

The Cultural Crisis Examined: A False Religion, Priesthood, and Doctrine

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For a long time Israel was without the true God, and without a teaching priest and without law, but when in their distress they turned to the LORD, the God of Israel, and sought him, he was found by them.

2 Chronicles 15:3-4

As we conclude 2021 and contemplate the way forward it is imperative we clarify the core issues of the current cultural crisis—"Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint, but blessed is he who keeps the law" (Prov 29:18). Like Israel, the church – and consequently our culture – has been "without the true God, and without a teaching priest and without law". These are the three core issues.

On the heels of Solomon's idolatry and passing the kingdom had divided between Rehoboam and Jeroboam; the former ruling Judah (the southern kingdom) and the latter Israel (the northern kingdom). But both only led the people into further idolatry.

Unsurprisingly this was accompanied by much social and civil unrest: "for great disturbances afflicted all the inhabitants of the lands. They were broken in pieces. Nation was crushed by nation and city by city, for God troubled them with every sort of distress" (1 Chr 15:5, 6).

For 20 years Jeroboam had been leading Israel in apostasy and rebellion against the house of David, when Asa suddenly emerged as a reforming king over Judah (1 Kgs 15:8-14).

What then were the positive reforms demanded for Israel's recovery from apostasy? For her return to the Lord and his covenant? Both as a nation and as the people of God; that is to say, as a church and a civil society.

The answer will inform our own day. These needed reforms are reflected in three negatives: they were "without *the true God*, and without *a teaching priest* and without *law*". She must therefore correct three things: 1) her false religion 2) her false priests; and 3) her false doctrine.

There is no lasting revival or reformation without this triad.

The source of Israel's "disturbances" was not primarily political but theological—rooted in her own covenant delinquency. Although, the theological does have massive political application, as we shall see.

Because the church as the "salt of the earth" has lost its savour (salt signifying *covenant loyalty*), it is thrown out to be trampled under the feet of men (Mt 5:13). In other words, the responsibility for the state overreach of the covid-crisis lands squarely at the feet of the church. The state has usurped the sovereign sphere of the church, dictating when and how it is permitted to gather, because the church itself has first bowed to the *zeitgeist*, to the secular-humanist gods. She has forsaken the Lord and his covenant. So goes the church, so goes the world. And because, under God's judgement, the church's lampstand has been removed, her prophetic ministry as the "light of the world" has instead been subverted and become darkness (cf. Mt 5:14-16; Rev 2:1-5). Hence, the current cultural darkness. For Christians to point the finger at the world and her political leaders and their failed policies is a denial of their own guilt. The reason why our politicians and their policies fail is because the church has denied the application of God's law-word to politics and public policy, falsely espousing the dualism of the secular-sacred—the lie that the *spiritual* should not only be separated from the *secular* but is inherently superior to it. It is thus more spiritual to be a minister of the church than a minister of state. This is not rooted in biblical Christianity but rather Neoplatonism and Eastern Mysticism.

We have thus embraced a *false religion*, a *false priesthood*, and a *false doctrine*. Let us consider this triad a little further.

A False Religion

First, rejecting *the true God*, the modern West has embraced the gods of the nations and hence a false immanentistic religion.

There is no “prophetic vision” of the triune God as the LORD GOD (Yahweh-Elohim)—the immanent and yet transcendent God, carrying out his eternal counsels in time-space history; as self-existent and self-revealing (Ex 3), calling forth the end from the beginning, electing and calling whom he wills; as “the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God” (1 Tim 1:17); as Sovereign Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer, Governor, and Judge of the entire cosmos, of all things visible and invisible (Col 1:15-23). As Joe Boot has written: “Christ is the King of kings and Lord of lords, to whom all men are subject, under whose law all men are held to account (both king and commoner), and by whose gospel alone men can find redemption and restoration”.

He is instead a pygmy God of our own imagination. Rather than a God to be feared he is our best buddy and heavenly therapist, an equal; a domesticated god who endorses my personal autonomy and guarantees my personal peace and affluence, who empowers me to “live my life”. And yet, remains very piously, “my personal Saviour”!

Reiterating the Fall, over the last 300 years the church (followed by the culture) has stepped out from under the commanding law-word of God. She instead stands over it in judgement, determining for herself what is true (aka medieval scholasticism and modern neo-orthodoxy). Like our first parents, autonomous-man now stands supreme, his own ultimate reference point; indeed his own would-be god. Humanism prevails in both church and culture.

A False Priesthood

Second, in rejecting the true God the West finds itself without a *teaching priest*. With autonomous-man as his own would-be god, the cult of therapy has overtaken the Christian ministry. Pastors are viewed as therapists rather than as teachers of God’s law-word that commands obedience (2 Tim 3:16-17). We have forsaken the apostolic goal of Christian ministry: “Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, *that we may present everyone mature* in Christ” (Col 1:28). The Christian minister warns and teaches to one end—*maturity*. This was the burden of the writer to the Hebrews when he declares: “Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and *go on to maturity*, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits” (Heb 6:1–3).

