, but it can also cause a lot of problems. There are things that are permitted in an actual war (such as killing), which should not be tolerated in a metaphorical war, as when a school superintendent declares war on poor spelling. Thus, this second section is devoted to all the *buts* and *how comes* and *are we allowed tos* that crop up once we have accepted (as we should have) the notion of a culture war.

So, in our culture war, what is permitted and what is not?

WAR IS DECEPTION

The ancient Chinese strategist, Sun Tzu, said this: "All warfare is based on deception." For those who accept the lawfulness of warfare, this is not controversial. Pacifists object to deception in warfare, but only because they object to everything else about warfare along with it. But if it is lawful to kill a man at a checkpoint, surely it is lawful to deceive him in order to spare his life.

Few Christians believe that an undercover operative has an obligation to answer truthfully when asked a direct question. "Are you a spy?" "Yes, actually…Thank you for this opportunity to come clean." Still fewer Christians believe that the questioner should be summarily shot in order that the spy might avoid the sin of deceiving somebody.

A man who paints his tank to look like a bush is telling enemy pilots that his tank is a bush when in fact—let us be frank—it is not a bush. God Himself gave the Israelites a strategy that depended upon deception at the second battle of Ai (Josh. 8:2).

Sun Tzu was right—warfare is deception. A good general wants the enemy to believe the opposite of what is actually the case, in as many instances as possible. He wants him to believe he is far away when he is close, and to believe

he is close when he is far away. He wants him to believe he is strong when he is weak, and weak when he is strong.

This is something we have to work through carefully because we are under constraints that the progressives are not under at all. They do not answer to God, and so they behave accordingly. But we are people who serve the Lord, one whose very name is the truth (John 14:6).

How does the nature of war function with the ninth commandment? The ninth commandment strikes at the heart of falsehood and lies, which are the native language of the devil. Without truth and trust, biblical culture is an impossibility. "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Ex. 20:16).

But what is the context of false witness? The commandment prohibits lying against one's *neighbor.* Paul tells the Colossians not to lie to *one another,* because they had put off the old man with his deeds (3:9). Trust is essential to all community, and false witness makes trust impossible. False witness can exist in such a society, but if it is not punished severely, that society will not be a society long. At its base, overt deception is an act of war— "A man who bears false witness against his neighbor is like a club, a sword, and a sharp arrow (Prov. 25:18; *cf.* 12:17–18). The psalmist recognizes this—"false witnesses have risen against me, and such as breathe out violence" (Ps. 27:12).

Bearing false witness is therefore civil war—warfare against one's neighbor, one's brother. It is an act of violence directed against someone with whom you should be at peace. Conversely, if it is lawful to deceive him directly and straight up, it is plainly time for a war that has moved beyond metaphor.

The same distinction exists with this sin as we see with the distinction between murder and just killing. We see godly deception as *an act of honorable war, or in a time that was equivalent to war,* throughout Scripture. God blessed the Hebrew

midwives for lying to Pharaoh (Ex. 1:15–21); He justified Rahab through her deception concerning the Hebrew spies (Jas. 2:25); David feigned madness to get away from Achish the king of Gath (1 Sam. 21:13–15). Such examples can be multiplied in Scripture many times over. The key is covenant—unless a covenant is assaulted or betrayed, the duty of believers is to speak the truth in love (Eph, 4:15). False witness destroys amity. If the amity is already destroyed on other grounds, or if the amity needs to be destroyed, then deception is lawful.

Having said this, we have to remind ourselves that God hates the sin of bearing false witness. “These six things the Lord hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him: a proud look, *a lying tongue,* hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, *a false witness who speaks lies,* and one who sows discord among brethren” (Prov. 6:16–19). God hates seven things, and lying makes the list twice. God sees to it that a liar does not go unpunished—liars will perish and not escape (Prov. 19:5, 9). The lake of fire is reserved for *liars* (Rev. 21:8). Jesus repeats this commandment with others (Mark 10:19).

God does not only prohibit the invention of such lies, He prohibits us from circulating them. “You shall not circulate a false report. Do not put your hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness” (Ex. 23:1). As Thomas Watson put it, very bluntly, it makes little difference if we carry the devil around in our mouth or in our ear.

What then? What is prohibited? How must we guard our lips and ears?

We should begin with the obvious—we have to deal with the sin of outright lies, which means we must r*epent and make restitution.* Restitution means confessing the lie to the appropriate person, the person who was lied to. Whatever it costs to put the lie right, it will cost less than *not* putting it right.

In doing this, we have to reject euphemisms—white lies, exaggerations, spin-doctoring, etc. This just means you are compounding the lies you have told to others with lies you are telling yourself. As Christians we have a duty to cultivate the habit of accuracy of mind—blurry edges, smudgy perspectives, telling just "your side," even if you "honestly" think them to be true at the time you are speaking, are still violations of the ninth commandment.

Truth which is "technically" the truth is just clever lying. If you tell your wife that you are happy that the boss "came in sober today," the fact that this is *true* doesn't keep it from being a lie. Similarly, telling someone just half of the story is actually bad when the other half made all the difference. Many pietistic Christians comfort themselves that this is scrupulous truth-telling, when it really just reveals the subtlety of their hearts. And if such a lie is told to the Gestapo ("Of *course* there are Jews in the basement," followed by a sarcastic laugh), it may be justified on other grounds—just as lying through your teeth would be. ("I am hiding no Jews in the basement.") And if such "technically true" lies are told to your neighbor, your brother, then it cannot be justified under any circumstances.

So then, what we have is a duty to scrupulous truth-telling in a time of peace, and the liberty to use deception after the shooting starts. What about those ambiguous in-between times, times of heightened tension, with the stakes very high, but with no actual bloodshed yet?

Here are several scriptural examples. When Nathan the prophet came to rebuke David for his sin with Bathsheba, he did it by trapping him. He told King David a false story about a man who had his sheep taken by a wealthy neighbor (2 Sam. 12:3–4). David was angry and pronounced judgment on the man, not knowing that he had been deceived into pronouncing judgment on himself. This

was a good and godly deception. Nathan was not in a state of open war with David, but when he came to tell this "lie," he was taking his life in his hands. David had already killed one man to keep this sin secret.

Another example is similar. One of the sons of the prophets deceived Ahab into pronouncing a sentence on himself (1 Kings 20:38–43). He had let Ben-hadad go free, even though God had delivered him into Ahab's hands. The prophet told a parallel story, only on an individual level. In *that* form, the king knew what justice was, and delivered the verdict. He was highly displeased to discover that the verdict circled back and landed on him.

Consequently, Lila Rose taking hidden cameras into abortion clinics is the Lord's work. It is deceptive, and God bless all of it. The hidden cameras that were used to bring down the utterly corrupt ACORN were in the same category. This is deception, but it is not self-serving deception.

Here is the difference. Suppose a man heads up a Christian organization devoted to some aspect of our culture war—a pro-life organization, say. Suppose also that he committed adultery against his wife thirty years before, in the early years of his marriage. His wife knows about it, and they worked through all of that at the time. They have a good marriage now. If the diggers-of-dirt on the other side throw this at him at a press conference, he has a moral obligation before God to do nothing other than to *own the truth*. Lying about it "because we are in a culture war" is to exhibit a high level of confusion.

But take that same man, but this time as one who has been faithful to his wife, who knows that he has a leaker in his organization, and he suspects that he knows who it is, someone who is hacking into computers where he has no right to be. He and his closest adviser exchange e-mails about a supposed "regrettable instance of adultery five years before, and gee, hope nobody finds out about it."

The leaker jumps on it, and the adultery gets thrown in his face at a press conference. “It gives me great pleasure,” he should say, “to announce the successful completion of our most recent sting operation.” That is deception, just like the previous situation, but they are as unlike as night and day. One is deception in the service of deception, and the other is deception in the service of *honesty*. The deception was run for the *sake* of the denouement, so that it could be brought out in the open.

One last category should be noted. There is a kind of deception that occurs in spiritual warfare that is the result of the peculiar kind of blindness that covers the hearts and minds of those who reject God. Paul tells us that God’s open strategy of sending His Son to the cross, so that He would rise again on the third day, was a strategy that was still a closed book to the “rulers of this age.”

“But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, *even* the hidden *wisdom*, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known *it*, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Cor. 2:7–8).

There are certain moves, certain strategies, certain plans, certain ways of thinking, that are God’s version of the purloined letter. God hides some of His best work in plain sight. So should we.

In *The Lord of the Rings*, Sauron made his fatal mistake because he could not comprehend a mindset that could be in possession of the Ring and yet seek to destroy it. This was hidden from him in the ordinary ways, but that is not why it was successfully hidden.

IS THE LANGUAGE OF WAR APPROPRIATE?

I once received a thoughtful letter from a friend asking about the war motif that runs through a bunch of our stuff here in Moscow. My dad's formative book is called *Principles of War*. There is the Canon Press tag "Publishing Is Warfare" that we have had around here for a few decades now. There is New St. Andrew's motto which being translated means "For the faithful, wars shall never cease." We have that darn Van Tilian antithesis underfoot all the time. I had that *Collision* with Christopher Hitchens. My commentary on Hebrews is called *Christ and His Rivals*. The cover of *Future Men* has a couple of boys just a rasslin'. What is this, Wilson Agonistes?

I suppose it would be useless to deny that this is a common theme in what comes out of the suite of ministries here. I actually would not want to deny it—but I am most eager to frame it. Unless such a "warrior" mindset is contextualized rightly, it will soon devour itself. When men have been at war too long, they don't know what to do when the peace treaty is signed…so they hire themselves out as mercenaries. The fighting must continue because that is the only skill set they have.

With that in mind, here are a few thoughts for Christians who consider themselves, as we most certainly do, to be involved in a spiritual war, in a constant, total war. The work of cultural reformation is a contact sport, and there are many issues to keep in mind as we pursue it.

First, Solzhenitsyn rightly said that the line between good and evil runs through every human heart. When you put on the breastplate of righteousness, one of the first things you learn is that there is a treacherous sneak inside the breastplate. So it is important not to fall into a simplistic approach that conveniently locates the bad guys always over "there." It is far more complicated than that.

A second thing is this. The point of fighting is to win the peace. The Church Militant will not be bored in Heaven, sitting around with nothing to do. The Church Militant will have won through to Heaven, and will know what to do when it eventually gets there. In the words of the spiritual, “gonna lay down my sword and shield, down by the riverside.” In the words of Isaiah, we will study war no more—and this will be a blessing, not a grief.

Third, with the antithesis between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent having been established by God in the first few pages of our history, we should take that as a fixed given. Warfare describes the way the world is, and it is not a state of affairs chosen by us. Sheep don’t have to declare war on the wolves. Were the sheep to issue such a declaration, that would not be the beginning of the antipathy between them. Given how sheep think, however, it might be the beginning of an ovine awareness of the war that had been going on a long time before their awareness of it began. Within the Church, it is far more common for flatterers and false teachers to say, “Peace, peace,” when there is no peace, than for them to say, “War, war,” when there is no war. Refusing to use the language of war does not mean that the war is over.

A fourth principle is this—an essential part of maintaining balance in all this is recognizing that the apostle Paul’s argument concerning body life applies to armies and navies as well. This means it applies to spiritual armies and spiritual navies. Anybody who demands that everybody “think strategically like an admiral or general” is…well, he is not thinking strategically like an admiral or general. You need cooks and drivers and mathematicians and technicians and mechanics and snipers and navigators, and to demand that everybody drop what they are doing to do what a strategist in the Pentagon is doing misconstrues the very nature of war. When the bugle blows indistinctly, nobody gets ready for

battle. But when it blows distinctly, thousands move swiftly to do completely different things. It is important to remember that many of the things that are done may not look like fighting—as, for example, playing a bugle.

Fifth, being aware that we are on a constant war footing does not create a license to abolish all the things the enemy would love to abolish, were he to win the conflict. What would the devil love to take away from us were he to win the war? To surrender those things preemptively is actually to surrender the war. In this conflict, you can't lose your merry warriors without losing the war. To surrender those things for the sake of beating him is actually losing to him. I refer, of course, to music on the front porch, reading to the grandkids, lovemaking, cold beer, picnics in the sunshine, rained-out picnics, green beans with pistachios in them, cigars that spread their rich aroma across the deck like a benediction, hiking…

all of these things (and thousands more) are psych-ops for the devil. They are also psych-ops for the fussers in our own ranks. There is a way of fighting the enemy that is actually a process of becoming the enemy.

Grendel hated the glorious song of the scop that could be heard coming from Heorot. The joy of the Lord is our strength. Laughter is war.

SATIRIC BITE

Over the years, one of the most common questions I have received has to do with the use of satire. For some Christians, it is a guilty pleasure, and many others believe that it is out of bounds entirely.

But, as a quick glance at the rough and tumble world of political and cultural engagement will reveal, satire is a very effective and potent tactic. Why should Christians not use this weapon in the culture war that we have been discussing?

And if Christians do, what are the bounds set for it? We are not lawless, and we cannot adopt an "anything goes" approach.

When Jesus makes fun of a Pharisaical double-wide phylactery, it would not be to the point for one of the Pharisees to respond with, "Oh, yeah? Well, *you* have funny sandals!" This is because the clash here was between the seed of the woman and the brood of vipers. It was not a neutral "game" where various penalties and prohibited holds applied equally to both sides. In short, Jesus got to call them white-washed sepulchers, and they did *not* get to call Him a demon-possessed drunkard in return, even though some modern neutrality-mongers might want to say that fairness required it. But the polemical exchange between Christ and the Pharisees was not a neutral game. This means that because of certain unwieldy personal realities like *righteousness* and *unrighteousness*, Jesus had an unfair advantage over them.

So how do we answer this question? Let us imagine a potential satirist who is wondering if he ought to develop this particular "spiritual gift." What questions should he ask and answer? What principles should he follow to help him distinguish satire that will be (in the long run) edifying in the Church from that which will be destructive to the Church? What must we remember when we are engaged in a battle of wits in the public square?

The following list is not exhaustive, but I do believe it answers the basic questions that might be raised. Checklists should never be employed in a mechanical and quantitative way, but if that is kept in mind, I think these principles should be helpful, especially since they are geared more to the character of the satirist than to an abstraction like "good satire."

1. A godly satirist should be a member of a worshiping community of orthodox and faithful Christians, and he should live in such a way as to be

accountable to others for his words and actions. He should not be the sole judge and arbiter of the words that come from his mouth and keyboard. He should be one who knows how to live fruitfully in community with other Christians (Eph. 5:21).

2. A godly satirist should be steeped in the language and categories of Scripture. This should be done through constant reading and rereading, and/or listening repeatedly to Scripture on audio. Spurgeon said of Bunyan that if you pricked him anywhere, his blood would run bibline. It should be the same here (2 Tim. 3:16–17).

3. A godly satirist should have a warm and affectionate relationship with his wife, sons, daughters, mother, and father. No close member of his family should flinch when he walks into the room (Col. 3:19, 21).

4. A godly satirist should be well-educated, well-read in the kind of literature that he is seeking to contribute to. A good ear comes not only from practice, but also from listening long and thoughtfully to those who are gifted and have practiced the same art. The list would include individuals who are not worthy of imitation in every respect (*e.g.* Swift, Mencken) and it should include those who are genuine exemplars (*e.g.* Spurgeon, Chesterton).

5. A godly satirist should study to learn the quantitative boundary between satire and scurrility, knowing from the outset that there *is* such a boundary. It is easy to pretend that there is no "logical" difference whatever between 37 lashes and 42 lashes, but the Scriptures say that the former is not necessarily degrading and the latter necessarily is (Deut. 25:1–3).

6. A godly satirist should study the *qualitative* difference between satire and scurrility. This is a matter of timbre and tone. No mechanical rules can be set down for it, but it is a very important distinction to make (Heb. 5:14). It is the

shrillness or “screech” test. The ability to tell the difference between right and wrong in this kind of thing is a matter of long practice and godly maturity.

7. A godly satirist should not be too young. Paul tells Timothy not to ordain a *neophyte*, what Tyndale translated as “young scholar” (1 Tim. 3:6). The reason for this is to avoid the snare of the devil. An acid tongue is frequently a diabolical tongue. In his *Table Talk*, Martin Luther once quoted an old instructor of his who had long wondered how St. Jerome, God’s grouch, had ever gotten saved. But old and crotchety men come from somewhere, and where they come from is young men who were promoted too soon and too rapidly (usually because of native intellectual ability) to positions that then go to their heads. Because satire assumes a stance of rhetorical superiority, there is a real snare in it for certain young men. So native ability is no substitute for seasoned experience. And if I may speak autobiographically here, I was in my thirties before I began using satire in any kind of consistent way, and I was well into my forties before anybody noticed.

8. A godly satirist should *target* lack of proportion, not *exhibit* lack of proportion (Matt. 23:24).

9. A godly satirist should look carefully (and regularly) at the effect he is having on younger Christians who know him and desire to imitate him (2 Cor. 11:1). Does their imitation of him lead regularly to relational disasters in their lives? Does their imitation cause one firestorm after another in the church? Or do they, using wisdom, imitate more than just the *fact* that their mentor occasionally uses satire, and go on to make appropriate distinctions having to do with objects, levels, occasions, warrant, and so on? If the imitator is becoming more and more like the satirist, is this a matter that causes dismay in all godly observers? Or is it something that encourages them?

10. A godly satirist should have long experience in letting love cover a multitude of sins (1 Pet. 4:8). He should not be the kind of man who *consistently* gets bad service in restaurants. One of his chief characteristics in his day-to-day living should be his *patience* (Gal. 5:22). Road rage should be an alien temptation for him.

11. A godly satirist should be courageous. Lawful satire is leveled at targets that know how to defend themselves, and that *will* defend themselves. As King Lune of Archenland put it, “Never taunt a man save when he is stronger than you: then, as you please.” Lawful satire is a challenge to engage; nothing is more unbecoming than to act surprised when the challenge is received and answered. Don’t start what you are not prepared to finish.

12. A godly satirist should be a man who knows how to humble himself in order to seek forgiveness from others for sins he has committed (Jas. 5:16). If he is too proud to humble himself when he has sinned, then he is too proud for this calling.

13. A godly satirist should not be an *angry* man. His demeanor should generally be jolly, not angry. Man’s anger does not advance God’s righteousness (Jas. 1:20). Anger, even when it is righteous (Eph. 4:26), is like manna and goes bad overnight (Eph. 4:27). Occasions of anger are appropriate (as Christ’s example shows us in Mk. 3:5), but if it is an accurate description of a man’s general demeanor, he should not even think about satire.

14. A godly satirist should not have “little man syndrome,” meaning that he should not employ satire because he has something deep inside to prove, usually to his father. If he is trying to make the little voices in his head go away, he should be aware that the use of satire only inflames them.

15. A godly satirist must be free of all envy. James tells us that truly destructive battles occur within the church because of envy (Jas. 4:1–6). This means that a satirist must be sure in his heart that he is not in any envious way dazzled or bewildered by that which he is attacking. The history of polemical exchanges has seen more than a few moralistic denouncers of immorality whose real beef was that they were not getting any. Envy operates on the philosophy that if "I can't have it, nobody should have it," and this can easily be expressed through moralistic denunciations. But the prophet Nathan would not have been able to deal with David rightly if Nathan had been secretly desiring Bathsheba for himself. Envious satire is brittle satire, and not very effective.

16. A godly satirist should know the difference between weakness and arrogance, and, as far as possible, reserve his arrows for the latter. No doubt sometimes the former are caught in the crossfire—some simple widow in Israel probably thought that the gold sanctified the altar because her rabbi had told her that. Christ's words of rebuke were directed at the rabbi, but His words still had some relationship to her. In the same way, if I were to attack some huckster televangelist for telling people to send ten dollars to get an anointed cloth to put on the top of their television in order to juice up the healing power of his weekly show, this attack *does* affect those simple souls who are getting fleeced. And some of them may indeed take offense because their spiritual master is being insulted. But this is not the intent—the main target needs to be those who know better.

17. A godly satirist needs to read widely in church history, particularly in ancient disputes. This will dislodge the very provincial notion that the current rules of academic etiquette are somehow binding on all generations of the Church. Scripture is the norm, not our current traditions. A good way to check

ourselves is by looking at how Scripture was applied by other generations of the Church. C.S. Lewis's essay on the reading of old books in *God in the Dock* is apropos here. Other generations are not the authority—Scripture is. But getting to know others who read and apply the same passages you know, but in a very different way, is a healthy spiritual exercise.

18. A godly satirist must love to sing all the psalms that God has given us (Eph. 5:19). Nothing serves like the psalms if the goal is to nurture and restore a vertebrate church. In these days of the invertebrate church, the satirist is thought to be the pestilent fellow, and *he* is the one who has to be put out in order to restore peace. The object of his satirical observations might be the lesbian bishop who thinks the central message of Romans is about global warming, but the more he says or writes anything about it, the more it is *his* behavior that is thought to be clearly "unscriptural." Right—like, who cares about *that* anymore?

19. A godly satirist should not be stuck on one speed (Ecc. 3:1–8). All satire, all the time, would be tolerable for about forty-five minutes. We are to weep with those who weep, laugh with those who laugh, encourage the downcast, rebuke the arrogant and powerful, comfort the afflicted, and (here is where satire can come in) afflict the comfortable. This means that we cannot have a "one-response-fits-all-situations" approach. If I might be permitted one more personal reference, satire is just a tiny fraction of our ministry here. In other words, I have written not only *A Serrated Edge* but also *My Life For Yours*. Satire is just a small portion of what goes on in the pages of *Credenda*—I suspect that for many, turning to the Cave of Adullam *first* is a guilty pleasure, and if they don't read further, they might come to assume that this is all we do. But the principle is that satiric response needs to be held in balance and tension with all the other

appropriate responses that Scripture calls us to. And that balance means that satire occupies a clear minority position.

20. A godly satirist should hate what is evil. The fear of God is not only the beginning of knowledge, but it is also defined as the hatred of evil. “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate” (Prov. 8:14, KJV).

21. A godly satirist should love what is good (Tit. 2:14). He should be motivated by a love that seeks to defend what is noble and right, or weak and defenseless, and not be motivated by a bitterness that seeks to bite and tear (Gal. 5:13–15).

As God’s people, we are called to gentleness. But the point must be constantly made that there is no virtue or vice in a transitive verb. If a policeman is gentle with the rapist, he is harsh with the rapist’s victim. If a shepherd is gentle with wolves, he is being harsh with the sheep. We must learn when and how we are to be gentle (for we are to be gentle people), and we must also learn when and how we are to be hard (and as pointed) as nails.

