NICOTINE THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

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Ideas Without Consequences

As recent political wisdom has it, a neo-conservative is a liberal who got mugged by reality. So, what does that make a neo-Calvinist? A fundamentalist who stumbled across the doctrine of creation? Of course, the roots of neo-Calvinism go deeper than the top soil of fundamentalism. Neo-Calvinists trace their lineage to the jack of all spheres, Abraham Kuyper, the Reformed theologian who also managed to start a new university, political party, and eventually served as Prime Minister of the Netherlands. His lectures on Calvinism, delivered one hundred years ago at Princeton Theological Seminary, became a catalyst for a vigorous application of Calvinism to all spheres of life. Kuyper shows a mind and heart clearly in a different league than fundamentalism. But sometimes the way neo-Calvinists have applied the Reformed tradition makes the so-called "Christian-world-and-life view" look like nothing more than a high brow version of the fundamentalist notion of full-time Christian service.

What for fundamentalists was worldliness or secularism or entertainment, for neo-Calvinism, by the wave of the magical wand of creation's goodness, becomes something to be taken captive for Christ and redeemed (though it is not clear why something like mass communications that is good by virtue of creation needs to be redeemed; nor is it clear how something without a soul can be redeemed -- but we digress). For the neo-Calvinist the line that fundamentalists draw between the church and the world is still there, but the neo-Calvinist seems to include everything in the church, such as the arts, secular callings, science, etc. It is as if the distinctions among the sacred, the common, and the profane don't exist. Under the umbrella of Christ's lordship, everything short of prostitution and gambling becomes a sacred activity laden with redemptive significance. All of which makes us suspicious of any set of ideas that bears the prefix "neo." Here *neo*-evangelicalism, *neo*-orthodoxy, *neo*-scholasticism, along with *neo*-conservatism and *neo*-Calvinism come to mind. When Old Lifers hear the word "neo" they reach for their double-edged sword.

NEO-CALVINIST DISMISSALS aside, the idea of the holy, as in the uniqueness and set-apartness of the holy day (the Sabbath), the holy meal (the Lord's Supper), the holy water (Baptism) and the holy calling (the ministry of Word and Sacrament that happen on the holy day) appears to make distinctions among the sacred, common and profane valuable when Christians think about life in this world. For instance, baking is not a holy activity. It is something that believers and non-believers do. But the commonness of baking doesn't make it illegitimate for believers. Nor do the baked goods made by a believer necessarily look and taste different from those made by a non-believer, though bread set apart for the Lord's Supper does become holy. But here it is the man with the holy calling who by the blessing of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit makes the bread holy, not the Christian baker. (Just to play this out, bread made by non-Christians works just as well in the sacrament as long as the Spirit is at work. That is the only way bread can move out of the realm of the common into that of the holy.)

In addition to the harm that neo-Calvinism has done by obliterating the distinction between the holy and the common (aside from abetting the appeal of theonomy by making Christ's lordship over the state no different from his lordship over the church), it has also advanced a naive view of modern political economy and its fruits. For instance, R. B. Kuiper (deemed by James Bratt the only man to win the triple crown of twentieth-century Reformed orthodoxy for presiding at different times over Calvin College, Calvin Seminary, and the faculty of Westminster Seminary) writes the following on the basis of the neo-Calvinist idea that the world belongs to God and his children. "This is their Father's world. . . . They are to use radio, television, aeronautics, atomic energy, and countless other things to the glory of God and his Christ." *Atomic energy*?!? Such activity, Kuiper adds, is a "phase of world conquest." Conquest indeed, though we are not sure who has been conquered. Kuiper seems to have no sense of economies of scale, who profits from such technology, who holds power by virtue of it, and how such technology can be

INSIDE

The *Nicotine Theological Journal* will likely be published four times a year. It is sponsored by the Old Life Theological Society, an association dedicated to recovering the riches of confessional Presbyterianism.

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easily abused for sinful ends.

Maybe Kuiper's naivete stems from having spent too much time with those Presbyterian fundamentalists in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Listen then to Albert M. Wolters, whose Dutch blood and vocation as a religion professor in Canada should immunize him against the viruses prevalent in U.S. Protestantism. In the popular, *Creation Regained*, he writes, "The original good creation is to be restored. . . . Marriage should not be avoided by Christians, but sanctified. . . . Politics should not be declared off-limits, but reformed. Art ought not to be pronounced worldly, but claimed for Christ. Business must no longer get relegated to the secular world, but must be made to conform again to God-honoring standards." So far not so bad.

Later, however, Wolters says, "Parents put a specific normative structure into practice for the family, corporate boards for corporations, parliaments for kings or states, school boards for schools, and so on. . . . Church, marriage, family, corporation, state, school all stand *alongside* each other before the face of God."