Ministers as teaching elders are not *Dr Feelgoods* or people-carers. Rather they are shepherds of the flock who must give an account to the Chief-Shepherd for their stewardship. For this reason God’s law-word must be applied to all four covenantal spheres, not limited to but progressing from the *individual*, to the *family*, the *church*, and the *state*. In this way the Kingdom of God leavens the *whole* lump (Mt 13), progressively advancing as the *internal integrity* of each sphere leads to *external integration* with the next. Each sphere sacrifices on the altar of the next. In this way no sphere violates or usurps the sovereignty of another. Each is sovereign under the authority of God’s Word, which defines and delimits their functions. And so the Kingdom comes, not by revolution but by gradual transformation. As with the OT church, so today: “Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you have increased and possess the land” (Ex 23:30).

A False Doctrine

Third, as a result of forsaking the true God for autonomous-man and the subversion of the Christian ministry to the cult of therapy we have invented anthropocentric *false doctrines* as a parody of the true gospel. Serving a false religion, false teachers must concoct false doctrines. And so we have truncated the gospel to serve human autonomy and the cult of therapy, to massage man’s ego into a false piety. This manifests in such false doctrines as *Deism* which predicates god as an absentee landlord; as the Creator but not as Sustainer. Having wound up the clock – i.e. the world – he now stands back to watch it run down. Man is hence free to control his world. This then morphs into such teachings as *Open Theism*, that God is not in control and the future is still open, to be determined by man. It also manifests in *Arminianism* and *Pelagianism*, teaching that man determines his own salvation in place of the biblical doctrines of grace (e.g. sovereign election, total inability, the 5 solas etc.). And above all it manifests in *Dualism*, the separation and hierarchy of *spirit over matter*, and of the *sacred over the secular*. This robs the gospel of Christ’s lordship over all things. It expels Christianity from the public square under the false rubric of the separation of church and state, of the sacred and the secular, resulting in such false teachings as *The Two Kingdoms*, which posits that God’s inscripturated law is for the church but not for the world; they are two separate kingdoms, one ruled by God’s law, the other by man’s law. This then overlaps with the false teachings of *Antinomianism* and *Marcionism*, that the OT was a dispensation of *law* and the NT one of *grace*, positing a false antithesis between law and gospel. The twain shall never meet! And so, to undermine the true God and his law-word, false gods require false teachers and doctrines. They especially undermine the comprehensive application of biblical law to all of life.

In these ways “his satanic majesty” has contrived to rob the gospel of its power to save to the uttermost, to redeem the totality of God’s creation, and hence govern nations and build a Christian civilisation. Through these false teachings the gospel’s potency as a comprehensive world-and-life-view was lost and the church’s prophetic voice to the political sphere halted.

We must therefore recover the unity of Scripture in both the *Law of God* and the *Gospel of God*. They are not antithetical. Together, they are rather the thesis—indeed, the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:20). Hence, “*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness*” (2 Tim 3:16). The gospel without the law is a false spirituality, and undeniably an abomination to God: “If one turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination” (Prov 28:9). Law and Gospel is the entire counsel of God for man, not only individually but also corporately for society. As John Wycliff first penned in 1384, some 400 years before the American constitution: “The Bible is for the government of the people, by the people and for the people”.

Summary conclusion

In summary, we have set up a *false religion* of autonomous-man. Every *false god* demands a *false priesthood* and *false teachings* to promote its worship. These teachings will inevitably promote the laws of that god. It has been said that when a nation changes its god it changes its law. This captures well the current cultural crisis. With the loss of biblical orthodoxy in the church and the Christian consensus in the culture, we have jettisoned biblical law. With its antinomian beliefs the church has led the way for the world to reject the law of God in all its moral and civil applicability. Nevertheless, society does not function without law, it will enact *somebody’s* law. The options are simple: either God’s or man’s. One is absolute and transcendent, the other is arbitrary and totally immanentistic. Either man is set free by obedience to the one true God or he is imprisoned by the power state within a closed materialistic system, beyond which there is no appeal.

These then are the core issues to do business with if we are to see the increase of God’s government in the earth. At the turn of the Millennium I wrote that 1950 to 2025 was a hinge of history. And on this hinge would swing a door into a new epoch. We are currently seeing a brazen attempt by the spiritual and cultural powers of darkness to establish a dystopian global governance that vehemently rejects the West’s Christian history. Nevertheless, God has installed his King on Zion and holds them in derision (Ps 2). It is he who governs history and through sometimes difficult times advances his church to fill the earth with the new humanity.

To this end we labour.

Hosanna in the Highest!

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