APOLOGY THEOLOGY

Life in community is hard, and life in large community is even harder. When we have angered someone we didn’t want to anger, or hurt someone we ought not to have hurt, we should be eager to put it right, and we should *act* like we are eager to put it right (Prov. 15:1). When we offend someone we were *intending* to offend, and we had good biblical reasons for intending that, we should do our level best to be what I call Tom Petty Presbyterians—don’t back down. Don’t climb down either. Above all, don’t crawl.

This is complicated even further when one action (say a book or article) draws both responses—one from the target group and another from what might be called the collateral damage group. You have to respond fittingly to both groups. And if 95% of the damage was with the surrounding civilian population, that is what should be called "missing," and fulsome apologies are in order. But even there, apologies are not extended to the group that was originally and lawfully targeted.

Anyone who has not noticed that "demands for apologies" have become one of the central political and cultural tactics of our day has simply not been paying attention. Like many effective tactics, it depends on an impulse that was originally good and right. It is the old Pottery Barn rule—you break it, it's yours. Everybody knows that. But in our hyper age, we have gotten to the point where old high school pranks can be hauled out in presidential campaigns. This is simply pathological.

So a Christian must always distinguish those who want you to apologize so that the relationship can be restored, and those who do it to steer and manipulate you. There is a vast chasm between the two. What I mean is that the principle involved here is not subtle, even though the practical side of it can be challenging.

If you step into the arena of cultural engagement, and if you are at all effective, it will not be long before someone is calling upon you to apologize. It will be about ten minutes after that when a number of your Christian friends take you aside to urge you to consider apologizing.

This can even be challenging with just two people (depending on which two it is), but when you are dealing with hundreds of people, or thousands, the level of difficulty rises exponentially. But, as I just mentioned, this is a practical

difficulty, not a theoretical one. Life is simple. You want to apologize to those you owe one to, and you want to refuse to apologize to those you don't own one to. But life is also complicated. Who belongs to each group?

This is why James tells us that not many should want to become teachers (Jas. 3:1) because teachers work with words, and where words are many, sin is not absent (Prov. 10:19). The tongue is compared to a small fire in a bone dry forest (Jas. 3:5–6), and teachers are those who work in the woods all the time. There are trees all around, in every direction.

Here are some scriptural examples of the kind of thing I am talking about. The apostle Paul wrote some white hot rebukes to the saints at Galatia, but he also wanted to be present with them so that he would be able *to change his tone* with them (Gal. 4:20). He knew that his communication needed to be calibrated in real time, and he knew this even when his written words were the inspired word of God. How much more is face-to-face communication necessary in contextualizing *uninspired* words?

When fellow Christians are among those who have taken up a grievance, it is appropriate to seek, multiple times, to arrange for face-to-face meetings with such brothers. If you are refused, then you should take that into account when trying to evaluate the sincerity of the grievance.

Then there was the time when the apostle Paul issued a qualified apology, that is, one that was not straightforward and simple. He was on trial before the Sanhedrin, and when he defended himself by saying his conscience was clean, the high priest ordered him to be struck on the mouth (Acts 23:2). Paul's eyesight was apparently not very good, and he didn't know who had given that order. He said "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall…" (Acts 23:3). When he was informed that it was the high priest he was talking to, he corrected himself,

in effect explaining that his mistake was made in ignorance, while at the same time applying the Scriptures to himself under his new understanding. He apologized, but it was most certainly qualified. That qualification was not "spin." Had the order come from the kind of person Paul had originally thought it had, he would have apologized for nothing.

Keep in mind this was the same body that had murdered Jesus. You offer apologies in accordance with what Scripture requires of you, and this may or may not be in accordance with the desires of those who receive the apology. Also keep in mind that Ananias *was* a whited wall. Paul apologized for saying it, not for thinking it. He apologized because the context turned out to be different than what he had assumed.

Then there is another angle. There was the time when Jesus insulted the scribes and Pharisees, and some lawyers took up the offense, and said that His words insulted them also (Luke 11:45). The Lord's response to that was to thank them for the reminder, and to say "Woe unto you, ye lawyers…" (Luke 11:46). He was asked for an apology to a "collateral damage" group, and what He did was simply expand the target zone.

In a little known episode from the Old Testament, one time John Knox wrote a small missive aimed at a tyrannical woman, Bloody Mary. That pamphlet was entitled *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*. Unfortunately, after the rock left Knox's hand, Mary died and was replaced by Elizabeth, a Protestant. She was a Protestant, unlike Mary, but she was also a woman, *like* Mary, and when the rock bounced off her forehead, she was displeased, which is something Elizabeth knew how to be. Knox labored to explain and beg pardon, but it was a tough audience. There are times when

“that’s not what I meant” is a difficult sell. Oh, well. Church history staggered on regardless.

So returning to the top, we need to distinguish between those who demand apologies as a weapon, and those who want to see genuine reconciliation. Beware of the claque of accusers, the that’s-not-good-enoughers, and the deeply grieved. Sometimes it involves race, and a lot of times it doesn’t. When it involves race, we should make a point of factoring in the very real problem of racial sensitivity scam artists. They are out there, and there are a lot of them. One of the central reasons there are a lot of them is because the sins of white people against blacks were the kinds of inexcusable sins that spanned centuries, and hence created a vast quarry in which the scam artists may labor happily for many years to come.

Because conflict is the kind of thing it is, there have been times over the years when I have owed an apology in the midst of conflict, and there are times when I have owed an apology to those whose sole interest was to take me out. I have, under such circumstances, offered the apology regardless of whether or not I believed it would be either ignored or used against me. God is the one who sees everything, and He knows the heart. *He* is the one who requires it. But in such settings, it must be offered in submission to God, and never in surrender to the enemies of grace. Paul apologized to the Sanhedrin because Ex. 22 required it, and not because Ananias was wiping his eyes.

In the work of cultural reformation, we are up against regiments of people who are perpetually aggrieved. We must not labor in such a way as to perpetuate something that is already trying to be perpetual. In a discussion of same sex marriage, David French once stated a profound truth: “It took me a long time to

realize the following truth: No matter how compassionate, charitable, winsome, and kind you are, if you oppose the sexual revolution you are the enemy."

And this is precisely why Christians need to learn how to not care at all about certain things, and to care enormously about others. This is what I mean by having thick skin and a tender heart. Hint: this "caring" response must not be measured and evaluated by the state-certified Curators of the Perpetual Grievance. They figured out (a long time ago) how to use the tender consciences of Christians against them. It is time that we got wise to that game. The fact that God knows our many faults (Ps. 130:3) does not mean that *they* have a right to bring charges against us (Ps. 31:13). David had many faults, and he was often attacked *with* them—but he was not attacked *for* them.

Think of it this way: "With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you…" (1 Pet. 4:4, ESV).

When they are surprised, we ought not to be. We ought not to be surprised when we don't join them, obviously, and we ought not to be surprised when they malign us for it, just as the apostle Peter outlined for us in the briefing beforehand.

Christians are trained—catechized—to care about the testimony we have with the world. This is important, as Peter does mention in the passage that follows. When we suffer, it ought not be because of murder, or theft, or doing evil, or as a busybody (v. 15). If you are being an outlaw, or a jerk, or a Comstockian fusser, and then cry persecution when called on it, that really is a problem. But once Christians learn this lesson about the importance of a good testimony, they almost always start policing their own ranks in a way that ignores what Peter says in all the surrounding context.

We don’t have a poor testimony just because a bunch of “outraged” pagans have agreed to claim that we do. When some Christian says something that is not politically correct, and the baddies all go into outrage mode, calling for apologies, we have to understand that *they are running a play* from their handbook.

If we go through a fiery trial, we ought not to think that “some strange thing” is happening (v. 12). If we partake in Christ’s sufferings (which includes being slandered), Peter says that we are to rejoice. This lines up with what Jesus taught us on the same subject (Matt. 5:12). If you are reproached for the name of Christ, then you are happy—and the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you (v. 14).

This is why, in the Olympic games of our culture wars, it is possible to win a gold medal from God when a bunch of your fellow Christians are embarrassed even to look at you. And that is also why this particular kind of gold medal doesn’t usually go to your head—you can’t hear the national anthem over all the sobbing, and the podium you are standing on is barely visible any more because of the great heap of rotting produce, dead cats, and other objects of questionable origin.

So here is the key. When you are reproached for the sake of Christ, the adversary will almost never issue a press release saying that you are being attacked because you are such a fine Christian. Why would they do that? The point of slander is to make the slander stick. And the point of gullible Christians is to believe them, try to witness to them while staying in line (according to them), and to upbraid you for having provoked them so.

OPPORTUNITY FAIL

A story is told of a man who was going to be hanged, and this was back in the day when such events were done in public. A crowd had of course gathered, and the convicted criminal was given an opportunity to take five minutes to address the crowd. The criminal declined, just wanting to get it over with. At that moment, another fellow, who was running for Congress, jumped up and asked if he could have the five minutes. The moral of the story is that the meaning of propriety is important. Not every opportunity is an opportunity, if you follow what I mean. Someone who takes every opening, who jumps on every opportunity to talk about what is on his mind, is either an opportunist, or someone who comes off like one.

In the days of instant turnaround response created by Twitter, and numerous blogs, and Facebook, this is something we need to be very careful about. In some ways, the entire news cycle has changed, affecting everyone, but in other ways, the principles are the same. Our response times will be faster than they were fifty years ago, but there are still limits and boundaries. The only difference between salad and garbage is timing.

Take for example, the school shooting in Newtown, Connecticut in 2012. Whenever you have to deal with anything like that, something that simply crushes the heart, it is important to think carefully before speaking or writing. This is not the time to be debating gun control, drone attacks in the Middle East, and it is certainly not the time to be drawing ham-fisted comparisons to the abortion carnage. The reason for this is that the parents who were broken over the tragedy were parents who had chosen life, not parents who hadn't.

The issue is not relevance, but demeanor and spirit, in this case measured by timing. The issue is not whether you are *right*, but whether you are right all the way down. If you do not know what spirit you are of (Luke 9:55), the wrongness

down below will eventually work its way to the surface, and one day you will find yourself among the Westboro Baptists, shrieking at people.

Suppose you lived in a neighborhood where a horrific murder took place, and the grieving family members were clustered on the front lawn. Suppose the neighbor on one side of the victim's family was a salesman for security systems, and he believes that had they only purchased it last month like he asked, all this could have been prevented. And suppose the neighbor on the other side of them had a bad experience with that very same security system, and started to argue with the salesman neighbor about it. Does it really matter who is right?

Let me illustrate it another way. I believe I can say without controversy that I have dedicated a significant part of my life to getting Christian children out of the government school system. Those are my convictions, and I haven't altered them. I am a declared and open foe of the whole system, as I think many may have gathered by this time. And yet, I want to say that Victoria Soto, the first grade public school teacher who gave her life for her students, *was everything a teacher ought to be*. There is no greater love than that (John 15:13). There is no finer teacher than that; she was no hireling (John 10:13). And I don't care whether she was a member of the Connecticut Education Association. If she was, then a member of the CEA crowned her teaching career with greater glory than I have done. If my politics on the thing blunt my ability to see *that*, I am more ideological than principled.

Dragging in irrelevant issues is obviously wrong-headed because the issues are irrelevant. Relevant issues—like abortion and gun control—need to be brought in at the right time, and at just the right time. If you crowd them in early, you come off like an opportunist trying to sell something. If you bring them up after the memory of the tragedy has faded completely, you have missed a genuine

opportunity. If the security system salesman had a good heart, and a good security system, he would have had a long talk with his wife that night about what they do to make the neighborhood safer, and they would do so in a way that would likely be appreciated.

My father taught me many years ago that the point is to win the man, not the argument. If you win the man, the argument follows. And if you have won the man's attention and respect, you will have the opportunity to present an argument that will be heard.

There are issues that we must address, and address in the near future. But I don't just want to say them with no one listening. That is not a prophetic voice—that is just venting. In the aftermath of this, we will make decisions, and we shouldn't make stupid ones. As we debate those issues, we must do so intelligently.

As Christians, we must begin with the gospel issues. We have to know and understand that we cannot cultivate a culture of death and expect life to be honored and respected in that culture. The abortion culture has had consequences, and if you compare Obama's remarks on the value of life with his abortion record, the irony really is flabbergasting. We need to say so, but we need to say so at the right time—not because the issues are unimportant, but rather because they really are crucial.

We will also debate gun control. But if people are introducing legislation before the funerals are held, the only thing we should say in response is that we believe that respect for the victims dictates waiting until a more appropriate time before we get into it. When we get there, which will be pretty soon, another issue (a relevant one) that must be placed on the table is the place of prescription drugs in all this—in the last ten years, out of all the school shootings by young

people, what prescription drugs were they on? May we talk about that? Yes. When the time is more appropriate, and that will be soon enough.

School shootings happen in the *polis*, and they are therefore political. But someone who is principled, and not an opportunist, knows that something ill-timed, however true in its own right, will be chalked up in the opposite category. If you bless your neighbor with a loud voice first thing in the morning, he knows how to categorize it (Prov. 27:14).

So none of this means that abortion is irrelevant to this tragedy, for it certainly is not, but we want to make sure we locate it as a clear point of *gospel* relevance. Otherwise we just come off as opportunists who are just looking for a chance to haul the topic of conversation over to a particular hobby horse. But in the aftermath of something sick like a school shooting, we need to reconnect with the permanent things. If we don't point to transcendental realities in a time like this—gospel truths—then we might as well sign a peace treaty with the darkness now.

I have often said that nativity sets should include a set of Herod's soldiers—that is as much a part of the Christmas story as the shepherds, or the star, or the wise men. These traditional figures all glorified Christ in His coming, but the reality of such bloody soldiers was the *reason* He came. Nothing illustrates the need for His mission to us better than that appalling loss to Ramah. An early English carol, "Unto Us is Born a Son," has a verse that understands this juxtaposition of humility and adoration over against the haughtiness of pride and blood.

> This did Herod sore affray,
> And grievously bewilder
> So he gave the word to slay,
> And slew the little childer,
> And slew the little childer.

And Rachel wept for her children, for they were no more.

Two things should stand out about this. First, while I noted that the immediate aftermath of such a tragedy is not the time to call out those who would use the tragedy to promote gun control—or to call them names on the Internet—we *must* confront those who would continue their lock-down policies of gospel control. And by gospel, I mean the whole counsel of God for a lost and sinful race—the restored order of things, repentance for sin, and true faith in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. If you want a society which refuses to name the name of Jesus, and yet is somehow free from these sorts of outrages, you want something that this sinful world cannot ever provide.

We can have no salvation without a Savior. God sent a Savior to us, and we have no saviors of our own, just a lot of pretenders. His invitation to our generation is the same as it has been for every generation, and it is "come with me." We cannot be saved unless we do.

It is not possible to build a culture around a *denial* of God-given standards, and then arbitrarily reintroduce those standards at your convenience, whenever you need a word like *evil* to describe what has just happened. Those words cannot just be whistled up from the place where we exiled them. If we have banished them, and their definitions, and every possible support for them, we need to reckon with the fact that they are now *gone*.

Cultural unbelief, which leads inexorably to cultural nihilism and despair, is utterly incapable of responding appropriately to things like this, while remaining fully capable of creating them. In the prophetic words of C.S. Lewis, "In a sort of ghastly simplicity we remove the organ and demand the function. We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honour

and are shocked to find traitors in our midst. We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful."

So the school shooting was horrendous, but far worse is the fact that our blind seers have no idea what to say about it. The horror happened, and it was immediately followed by the horror of countless individuals saying wildly inappropriate things about it. We have monsters in our midst, and vapidity in our highest council chambers, not to mention the monsters there too, and *all* of them want to slouch toward Bethlehem. God have mercy.

And this leads to the second thing that stands out. The reason we need to have fixed and God-given standards is not so that we might climb up some moralistic ladder, rebuilding a mythical past where these sorts of things didn't happen to us. No, these sorts of things have always happened. We live on a screwed-up planet. We must have a God-given, fixed standard *so that we may know why we need forgiveness so much*. God's law is not to pat us on the back and tell us what fine fellows we are. God's law is given to provide a proper shape for our repentance. In moments like this, we are aghast, but our "repentance" is formless and void. We need the shape of God's holy Word so that we know how shapeless we have become. We need the Spirit of God to move on our chaotic waters.

And here is where abortion really is relevant, along with all the other awful things we do to children. We do not need to talk about these things as *political* issues—however appropriate and necessary that may be in its time and place. But before we can even think about that, we need to come to grips with the fact that, at the personal level, it is plain that an aching blood-guilt rests upon our nation. I am not talking about our officials, though they are included. I am talking about the millions of us who have occasioned it, paid for it, obtained it, provided it, and funded it. According to Scripture, blood is something that

returns to those who shed it. It also returns to the land where it was shed. And our vast reservoir of guilt is larger and deeper than it has ever been.

The only blood that does not return with compounded guilt is the blood of Jesus. His blood comes to us for cleansing, and not for condemnation. His blood does not return with guilt, and it is the only way that all the other guilt can be prevented from returning to us. An old gospel song points the only way to our salvation—"nothing but the blood of Jesus." *Nothing*.

So we must confess that while the spirit of Christ is alive in the world, the spirit of Herod is not yet gone. And the only way to expel that kind of darkness is to boldly proclaim that Jesus came into this world precisely to destroy *this* kind of darkness through His death and resurrection. He was born in Bethlehem from Mary, and He was born again in Jerusalem, the first born from the dead. His grave, just like Mary, was full of grace.

This is a darkness that must be confronted, and it can only be confronted by believers who are prepared to wield the gospel—not as a sectarian talking point, but as real gospel for real sin, real balm for real pain, real light for real darkness. So go find your kids, hug the little childer, thank God for the life that is in them, and teach them the Christmas story. We need it so much.

Section 3

A Theology *of* Resistance

Chesterton said that once we know the beginning we know the "form." Many Christian activists and reformers are in the position of being activists and reformers because they *see*—they anticipate, they look forward, they can run out the consequences. If they were in a position to do so, they would be good providers for our society. The word *provide* comes from two Latin words, meaning *to see beforehand*. You can give the provision because you saw it coming. How does this work in a culture war? To understand what's going on in reformers' minds and behind radicals' blindness, we need a mature theology of resistance. And that is the subject of Section Three.

When someone sees ordinary things coming—springtime and harvest, for example—he is considered diligent. The sluggard is surprised by the arrival of winter. He wants desperately, but has nothing (Prov. 13:4). He is reduced to begging in the time of harvest (Prov. 20:4). But can you warn him beforehand? Not a bit of it—he is wiser in his own conceits than seven men with good reasons (Prov. 26:16).

When someone sees extraordinary things coming—the famine that threatened Egypt, for example—he is considered a prophet like Joseph. When someone truly identifies future things in a way that is not consistent with chance, we say that he is a prophet of God (Is. 41:23). And (in a movie) if someone were able to predict the winning lottery numbers, we would say it was clairvoyance…or cheating.

But when someone sees damnation coming to someone, the more his prediction is confirmed, the more it is discounted and despised. This applies to individuals who are in the process of apostasy, and it applies to cultures that are coming apart. Those who anticipate, those who see, those who predict, are like Cassandra, speaking the truth and never believed. This is because of the very

nature of damnation. When someone is spiraling toward the darkness, the light doesn't get any better as he goes. This is happening to them because they can't see. This is what a judicial stupor *is*.

Let me illustrate it with individuals first, and then move on to our culture at large. Suppose you have two partners in a business, fast friends. They have strong fellowship together, and are very much of one mind (Ps. 56:14). After a few years, one of them starts to say and do some strange things—reading odd books, watching movies he shouldn't, dropping the random comment here and there. The two friends talk about it, agreeing to disagree at the end, but the healthy friend remains worried. Then one day something happens that makes a bigger confrontation necessary. Not the end of the world, but it needs to be addressed. Suppose the one friend says to the other, in a spirit of frank earnestness, that if you keep this up, if you keep thinking like this, if you continue going in this direction, you are going to wind up divorcing your wife, and you will run off with some teenage boy who wants to become a model in Manhattan. And after you are gone, we will discover how much money you embezzled. *Don't do this to me, man.* The other friend is shocked and denies all of it. *That could never happen. It saddens me to think…*

Now—five years later, he divorces his wife, runs off with a boy who was thirteen when the prediction was made, and the auditor calls the remaining partner with some bad news. And the point is this. For the person who is apostatizing, for the person who is falling away, the accuracy of the predictions made beforehand does not in any way confirm that he is in the wrong. The nature of doing wrong is *self-will*, with the outside world and all its facts considered to be irrelevant. To the extent they are thought about at all, they are

just an additional grievance. Every confirmation of the truth after the event is filed in the how-dare-he file.

This is our position as we are trying to confront our nation. Each new outrage is met with a new set of predictions, and is answered with a fusillade of denunciations, denials, and curses. Homosexual marriage doesn't mean polygamy, you bozo. Polygamy doesn't mean sanctioned pederasty, you bozo. Then, three weeks after the ink is dry on the Gay-Is-The-New-Straight legislation, who do you find testifying before Congress? Is it the Big Love family? What a shock. But if you hope that pointing out that you called this shot beforehand and that it was stoutly denied beforehand by everybody in the room, will convince anybody in the room now, you are living in a dream world. Winning an argument, with documents and everything, is not what brings repentance.

This is because cultural damnation is denial of God, denial of the truth, denial of reason, denial of what is obvious, and it is denial of all these things, *no matter what*. Absolutely anything can be repulsed (and will be repulsed) by a heart in this condition. A private heart in this condition cannot repent. A public mind in this condition cannot repent. There is nothing, absolutely nothing, that can cause the old heart to see. And that is why, when the Spirit moves, He does what He does by giving a new heart.

And when He does that, nothing can stop Him.

A PUBLIC MIND

John Bunyan spent a number of years in jail, and it was not for preaching the gospel, as is commonly supposed. He was there for preaching the gospel *without a license*.

A lot of modern Christians, far more cooperative than they ought to be, will immediately wonder why Bunyan didn't hie himself down to the Department of Preaching Licenses, and stand in line like a good boy. The answer has to do with the nature of lawful authority. How do jurisdictions work?

Now the issue I am raising does not have to do with whether or not Bunyan made the right call. My point is that he lived in a time when men had to make such calls regularly, and they knew what the issues were when they did so. We are not so fortunate. We tend to assume that if the existing authorities tell us to do anything short of swearing an oath to worship Satan, then we have to do it. This does not exhibit a mature theology of resistance.

Certain truths lie right on the surface of the Bible, and this is why true Christians generally do well in times of overt persecution. When they are commanded to bow down to an idol, they know that Daniel's three friends refused to do so (Dan. 3:16). When they are commanded to stop spreading the gospel, they know that this was the point where the apostles refused to cooperate (Acts 5:29).

Where Christians don't do as well is when times are relatively peaceful, and they are asked to do something that seems relatively minor, but which surrenders the jurisdictional principle. Another way of saying this is that Christians do better when the trap has sprung than they do in refusing to take the bait.

> And when they were come, they say unto him, Master, we know that thou art true, and carest for no man: for thou regardest not the person of men, but teachest the way of God in truth: Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not? Shall we give, or shall we not give? But he, knowing their hypocrisy, said unto them, Why tempt ye me? bring me a penny, that I may see it. And they brought it. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? And they said unto him, Caesar's. And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. And they marvelled at him. (Mark 12:14–17, KJV)

This exchange is often misread. Jesus was asked whether it was lawful to pay tribute to Caesar or not. The way the encounter is frequently read, the answer

Jesus gives is “yes, it is lawful.” But why would an affirmative answer to a simple binary question cause them to marvel at Him? Much more is going on here than is immediately obvious to us.

They were trying to trap Jesus with a question of tax policy, and Jesus answered by pointing to two different kinds of coin. One coin had the image of Caesar on it, and it was therefore lawful in principle to give that back to Caesar. That which has Washington’s image on it may be sent back to Washington. That which has “Federal Reserve Note” printed on it may be mailed back to the Federal Reserve. But Jesus did not just say that they should render Caesar’s image back to him—He said that something should be rendered back to God *and not to Caesar*. What would that be?

The answer is that we are coin from God’s mint. We are created in the image of God, and are therefore *forbidden* to render ourselves to Caesar. We give one thing to Caesar and another to God. We may not render it all to Caesar. It is prohibited. And they marveled at Him.

Now this creates a line that must not be crossed, and it also creates a host of questions about that line. I do not want to minimize how legitimately complicated such questions can get—Bunyan was imprisoned by a Christian nation for refusing to go through normal channels to get a blessing to preach.

But there are other times when it is not complicated at all, and it only seems complicated because of our own cowardice. We live in a time when the ruling elite formally denies that we are in fact created in the image of God. That is considered by them to be a legal and jurisdictional irrelevance. And so it is that they reserve to themselves the right to seize property, ban the sale of Big Gulps, and fine Christian photographers who don’t want to record the joy and laughter

of a perverse union. *The issue is not the dollar amount*. The issue is the jurisdictional claim implicit in the ruling. What are they saying it means?

A COIN FROM GOD'S MINT

If I am God's coin, I don't need to know my monetary value to Him to know whether or not this coin can be rendered to Caesar. I may be a penny and I may be a ten dollar bill, but in either case, I may not make any payments to Caesar from this account. I just need to know that God's image is on me, and that God's image is being restored in me through Christ.

Is it lawful for Christians to drive on a toll road? Can they throw two quarters in the basket and drive on with a clean conscience? Sure thing. But what if the existing authorities reduced the price in one way and raised it in another? Suppose the toll was just a quarter, but a sign over the toll booth said "Artemis Turnpike," and you had to say *Hail Artemis* to the sullen occupant of the booth before depositing your quarter. Is that what your conscience costs? A quarter?

So the issue is never the *amount*. The issue is what it means. And because we live in a culture that formally denies that we are created in God's image, we ought to be having many more clashes than we are. This is why the theory of evolution is such a big issue—the theory of evolution is a jurisdictional claim that the devil is making. If we were not created in the image of God, then this means that we have no jurisdictional appeal beyond Caesar. If there is no God above Caesar, then Caesar is God. If there is a God in Heaven, and He has placed His image on us, then this absolutely requires the biblical concept of limited government.

It is easy to recognize that this is a complicated subject. We know that there will be turmoil when we get to the point of conflict, and there will be questions

we cannot answer. There will be tangles. That's all right. What is *not* over our head is the realization that we will very soon be in over our heads.

Because we live in a universe, created by the one true God, this means that everything is connected. Every subject is related. Every move the government makes is connected to something else. Congress passes a law and three months later, in Brazil, a butterfly flaps its wings.

What we need is for God to give us the grace of being able to see this. We need to see all the connections—and we need to do this without becoming conspiracybots. We need to see all the connections—not as plot points in the grand conspiracy, but rather as the threads in a tightly-woven tapestry. We need for God to give us seers, *who see the world whole and entire*.

Because we confess that Jesus is the God/man, the only one who is equally at home both in Heaven and on earth, this liberates us from every pretender and poser down here who wants to be the final anything. There are quite a few of those guys, incidentally. Apart from Christ, all sorts of people, in black robes and white lab coats, want to be the final word. They want to act like they are pacing back and forth on the widow's walk of humanity's great house, gazing heroically out to sea, under the azure sky, when they are actually down in the crawl space trying to suppress those darn coughing fits.

So here is the foundational principle: *Jesus is Lord and Caesar is not.*

Everything else in all political economy is a footnote to that profound and glorious reality. And we don't need to pray in order to make that true. It was true before any of us were born. But we should pray that God gives us the vision to see and believe that. Why should we believe that? Well, we are called *believers*, after all.

JABBA THE HUTT WITH A THYROID PROBLEM

Chesterton observed—and why wouldn't he?—that we drastically misunderstand the nature of our sin and rebellion. We like to flatter ourselves in our discontent, saying that the spirit of rebellion rises up within us because of all the things that are wrong. But the reality is the other way—things go wrong because rebellion has risen up within us.

Satan did not revolt against God because of the grim conditions of Hell. Hell is the result of him revolting against the delightful conditions of Heaven. Adam did not rebel against God because he was tired of living in a slum. No, his children live in slums because he grew tired of living in Paradise. Thus far Chesterton.

Now that history is mixed—good and evil mingled together—we have multiple opportunities to make our confusion on this point more plausible. There *are* evils present, and so we may readily point at them, but our revolt is actually against the good things that are present. That's our story, and we continue on our way, sinners in search of plausible deniability. We live in world that contains both dark evil and staggering goodness. The cause of the evil is our revolt against the good, which we routinely justify by pointing at the evil.

This is the fundamental difference between radicals and reformers. Both recognize that good and evil exist, but the radical wants to blame the *good* as the root source of all evil. The reformer wants to fight evil, and so he does. The radical resents what is truly evil, but what he fights is the good. The reformer doesn't resent evil—he is no sentimentalist—but he does hate it. St. George fights the dragon, and does so with a good will.

The radical blames sex; the reformer blames lust. The radical blames money; the reformer blames mammon. The radical blames the systemic nature of

oppression; the reformer blames men and women.

Radicals want to mess with the categories. They operate with an intellectual dishonesty that is truly fundamental. How can you tell? It really is simple—they call good things evil, and call evil things good (Is. 5:20). The distinction between men and women is a good thing, and so they blur it with metrosexuality. Worldliness is a true evil, and so they pursue it in the name of cultural engagement. The ability to raise the poor from poverty by teaching them how to make money is a good thing, and so they blur it by condemning the ability to make money. Nowhere are the sentimentalist contradictions of radicalism so apparent as here. The fact that people are poor is an outrage, and the fact that the means exist for bringing them out of poverty is an even worse outrage. They say the disease is wicked, and the medicine worse.

So what we should be after is true engagement, not surrender. What we must pursue is cultural engagement, not cultural surrender parading itself as engagement. In order to keep our bearings, and in order to keep our heads, we have to reject every attempt to get us to compromise our fundamental allegiance to Scripture as God's infallible Word to us. It all comes back to this. *Yea, hath God said* is always a strategic move so that we may jump in there with *here's what I think*.

The radical thinks that human sexuality is up for grabs. The reformer knows what God's intention from the beginning was. The radical has no understanding whatever of basic economics. The reformer knows that envy distorts economic understanding, and is the only thing that really does. The radical believes that he has a vision that justifies all his social tinkering. The reformer knows that he cannot possibly understand anything so complicated as the simplest human economy, which is why God gave us His law.

Here is how the whole pattern of cultural engagement has played out in our nation, and in our generation. After evangelicals were forced out of their position of privilege in the public square in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they retreated to their cultural ghettos. When the general cultural apostasy forced them out of their abdication in the seventies, they came back into the process in force, and the religious right became an identifiable factor in national affairs again. Those who had taunted these religious conservatives for being disengaged were dismayed by what their engagement looked like, and so they began to taunt them for *that*. We were only to be allowed back into the public square if we immediately veered over to the left.

It turns out that what the radicals had meant by cultural engagement was actually code for "get with the program," and the program coordinator, as always, needed to be a state so swollen it looks like Jabba the Hutt whenever his thyroid was acting up.

So we should be in the market for young Christian men and women who are willing to be trained in *genuine* cultural engagement. They won't be embarrassed by old-fashioned virtues, like hard work and discipline. They will respect authority and defy the authorities. They won't get fired from jobs because of laziness, and they will get fired from them because of something they said about homosexuality. They won't resent money and success, and they won't be dazzled by money and success. They will laugh at the hipsters, and they will laugh at themselves laughing at the hipsters. They will loathe the enticements of corrupt entertainment, and they will love a true story. They would rather die than become one of the cool kids. They will be cool.

MAINTAINING THE NEGATIVE

Since what we are seeking to reform is our public life together, the principal object of our concern should be the current state of our public life together. We are not attempting time travel to Arcadia or perpetrating some sort of a book-jump into Utopia. We play cards with the hand we were dealt, and what we were dealt is this dog's breakfast of a civic order. We start where we are, and we are to go somewhere good that we can actually get to from here.

So someone interested in genuine reform has to have his eye on three things. What are they? First, since our principal problem is the idolatrous cancer of statism, we must first be interested in keeping that statism from getting any worse. Second, we have to roll back as much of that statism as we can. And third, those things which are healthy in themselves, and which may be allowed to remain, must be grounded in our desire to do the will of Jesus, as revealed in Scripture.

So, to take an issue at random, am I saying that Jesus doesn't want us to pass any more of these inane gun control laws? Right, that's what I am saying, and I am grateful for this opportunity to come clean and explain myself.

This, of course, sounds perfectly outrageous to those children of this age who have memorized almost all of the secularist catechism. And if they allowed themselves to think about what I just said for more than ten minutes, they would get pretty whipped up about it. How *dare* I?

How dare I what? Well, speak for Jesus on a "political" matter when no reputable concordance or Bible search software contains any reference to automatic or semi-automatic weapons. Seems like a reasonable question, right? But it only seems like a reasonable question because it is entirely the wrong question. We have to learn how to stop being distracted by optical illusions.

If I am debating someone who was maintaining that God didn't know where South Dakota was, the difference between us would not be about *geography*. And if I am debating someone who thinks the government has the right to tell me what kind of light bulb to use, the difference between us is not about the best wattage for my living room. If I am debating someone who wants to ban magazines with more than ten rounds, they want it to be about the magazines—whereas if I still have my wits about me, I should know that the debate is over whether or not the ATF rose from the dead in order to ascend into the heavenly realm, in order to give gifts to men. I maintain the negative, but maybe that's just me.

As has already been mentioned, that great mentor of the hard left, Saul Alinsky, taught all the non-chumps on *his* side that the issue is never the issue. Keep your eye on the ball. What is the *stated* purpose of the law, and what is the *real* purpose of the law? The stated purpose of such laws is to keep devastating weapons out of the hands of criminals. The *real* purpose of the law is to grow the power of the idol-state, and to shrink the power of those capable of resisting it. This sleight of hand matters because what genuine Christian wants criminals to have devastating weapons? And what genuine Christian wants a bigger and more powerful idol-state? There are two different questions on the table, and so it matters which one is the real one.

If I am Paul come to idolatrous Athens, and I find 454 idols all over that idol-ridden city, would I support gun control laws sponsored by the 455th shrine? No, of course not. The first order of business would be to topple all the idols, and then figure out what a God-honoring civil order would do with the guns.

And the answer to that question, incidentally, if we may run ahead for a moment, is *nothing*. In a God-honoring civil order, there would be no need to do

anything with the guns. The guns weren't doing anything wrong, being inanimate and all. I am not with N.T. Wright on this, whose only law-application from the Old Testament has to do with how Jubilee laws apply to the World Bank. All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable, and Scripture tells us to do things with murderers that we simply refuse to do, and it never tells us to do anything whatever with the murder weapons. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Ecc. 8:11, ESV). It does not say, however much we might like it to, "Because the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil, therefore remove all the weapons from the general populace, and accumulate them in the arsenals of an arrogant and overweening state" (Ecc. 22:11). Like I say, it doesn't say that, for which we may render thanks to a merciful God.

Alinsky was an idolater, but like Joab, he was a shrewd man. So I am actually with Alinsky on this one point, and the issue should be kept the only issue. That issue is *who the ruling elites think they are.* Since at least 1913, they have been of a mind to exalt all their cabinet seats above the stars of God, sitting upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north. And lo, they have come a cropper.

NATURAL LAW AND THE LORDSHIP OF JESUS

Let us begin by defining natural law, move on to the covenant of creation, and from that point move on to discuss the lordship of Jesus Christ.

Try to set aside (for the nonce, as we say) the various systematic formulations of natural law that you may have encountered. As I have stated before, for various reasons I prefer to talk about natural revelation, over against natural law.

But let me run around and push from the other direction, if I might. At a certain point, some advocates of the "Bible as the only source of morality" paint themselves into a corner. It is like those people who say that because they have a Bible, they don't need human teachers. But the Bible says that they *do* need human teachers. So they must be wrong on two counts. First, the Bible establishes human teachers instead of dislodging them, and second, this fact in Scripture is so obvious that if anybody needed a human teacher, it would be the guy who doesn't see that.

So, like I said, set aside your natural law *systems*, and ask yourself two questions. Does the Bible teach the reality of natural revelation? This revelation would mean that someone can get accurate information about God simply from the way things in the world are, whether inside or outside him, without reference to any special revelation from God. And second, does any element of this natural revelation bring with it any sense of moral obligation? If so, one of the things that natural revelation reveals is *law*, and calling it natural law doesn't give me heartburn.

So the question is posed. There are many ways to answer it, and I will just pick one. There is much more, but this will suffice.

> 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: 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. (Rom. 1:20–21)

In sum, the eternal power and Godhead is known from the things that are made, and the knowledge that arises from this is knowledge that brings moral culpability with it. For the knowledge was not just that God was *there* somewhere, but that He was worthy of worship and honor. Worship and honor were required by the knowledge that natural revelation brought. This they refused to do, in defiance of this light from natural revelation, and this light from

natural revelation can certainly be called a natural law. It has all the ingredients– a lawgiver, a standard, a subject, and moral responsibility. Nothing is missing.

You cannot find a rock or a pebble anywhere that does not command you to *worship* Him. This is natural law.

From this position, we should then consider what responsibilities we have before God as mere creatures, whether believing or not. And this affects the public sphere. As Glen Moots put it, “The idea of a binding moral covenant on all persons, with salutary relevance even for the spiritually unregenerate, gave the covenant of works tremendous impetus for political theology.”4

Of course all Reformed thinkers know that everything is connected, but we can still sometimes be surprised at how *closely* connected it all can be. What do natural law, the covenant of works, theocracy, regeneration, and homosexual marriage have in common? They are all different aspects of the same subject, that’s what.

For reasons I have urged over the course of years, I really don’t like using the name “covenant of works.” It just confuses things, and one of the things it confuses is the crucial *need* for a “covenant of works.” I much prefer to use “covenant of creation,” or a name the Westminster Confession uses elsewhere, “covenant of life.” But unless we hold to a covenant of creation *distinct from* a covenant of grace, we will have no basis for speaking to certain public policy issues of the day, like homosexual marriage.

Several books could be written on this basis, and I am going to try to do it in just several paragraphs, so bear with me. If the church is going to speak authoritatively in the public square—theocracy—then there needs to be a basis for speaking to the non-believers. The covenant of creation provides that basis.

Suppose one of them comes back with “Well, we don’t believe in your covenant of creation,” and asks you what you think of them apples.

The reply is that the covenant of creation is the only possible basis for natural law, which he *does* recognize (perhaps in spite of himself). He cannot account for this natural law within the framework of his worldview, but it is there nonetheless. For example, the late Christopher Hitchens did not use the language of natural law, but he sure appealed to it all the time.

If there is to be a intersect between church and state, then we have the problem of the wheat and tares times ten. Not only do we need to have a theological framework to deal with the baptized unconverted, but we also need to have a framework to deal with the unbaptized unconverted. How do we declare the lordship of Christ over all things when a significant number of people are obviously outside the covenant of grace?

Failure to look these facts straight in the eye will tend, inexorably, to transform the claims of theocracy into ecclesiocracy, and from that into a *separated* ecclesiocracy. And when our separated ecclesial community gets out to the woods of Montana, we will not practice homosexual marriage among ourselves out there. But we will have absolutely nothing to say to the infidels in San Fransisco, and if anybody suggests that we send them a prophet to declare their wicked ways to them, we will find our theological tool chest to be empty of tools and full of excuses. You see, we don’t believe in natural law and nature/grace dualisms.

But the covenant of creation is a covenant that was made with absolutely all mankind in Adam. The covenant of grace is made with those who are elect in the second Adam. These cannot be the same covenants *because they are not made with the same people.* The covenant of grace is made with a distinct *subset* of

those with whom the covenant of creation was made. It must therefore be a distinct covenant. The question is this: is there a remainder left over after the covenant of grace is established? Are these people in the remainder under any covenantal obligations to God at all? The answer has to be *yes*.

The reason "monocovenantalism" doesn't work is because the parties are different. There are some similarities to the illustration of the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution, but only if you take into account (through a thought experiment) three states that were parties under the Articles but which did not ratify the Constitution. Now your thought experiment has a remainder. Every state under the Constitution was once under the Articles, but in a well-crafted thought experiment not all the states under the Articles came into the Constitution. In the same way, all members of the covenant of grace were parties to the covenant of creation…

but not all the parties under the covenant of creation are under the covenant of grace. What do we do with *them*?

And so what do you do with those folks who refuse to believe in Jesus, but who are part of your civil polity? Think of a bumper sticker. "I belong to the covenant of creation, and I vote." The Church can say to them (authoritatively) that certain things are just off the table (like homosexual marriage) *because of natural law*. These people can refuse baptism on the basis of their unbelief, but their unbelief is not potent enough to remake the world they live in. The reason they appear to be having some success in the present (as measured by things like homo marriage) is not because of *their* unbelief. It is because of the *Church's* unbelief. The Church is suffering a crisis of faith concerning the government of the world, as evidenced by our chariness in handling natural law. Why don't *we* believe in natural law? Because of cowardice.

Our tenacity in believing in special revelation only is something that can actually fly in the current pomo *zeitgeist*—because we are talking about what all of us "in our faith community" accept as true. *But when you make a claim about natural law, you are self-evidently talking about the whole world and everybody in it.* This is what some might call a totalizing metanarrative, and God bless more and more of it, I say.

> Even though the Fall into sin guaranteed that no one would perfectly keep the covenant of works, persons did not become released from its obligations nevertheless…It was a means by which, according to the Reformed reading of the Genesis account, God enabled moral (and therefore political) order. Natural law could therefore govern the conscience of all men. (Moots, p. 80)

Having said all this in defense of natural law (and a robust bicovenantalism), I want to hasten to add that I am not defending any and all forms of natural law theory. Natural law is not impersonal, but is rather the will of the triune God. Natural law is not inconsistent in any way with special revelation, and natural law rightly understood is not embarrassed in any way by the specific revelation found in Scripture. You shall not suffer a witch to live, objects falling down at 9.8 meters per second squared, and nature itself teaching us that long hair is a woman's glory are all expressions of the same personal and divine will.

In short, I hold to the necessity of natural law in the same way that the Reformers did, and would suggest that there is no way for us to assert the Lordship of Jesus Christ over all things without appealing to it.

Theocracy, not mere ecclesiocracy. Theocracy, not sheer bibliocracy. Mere Christendom. When we confess Jesus as Lord, we have to take care to listen to everything He ever said, anywhere He might have said it. As it happens, He has told us a great deal through natural law, all of it consistent with everything He tells us in His Scriptures. All of Christ for all the world.

SLAYING THE JABBERWOCK

Unless we begin our understanding of cultural history with certain key biblical doctrines well in hand, we are going to get hopelessly gummed up. One of the stickiest ways to get gummed up is in the matter of glibly assigning responsibility for the causes of this or that.

But before turning to that issue, let me at least briefly mention two doctrines that are extremely relevant to this discussion, which are the doctrines of divine revelation and the revealed doctrine of the antithesis. As the history of modern philosophy has demonstrated, without God's gift of light we are all of us in the dark. Without some light from God, we cannot even know we are in the dark, although lots of our modern johnnies pretend to know *that*, so that they may begin work on their bulging forehead workarounds. But if Kant can't know anything "in itself, as it is," then one wonders how he figured out the limitations of epistemology as they are. If we cannot know a thing-in-itself (*Ding an sich*), then it might as well be a transcendental absurdity (*Ding an dong*).

And once we have settled into the realization that we can know nothing of our situation *unless God tells us*, we must be further humbled by the realization that His Word is absolutely perfect, and that the only imperfections anywhere near that revelation are the imperfections imported by our dishonest hermeneutics, along with insolent philosophical attempts to evade the necessity of a God-given and therefore infallible and inerrant Word.

All this is prolegomena to my attempt to slay the Jabberwock. One of the very first things that was revealed to us after the crash of our first parents is the doctrine of the antithesis. This is the doctrine that throughout human history, there will be constant, total war between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. War is declared in the third chapter of the Bible, the central victory

is accomplished when the Lord Jesus crushed the head of the serpent at the cross, and the rest of history consists of believers in Jesus being sent out into the world in order to manhandle all the snakes they can find.

This is a central narrative thread in all human history, and failure to grasp this is prelude to being deceived and undone, as our mother Eve was.

Now what does this have to do with the question of cultural causation? It is commonplace for partisans of various stripes to blame bad things on their adversaries in a most simplistic way. For example, someone might want to blame the Protestant Reformation for our modern social balkanizations, but this is way too convenient, and besides, why don't these same people thank the Protestant Reformers for indoor plumbing?

Now I do believe that history *can* be "read," and further, I believe that it must be read if we are to be faithful in our generation. And I believe that some events can be assigned as the straight line cause of other things. For example, the invention of the printing press did lead to a widespread distribution of books. The invention of the Internet has likewise led to a widespread dissemination of cat videos. But if we go out much further than that, things get rapidly more complicated, and this is where the antithesis comes in.

In a sword fight, we are not surprised by thrust, parry, counter thrust. In a massive, spiritual war, why would it be any different? Something happens, something is invented, a truth is realized, one side picks it up, and the other side tries to deflect it, or co-opt it, or shut it down. For every measure, there is a counter measure. Parry, thrust.

Let me give an example of something current that illustrates this nicely. I am fond of saying in sermons that we have to "read our stories." As my son Nate argued in his *Notes From the Tilt-a-Whirl*, we are all of us God's spoken word,

and our responsibility is to grasp the fact of this, and read our lines as though God were the director—because He is. This, in reaction to a dusty kind of orthodoxy that has reduced certain propositions to dead maxims, as dry and crispy as beetles pinned to a museum display board one hundred years ago.

But, at the very same time, postmodernists are emphasizing story and narrative too, bless their hearts, and they are doing it over against the flaming sword of orthodox propositions. These propositions, such as "Jesus rose from the grave," are wild and free like a lion that has never even seen a man, and these new narrativalists are trying to turn it into a domesticated tabby cat to keep the mice population down in their faith-community community hall. But of course, this turns every "faith community" into a cargo cult, and who is more lost than we are? And why? Because we don't want God to speak the authoritative Word over all that is.

Narrative theology is important—crucial in fact. But when it becomes apparent that it is important in this world of war, both sides will attempt to seize it, and will use it to their own ends. This is why it is as silly to assume that someone is a postmodernist because he emphasizes *story* as it would be to assume that someone was a Union soldier because he was on the field at Gettysburg, and had a gun. Right, he did, but which way was it pointed?

With regard to this issue, one side will say that we have a responsibility to read our own story accurately, and fit it into God's metanarrative, the absolute story, the ultimate story. The theme of this world's history is, as a friend put it, "kill the dragon, get the girl." But God is the only one to define what the dragon is, and who the girl is. The other alternative approach detaches story from God's revelation of Himself, and goes off to find a corner somewhere with their security blanket and narratival binky. In that isolated corner, it does not matter if

dragons and girls come into the story. They probably will, given the deep structure of the world, but they will also be faithless incorporations, given the deep structure of our rebellion.

You can't have a fight with a midnight intruder in your home without breaking some of the furniture. But the cause of this was the intruder's intrusion—the cause was not confronting him. The fight caused the damage, but the fight was good (from one side), and the damage a sadness.

A simplistic approach gives way, almost immediately, to a *post hoc* analysis, and does so on the basis of blinkered partisan loyalties. This is why people like to say that the Reformation caused the rise of our fragmented epistemologies. As well say that the Advent of Christ caused the rise of Islam—which it did, but only in the sense that the arrival of Wellington caused Napoleon to show up. As well say that the Incarnation caused some Christians to pray to pictures.

Truth does what it does, and true hearts respond to it one way, and false hearts respond to it in another. It is not possible, in a fallen world, to have truth enter history and pass through it untouched, like Jesus did once with the mob at Nazareth (Luke 4:29–30). And while truth has come thus far on this battlefield, we should not say that truth caused all the dents in its own armor. Those came from elsewhere, although it must be said dents were not unexpected.

Truth is resisted, obstructed, lied about, persecuted, and then when all that damage is done, the opponents of the truth glibly declare that the truth must not be all that true—look at all the damage! Father and son are set against one another (Luke 12:53), and so this cannot be from God. Christianity is the proximate cause of all these heresies—should this not make us think? Well, yes it should, but it should make us think in a straight line.

Genuine currency does not “cause” counterfeits, even though in one sense it does. The issue is the truth, and not whatever false things have been done to or with the truth.

So then, what is the rule for those who would be reformers? The rule is never to apologize for the truth. *Never*. When Scripture requires us to seek forgiveness or put something right, what we are putting right is our complicity in some lie or other. Lies must always be repudiated, and while it is certainly humbling, it is never strategically stupid. We are servants of the truth—how can it hurt us to get rid of another lie? Armies are not weakened by finding and hanging another spy in their ranks.

What *is* strategically stupid is to allow the lie to discredit the truth. What would be stupid would be to hang the spy and accuse the army. What is strategically stupid is to apologize for being evangelical. What is strategically stupid is to confound some of the foibles of those who hold to the truth with the truth itself.

So then, the only troubles the truth has directly caused are those troubles which the world had coming to it. Everything else was from the evil one.

THE DEMOCRATIC DILEMMA

Those laboring for biblical reformation are often accused of not “believing in democracy.” Because our faith in Jesus and in the Scriptures is absolute, we cannot have faith in the people. Now it is quite true that we cannot have absolute faith in the people, for that would be idolatry (not to mention dumb). But we have no problem incorporating strong democratic elements in our vision of an ideal polity. There are reasons for this.

C.S. Lewis once said there were two basic approaches to democracy. One is idolatrous, and the other reflects a more biblical view of man. The first is the assumption that every last man's opinion is so valuable that we should do our level best to get his input before we do anything. This is the idolatrous option.

The other acknowledges the sinfulness of man, such that it is unwise to concentrate too much power in any one spot. Democracy is, in this view, part of a system of checks and balances, where the power is spread as thinly as possible in order to keep an entrenched ruling class (of any sort) from having its unbridled way.

This means that if an election tilts against the incumbents, this would appear to be a successful example of this design working. But the thing to keep in mind is that corrective elections, even corrective wave elections, are not solution elections. "Throw the bums out" may often be just what's demanded, the need of the moment, and no argument there. Who could not but agree that an hour of evening news without the current Speaker of the House would be a real spot of sunshine in an otherwise drab and dreary chain of news stories? But what then? What do we do next?

Our very next political move needs to be calling on Jesus. The reason we need to throw the bums out first is that they get in the way of calling on Jesus, and repentance precedes faith.

There are significant earthly consequences to what we do and in how we vote, but we have to be shrewd in understanding what those consequences actually are. If I owe you a thousand bucks, you've got me. The borrower becomes the lender's slave. But there is a point at which that reality breaks down. If I owe you a bazillion bucks, I've got you. There actually is a point where the lender

becomes the borrower's slave. And this is why we should all agree with the bumper sticker, "Please, nobody tell Obama what comes after a trillion."

Elections ought therefore to be thought of as something of an intervention. The powers that be, the lenders, the bankers, the regulators, the congressmen, the smartest guys in the room, are all of them out of control. They are selling themselves into slavery. Back in the old days, when the people were borrowing a thousand bucks, the lenders were able to maintain their position of control. But now, when they have lent half the assets of America to all the winos in America, and those winos have peed it all away, a moment arises when the responsible adults in the room look at each other, nod, and say, "It's time." But these guys don't want to go to rehab any more than did Amy Winehouse, no, no, no, but always keep in mind the fact that drying out in rehab, however salutary in itself, is not the same thing as fixing the problem.

In this case, going into the voting booth and voting for "It's time" sends both the wino and the guy giving him cash to a place where they have to stop it. One guy goes to wino rehab and the other one to banker rehab. In both cases, it is just to clear the head so that they can figure out they need to call on Jesus.

The late Sen. Eugene McCarthy said that being a senator was a lot like being a football coach—you had to be smart enough to understand the game and dumb enough to think it was important. This leads naturally to the reflection by Augustine in *The City of God*, when he said that in the kingdoms of men, the dead are replaced by the dying. In short, the story that God is telling with His sprawling narrative of a world is not the same story that many of His characters are trying to tell.

It is the responsibility of sane Christians to try to line up the story they are telling themselves about their lives with the story that God is telling about their

lives. Does this seem cryptic? Bring it down to the voting booth. When I go in there, what am I trying to accomplish?

Ultimately, I am working out my salvation with fear and trembling, the same thing I am trying to do when I fry an egg, or type a phrase, or drive down the road to an appointment. I am not trying to save America, unless saving America is a proximate means to the larger end of glorifying God through the salvation of His people through the gospel. This is not quietism; this is not activism. This is perspective. No matter what happens in the next election, God is on His throne, and we should still be in the process of gathering before it.

Section 4

Three Stumbling Blocks

Most of the really big problems in the world are caused by the smartest guys in the room. Having a high intellectual rpm is not necessarily a good thing. This grim reality reminds me of William F. Buckley's famous comment about responsible governance: "I'd rather entrust the government of the United States to the first 400 people listed in the Boston telephone directory than to the faculty of Harvard University."

Some might say he was speaking hyperbolically. I don't think so, but even if he was, if I said it, I wouldn't be.

As foreshadowed by the title, I want to point out three stumbling blocks in the paths of reformers, each one maintained by (or at least maintenanced by) "the smartest guys in the room."

COOL SHAME

The ruling elites have a deep set of pathologies going, and many of them have by now manifested themselves as severely dysfunctional. But one of their pathologies that still works on a lot of people is their ability to act convincingly like they are still the arbiters of cool.

Given the nature of "cool," it is difficult to use examples that do not rapidly become dated. The entire concept of cool rests upon planned obsolescence with a cycle measured in minutes. But certain examples are well known enough to serve over a period of years. One time I wrote (appreciatively) about Sarah Palin on my blog, and a comment came up in the thread that I thought worth repeating here. The word *cool-shamed* in there is worth a million dollars. Grab that word, study it, and when you are done you will understand why conservatives with nuance-ability are so good at pedaling backward.

The shrill left approach is effective, though, when it comes to people easily embarrassed or cool-

> shamed. I think a lot of hard conservative types aren't willing to associate with things generally liked by mainstream red-staters who lack nuance. To them, liking Palin is similar to openly liking *The Blind Side* or *Fireproof*. Being seen to have unsophisticated tastes (even by one's enemies) is just too much to bear…the last thing we need is a leader with nuance. We need the right principles, black and white vision, and an inability to feel fear (or poll pressure).

We don't need sophisticated economics. We need people who understand the difference between bigger numbers and smaller numbers. We don't need nuance in race relations. We need to judge people by the content of their character rather than the color of their skin. We don't need wise men who manage an endless series of nation-building wars. We need our wars to be purposive, rare, and short. We don't need a candidate who wins the grudging respect of the professional left. We need a candidate who has an uncanny ability to set them all off as barking mad. In sum, this means we need a candidate who is embarrassing to the conservative establishment. And that is why I would rather do a sweep of Tea Party rallies and be governed by the first 400 people we found wearing Uncle Sam hats than by the faculty of Harvard.

As we are in the process of airing this place out, this word *cool-shaming* is a key that can unlock a lot of the rooms, especially the mildewed ones.

We are always dealing with new permutations of it, but the phenomenon has been with us for a while. Think of the essential pose as one of political and cultural engagement *as fashion statement*. If a moral plug-ugly like Che Guevara can become an iconic T-shirt presence, then of course *somebody* is seriously disordered.

But the point for the practitioner is to strike a *safe* pose, one that cannot be laughed at. Cool posers are the ultimate cowards. And that is why those who figure out a way to laugh at this kind of thing are about the only friends our bedraggled republic even has anymore.

Tom Wolfe is of course deadly with the double barrels, and when he published that clay pigeon entitled *Radical Chic and Mau-Mauing the Flak Catchers*, this was just his way of yelling, "Pull!" Back in the sixties, radical chic was the practice of wearing radical politics like it was a scarf you could buy on 5th Avenue…Excuse me. I have just been informed that we are living in a post-metaphorical era, and that my use of a metaphor involving a gun may open me up to misunderstanding, and perhaps even to calumny. To all such calumnies, I can only say…"Pull!"

Excuse me again. Lest there be any unnecessary distress, allow me to deconstruct my own metaphor and point out that in the illustration the clay targets are the calumnies, which are abstractions, and are not the calumniators themselves.

This vice I am talking about—vulnerability to cool-shaming—is one that Christian moral theology has long been aware of. After that, we can discuss for a moment how this vice has gone viral, and has taken on the widespread cultural identity that it has. In *The Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis has Screwtape explaining to the junior tempter Wormwood how the simple can be taken in on this point.

> But flippancy is the best of all. In the first place it is very economical. Only a clever human can make a real Joke about virtue, or indeed about anything else; any of them can be trained to talk as if virtue were funny. Among flippant people the Joke is always assumed to have been made. No one actually makes it; but every serious subject is discussed in a manner which implies that they have already found a ridiculous side to it.

Screwtape goes on:

> If prolonged, the habit of Flippancy builds up around a man the finest armour-plating against the Enemy that I know, and it is quite free from the dangers inherent in the other sources of laughter. It is a thousand miles away from joy; it deadens, instead of sharpening, the intellect; and it excites no affection between those who practise it.[5]

When Lewis was addressing this, he was talking about a vice that an individual might fall into, or a set of bad conversational habits that a circle of acquaintances might allow to take over their discussions. Since that time, in the rise of all our virtual villages, we can see what this vice looks like when millions of people are passing it on like a human wave in a stadium. Ten million see a particular sitcom, and they are all cool-shamed into cringing when that unsympathetic and very greasy character makes that homo-joke. Do you doubt what I say? Did *you* just cringe when I used the word *homo-joke*? You may be a very conservative Christian, and you are with me on the merits, but you still do whatever *their* laugh track tells you to.

The key is in the unproven assumption that "whatever it is" has already been shown to be uncool, unhip, risible, or filled to the brim with hate. Communities, including various blogospheric ones, are those which share their assumptions. They communicate their assumptions, one with another. They all partake of them. But some of us want to give those assumptions the raspberry.

So, then, back to our example of Sarah Palin. The point is not agreement or disagreement on this or that. I believe that there are substantive arguments to be made concerning Palin, both ways, for and against. Great, let's have a discussion. Grab a cold one and have a seat. I am open to hear from those who would *argue* that the woman is a ding dong, or to those who *argue* that certain of her positions (e.g., her brand of feminism) mean that we should not support her. Have at it. But if you just assume that she is a welterweight because that is what "everybody who really matters already knows," then this attempt at cool-shaming will just make me wonder (out *loud*) how it is that a welterweight has blackened so many heavyweight eyes so far.

Excuse me. By taking a metaphor from the boxing ring, I am not trying to encourage anyone to resort to violence in the pursuit of their political aims. Don't punch anybody. Neither am I trying to say that a woman in the boxing ring is anything other than an appalling spectacle of the fruitiest and highest order.

There are some stately cottonwoods down the hill from us. Every year, once a year, the air around our house is filled with fluff that blows by us in the breeze. And that is what all the appeals to cool-shame look like to me.

OUR LITTLE PIGGY HEARTS

The second stumbling block to reformation is found in every reformer's own piggy little heart. Idolatry is to place any created thing in the place that should be occupied by the living God alone. Gross idolatry occurs when someone carves or paints an object, and then bows down in front of it. This is prohibited in the ten commandments—no graven images. But idolatry can also occur when we are dealing with legitimate objects in their own right, but we think of them wrongly in our hearts. This is why Paul says that greed is idolatry (Col. 3:5).

Wealth enables you to sit on top of the world (Dt. 8:18). Mammon enables the world to sit on top of you (Matt. 6:24).

A repentant Baal worshiper would have all the images of Baal taken out of his house…and of course from his heart. But a repentant miser does not have to take all the money out of his wallet. He must still handle the former object of his idolatry, and do so on a daily basis, but now he must do so in wisdom and humility.

It is a difference between idols that are razed and idols that are demoted. For the former, you must stop praying to pictures. You have to throw away the idols. For the latter, you must evaluate, honestly, before God, whether certain things

(good in themselves) must be taken off the god-shelf of your heart. Let me mention some of the chief idols of our day in this regard—idols you may keep, but which must be stored in the basement. These would include the state and its bribes, financial security, your household comforts, your reputation, and so forth.

And of course, for this second category of idolatry, it is virtually impossible for us to gauge the heart of another. Don't waste any of your energy trying to do that. But it is not impossible to evaluate your own heart in this regard.

But when you get the hierarchy of money arranged correctly in your heart and mind, you want to make sure that wealth is really wealth (treated as a gift from God), and Mammon is really Mammon (treated as a snare of the devil). One of the best indicators that we don't have this all sorted out correctly is the way that Republicans and Democrats conduct negotiations about things like fiscal cliffs, debt limit deadlines, tax hikes, and so on. Usually, the Republicans are lame and the Democrats are *eeeevil*, which means that we should handle every such moment as a teachable moment. We should take these teachable moments whenever they arise, for there will be fewer and fewer of them as the clouds of economic lunacy settle in.

The president insists on raising the tax rates on the richest among us, saying that they can afford to "pay a little more." This is objectionable, on the surface, in two ways. Let me just mention those briefly, and then move on to a third place where it is doing real damage.

First, it is stealing. Taxing money simply because it is *there* is offensive to God. The language of "fair share" notwithstanding, the top five percent already pay fifty-seven percent of the tax load. Here is a question without guile—when will the wealthy *finally* get around to paying their "fair share"? What *is* that fair share exactly?

Second, if all the rich people and their accountants were ultra-cooperative, raising taxes on the wealthy with the proposed rates would fund the federal government for about ten days. But as the process of taxation shows itself more and more envy-ridden and irrational, we have reason to believe the rich will become less and less cooperative. They have lawyers and accountants to help them move their money out of range, as I would encourage all of them to do. Sail away until you can't see the pirate flag anymore. But—you may be assured—"out of range" will not include the kind of investment opportunities that will create jobs.

So let's get to the real damage. While I object to all attempts at stealing, I am not spending a lot of time lamenting the sad lot of the rich, because I do think they have the wherewithal to limit the damages of this attempted larceny. People are trying to rob their big house on the hill, but they can usually afford a security system.

The real problem is created for the thieves themselves—Obama, the Democratic Party, everybody who voted for them, everyone in Washington who opposes them in such a lame-sauce fashion, and everyone who supports *them*. If someone attempts to steal something from me, but fails, then I am none the worse. But for the aspiring thief, he gets all the guilt credits for having made such an attempt and none of the booty. He has the worst of both worlds. He tried to steal two stools and he then fell between them.

And this is the position the American people are now in. We have thieves in Congress and in the White House because we have thievery in our hearts. Because we have larceny in our hearts, wanting to pay off 2012 debts with 2022 money, we put up with Bernanke's monkeyshines at the Fed. Because we have larceny in our hearts, we hear a politician say that the rich should pay their "fair

share” and we reflexively say *yeah!*—in the name of justice. Thus we call rank injustice justice (Is. 5:20), and we do it because there is larceny in our little piggy hearts.

Because we have larceny in our hearts, we call it greed when someone wants to keep the money he made, and we don’t call it greed when we want to take it away from him. But we are the ones with sticky fingers—and we have sticky fingers because of our sticky hearts.

Because we have larceny in our hearts, we cannot follow any economic arguments that have square shoulders, an upright posture, and an honest face. Who do they think they are anyway?

The science fiction writer Robert Heinlein once wrote about it this way:

> Throughout history, poverty is the normal condition of man. Advances that permit this norm to be exceeded—here and there, now and then—are the work of an extremely small minority, frequently despised, often condemned, and almost always opposed by right-thinking people. Whenever this tiny minority is kept from creating, or (as sometimes happens) is driven out of society, the people slip back into abject poverty. This is known as ‘bad luck.’

By the way, and I simply make this point in passing, it will do no good to get off this charge of self-destructive greed by appealing to our cultural memories of Robin Hood. He was not robbing the rich to give to the poor. He was robbing the *tax collectors* in order to get the money back to the people who had earned it in the first place. The Sherwood Forest hideout had a Gadsden flag flying over it.

SIMPLE COWARDICE

A real reformer is not a member of a faction. Men have always tended to divide into opposing factions, whether it is Crips and Bloods or Guelphs and Ghibellines. But factional differences (while very real) don’t go down to the deep foundations. An ancient city is debating whether to defend the city with a

powerful navy, or with an entrenched army. The conflict between the factions arguing for both options can be very real, but everyone's goal is to defend the city.

But real reform is not that which argues *left* at the crossroads instead of *right*. Reform opposes the revolution, and the revolution is that "faction" (if we must call it that) that is in full-throated opposition to the way God made the world. In contrast to this, we must have our debates, our conflicts, and even our wars, over differences that rest on the back of enormous commonality. When the question before the house is whether to stop on this island and build our city, or proceed to the next one, or if we shall allow the prince over our territory to be a Lutheran, or if our legislature should be bicameral or not—you can imagine the conflict getting pretty hot.

But the question before the house in *our* day is whether we are going to live in the world God created, or whether we shall do otherwise. A reformer takes the affirmative view, and the revolutionary insists that we must, we shall, do otherwise. This puts the whole conflict on an entirely different footing. Who shall, at the end of the day, ascend to the sides of the north?

Think for a moment what sorts of "reforms" the revolutionaries are instituting. They want women to be able to marry women, for example, and men to marry men. They are seriously discussing the minting of a trillion dollar coin backed with the requisite amount of balloon juice. And whether they ever mint that particular coin or not, they are doing the same thing in principle now, to the tune of trillions of metric tons of balloon juice. The Federal Reserve is now being run by non-Euclidians who have been a little too free with the bourbon. They want our philosophers to spin a new world for us that will provide full scope for all of

our horny little lusts. And sexbots. Don't forget the sexbots. They will be squaring the circle next.

Back in the old days, when the conflict was between supporters of the king's dim-witted oldest son and his charismatic younger son, the outcome really was up in the air. With the establishment on one side, and the lean, hungry ambitious young men on the other, we might have real trouble predicting which way it was going to go. Old-fashioned wars could get pretty nasty, but still—it was an old-fashioned war.

But now…? The real reformer has a real advantage, but one which he rarely recognizes himself as having. *Living in the world that actually exists is an enormous advantage.* There are times when it almost seems to me like cheating or something. In the long run, we need not worry. In the long run, blind stupidity never works. The revolutionary alternates between throwing rocks at the moon and barking at it.

The only thing the revolutionary can have going for him is momentary ascendancy, and the resultant peer pressure that might make an insecure reformer blush and shuffle his feet. Suppose in some dystopic future, they were to put you on the fifty-yard-line at half time in their Super Bowl, in order to ask you a few questions. If you get them right, you will receive 10 million dollars and a retirement villa in the Caribbean, but if you get them wrong, you will be flayed and crucified. What would your feelings be if the first question was "how many oranges do you get if you add two oranges to two other oranges?" Relief, right? But *then*, when you answer, "Four," the crowd roars, "NO!" Now the sensation is consternation.

Reformers in the past have been martyrs for even crazier reasons, but everything that is happening in such a scenario is a test of *courage*, and not an

intellectual test. And a courageous man defending the way reality actually is may of course be killed—but he is still invincible.

This is why, incidentally, the battle over homosexual marriage is almost ideal for us. Or, rather, it is why it would be an ideal issue for reformers who have been blessed with some measure of courage. We don't need *much* courage—just enough to see and say how ludicrous it all is. Just enough to summon up the nerve to fill the room with the smell of burnt Marshwiggle.

Section 5

The Littlest Platoon

There is no getting around it—little kids are cute. Some are cuter than others (depending, of course, on whether or not they are one's own direct lineal descendants). The problem comes when we take this undeniable reality, and project it onto some of the statements Scripture gives us about the blessing of children. As a result, we wind up hanging on to a blessing, but perhaps the wrong one.

"Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate" (Psalm 127:3–5, ESV).

Notice what the psalmist says here: Children are a heritage, a reward. But then the first metaphor is jarring, and perhaps not what we were expecting. Instead of saying that they are like a row of stuffed bunnies in a well-decorated crib, he says that children from the Lord are like a fistful of arrows. Children are arrows for the fist, and even more arrows for the quiver. For what occasion? Target practice? Costume parties?

You see, kids are important enough to the reformation that I thought they deserved their own section.

ARROW CHILDREN

In the ancient world, the city gates were not only where defenders of a city would face invaders, but they were also what we would call the public square. Blessed was the man who had sons to stand with him in a crucial showdown at the city council. They were shoulder to shoulder behind him, and not over on the other side. Neither were they all at home playing video games or out back smoking in the alley.

The patter of little feet around the house is a blessing of God, one that we know by natural revelation. But the promise of formidable children is a promise given to us by special revelation. To focus on how delightful children are when they are small is to zero in on the promise and to forget the fulfillment. Acorns are cute, but sprawling oaks weathering a storm are glorious. And when we focus on the real blessing of "adorable" children, this can be the cause of mission drift.

Kids are adorable when they are little, and when they are little, they are also largely defenseless. Because of this, good parents are constantly watching out for threats to them. This is obviously a good thing, as far as it goes, but it is not a good thing if we get stuck in that mode. If that happens, the end result is the same as what happens when you mollycoddle anything. Bringing up children as though they will be perpetually endangered is to create a circumstance where they likely will be.

When you look at children, do you see potential victims or potential heroes? The eye of faith sees both. We should seek to nurture and train children through the defenseless stage, knowing that on the other side of that endangered state is what we are truly after—a dangerous state.

This is a choice that all Christian parents should embrace with real integrity. Do you want to bring up endangered kids or dangerous kids? Of course, unless they are Hercules killing snakes in the crib, they are all "endangered" when they are six months old. But what is the ultimate goal you have in mind? Is it faithful service to God when they are adults? Would you like them to be smooth stones in the sling of the Son of David? Or are you just hoping they make enough money to get by, are generally nice people, and always come home for the holidays?

It would be easy to dismiss this whole question as one that has no relevance until “later.” But procrastination here is a very significant mistake. The mindset that parents have (or do not have) will be one of the main factors in how they decide how they will educate the kids, which is a decision that arrives pretty durn early. Do you drop the kids off at your district’s city gate and hope that your enemies (and God’s) aren’t hired to do too much of the training? Or do you react the other direction and hunt for a private school that will wrap them up in cotton batting for as long as possible? Or do you want to provide them with a Jesus-centered education that will train them for the battle, the way boot camp is supposed to?

I have been intimately involved with Christian education for a number of decades, and I have to admit that I do get joy from watching little first-graders doing their Scripture recitations, for example. But the real joy is when I hear a high school graduate speak the truth wonderfully (as I have heard many do), and when I see faithful, well-educated young men and women who are ready to stand in the city gate, arrows about to make the world quiver. *That’s* what I’m talking about.

RIGHT KIND OF BRIGHT IN THEIR EYES

Many conservative Christians know that the culture war we are fighting is a desperate battle for our children. Now fighting for your children and grandchildren is a noble enterprise. It is what we are called to do. When such fighting is necessary, as in a fallen world it constantly is, it is something we are called to do for the sake of others, and this includes our children.

“And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord, *which is*

great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses" (Neh. 4:14).

But as good as this is, we need to move past it. Once we realize that we are in a long war, a war in which the first blood shed was that of Abel, and the last blood shed will be that of the final martyr, an honored someone who will no doubt not be born for many centuries yet, we will finally recognize the importance of the time we are called to invest in our children.

Because it is a long war, it crosses generations. In a very short space of time, your children will join you in the line, and a short time after that, their children will join them. This means that we begin by fighting *for* our children, but we must end by fighting *by means of* them. We must do two things simultaneously —we must fight today's battles, and we must recruit and train tomorrow's warriors.

If I am allotted more than the proverbial three score and ten, I hope to see my children and grandchildren hitting their stride. My contribution will be that of making penetrating geezer comments from the corner of the living room after Sabbath dinner. I will see myself as still fighting through them.

I see this in my own father—still fruitful in his own ministry—whenever he hears of any skirmish or battle that his descendants have gotten themselves into. He is an old war horse, restless in his stall, wanting to get into it himself. But he actually *is* "into" it. None of us would be where we are now without him, and I hope that I have the same privilege that he has been given—that of seeing a lot of downstream damage to the work of the adversary.

Decades from now, when my descendants are giving fits to whatever progressives are calling themselves in the 22nd century, I hope that my name is a hissing and a byword to them.

So a short-sighted man who throws himself into ministry, neglecting his family in order to do so, is not just demonstrating for us that he doesn't understand his wife and kids. He is demonstrating for us the fact that he doesn't understand the nature of true ministry.

"One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)" (1 Tim. 3:4–5).

"If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly" (Titus 1:6).

This is not just thrown in there as a mindless rule so that ecclesiastical fussbudgets might have something to agitate about during elder elections. If a man's children don't care what he believes about the Bible, then why should we? This is a line of argument that Paul endorses. If his children have walked away from what he says is important about the Bible, but we are still hanging on to his every word, the chances are good that we have adopted a false and unbiblical set of weights and measures, and are hanging on to the wrong words, or to good words for the wrong reasons.

Jesus said that we were to evaluate teachers by the kind of fruit they produced. And what better place to check than their garden at home? A man who is wrong about children will find it difficult to be right about anything else.

So what we need are more children with the right kind of bright in their eyes, like Jonathan after he ate the honey. But in that case, it was in spite of his father's foolish prohibition. May God spare us from the indignity of having children who do well despite us. We want children who have that kind of bright in their eyes because they have fathers who gave them the honey.

ON THROWING WET SPONGES AT MY HEAD

Many years ago, shortly after I had begun making a nuisance of myself to the somnolent liberalism of our little town, my wife and I crossed a threshold in how we learned to deal with public criticism. I had begun writing a weekly column for our newspaper, and the column addressed various cultural and political issues, written by me, a local evangelical pastor. (For you kids who don't know what a newspaper is, it is like a blog on paper that is all about stuff that happened the day before yesterday.)

At any rate, after one of my early columns had curtsied and left the stage, an indignant letter to the editor appeared, written by, as I recall, a gent named Terry Lawhead. It ran thus, and after all these years I believe I can still quote it verbatim.

> Editor,
> Doug Wilson is a complete idiot.
> *Terry Lawhead, Moscow*

My dear wife read this penetrating analysis before I got home, and of course this kind of thing was a complete novelty…our very first encounter with liberal tolerance. She said reading that was like getting punched in the stomach. When I got home, we talked it through and adopted the official demeanor toward hostile criticism that we have sought to maintain in our home ever since that time. I suggested that Nancy reply with her own letter to the editor. It should run:

> Editor,
> Terry Lawhead doesn't know the half of it.
> *Nancy Wilson, Moscow*

She thought that might come across a tad disrespectful, but she did clip out Terry's letter for a place of honor on our fridge.

But this does create another problem. Does not a breezy and cavalier dismissal of criticism like this create a macho mentality that considers itself above

correction no matter what? And who wants to be *that* guy? We all need correction, and we all should be open to the kind that would help us—even if it is from people who don't know us, or even from people who are hostile to us.

The key here, for anybody in the midst of the fray, is to have family and friends who have open access to you, and who have the liberty to say that a particular criticism strikes them as valid, or to offer criticisms of their own. It might be an editor, it could be a friend, it might be your elders, it could be your wife or kids—or if you are a blessed writer, it could be all of them.

If you are blessed with this kind of vertebrate companionship, you know that their views are not being driven by the fear of man—what a death trap that is! They will tell you when they believe you should grant a particular point, and you can trust them. You know how open to correction they are in face-to-face life, and they know how open to it you are. You know their commitment to principle, and they know yours. If a critic is right, they will tell you, and you should say so. If he isn't, be deaf to expediency.

I say *expediency* because demanding corrections and apologies is one of the central polemical tactics in use in our day, as we have already noted. And if you retract or apologize for the wrong reasons, they've got you and they know they've got you—and they work it. But the funny thing is that if you apologize or retract out of principle, before God, nobody notices that you've done it. You may have issued corrections twenty times, but you are still the guy "who never admits he's wrong." You are actually the guy who never admits he is wrong in a way that can be used as a lever on you, and that makes them a tad peevish.

But depending on friends *can* be dangerous, because you need friends with backbone, which is not something that all friends necessarily come with. If one of your friends is skittish about a delicate donor base, you need to know that. If

your wife cares too much about societal respectability and acceptance, you need to know that.

Taking a principled approach like this can be a real help to your wife—she will likely take the abuse and criticism that is hurled your way more personally than you do, and she needs to know that if and when she had a grounded concern, not based on the mere fact of the conflict, you would *listen* to her.

You can't fight effectively alone, but you need the right kind of companions around you. Robin Hood needed his merry men. That, and lots of trees, like we have in Idaho.

James tells us that the wisdom from above is "easily entreated." To be of any use in the culture wars, you must be known as that kind of man by those in a position to know. A man who has never sought forgiveness or accepted correction from his wife, kids, friends, etc. is not being a man of integrity when he refuses to back down in a public dispute. Such a refusal would just be the flag on top of his own personal mountain of arrogance.

And for those not in a position to know…why would it matter what they say? If a man is open to true criticism, it doesn't matter that a world full of falsehood refuses to believe it. These are the times when the disdain may be cordially returned.

If hostile critics at a distance miss the mark, then great. I think it was Winston Churchill who said there is nothing quite so exhilarating as being shot at without result. If hostile critics at a distance hit the mark, your response should be along the lines of, "Son of gun, look at that. I stand corrected. Jefferson Davis did *not* in fact begin his career in politics as a hurdy-gurdy man on the streets of Richmond."

This is why I have said before that public engagement in a world as screwed up as ours requires, in addition to basic competence with facts and words, a thick skin and a tender heart. Look. If you stick your head through the hole in the canvas at the county fair, you have no right to be shocked and dismayed when people throw wet sponges at it. Fortunately, given the state of criticism these days, lots of people miss—especially the feminists, who usually throw like a girl.

Now, see, there's an example of me doing something that some in these troublous times describe as "hurtful." And if there were to be an immediate chorus of voices demanding that I apologize for it, and I refused, would this mean that I am not open to correction? Not at all. It does mean, however, that I am not all that open to correction for having a sense of humor.

That reminds me…

Q. How many feminists does it take to change a light bulb?
A. That's not funny!

The great biblical principle applies in these lesser things, and not just in matters of the gospel. If God approves, who is he that condemns? If God is unhappy with it, then what does it matter if the whole world approves?

But how can we know if God approves? Well…He wrote a book. Moreover, He has given you the opportunity to live with stalwart companions who are steeped in that book, just as you are. In that environment, trust the Spirit to work—He is the only one who works correction without accusation.

Section 6

Aphorisms, Tweets, Whatever

In line with Rule for Reformers #4, *Reformers must cultivate a high sense of humor,* I offer the following section, which at least demonstrates *a* sense of humor, if not a cultivated one. Birds break into song when fighting for their country. I break into tweets.

No need for discouragement—we are 2,000 years past the tipping point. Merry Christmas, all of you!

The miracle in the sky above was nothing in comparison to the miracle in Mary's arms in the house below.

Bethlehem was the opening gambit in the last campaign of a long war.

Victory is a lot closer than we believe it to be.

Following Sun Tzu, our first responsibility is to attack the enemy's plan. In the second place, we attack his alliances. In the third place, we attack his forces.

Victory in war, including culture war, is like the collapsing of a dam. Preparation is needed for the aftermath.

To prevail in conflict is not possible without deception. Where you are weak, he should think you are strong. Where you are strong, he should believe you are weak.

Where you are present, he should believe you to be absent. Where you are absent, he should believe you to be present. When you are distant, he should believe you to be near. When you are near, he should believe you are distant.

When you have no plan, he should believe you do. When you are executing a plan, he should believe you are doing nothing.

Your strength is not measured by how strong you are. Your strength is measured by how strong your adversary believes you are.

Weapons are no substitute for a strategy.

Superior weapons do not make up for an inferior strategy.

Superior weapons do not make up for inferior men.

The phrase “culture wars” should not be applied to mere policy differences. If one party wants to go left and the other wants to go right, there should be no culture war. If one faction wants to hollow the nation out from within, then we engage.

God hammers our victory in His forge, and the stars are the sparks.

Culture warriors take note. Chesterton: The one glimpse of paradise on earth is to fight in a losing cause…and not lose it.

No man is truly sanctified until his money is.

What is the public square for? Well, that’s where we are supposed to burn the idols—Deut. 13:16.

The wicked reign, and then they suffer. The godly do not have this spiritual dyslexia—they suffer, and then reign.

The IRS wants to know contents of our prayers. Fine, but that may involve sulfur, brimstone, raining scorpions, and hail the size of cantaloupe.

Satan is the great accuser, and so nothing disappoints him like mercy does.

In times of soft tyranny like ours, pray that God raises up men who dare to say what many dare to think.

The grace of God is endless. Oceans of gift to fill my little thimble.

The warehouses of deliverance never have an inventory crisis.

If you insist on marrying a child of the devil, you shouldn't be surprised when you have difficulties with your in-laws.

The glory of God haunts every surrendered heart.

If I am going to get nailed, I would rather it be for doing the right thing poorly instead of the wrong thing well.

Believing the universe is governed by absolute goodness is the only possible basis for thinking anything could be wrong with it now.

Evolution provides a framework of transgression—what you believe you have descended from has a great deal to do with what you will descend to.

It is not wisdom to build up your business by pulling down your soul.

Thought of a great phrase the other day—"spelunking in the caverns of joy." Not sure how to use it.

Since the love of God is an artesian well, we should love our neighbors from the well, and not from a bucket.

Discontent is a herd animal.

Epistemic humility must never be allowed to interfere with the crucial task of identifying epistemic fatheads.

Calling the next iteration of unbelief post-liberalism is like calling someone a post-leper because another finger fell off.

Never forget that the wrath and judgment of God is not simply just and righteous and holy, but that it is also…altogether beautiful.

What some call social justice is actually personal vengeance dressed up in a rented tux. The cheap cologne is the usual giveaway.

Christians must not be limited to the testimony that the resurrection happened. We must also testify how the resurrection is inexorable.

The resurrection was the first step in turning the world inside out. The Lord rose from the dead, and then began pulling death after Him.

The sanctifying work of the Spirit on His Temple advances, but the sound of the chisel is not heard.

Same-sex marriage is not what some folks will be allowed to do in private, but rather what you will be allowed to say about it in public.

It is not surefire, but the very best way to perpetuate an affliction is to chafe and grumble under it.

For those trying to understand the history of statism, keep in mind that the camel's nose doesn't look anything like the rest of the camel.

Always distinguish those who want you to apologize so that relationship can be restored, and those who do it to steer and manipulate you.

Adam lost his bride through disobedience at a tree; the last Adam won His bride through His obedience on one.

Without the evangelical center, attempts at reform are like assigning a personal trainer to every corpse, in order to escort it to the gym.

The evangelical center is this—after the miracle, the water should taste like wine.

Seneca Falls, Selma, Stonewall, Sodom…Hey! How did we get on this Slippery Slope?

The halls of Heaven are spacious and wide, with the beams exceedingly high. But the lintel is low, right on the ground.

As the body without the spirit is dead, so also a sermon without application is dead.

Humility is not pretending to be smaller than you are. Humility is understanding what you are.

As the wise man once said, liberals don't care what you do, so long as it is mandatory.

When Jesus rose from the dead, He did not just come out of the grave. He rose from condemnation.

Challenging times: perhaps we ought to return to the worship of God the Father Almighty, and stop chumming around with our sky buddy.

If you are in it for little accomplishments, be sure to make little plans.

Secular modernity is the great rust-belt god-factory, and we are long past the time for lay-offs.

Let's try to think outside the box. Said the guy in the cubicle.

The cross of Jesus Christ is the place of no condemnation precisely because it is the place of all condemnation.

Don’t let your home be the place where you receive most of your gifts and do most of your grumbling.

The mission of the Church is to scatter throughout the whole earth, in search of profane persons and things, that we may consecrate them all.

In one sense, Heaven and Hell have the same definition. They are both places where you become what you have been becoming.

For the foolish, some of the way-stations of Hell can seem like small heavens.

Carnal ambition is the one sin that step by step, up a long marble staircase, ascends to Hell.

Spurgeon once said that when God begins to work, it always looks more like an undoing than a doing.

In regeneration, a man is made fundamentally unfit for the devil’s work.

Behold our wealth creators. Some say we should encourage them, while others wonder how much they will put up with. Two worldviews.

Heaven is an infinite distance from us, but if we are on the right road, we can walk there all the same.

At a recent dinner my dad said, “No sense dying with a good reputation.” My daughter asked if his was good. “Better than it ought to be.”

There is no glory without vicarious, blood substitution. And with it, glory is the inexorable finale.

If you keep the law of God, you are not described in Scripture as a pinched legalist, but rather as happy (Prov. 29:18).

If Obama is Carter redux, and Carter is insufferable in retirement after one failed term, just think about the future and try to be brave.

One drop of heavenly comfort is sufficient to sweeten a great salt ocean of earthly sorrows and affliction.

Thomas Watson: “When Christ has done dying, he has not done loving.” He intercedes still.

The word “grace” can do nothing but shift uneasily in an ungracious mouth.

What are the first stirrings of grace in the heart but mustard-
seed glory?

It is not what you are doing when reading Scripture. It is what Scripture is doing when you are reading Scripture.

If gun control saves at least one child’s life, it is worth it. Really? Even if not having gun control saves ten children’s lives?

As you go to hear the Word preached, to use the words of a wise teacher, be sure to disconnect your inner lawyer.

One of the chief ornaments of duty is difficulty.

Postmodernists are hostile to argumentation, so it is hard to argue with them. But as an intellectual mood, it can be dispelled. I suggest pepper spray.

The Father speaks, and so we preach. The Son is spoken, so we have something to say. The Spirit anoints, and so we are understood.

The grace of God to us is not Christ’s indulgence. It is Christ’s righteousness.

The fiscal cliff was averted because we all voted to hit the rocks at the bottom on purpose.

Whenever God sends us into affliction, we always find Him there before us, waiting for us.

God offers the gift of truth, goodness, beauty. We settle for the wrapping paper of doctrinalism, moralism, and formalism.

“Well, the only thing we can do now is pray about it.” “Oh, no! Has it come to that?”

All I want is for the wealthy to pay their fair share…said the tapeworm to the intestinal wall.

Leaves on the tree of life are for the healing of the nations, and they cannot be applied without the nations getting better.

The promises of God have no expiration date.

Love is rendered to God through your neighbor. All else is rendered into the void.

Grace does not amount to antinomianism, but for some reason real grace always brings charges of antinomianism.

Of course the Second Amendment allows us modern weaponry. How else do we shoot down the surveillance drones?

The reformation, when it comes, will be a mess. But let’s not make a mess and call it reformation.

When fighting principalities and powers in high places, the preacher should take care to aim low…where the sin is.

What am I going to do during the course of Obama’s second term? Well, by the grace of God, I hope to misbehave.

Some people have wronged you so significantly that they may never find it in their hearts to forgive you.

Precisely because we are not disembodied spirits, there are no human rights without property rights.

Conservatives discourage easily because without a robust eschatology every battle is the entire war.

As we are resisting the Obama madness, I don't think God is chastising us for our divided counsels. But He is certainly doing it with them.

Compassion is loving others with your stuff. It is not, incidentally, loving others with other people's stuff.

Before the creation, God wanted a universe, which is not the same thing as lacking a universe.

We are seeing the shrinking of the American mind if, as I believe, big government is the first refuge of small minds.

Look on the bright side. These death panels mean that I will eventually get to go where there is no Obamacare. I mean, there's that.

Rationalistic secularism is a small and pretty slow quadruped. Faith is winged reason, spiraling like a hawk.

The legs of unbelief are way too short to outrun the goodness and grace of God.

Thomas Watson said it well: God sometimes accepts the willingness without the work, but never the work without the willingness.

Few ministers call themselves, as Paul did, "chief of sinners." But when they do, there shouldn't be a chorus of amens from the congregation.

Some men display their copy of the Westminster Confession upon their shelves proudly, the highest achievement of the taxidermist's art.

Never forget that Jesus commands us to come before He commands us to go.

If you say you don't like the devil's beef, then perhaps you should stop smelling his gravy.

Would you rather be a scholar discoursing about the crisis of displacement, or a country singer singing about how much you miss Georgia?

Despising free markets is just a fancy way of disliking people.

"I'd rather be ruled by a wise Christian than a foolish Turk"—Martin Luther after a few beers.

Why do they always call themselves postmodern, and never post-Darwinian?

It has been wisely observed that it is not the high cost of living that's getting us. It is the cost of living too high.

What's the problem? You need a creed with a backbone, and a backbone with a creed.

If you do not love the present, which you have seen, how can you love the future, which you have not seen?

If you are not content where you are, there is no reason to believe you will be content when you get where you would rather be.

Conscience is the character of one's whole life in a reduction sauce.

Anti-Americanism is just a denominational variant of Americanism.

The Christian faith is not supposed to build civilization. The Christian faith builds the men and woman…who build the civilization.

Couldn’t sleep last night and caught twenty minutes of health and wealth preaching. Those guys assume way more than the verses say. And I assume way less.

Half the nutcracker is vicarious death of Jesus. The other is the need for new birth. God cracks the heart of stone and pours His Spirit in.

If we lived in Nazareth two thousand years ago, next door to Jesus, what fine neighbors we would be. But Jesus is our neighbor now.

If a man is blessed with sons standing with him in the city gates, what is the first thing that comes to modernism’s mind? Why, nepotism!

The relationship of faith and works is similar to the relationship of science and art.

Renunciation alone gets us hermits on poles. Engagement alone gets us hipsters and worldlings. The answer is the new birth.

Leftist leveling is a Christian counterfeit, using envy and cutting, and would throw down Heaven if it could. The gospel levels by lifting.

It is no shame to seek the Lord in trouble (2 Chron. 20:3). Be shamed when you seek other gods, or if you forget the Lord after deliverance.

Virtue without Christ is like a corpse without a head.

Trying to live right in this world without God is like trying to navigate the Pacific using only the reflection of stars in the water.

Reminder: copying the outside of a culture is not the same thing as engaging with it.

When it comes to your long term difficulties, don’t surrender your fort half an hour before the cavalry arrives—Luke 18:1

Just as Moses saw the promised land from Pisgah, so also David saw the Temple from the building supplies.

My mixed review of postmodernism. I like it when they are shooting at the Calormenes. I don’t like it when they shoot at the horses.

Proverbs are integrated with wisdom. Pearls need a string.

Section 7

Five Key Battlegrounds

Applying our terminology from Section 1, the five battlegrounds analyzed here should each be considered *decisive points* in the culture war. I'm sure I've been accused of "jumping up and down too much" on each one of them, and so I have written this section to get you all to start jumping too.

REMEMBERING GOD IN WORSHIP

The sixth chapter of Deuteronomy is a passage which is familiar for many reasons. The Lord Jesus quotes it when He tells us what the greatest commandment in all Scripture is (Luke 10:27). This passage contains the great *Shema*, recited by the Jews constantly—"Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord." This is the passage that led many of us to undertake the high calling of Christian education for our children—when you walk along the road, and when you are sitting in your house. But there is another jewel here for us: "Then beware lest thou forget the Lord, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage…." (Deut. 6:4–13).

A summary of the context will be helpful to start. Hear, O Israel, the YHWH our Elohim, is one YHWH (v. 4). In paraphrase, we might say *the Jehovah, our Gods, is one Jehovah*. And you shall love the YHWH your Elohim with everything you've got (v. 5). These words that Moses is delivering shall *reside* in your heart (v. 6). As a result, they must also be in your mouth as you teach your children in every setting (v. 7). Tie them on your hand, bind them to your forehead (v. 8). These two locations indicate *behavior* and *thought*. Be careful, little hand, what you do. Be careful, little head, what you think. Write them down on your door-posts and gates (v. 9). Then, when God gives you an abundance of His goodness (vv. 10–11), you must watch out lest you *forget* the

Lord, who brought you out of the house of slavery (v. 12). You shall fear the Lord, and serve the Lord, and take your oaths in His name (v. 13).

There are a number of verbs in the imperative in this passage—hear, love, teach, talk, bind, write, fear, serve, and swear. But we should be able to see that they all come together in this—*remember*. Do not forget (v. 12). We know from the New Testament, that the highest form our obedience takes is in submission to the great command *to love*. But what do you do exactly when you love? Should you grit your teeth and radiate love rays? No…we love by *remembering*.

Now we must be careful. With a point like this, one of the first things we might forget is that God loved us *first*. If we love because He first loved us (1 John 4:19), then we remember Him because He *first* remembered us. This means that God remembers us, and it is only because He remembers us that we can remember Him. There are numerous examples of God's remembrance, so let's just point to a few. God *remembered* Noah (Gen. 8:1). God *remembered* Rachel (Gen. 30:22). God *remembered* His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Ex. 2:24). God *remembered* the house of Israel (Ps. 98:3). What is all this but to say that God *loved* His people? So *remember*, then, salvation is by grace through faith, from first to last.

When forgetfulness begins, love is then in decline. Do not forget all the Lord's benefits (Ps. 103:2). The Israelites did evil when they forgot (Judg. 3:7). Paul loved the poor by remembering them (Gal. 2:10). The blood of Jesus is the only possible covering for our sin. A cloak of forgetfulness can't cover sin, because forgetfulness is one of the greatest of sins. Never hide your dirty sins under a pile of bigger, dirty sins. Never hide your crud under worse crud. Not smart.

Someone once noted that we all walk backward into the future. And Samuel Johnson once observed that we more often need to be *reminded* than we need to

be *instructed*. Instructing someone on what he already knows is an irritation. Reminding someone of what we all confess is a blessing.

> Therefore I intend *always to remind you* of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up *by way of reminder*…This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind *by way of reminder*, that you should *remember* the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles. (2 Pet. 1:12–13, 3:1–2)

What are we to remember? We have a Bible full of things to remember, not to mention a creation full of them. But let us set our loves in order.

We are to remember the law of God. We have this in our text. God delivered us from the house of slavery, and His law is our life. Love is defined by the law (Rom. 13:8). Of course, if we have forgotten God and His Word, that same law condemns us…and drives us to Christ.

We are to remember the salvation of God. We see this through the Passover in the Old Testament (Ex. 12:14), and the Lord's Supper in the New (1 Cor. 11:24–26). We are to eat this bread, and drink this cup as a remembrance (*anamnesis*).

We are to remember the process of sanctification in the course of our pilgrimage through this world. We have a duty in perseverance, and perseverance in any kind of long haul is that which enables you to remember when the thought comes into your head…*why am I doing this again?*

Returning to our text from Deuteronomy, what is the great eraser? We have written all the goodness of God up on the board, to remind ourselves, up in front of the class. We have memorialized His great kindnesses to us. What is most frequently used to wipe it all away? What makes us forget the goodness of God? The answer is…the goodness of God. He gives us wealth (Deut. 6:10–12), and our minds instantly start to wander. He gives us a good land (Deut. 8:7–18), and

we take all the credit for ourselves (Deut. 8:18), as though we arranged for it all ourselves.

"The wicked shall be turned into hell, *and all the nations that forget God*" (Ps. 9:17).

Scripture teaches us what the rhythm of our remembrance should be. We are called to appear before the Lord, to worship, every seven days. In the old covenant, this was the seventh day, but in the new covenant, that day has been moved to the first day of the week.

The key battle in our culture wars is the reestablishment of worship that is pleasing to God. Our worship of Him must be weighty and substantive—but many churches have tried to turn their worship services into some kind of very light ministry meringue. Our worship services should renew our covenant with God in a solemn, joyful, and dignified way. We are commanded to worship Him with reverence and godly awe (Heb. 12:28–29). Why don't we? Why do we refuse to do this? Our refusal is costing us far more than we think. Henry Van Til once noted that culture is religion externalized. *Cultus* (worship) lies at the heart of every *culture*. And the reason our culture has forgotten God is because our worship services did that first.

Our worship services should summon us into the presence of God. We should bow together to confess our sins as a people—and represent the sins of our nation before Him as we do. We should consecrate ourselves to Him fully as we confess our faith, sing psalms and hymns, and hear a message that is preached out of the Bible. We should gather around the Lord's Table weekly, and then, under the benediction of His appointed minister, we should head out into another week to conduct another series of raids.

THE POLITICS OF SODOMY

I was once asked about my “constant hammering” on the issue of homosexuality. Why do I keep going on about it? Why don’t I write about sins my parishioners might actually be committing? Well, actually I do that too—my book *Fidelity* was written for that express purpose. So that front is actually covered.

However, the central part of this question still needs to be answered. Why is human sexuality such a big theological and political issue? But before answering it, let me set the stage first.

Sodomy was a felony in all 50 states as recently as 1962, when I was nine years old. The establishment narrative—a very clever perversion of the Whig view of history, which was in its turn a perversion of postmillennialism—is that we are all of us gradually emerging from the dark woods of old-timey superstitions, and that these things take time. That gradual evolutionary emergence has us leaving behind the way we “used to be” and walking toward the higher mountain meadows of egalitarianism, where everything is bright and sunny and the clouds are fluffy.

As a result of this narrative, we see a facile equation of “civil rights” for homosexuals with the actual expansion of civil rights for other minorities. “From Seneca Falls to Selma to Stonewall,” to take President Obama’s phrase, is an illustration of this narrative in action. But prior to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 it wasn’t a felony to be black. It was perfectly fine to be black—it simply wasn’t fine to be black and doing the same things that whites were doing, like attending the same school.

I grew up in a segregated town, which meant that blacks were prohibited from attending the same school I went to, and they were excluded simply on the basis of the color of their skin. They were treated as different, and were thus excluded

from being allowed to do the same things I was allowed to do (in this case, attend Germantown Elementary). *Different* people were not allowed to do the *same* thing. That is a crucial point, and I would plead with you to keep a weather eye on it.

Homosexual agitators argue that this is precisely their situation. They are different, and they are not allowed to do the same thing straights are allowed to do (e.g. marry). But this is so absurd that it is astonishing to me that the entire country has been able to debate this thing for years without getting into a fit of the giggles.

If we are to treat men equally, this means that when one man marries a woman, a different man should be allowed to do the same thing—marry a woman also. You have different men doing the same thing. In the case of hetero- and homosexual marriage, you have different men doing completely different things, and (here is the key point…) *the agitators insist that we all call it the same thing*, under penalty of law.

They will go in an opposite direction, but if you point this out, you must be filled with hate. The body politic demands of us that we all say this particular set of quite distinct actions are precisely and exactly the same action. But whenever *doublespeak* is demanded of me, I start looking around for Big Brother. And well, look, here he is! Right on schedule!

As I hinted a moment ago, this is not simply a matter of dealing with a particular sexual vice. The reason for singling out sodomy for particular political attention right now is the homo-activists have made it their central political weapon. Other sins can still be addressed by pastors for what they are—sins. In the 1950s, when a pastor was counseling a homosexual parishioner, he was doing what pastors now do when they offer counsel to members with a porn

problem, for example. He was trying to help someone with a personal struggle—and he was not having to deal simultaneously with a culture-wide insistence that this personal struggle be universally-recognized as a matter of personal pride instead of personal shame. At that time, sodomy had not yet been made into a flag for a movement.

Think about it. There are no Adultery Pride Marches. There are no Masturbation is Cool Stadium Rallies. There is no such thing as Secret Porn Stash Pride Day. Of course, since we live in absurd times, all this must be qualified with the word *yet*. So right now, as we speak, same sex couplings are being used by our ruling class in a completely different way than are these other sexual vices. We are experiencing a culture-wide full-court press on this subject. If there is a continuum between Selma and Stonewall, then the time is coming, and now is, when it will be just as unacceptable to say anywhere, *including from the pulpit*, that sodomy is an offense to God. Any minister who tries it will be treated the same way a minister today would be treated if he preached a sermon on race relations, using the phrase "colored people" throughout, and illustrated it with heart-warming video clips from *Song of the South*.

We are up against a very potent demand that we make our public demeanor toward homosexuals one that walks very gingerly, like a cat on hot bricks. I think it was Spurgeon who said that some ministers exegete a text the way a donkey eats a thistle, that is to say, very carefully. If you continue to believe, in the deepest recesses of your heart, that same-sex activity is not *exactly* what God wants us doing, you currently have to express this sentiment, if you express it at all, by saying that you do not believe, at the end of the day, that same sex attractions are able to present us with an optimal opportunity for human thriving. You are *not* allowed to say, unless you are prepared to be a pariah, that sodomy

is a very bad sin. Thanks for asking the question. *And kind of gross, if you think about it.* The zeitgeist is currently insisting that we mince our words the way Liberace used to walk.

So the reason I go on about this is that there are *many* ministers, in conservative, evangelical and Reformed circles, who are currently bending to these demands. But friends, the last thing we should do, when dealing with an angry mob on Lot's front porch, is any bending of any kind.

Sodomy is therefore a political act, and those engaged in the movement know it. They have made no secret of it. So I don't really feel bad for noticing this, and for refusing to go along with it. And in refusing to go along with it, I believe that such refusals should come as soon as you realize what road you are on, and not come when you balk at going the last half mile of it.

Incidentally, asking a woman to marry you and to walk with you as you bring up children in the Lord together, is also a potent political act. But, in contrast to the sodomy revolution, it is a political act *that actually bears fruit*. More people who live that way should know about it. Somebody should tell them.

But when we go to tell them, that raises some additional issues.

We live in a bad neighborhood, meaning this world of ours, and so this means that we have two kinds of problems. The first would be, naturally, the bad dudes roaming the neighborhood. The second problem would be those endearing but exasperating naifs living inside the house with us, who persist in leaving invitational lights on and doors unlocked. One problem is direct, and the other is indirect. One problem is assault and the other problem is failure to take the real possibility of a real assault into account.

So here is the unlocked door. It is what W.W. Bartley called the "retreat to commitment." (The phrase is his. I am doing something else with it than what he

is doing.) Because the word *commitment* is being used, we all feel all orthodoxy and everything, but because an actual retreat has occurred, a realm where that commitment need not be applied is ceded to the adversary. That abandoned realm may be different for different faith communities, and it is usually huge. Some abandon reason, others science, others business, others the arts, and so on. Others abandon absolutely everything that lies outside the walls of Wabash Bible College, which is pre-mill and pre-trib all the way out to the fences. Still others abandon everything outside the mind and heart of the last remaining Christian instructor in the grad program at Slewfoot Seminary.

Now one of the real problems with natural revelation (for those retreating, that is) is that it doesn't allow for a coherent retreat, and that is because natural revelation is what it is, and it is that way all the way out to the edges of the universe, provided the universe has edges. If it doesn't have edges, the lordship of Christ extends as far as the universe does.

Some with a piercing gaze have noticed that Christian churches have New Testaments and mosques and synagogues don't. This means that they can pretend that the claims of Scripture are simply a constitutional framework for our own faith community, and need not be applied in that imperious way that Charlemagne might have applied it to the Saracens, for example. There were some things that went on back then that were deeply hurtful, and we have renegade bombers in our day who are still upset about it.

So, we mutter, this is "our" text, and we want to deeply respect those other faith communities with "their" texts and everything. We have retreated to our commitment, and—fair is fair—we let them retreat into theirs. In fact, we kind of insist, though with a querulous voice, that the bombers retreat to theirs.

But somebody outside is still running the show. Somebody is outside the walls of *all* our faith communities applying the tenets of his religion to absolutely everybody. But he is shrewd enough to call it secularism, leaving out the tell-tale prayers, candles, and altars, and *poof!* nobody notices that it is an imposed faith system into which not everybody has been baptized. But it is still just as mandatory as that time when Ivan the Terrible had that fellow's hat nailed to his head.

Now that "somebody" who is still running the show doesn't like any reminders that Somebody Else is really running the show, and He is the one who will bring all human history to a final crashing unveiling day when every last one of us will be standing before the throne of the Almighty God—some of us in white robes given to us by Jesus, and others completely naked. One portion of the human race will be on the right, and the other portion will be on the left. There will be no third spot for the secularists to stand.

But the God who passes judgment on that day is the same God who inspired the Scriptures to be written, and He is also the same God who governs the fall of sparrows, the motion of atoms in all of Neptune's moons, the number of hairs on every head that will come up before Him at the judgment, the intricate mathematical patterns found in the waving grass in every field on earth, and the guttural praise of all the frogs in springtime. But this means that God's revelation of Himself goes all the way out to the edges. We can't get away from it. God wrote two books—the Word and the world. His name is on the spine of *both* of them. They each can be read apart from the other, but neither can be read fully without some working knowledge of the other.

To take an illustration from Cornelius Van Til, if there were a place on the dials of our radios where God were not constantly broadcasting, 24–7, where

would we sinners all have our radios tuned? Right—they would all be carefully tuned to that one place where God was *not* speaking. We don't want God to speak, we don't want Him to reveal, we don't want *Him*. But on the built-in radios that God gave every mother's son of us, spiritually welded to the inside of our occiput bone, there is no silent spot. It is all God, all the time, that intolerable broadcaster.

Those who claim otherwise are suppressing the truth in unrighteousness. One of the best ways, incidentally, for ignoring things that you really know, besides getting stoned or drunk, is the pursuit of sexual license. This is why the pagans in Romans 1 wind up where they do—they refuse to honor God as God, and refuse to give Him thanks, and so they wind up receiving in themselves the due penalty of their error (Rom. 1:27–28). This is why the Bible consistently describes the pursuit of idols as *whoring* (Ex. 34:16). Why would this principle change just because the idols were forged in our postmodern rebellion? All idolatry is whoredom, and so believers ought not be shocked that we have arrived at that part of the golden calf dance where the *girlz* are taking off their tops. This is what always happens.

But God does not cater to us or our sinful whims. He speaks the authoritative Word, and He is never not speaking, and we are never out of ear shot. We cannot turn anywhere for a moment's peace and quiet. What we have mistaken for peace and quiet is the clamor of our own voices trying to shout down faithful Christians, and we tell ourselves that under the noise of our yelling (made necessary by those hate-filled fundamentalists) is the true peace and quiet we all desire. We will finally be able to enjoy that peace and quiet when the last hater is loaded onto the trains going out to the Peace and Joy camps.

In the great words of Francis Schaeffer, He is there and He is not silent. Got that? *Not silent*. Find me one place in the universe that is silent about Him. The stars sing about Him. The oceans provide the bass line. The mountain ranges skip like a calf, and the trees reach yearningly toward the Heaven that they so wonderfully represent to us. And the azure sky tells men to stop bonking their girlfriends.

"And when Moses saw that the people had broken loose (for Aaron had let them break loose, to the derision of their enemies)…"(Ex. 32:25, ESV).

Aaron was that kind of fellow I referred to at the beginning, the one who insisted on leaving doors unlocked. Wise rule would have kept the people from breaking loose, and unwise rule allows for them to break loose. Because we are currently being ruled by miscreants and incompetents, America has broken loose. The pattern holds true, right down to the derision of our enemies.

What we need are some Levites with the sword of the Spirit to ascend into their pulpits and fix it. But that might require some courage, and so as a proposed alternative we have built a conference circuit, and a series of networks and coalitions, and let's not forget the blogs, where we have all agreed to wave our swords in the air, and to do so in a gospel-centered way.

THE SOUL OF EDUCATION

When it comes to the question of education, I have argued for years as a pastor that a Christian education for Christian kids is mandated by Scripture (Eph. 6:1–4). A Christian education for all Christian children should be a non-negotiable. And as a cultural activist, I have long argued that a classical Christian education is a *tactical* non-negotiable. If we want to graduate students who have a

chronological map in their heads, with an x on it that says, “You are here,” then classical education is a necessity.

But during the heyday of the Occupy movement, Rush Limbaugh went on a little rant about classical education. He was riffing off the protest of an Occupy demonstrator, whose sign bemoaned her “useless” classical studies degree, and his basic response was that anybody who was dumb enough to get a classical studies degree deserved whatever they got, good and hard. Now as a recipient of one such degree, allow me to rise, however briefly, to the defense. My purpose is not to provide an exhaustive response, but rather simply to dance around the room a little bit, pointing out a few objects of interest on the walls as I go.

Rush said, among other things,

> Any of you at random listening all across the fruited plain, what the *bleep* is classical studies? What classics are studied?…What are the classics?…For all of you young skulls full of mush out there… when you go to college, do not do classical studies. What the *bleep* is it anyway?

Thus far the gentleman on the radio.

This is what might be called a major hoot, but only in a sad kind of way. You know, a sad hoot, like Obama talking about jobs. One of the most vocal defenders of our Western civilization has joined the rabble in giving the raspberry to the study of dead, white guys. *Gentlemen, we must now retreat to the inner city and defend the gates from there.*

What good is a classical education? Well, one thing it can do is enable you to draft the kind of Constitution that will allow its foremost defenders two and half centuries later to not know what the heck went into it. Let’s not forget *that*.

Look. I like Ronald Reagan. But defending the right wing of your civilization from Reagan on down is like appealing to the ancient lineage of Gondor—you know, way back to Denethor’s grandfather. Three stewards in a *row*.

If there is one thing worse than an occuhippie with a classics degree and no job, that would be a radio talk show host with cultural amnesia—in charge of organizing all our cultural defenses. Here is a brief statement of what a classical Christian education, rightly considered, is capable of accomplishing.

A Christian education is one which acknowledges the lordship of Christ in every subject studied, and which teaches the relations of each subject in a way that is consistent with Scripture. Each subject is taught as part of an integrated whole, with Scripture at the center. Christ is the axle, and everything taught is a spoke. A classical education has two characteristics. First, it follows the pedagogy developed over the course of Western Civilization—that of grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric. And second, it also acknowledges the authority of the past. Tradition is not absolute—only Scripture has that place—but respecting tradition is a way of honoring our fathers and our mothers. This is why classical education also defines the content of the curriculum—Herodotus and Augustine, Calvin and Edwards, Aristotle and Plutarch.

But this is just the body of classical and Christian education. Classical and Christian education also has a soul—something harder to define, but easy to describe.

Scripture teaches us that to the pure all things are pure (Titus 1:15). To the defiled, all things are defiled. The principle can and should be extended. To the dullard all things are dull. One of the central reasons why G.K. Chesterton is such a wonderful thinker and writer is that he had the gift of making us see how extraordinary all ordinary things are. He would cock his head sideways and describe the living room from that vantage, and all of us would learn new things about a place where we had lived for years.

The simpleton thinks that ordinary things are ordinary. The faux mystic drops some acid in order to find out that extraordinary visions are extraordinary. But only a healthy soul can see how remarkable every unremarkable thing actually is. When you consider how many magnificent things can be done with a potato, you recognize the absolute sovereignty of God, and the depth of His wisdom. When you realize how many epochs and eons are represented by the gravel in your driveway, you want to cry out with the seraphim. As Chesterton once put it, making this same point, "The poets have been singularly silent on the subject of cheese."

On some subjects, we know these things instinctively. One of the most obvious things that a new father might say about the birth of his first child is that "the whole thing was a *miracle*." But a cynic comes alongside that new father and mocks—"and this 'miracle,'" he says, "has happened how many times? *Billions*?" But the exultant wisdom of a new father trumps the cynic's vaunted ability to count. The fact that things happen all the time, over and over again, does not mean they are not magic. What it actually means is that they represent a very strong magic indeed. And in addition to the magic of this unbelievable world careening all around us, we have the additional spell that someone has cast on our eyes—making us blind to all of it. How easy it is to become a dwarf in a stable!

So here is Chesterton again, making old things new.

> "The sun rises every morning…Now, to put the matter in a popular phrase, it might be true that the sun rises regularly because he never gets tired of rising. His routine might be due, not to a lifelessness, but to a rush of life. The thing I mean can be seen, for instance, in children, when they find some game or joke that they specially enjoy. A child kicks his legs rhythmically through excess, not absence, of life. Because children have abounding vitality, because they are in spirit fierce and free, therefore they want things repeated and unchanged. They always say, "Do it again"; and the grown-up person does it again until he is nearly dead. For grown-up people are not strong enough to exult in monotony. But perhaps God is strong enough to exult in monotony. It is possible that God says every morning, "Do it again" to the sun; and every evening, "Do it again" to the moon. It may not be

> automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike; it may be that God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them. It may be that He has the eternal appetite of infancy; for we have sinned and grown old, and our Father is younger than we."[6]

Yes, there is a sense in which our Father is younger than we. He is the Ancient of Days, but because He is life itself, because He is the living God, because He is the fountain of life, this means that all the days involved in that glorious title Ancient of Days, are each of them *new* days. They are new days, and they remain new days. How could He grow old? He is the everlasting one. He is the Ancient of Dawns, and they are *all* dawns, and every last one of them *stays* dawn.

Scripture says that the Lord has made all things new. "And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful" (Rev. 21:5). These words are indeed true and faithful, and we need to heed them, for we live in a world where young people grow old. But this passage is talking about the New Jerusalem, and the New Jerusalem will never—not in a million years—become the Old Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem of God is filled with the saints of God, and together we sing a new song. But the kind of new song we sing there never takes its place among the oldies. This means that the adjective *new* represents a particular *quality* of newness. Moreover it is a quality straight from the heart of the triune God.

Jesus says that the one who believes in Him will have rivers of living water flow out of him (John 7:38). Whatever could that mean? Among other things, it means that each believer is a fountainhead, a source. It means the water is fresh, new. Moreover, it is living water, which means that the fresh water stays fresh, it means the new water stays new. It has to stay new because it is alive. We do not urge our graduates to a life of eccentricity—though some might call it that. We do not want them to become hippies who were untimely born. The point is more

fundamental than that. We want them to stay friends with the Spirit of God, and not to grieve Him. He is that living water.

We want to give the same charge to every graduating class. Here it is—*grow wise; do not grow old*. Don't be a dullard. Don't become a dullard. Don't ever confuse the creeping onset of dullardry with an advance in your sanctification. Were such a thing to happen, it would actually be a regress.

Ambrose Bierce defines the *dullard* thus:

> A member of the reigning dynasty in letters and life. The Dullards came in with Adam, and being both numerous and sturdy have overrun the habitable world. The secret of their power is their insensibility to blows…In the turbulent times of the Crusades they withdrew thence and gradually overspread all Europe, occupying most of the high places in politics, art, literature, science and theology…According to the most trustworthy statistics the number of adult Dullards in the United States is but little short of thirty millions, including the statisticians.7 (*The Devil's Dictionary*)

The only thing to quarrel with here is the number thirty million, but we must also recall that Bierce was speaking in the 19th century, and before the invention of the Internet.

Losing your hair, that's all right. Some graduates may lose their right to the adjective *svelte*. In the years to come, in games of pick-up basketball, it is acceptable to lose a few steps. But, as I have written before, someone who has been educated in the permanent things ought never to lose the right kind of bright in his eyes.

Wisdom, like the mercies of God Himself, is new every morning. When we grow in wisdom, our outer man will still get weathered, and our bones will still age. We live before the final resurrection. But our inner man will be renewed by the Spirit of God, though our outer man perish (2 Cor. 4:16). As we grow in grace over the years—which is *not* the same thing as getting spooled up over additional scruples—we will find ourselves renewed. Put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge (Col. 3:10). Be *renewed* in the spirit of your mind

(Eph. 4:23). These things are not said so that we might run them through a moralistic filter and translate them all into a respectable and dreary way of being spiritually dull. *No*.

The way before us is full of choices and decisions. And every choice we make will have the effect of either making us duller and more like a tedium drill, or brighter and more like the Spirit of God who dwells in us. If we truly belong to Him, He has all along intended for us to be conformed to the image of His Son. My charge is that you grow up into that wisdom which is always a fresh wisdom. The point of a true education is to, by the grace of God, learn how to refuse to let the soul get old.

T.S. Eliot has Prufrock lament the timidity of his advancing years—"I grow old, I grow old, I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled." And what does that come to? "Do I dare to eat a peach?" Well, if we know what a real education is, I would charge you, by all that is alive—you had *better*.

FREE MEN, FREE MARKETS

There is no way to be involved in the work of cultural reformation without addressing the question of justice. But when you do, it will not be long before someone of your acquaintance is talking about "social justice," which ought to strike you the way the phrase "bone cancer" does, or "economic justice," which is just advanced bone cancer. Of course, there is such a thing as true social justice, and real economic justice, but they are poles apart from what is usually meant by those phrases.

A true reformer understands basic economics, and understands the relationship of gospel liberty and free markets. He must be constantly on guard against those who would steer the language of Scripture into yet another socialistic swamp.

“Those of low estate are but a breath; those of high estate are a delusion; in the balances they go up; they are together lighter than a breath” (Ps. 62:9).

The work of outreach and reformation must be built on something more substantial than the need. The need, as Oswald Chambers put it somewhere, is not the call. And neither is the need able to provide the theology for the call. When it tries to provide that theology, what we get is a bog of sentimentalism—not a good place to pour the foundation for anything.

If you build your mission on the needs of those of low estate, you are basing everything on a breath. If you base it on power and influence, those of high estate, you are building the whole thing on a delusion. Build on both together and they are together lighter than a breath—and will float off with your wood, hay, and stubble.

The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of God lasts forever. We are ambassadors for Christ (2 Cor. 5:20). We go because He told us to. We declare what we were told to declare. We live the way we were told to live. Stated at this level, of course, every professing Christian agrees. But the Spirit is in the details, and I have three in mind.

First, for us this must mean a grounded and foundational faith in the penal, substitutionary death of Christ on the cross for sin. If our work is not based on an *evangel* with actual good news in it, then it will all come to nothing. Second, our work of missions must be Reformed and Kuyperian. This is because cultural work must of necessity engage with the way unbelieving cultures actually are, and the task we have been assigned is utterly transformational. The only theology capable of doing this biblically is Reformed and Kuyperian. And third, we must have an eschatology that leaves room for victory, that leaves room for

actually accomplishing the mission. Otherwise, we will find ourselves signing peace treaties with Ammonites.

A good foil for each of these three points can be found in Donald Kraybill's book *The Upside-Down Kingdom*.8 First, Kraybill is pretty clearly an Abelardian on the atonement, which obliterates any possibility of a true "up-side down" kingdom. One of the reasons we must focus on Christ and Him crucified is because it is the message that actually brings every thought captive. But all those thoughts out there, all those high imaginations that don't want to be made captive, are quick to suggest to us that a cross of moral suasion and influence would be so much nicer. I dare say it would be nicer, but it wouldn't be *good*, and it wouldn't be potent. If we are going to be engaged in true cultural reformation, we need a gospel that kicks the devil in the teeth. And that means it must be a message of penal, substitutionary, vicarious, blood-bought atonement. When it comes to *this* substitute, we must accept no substitute.

Second, true radical discipleship is found in Kuyper's great statement that there is not one square inch in all creation that is not in the possession of the Lord Jesus. If this is missing, radicalism in discipleship always reduces to posturing and striking poses for the cameras. This is why Kraybill is stuck in a profound paradigmatic blindness, one which does not enable him to see how radically he truncates his calls for radical discipleship. This is scratch n' sniff radical discipleship. This is radical discipleship lite. This is shadow-boxing, pull-the-punch radical discipleship. He gets all the rhetorical steam he can get out of passages like Luke 14:33. But then, when he discusses what this might look like in actual financial practice, in this "let it all hang out, let the chips fall where they may" Jubilee lifestyle, the best he can come up with is a graduated tithe (p. 128). Someone who follows his advice still gets to keep a salary of 34K (even

though on his reading Jesus said to give it *all* away), and despite the fact that he acknowledges a few pages later that this is still wildly more than what the poor in other nations have to live on (p. 132). “The Jubilee message strikes home.” Yeah, with a Nerf bat.

This is posturing. The point is clearly not to *do* what you are actually maintaining that Jesus said to do. The point is to maintain a rhetorical superiority over those of us who say that Jesus taught nothing of the kind. Kraybill says that Jesus taught that we are to live in a “up-side down” way. This can be accomplished, he goes on to reassure us, if we lean just slightly to the left. But leaning five degrees to the left is not upside down. Sorry.

And third, an optimistic eschatological vision will prevent us from borrowing an eschatology of population explosions, monga carbon footprints, and global warming from the secularists who are without God and without hope in the world. There are only two forms of engagement that Christians can engage in—we must either adopt a transformationalist approach or a compromising approach. If we are not going to go the escapist route, waiting for the rapture, we must either take every thought captive, or we must split the difference. Kraybill splits the difference, taking some of his cues for radical discipleship from those who clearly despise the image of God found in little children. Kraybill goes so far as to equate babies with plastic litter and gas-guzzlers (p. 135). Golly Ned.

It turns out that the radical message of Jesus means that we shouldn’t throw our water bottles out of the windows of our SUVs, and we shouldn’t be having so many babies, people! Compromise is always pleasant at the beginning, and quite a relief, but there is no way to prevent it from getting ugly by the end.

Although N.T. Wright is an Anglican, and Kraybill is an anabaptist, they share some common confusions. N.T. Wright was once asked about the tendency

Americans have to line conservative theology up with conservative politics. In his answer, Wright says that in America the conservative/liberal spectrum in politics generally matches up with the conservative/liberal spectrum in theology, and he points out, quite accurately, that it is not this way in other countries, but rather far otherwise. From the way he framed the answer, it appeared to me that he was talking in this instance about economics, so I shall take it that way in what follows.

He makes the point that those who are conservative theologically across the pond are often passionately in the forefront of causes that we here would call left wing. I think this is true as well. I also think it is good that we are saved by grace, and not by works. If it were by works, our economic incompetence would leave a bunch of us hosed.

What I mean is this—many who claim to love Jesus with their theology hate the poor with their economics, and I think we should stop being okay with that. I frankly think we should knock it off—the gospel is not some airy fairy thing that fails to apply to how people have to live out their actual lives. When Jesus taught us to feed the poor, instead of turning their place of habitation into a desolation, this necessarily excludes every form of Keynesianism.

Now I also admit that the previous paragraph has a case of the cutes, but I also want to maintain—in deadly earnest—that leftism of every stripe is a poisonous and lying cheat. This being the case, it does not matter how many vibrant Christians, conservative in their theology, sign on board. How many robust Christians would have to believe in it before water would start flowing uphill? All the Christians in the world, thinking sweet thoughts all at the same time, could not make a minimum wage law that didn’t hurt the poor.

Think back a couple centuries, and I will speak to you in a parable. There was a doctor who traveled all over his region, and he was fully trained in the best science of his day. Unfortunately, this included the doctrine of the bodily humors, and so wherever he went, he would bleed many of his patients—some a half pint, some a pint, and some a quart. Because he was a diligent man, this regimen would be applied *daily*. He was compassionate, he was vibrant in his faith, he was a Trinitarian, and he believed in the resurrection of Jesus. He also rode a pale horse.

Think carefully about how Wright answered this question. He says that the conservative match-up between theology and politics is an American thing, and where he comes from we find a different match-up entirely.

Now there are different directions we can go with this. We might conclude, for example, that Jesus doesn't care what our economic policies are, so long as we love Him. Or we might decide that those who are conservative in their economics need to quit it, and become progressive, because that's what Jesus wants. Or we might go the other way, and say that the progressives ought to become conservatives, also in the name of Jesus. The correct answer, boys and girls, is the last one.

The first one is out because we are told to seek the good of the city where we dwell (Jer. 29:7). We are instructed to do good to all men (1 Thess. 5:15). Apathy and indifference are therefore out. The second option is excluded for the same reason, only more so. If we are told to do good to all men, not only does it exclude leaving them alone in their misery, it also excludes doing bad things to them, *creating* misery for them. Keynesianism destroys jobs, wages, families, neighborhoods, education, opportunity, and more. How is it seeking the good of the city to saddle them with sub-standard schools? How is it seeking the good of

the city to start subsidizing waste, fraud and abuse? All such meddling is economic stupidity, and God did not tell His people to fan out over the globe, doing stupid things to people.

Incidentally, while we are here, in the midst of my robust defense of true free markets, which only the Spirit of God can bring about through the gospel by setting men free from their envy and their covetousness gimmes, I anticipate a misleading challenge from the hipster left, alleging that I am simply defending our current system of crony capitalism, and worse, doing it all in the name of Jesus. To this I will simply reply that I was fighting crony capitalism (what I call crapitalism) when they were still in short pants, and observe, in addition, that if the world's poor could be fed with leftist ignorance of economics, the world would have been satiated generations ago. If leftist nostrums were Joseph's fat cows, what a fine world this would be!

When Wright says that there are a bunch of Christians in other places who are leftist in their economic politics, he is not telling us anything new. But what is his implication? He doesn't state it outright, but the clear hint is that American Christians have spent too much time on the farm, and they need to visit the big Keynesian city sometime and gaze at all the bright lights. Our facile identification of conservative theology and conservative politics is way too American and provincial, he would say.

Now if this is right, then it is right, and we should do as he says. But if it is wrong…and it *is* wrong…we shouldn't. But our response should not be to simply bonk heads over it. We need to have a debate. Does the gospel of Christ, in setting men free, bring in free markets or not? I would be happy to take the affirmative—because Jesus is not a Keynesian any more than Coriakin was a tall Dufflepud.

GETTING OUR SENSATE GROOVE BACK

Once there was a time when I caused a small stir on Facebook by saying, “One of the greatest aesthetic and artistic gifts the world ever received was the casting down of images in the Protestant Reformation.”

What could possibly be behind a comment like that? The battle for culture reformation includes truth, of course, goodness, certainly, but also…beauty. Does the phrase *an evangelical aesthetic* strike us as oxymoronic?

Around the time I made that comment, our family gathered after worship to grill burgers and, as is our wont, the conversation lofted above the green grass, like so much smoke from the burgers. We were discussing artistic ability, evangelicals, and the movies. My comment, and the reasons for it, were part of the discussion.

There are all kinds of critical things that can be said about this topic, many of them accurate, and there are also some common conclusions that can be drawn from these facts, many of them inaccurate. One of the inaccurate ones (as in, *wildly* inaccurate) is that evangelicals make bad movies because they are not as “visual” as other branches of Christendom, and they are not as visual because the Protestant reformers stripped our churches free of icons and images, lo, these many centuries ago, and we have never quite been able to get our sensate groove back.

So the movies *Fireproof* and *Courageous* were heavy-handed in the message they sought to convey, but the only reason people noticed it and squawked is that the message was true, and contrary to the prevailing propaganda. Those movies could have been every bit as heavy-handed without exciting comment had the message been about climate change, treating a gay teenage boy with dignity and

respect, or some down-’n-out protagonist discovering the critical importance of “believing in himself.” You only notice the propaganda that sticks out, and it sticks out by running contrary to the standard-issue propaganda. If it runs contrary to the prevailing standards for propaganda, then the aesthetic values have to be jaw-droppingly good. If it reinforces the current line, then it just blends in, like camo-gear in the bushes from fifty yards away, and has to be jaw-droppingly bad to get someone to notice.

So Ovid did not utter the caution that it is art to conceal art because the evangelicals of his day were producing too much cinematic schlock. He did it because this is a standard *human* mistake. Whenever you have anybody undertaking an artistic endeavor, you will have bunch of them doing this. Virgil produced a masterpiece elevating the Caesars of Rome, and John the Revelator gave us a masterpiece that put them all back in their place. If Virgil had an untalented cousin who praised the Caesars in all kinds of embarrassing ways, it would have been much harder for an ancient Roman to see or care about compared to the work of an untalented cousin of John.

And incidentally, it is a false notion entirely to assume that true art is found at one end of the spectrum and propaganda at the other. Orwell knew what he was talking about when he said that “all art is to some extent propaganda.”

So all art extends along a spectrum, from good to bad, passing through the mediocre, and whenever you have enough people doing it to make yourself a statistically significant bell curve, you will get that bell curve. When the trailing end of the bell curve is cited as “representative” of the whole, and the vanguard of the curve is noticed, if noticed at all, as an “exception,” then the person talking is either a foe or an insecure friend. Think about it. *October Baby* was

roughly in the same league with *We Bought a Zoo*, and one of my daughters was pretty sure it wasn't evangelicals who made *Hot Tub Time Machine*.

So then, let's bring this down to the supposed *visual* deficiencies of Protestant civilization. This is what was behind my Facebook comment. I have no problem with evangelicals receiving criticism for producing schlock. That is what criticism (rightly conceived) is *for*. What I cannot abide is *schlock criticism*—memes that make no sense getting endlessly repeated as though they were some kind of wisdom. One of those memes is that evangelicals are unique in their ability to produce this stuff. Anybody who says this cannot have been in a video rental store recently. Evangelicals make bad movies because making good movies is hard, which turns out to be the same reason why people *generally* make bad movies. Evangelicals make bad movies for the same reason evangelicals have ten toes—they are people and people tend to generate a disproportionate amount of crapola.

If we want to compare aesthetic contributions, then let us compare the best to the best, or the worst to the worst. Let us not—unless we want to reveal that we have a mongrel dog in the fight—compare the best of one to the worst of the other.

And this should be done carefully. When we are talking about the contributions of Christian civilization, I don't mind (at all) Roman Catholics taking pride in Bach, and they shouldn't mind it that I can glory in Dante. But when we come to the crossroads, and we compare Protestant civilization and artistry with Catholic, there are certain things that the facts prevent us from saying. It could be a useful talking point for a partisan to say that the stripping of the images from the churches constituted an opening salvo in a war on beauty,

and was sort of an aesthetic fall from Eden, a point that is just as false as it is convenient.

Keep in mind that I am comparing the general ethos of one form of civilization to another—I am not talking about whether a particular artist went to Heaven when he died. In the sense I am using, civilizations can even take credit for their heretics and apostates. And, in a slightly different way, we can take some mutual pride in men who passed each other crossing the Tiber, men like Chesterton or Donne.

Also remember that Francis Schaeffer used to talk about the "mannishness of man." Even in the grip of a really bad idea, it is hard to keep the image of God from manifesting itself. Take the Shakers and their radical simplicity. That was some bad whiskey, as far as civilization-building is concerned, but we still got some cool furniture out of it.

So then, be done with the idea that Protestantism "has no artistic soul." Remember my earlier point about Bach and Dante. I understand that we have to factor in Newton's comment about standing on the shoulders of giants—the magisterial Reformation does not show contempt for the great things accomplished down through church history prior to the Reformation. We know that what came after was built on what went before. But, I would want to argue (alongside Phillip Schaff) that the greatest accomplishment of the Roman Catholic church was Protestantism, and I would want to include the arts in this.

Consequently, I believe that the elimination of that idolatry in the churches was a great liberation for the people of God, and when the people are set free, like a loosed deer, they make and say beautiful things. "Naphtali is a deer let loose; He uses beautiful words" (Gen. 49:21).

And in the aftermath of that liberation, we do not see aesthetic contributions of the evangelical Reformation going all to blazes. Just the reverse. Protestantism gave us Bach, Shakespeare, Donne, Herbert, Rembrandt, Cranach, Durer, Holbein, Milton, Spenser, Defoe, Wren, Bunyan, and I could keep going with a very long list that ends with C.S. Lewis. Now I am more than ready to acknowledge that our civilizational high water mark was in part possible because of prep work by earlier Christians before those images came down. But in addition to this, I want to argue that a lot of it happened *because* the images came down. Ordinary life was exalted (in much the same ways that the Protestant doctrine of vocation glorified ordinary work), and beauty began to flow over the threshold of Ezekiel's temple, toward its appointed task of inundating the world of the mundane. Glory came to the *ordinary*, and it was brought there by Protestant missionaries. Think for a moment of the Dutch realists.

The goal was not to destroy holiness, but to get it out of the monasteries. The goal was not to destroy beauty, but to get it out of places where it was being falsely worshiped, and move it to places where it could be innocently enjoyed. Zwingli *did* take the organ out of the church, that's true enough, but it should also be remembered that he took it to his house.

So what I am not willing to admit, even if there has been a rash of preachy movies lately, is that this high water mark was actually a low water mark.

My favorite Catholic writer is, of course, Chesterton. He once said, in another context, that a courageous man ought to be willing to attack any error, however ancient it is. He also added, however, that there are some errors too old to patronize. The same principle applies here. There are some civilizations that are far too aesthetically accomplished to be patted on the head and told that they

have the soul of a badly educated Philistine. And if the critics go on to point out that the mistake we made was our cleansing of the sanctuaries, back before our fathers in the faith brought so many beautiful things into the world, then I will begin to suspect the creation of a brand new fallacy—*post hoc ergo non propter hoc*.

There are two basic ways for evangelical Christians to care about the arts. One is the Kuyperian Reformed route, and the other is the way of bohemian pose-striking. One of the most heartening aspects of the "young, restless, and Reformed" development is the possibility of a real aesthetic reformation. Perhaps I should explain myself.

Scripture teaches us, over and over again, that deliverance comes from odd and unexpected places. And Scripture also tells us repeatedly that the faithful who are waiting for such deliverance have a tendency to wait by the wrong door. David was just a shepherd boy. Joseph was handed off to a passing caravan for a bit of money. Daniel was a slave, captured in war. Esther was just one more beauty for the harem. Jeremiah was just a kid. And Jesus grew up in that podunk place, Galilee of the Gentiles.

When it comes to what is true, what is good, and what is beautiful, the emergent types have gone bohemian in all three areas. Their truth has gone to relativistic mush, their ideas of goodness are more interested in anal intercourse than they ought to be, and their concept of beauty is summed up by outrÃ© tattoos in inappropriate places. They have fallen for the simplest of Screwtape's devices, the idea that "gritty" is real and "lovely" is bourgeois. They fell into that superficial trap because they are such *deep* people.

In the meantime, with our culture teetering on the edge of the great desolation, the academic Keepers of Kuyper have been reading learned papers to each other,

dealing with lots of good material, but when anybody coughs, a small cloud of dust appears above the audience, and then slowly drifts away. A lot of really good stuff there, but about as lively as you might expect. They do produce some good books though.

And so *then*, in this setting, against all odds, a large sector of up and coming young evangelicals become ardent…

Calvinists. And then some black hip hop artists become…

Calvinists. And by *Calvinist*, I do not mean someone who grew up in the environs of Grand Rapids, and whose thought processes are tinctured with some elements of a by-gone Reformed tradition. I mean somebody who actually thinks that God is God, all the way up, all the way down, and all the way across.

This means that all the elements of a true Kuyperian renaissance are now in place. It has not happened yet, but it is starting to. (I have noticed some quite striking developments, which I hope to write about more in some other setting.) This is happening because it is not really possible to believe that God is *God*, and then not have it come into authoritative contact with everything. The young, restless, and Reformed are on the same conveyor belt called time that the rest of us are, and this means they will shortly have kids to educate, schools to start, businesses to build, albums to record, paintings to paint, novels to write…and decisions to make.

There are cautions, of course. The phrase *young, restless, Reformed* is not a cure-all. There are saints out there of a more seasoned mien—old, listless, and Reformed—no, just kidding—who bring a great deal of experience to the subject of aesthetics. Those of them who care about it could easily miss this trend because the burgeoning interest in aesthetics is taking place in areas where they are not accustomed to look. If a church service takes place in a warehouse, it

looks (architecturally) like there is no theological interest in aesthetics at all. But often it has simply been relocated—in this church, the fanatics of "standards" are all laboring at the sound board in the back. I am not at this point participating in a debate about where the standards *should* be manifested; I am simply maintaining that there ought to be such a discussion, and that we could easily find people to take up each side. In short, I am saying that there has not so much been an abandonment of aesthetic standards among the young and Reformed as there has been a relocation of where those standards are on display. But they care about it, a *lot*, and when committed Christians care about glorifying something, it is astonishing how much can be done.

But to those who are engaged in this kind of reformational work, I would say this—beware of the equipment. Back in the old days, buying a bunch of brushes didn't make you a painter. The same thing is true now. The fact that the "brushes" are far more expensive doesn't change the principle. In the realm of aesthetics, we are dealing with some permanent things, and it never will be possible to fix a bad story with good cameras. Buying a Red camera won't produce a tolerable screenplay or decent actors. The best sound engineer in the world won't turn a "Jesus is my girlfriend" song into "Love bade me welcome…" by Herbert.

Consequently, those who are laboring in the creative arts among the young, restless, and Reformed need to pray that God give them some words. They need poets, writers, wordsmiths, screenplay writers. *Special note*: this is not the same thing as needing people who desperately *want* to be poets, writers, etc. Still less is it a need for people who want to have written something grand, but are too lazy actually to do it. We need that kind of aspiring screenwriter like we need a sucking chest wound.

The lure of the equipment exists because the equipment is complicated and expensive. Having mastered the features of the complex tool, it is easy to think there is nothing left to master. But how many of us have had the experience of staring at a movie screen, thinking that thing up there the "dumbest thing I ever saw," while at the same time reeling under the weight of the knowledge that the dumbest thing you ever saw cost 75 million to make? And *somebody*—let us call him Mr. Chump—coughed that money up.

So pray that God send you someone with the words. We are the people of the Word, and so it is a good prayer.

I do not say anything here in the way of an iron-clad prediction. Think of it more as an attempt to call a play—but calling a play still has a predictive element to it. When you call a particular play, you do so because you believe the conditions are right for it. You believe your players are ready for it. Calling a football play should be more of a thoughtful process than calling 23 black on a roulette wheel is.

The arts need patrons. Patrons need money in order to be patrons. When money shows up, in large amounts, one of two things will happen to the arts—decadence or accomplishment. What is true of cultures is also true of subcultures.

Despite the economic downturn, despite the hard times that many believers are going through, the Reformed evangelical subculture currently has more influence, money, education, and numbers than it has ever had before. That money will either express itself in soft decadence or in genuine accomplishment. If that money is chasing aesthetic accomplishment alone, and not also support for church plants, or missions, or mercy ministry, then that money is chasing decadence. If a Christian makes a pile, and simply invests it the same way his

secular neighbor does, on the same principles, then that money is chasing decadence.

But if those who are rich in this present world are generous and willing to share, as Paul says to Timothy, if they are not setting their hope on riches, which can so easily evaporate, and if their good works include balanced support for artists, then the result will be genuine accomplishment.

I can imagine many a struggling artist adding his *amen* at this point, wondering why more potential patrons don't see their responsibilities in this. But I would argue that more patrons are willing to be patrons than artists are willing to be artists. Responsible patrons are put off by the bohemian posturing. If they are not put off by it, then they are funding the decadence of intellectual rot. If they run across a little lord byron in skinny jeans, and they go ahead and provide him with the funds to continue to brush his hair out of his eyes, they are making the desolate waste of our aesthetic underachievment worse.

Responsible patrons are put off by the posers, and they will continue to be put off by the posers until the artists start policing their own ranks. This is especially the case when the patrons are churches and Christian leaders.

This is especially important because true patronage will often be dismissed as philistinism by those who didn't make the cut. But real patrons fund real artists, and real artists defend real patrons—instead of defending a self-appointed coterie of friends who have never actually written or made anything, but who "have a great idea for a script." Making the grade for funding ought to be as difficult as the actual artistic work is, and those two things really ought to be interwoven.

Fussers want all the truth that they are willing to own to stay on the page in front of them. But good stories won't stay on the page. They sprawl. They spill

into all of life's corners. Christian stories get the truth into the bones. Pomo-artsy-fartsy stories take the bones out, which has another result entirely, one much less edifying.

If our aesthetic decisions continue to be in line with the evangelical truth that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, and the Reformed truth that He did not do this in some kind of haphazard way, and the Kuyperian truth that He is invested in the entire creation, then we are on the threshold of a striking aesthetic reformation. And about time.

Don't get me wrong. When I look at the young, restless, and Reformed, I do not see a *likely* source of deliverance. They actually make me think of a jungle full of monkeys. But perhaps the Holy Spirit smiles and says, "Just the thing."

Section 8

A Final Word *of* Encouragement

BLACK SWAN REVIVAL

Nassim Nicholas Taleb popularized the phrase *black swan* in the title of his fine book *The Black Swan*. A black swan event is a surprise, it has a major impact, and there will be those (after the fact) who claimed they saw it coming. But in actuality, virtually no one saw it coming because these things are extremely difficult to predict. But after they happen, they seem so obviously inevitable. Take a daily feature of everyone's life now—the development of the Internet. There it is, a black swan.

George Gilder, in his fine book *Knowledge and Power*, defined information as surprise. Information theory points to primacy of the *word*.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. God created the world by speaking, and He sustains it by continuing to speak. This world is fallen and broken, and so we are charged to remake the it by speaking. The world is not something that produces information. Information is something that produces the world. The future world, inundated by the knowledge of God, as the waters cover the sea, will have been brought into existence because we spoke it. What is it that overcomes the world? Is it not our faith (1 John 5:4–5)? And when we have faith, what do we do with it? We *speak* (2 Cor. 4:13).

In fact, any historical event, once it occurs, however unlikely, can be shown to have been inevitable by any competent historian. But reading the clues before it all happens is a different matter. And so we declare, with certainty, the inevitability of the highly improbable.

Christians understand the resurrection of Jesus was *the* black swan of all history—it was a surprise to everyone, it has transformed the world, and modern

Christians like to *tsk* at the twelve disciples for hiding in the upper room instead of being out by the Lord's grave, looking expectantly at their watches. Jesus had told them plainly beforehand what He was going to do, and then after the fact, He showed them again—going through all the Scriptures—how these things had to happen. It is so *plain* to us all…now that it has happened.

But the resurrection was not a one-off event—it was more like a theme. In God's great novel, this motif runs through it. And so, as Chesterton observed once, Christianity has died often, but that has not even slowed us down. This is because we serve a God who knows the way out of the grave.

But however many times it happens, the result is always the same—total surprise, a major impact, astonishment, and then a short period of time where we all adjust to the new reality, learning to take it all for granted. As any apt student of church history should be able to tell you, reformations and revivals are quintessential black swan events.

"But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead" (2 Cor. 1:9).

When it comes to revivals, the reason why it always comes as such a surprise to us is simple. God—in order to keep the glory where it needs to be kept—makes sure that we are in such a bad way, in such a condition of death and hopelessness, that nobody expects a resurrection. Resurrections are a key ingredient in what might be called one of God's favorite events—the surprise party.

In fact, this element of surprise is so key, I would be inclined to argue that if someone genuinely (and accurately) expects it to happen, this should be taken as evidence that it is already starting to happen. He may not see the valley flooded,

but he does see cracks in the dam, and an abnormal amount of water coming through. Some people call it five minutes beforehand, just not five years.

Why does God let things get into a horrible condition before He rises up and acts? The text above tells us why He did that to the apostle Paul. It was *so that they would not trust in themselves*. Now if there is any group of Christians who need to be taught not to trust in themselves, but in God who raises the dead, that group would be American evangelicals. For us, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" is a Christian school slogan for our track teams' T-shirts. Paul was talking there (Phil. 4:13) about this profound death and resurrection cycle in his life, while we tend to think it is about jumping higher, running faster, hanging with cuter girls afterward, and all with whiter teeth.

There are of course a number of situations where a "can do" spirit is admirable, but we don't really need to be reminded of those occasions. There are other places—like the marbletown boneyard—where such a mentality is plainly demented. We need our preachers to stop telling the skeletons to develop a positive mental attitude.

So is this why our country is coming apart in our hands? Is this why popular entertainment is so corrupt? Is this why our justices despise the gift of life? Is this why our laws cannot make out the reason God gave us boys and girls? Is this why Congress does not understand the concept of red ink? Yes—so that we would stop trusting in ourselves.

Is this why our fathers devise various means to run out on their families? Is this why wives are terminally disrespectful to them, doing what they can to chase them out early? Is this why our children are so sullen and unhappy? Yes—so that we would stop trusting in ourselves.

Is this why our seminaries do their level best to train sexless capons for future ministry? Is this why pulpits are treated as bunkers to hide in, instead of cockpits to fight from? Is this why we call theologians conservative if they condescend to believe *most* of the Bible? Yes—so that we would stop trusting in ourselves.

All hope is lost? *Good*. That means the conditions for a black swan revival are improving by the day. The stone-cold deader we get, the more God is hastening the day. Nothing is dying but what has needed to die for a long time.

Let it go, and let the black swan surprise you. And the way this works, we never need to *act* surprised.

ALL THE CONDEMNATION YOU COULD EVER WANT

If we see it by faith, we speak it in faith. But what do we say? What message must be preached in order bring about this "black swan revival"?

In a fallen world, there must always be an antithesis. But since the devil is the accuser, we should therefore see that his power rests in accusations that *misplace* the antithesis. Seeing this is the heart of all spiritual wisdom, and the beginning of all spiritual life. Earlier, we saw that we have no need for right wing devils to answer the left wing devils in a spirit of railing accusation.

The only liberation from accusation is to accuse the spirit of accusation. This is the only thing that can bedevil the devil. Everything else is *from* him—this is the only thing that strikes right *at* him. So it is no self-contradiction to judge judgmentalism, to condemn condemnation, and to accuse the spirit of accusation.

We see the right spirit of accusation in James 4:4, "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."

Don’t you see? *The whole world runs on accusation*, and so friendship with the world is friendship with that system of accusation. “We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one” (1 John 5:19, ESV). The only foundational accusation that may be permitted is therefore the accusation of *that*. Everything else degenerates into moralism, which is diabolical. When a bunch of people do it together, it is partisan moralism, which is devilishness running in packs.

So there are three things to remember in this regard.

First, this is why the thundering accusation—you adulterers and adulteresses!—is not diabolical. It is an accusation that strikes at the root. It is a *radical* challenge. It is only this kind of efficacious challenge that can overcome our inveterate self-righteousness—it is the challenge offered by a vicarious, substitutionary atonement. Only this can enable us to receive the word with meekness, to the salvation of our souls (Jas. 1:21). It presents the antithesis, and it places that antithesis in the right place—our desire to be friends with the whole system of condemnation that the world runs on. We must break with that, and the declared word must *command* us to break with that. Because Jesus died on the cross as a sin-substitute—and only because of that—we have a basis for rejecting the endless envious gnawing of the left and the self-sufficient hippie-punching of the right. There is no solution to our cultural or political troubles apart from the blood that Jesus shed.

Second, since we learn of this from the holy law of God, the grace of repentance is brought with it. What is repentance but the grace of the right kind of self-accusation? The wrong kind of self-accusation means dabbing around the edges of sin, an activity that the flesh indulges in regularly. There is a sorrow or grief that leads only to death. “For godly grief produces a repentance that leads

to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death" (2 Cor. 7:10, ESV). You can dab around the edges of your petty repentances in grief today, you may do it some more tomorrow, and the day after that. More than one person has gone off to Hell dabbing at their sins, and sometimes picking at them. Repentance, real repentance, goes right to the heart of everything. Real repentance sees that the devil, the accuser, is right *here*, under your breastbone. That is repentance unto life.

And third, the only place where it is safe to hear this word of condemnation is that same place where Jesus spoke the glorious and final word—it is finished. You look at the cross and you see an *unjust* condemnation. But when you step *into* the cross by faith, what happens? Now it is a *just* condemnation. *I* have been crucified with Christ, Paul says (Gal. 2:20). The cross was unjust because Jesus was on it, but it was entirely just because I am there too. Oh, the wisdom of God!

When you come to the cross, what are you coming to? You are coming to the place of *no* condemnation—precisely because it is *all* condemnation. Again, the wisdom of God! *No condemnation* is etched in stone over the doorway as we come in, and that is why we were so glad to come in. But turn and look over the doorway from inside—now it says *no condemning*. As we entered, we saw the word *forgiven* graven there too. But turn, look, now we see the word *forgiving*. When we came in, it said *debts expunged*. But now, looking out, it says to *expunge debts.*

How on earth can that be right? What is going on? I am looking out the door of Christ's cross, and I am looking at a world full of fornication, and adultery, and dealing drugs, and lunatic laws fashioned by pandering legislators, and porn, and ungodly wars, and lies, and blasphemies…whatever can the Lord mean, *no condemning*?

Lay the ax at the root! The real issue out there is self-righteousness. The issue is friendship with the world. The issue is that whole *system* of self-superiority, lies and accusations. We may (and must) address those other defined sins in our preaching and in our witness, *but only as they relate to this central thing*. And that is why this efficacious grace found in the cross is the only thing that has the power to uproot all those other sins. So for those pitiful moralists who are worried that too much cruciform grace will make room for sinning…are you *kidding*?

Christ was born at Bethlehem, where He received a body that was capable of dying. He grew up, obeying God and loving Him, as Israel had never done before. He identified with His sinful people completely, from the beginning of His ministry, when He submitted to a baptism of repentance. He taught us what He meant and what He was about through parables and miracles for three years. At the end of that time, He was railroaded by the Establishment, the liberal Sadducees and conservative Pharisees uniting against Him in their hatred. He was flogged, and taunted, and abused, and then was nailed to a cross, along with sinful identity of all His people. He died with two brigands, and was laid in a rich man's tomb. Three days later He came out of that tomb with your justification and forgiveness in both His hands, never to let it go. That is what we declare; that is what we say.

This is why Paul said that he resolved to know nothing except Christ and Him crucified. We should give ourselves to the same resolve. And why? We have come to the cross of Jesus, which is all the condemnation we could ever want.

Epilogue

At the ninth commencement for New St. Andrews College in 2006, one of the features of the evening was that we honored my father, Jim Wilson, for the impact he has had throughout the course of his long and fruitful life. Among some others, I was asked to make some comments, and here they are. Their relevance to the theme of this book should be obvious, and it makes a fitting conclusion.

Greetings in the name of the Lord Jesus. To all of you, graduates, parents, friends, staff, faculty, alumni—greetings in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Grace and peace to you. I have a three-fold task in the few minutes I have here with you.

The first is to anticipate and preempt anything my father, Jim Wilson, might want to say in response to all of this. The second is to acknowledge and honor the work that God has accomplished through him, and to mark and acknowledge the debt we here at NSA owe to him. And the third task is to do this in a way that fits with the nature of this occasion—a commencement at which we have gathered to honor the hard work of all those who are gathered here on the stage, prepared to graduate.

The first task is really the simplest. One of the foundational virtues I have seen my father embody is a genuine refusal, on numerous occasions, to try to climb the greasy pole of personal ambitions. Throughout the course of his life in the evangelical world, he was present on the ground floor of many ventures that later made the "big time." Because of principled stands he took, and/or because of a well-grounded suspicion that the "way of all flesh" is not absent from movements and ministries just because they are conducted in the name of Jesus, he on more than one occasion showed the same kind of disposition that let Lot have first pick. God has honored this in numerous ways. But that humble disposition of his, cultivated over many years, means that he would be extremely wary about receiving any kind of honor that we would like to give him.

So I have tried to think of his possible responses—anything from “thanks a lot everybody; there goes my treasure in heaven,” to “this was very nice of you, but not necessary,” to “I hope nobody thinks this means I agree with your Calvinism,” to “what will Bessie say about it?” And having thought of these responses, I wanted to touch on each of them in some way. And, speaking of my mother, let me say that everything I say here about my father goes double for her.

While I was in junior high school, my father decided to conduct an after-school Bible study for many of my friends and classmates. This had to have been the near equivalent of trying to lead a group of adolescent orangutans through the gospel of Mark, and yet still viewing the possible outcomes optimistically. I recall us all sitting there one time, open Bibles on our laps, and my father asked us all a question. We, of course, sat there agape, looking at him like so many show poodles waiting for the treat. And he said something which I remember vividly to this day, and which I never want to forget. He said, “The answer’s not on my forehead.” Over the course of many years, he has consistently exhibited this central truth—the authority and sufficiency of all Scripture for all of life. And fortunately, this principle, learned from him, actually helps me to address my first task.

We are honoring someone who has labored faithfully for many years in our midst. The Scriptures require this honor from us. The apostle Paul said it this way: “And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. And be at peace among yourselves” (1 Thess. 5:12–13).

Now we know that the Scriptures also call my father to refrain from all vainglorious attempts to earn the applause of men, and this is something which he has consistently done for over half a century. But they also call us to honor him for not trying to get us to honor him. This is not a contradiction in Scripture. We are called to honor him, "esteem him highly" in the words of Paul to the Thessalonians. He is not required to like it. And if I may anticipate him in this, he is the kind of man who will greatly appreciate what we are doing while not necessarily approving of it. But that is all right because he has his verses, and we have ours.

The second point I have to make is related to the first. Ronald Reagan had a plaque on his desk that said "there is no limit to what a man can do if he doesn't care who gets the credit." The reason we are here today, the reason numerous Christian ministries are growing and flourishing here in our town, is the result of this one man's vision, and is a testimony to the truth of Reagan's adage. If you really don't care who gets the credit—so long as the mission is accomplished—the impact of your labors is genuinely potent.

In the sixties, my father wrote a book called *Principles of War,* in which he took the principles of physical warfare and applied them to evangelism and spiritual warfare. As a result of his careful thinking and shrewd application of these principles, the ministries here have had an impact that is quite disproportionate to our numbers. But let me hasten to add (because there may be some onlookers who may want to file a zoning complaint because we have no permit for this "spiritual warfare" of ours) that we are talking about the spiritual authority of the gospel, the lordship of Jesus Christ, and the realm of the soul and spirit. It is political, yes, but not what our adversaries mean by political at all. We are preaching the kingdom of Christ, the *polis* of God. We are not talking

about worldly or carnal approaches at all, but rather a robust embrace of the gospel, a deep love of God and His Christ, and a zeal to worship Him rightly.

Nevertheless, we are doing all this here on the Palouse, and it is having quite an impact here, and all this is true because of some decisions that Jim Wilson made in the early seventies. These decisions, if run through the calculus of worldly wisdom, would have to be reckoned as certifiably insane. But when a kernel of corn dies in such a way, and goes into the ground, it bears much fruit. Jesus promised this, and He is the one who has made it come to pass.

My third task brings us to our graduates. We are gathered here to honor you, and all the hard work you have done. I know—the faculty may have sometimes pretended that the workload we assigned you was somehow normal or reasonable, but we all know better than that. Your accomplishment that we are honoring this evening is a significant accomplishment. In a day of declining standards, you have cheerfully embraced the considerable work assigned to you, and have completed it with distinction. Well done, to each one of you.

As we have honored Jim Wilson here this evening, this was not done as an intrusion—as though we were combining someone's surprise birthday party with your graduation in order to save some money on the cake. That being the case, what are we up to then?

If I might swipe a phrase from Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*, I would like to refer to the potency of a "long obedience in the same direction." Because the phrase comes from a book with that particular title, I have no qualms of conscience whatever over stealing it. I intend to employ his words to advance the Christian faith, a faith that this philosopher detested. But if we really are beyond good and evil, this must be all right, and besides, even though we are not beyond good and evil, it is all there in the gospels. First you bind the strong man, and

then you take all his uber-stuff. Nietzsche, for all his problems, was a shrewd observer of human behavior, and the impact of certain forms of behavior. He said this: “The essential thing ‘in heaven and earth’ is…that there should be long obedience in the same direction; there thereby results, and has always resulted in the long run, something which has made life worth living.”

That phrase is an important one, a good one. I have taken it, and I want to give it to you. A long obedience in the same direction. You graduates have made a good beginning, an honorable beginning. But as we mark this achievement, we want to deliver a charge to you as well. We not only want you to begin well, we also want you to finish well. Our God, who has begun a good work in you, will bring it to completion. When you are my father’s age, the year of our Lord will be somewhere in the mid 2060s, on the downhill slope toward the twenty-second century. You may come back to visit NSA then in order to watch your grandchildren graduate, and they, when they are my father’s age, will be living in the year of our Lord 2122. A long obedience in the same direction. Watching covenantal righteousness and mercy come to your children’s children is not an abstraction, a dry datum out of your catechism or doctrine class. This is one of God’s great promises, and it tastes just like the honey made by celestial bees allowed to forage in heaven’s clover. This is such a precious promise—a long obedience in the same direction. And no, this is not “works.” Obedience, like everything else that is good, is the gift of God, lest any should boast.

If you want to learn this grace of God down in your bones, the Scriptures say you must learn to imitate it. And when you imitate it, you must imitate personal faith and consider the outcome of particular lives. And that is, in part, why we have done what we have done here this evening. The Scriptures call us to this.

“Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct” (Heb 13:7).

Footnotes

1 Saul D. Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals: A Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals* (New York: Vintage, 1989).

2 The thirteen rules are excerpted from *RFR*, pp. 127–130, emphasis Alinsky's.

3 Jim Wilson, P*rinciples of War: A Handbook on Strategic Evangelism* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2009).

4 Glen Moots, *Politics Reformed: The Anglo-American Legacy of Covenant Theology* (Columbia: University of Missouri, 2010), 80.

5 C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 56.

6 G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 1994) 84.

7 Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1993).

8 Donald Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 1978).