AT LEAST WOLTERS HAS enough sense not to declare atomic energy a sphere before the face of God. But what about his rosy view of corporations? To be sure multi-national corporations these days occupy a separate sphere but maybe not the way God intended. And since when did IBM and GM become God-ordained institutions? Does Wolters really think there is a way to make Microsoft, McDonalds, or those executives David Letterman used to refer to as the "pinheads at GE" conform to God-honoring standards? Could neo-Calvinists recognize that multi-national corporations and their twin brother in world conquest, the nation-state, have run rough shod over the creational ordinance of marriage and the family? Might following God-honoring standards involve a return, no matter how nostalgic and impossible it sounds, to local economies, local cultures and local communities, which are not necessarily as efficient as their cosmopolitan rivals and so don't produce as much wealth, but restore families, churches, local governments, family-run businesses, and family-run schools to the God-honoring standard of possessing real and legitimate authority?

Neo-Calvinism is a very reassuring outlook, though, for North American Protestants living in the suburbs, buying a half-gallon of milk at 11:00 p.m. from a convenience store on the way home from a session meeting, shopping for Christmas by phone from L. L. Bean and Williams-Sonoma catalog sales staff, surfing the Internet to see which airline has the lowest fares to Florida in January, and employed by companies whose headquarters are thousands of miles away. In this setting it is very consoling to hear that the world, as much as it is run by large, impersonal bureaucracies, really belongs to God. Putting one's head down on the pillow at night with the knowledge that all truth is God's truth sure makes the Domino's pizza consumed in front of an ESPN late-night broadcast of a Fresno State-versus-BYU women's gymnastic match settle better in the tummy.

AND YET, HOW CHRISTIAN AND consoling can this world-and-life view be if it doesn't see the politics and economics of science, industry, and technology? After all, these modern conveniences did not occur in a vacuum. Instead, they have usually been the products of individuals and institutions (with individuals acting in governing capacities) whose greed and acquisitiveness are just as sinful as lying on the job or not paying taxes. This is not simply a matter of a Christian world view but of a Calvinist outlook.

At this point an older Reformed perspective, what we call "paleo-Calvinism," might be helpful. In this scheme, sin is a big concern and human nature is in need of constant restraint. And this is the principal post-lapsarian function of the God-ordained spheres of family, church and state. The spheres, then, are designed to keep people in check. But in neo-Calvinist hands they become a means toward human flourishing or, to use Nicholas Wolterstorff's phrase, they become "world formative."

What is more, the much vaunted notion of vocation will give little ammunition to neo-Calvinists. The only place where John Calvin discusses the doctrine of vocation in the *Institutes* (according to the index, always a reliable way to use a book), is at the end of book three, chapter ten where he refers to one's calling as "a sentry post so that he may not heedlessly wander about throughout life." Here Calvin appears to understand vocation not as a way for an individual to make it in the world, or even to build a successful

career. Rather vocation is another way by which God restrains evil. This would fit Calvin's piety which always viewed the world as something to which believers might become too deeply attached and prayed for the consummation of redemptive history so that believers would taste and see that glory procured for them by Christ.

In sum, paleo and neo-Calvinists appear to have remarkably different estimates of the world. For the former it is a place filled with sin that must be endured for the sake of the sanctification that occurs through suffering and other trials in life. For the latter it is a place to be taken captive for Christ and so offers Christians a variety of occupations to assist in that conquest.

WHERE, THEN, CAN YOU FIND A genuinely critical perspective on modern social and political structures? For starters, the writings of Wendell Berry, Stanley Hauerwas, Richard Weaver and Philip Rieff all make criticisms of modernity that are not explicitly Reformed but are nevertheless compatible with what paleo-Calvinists confess about the depravity of the human heart and its propensity to seek control over the world in ways similar to that which planned and built the Tower of Babel. All of these authors show the capacity to look beyond the surface of human accomplishments and question the so-called progress of modern technological and economic achievements.

Philip Rieff, who taught sociology at the University of Pennsylvania, has written thoughtfully about intellectual life and whether recent developments in universities and the research they produce is as beneficent as our education-admiring culture believes. For instance, in an essay on the politics of J. Robert Oppenheimer, the man who oversaw the production of America's atomic bomb and was later suspected of treason for hanging around with Soviet agents, Rieff argues that the most important aspect of the case was not whether Oppenheimer was guilty or whether he imperiled U.S. security but rather the immense power that scientists have by virtue of their expertise. "The autonomous cosmopolitan community of science is necessarily alienated from the American public and gains no advantage in taking an argument before it. The distance between the scientist with a liberal ethic and even the educated public is perhaps greater now than in the Protestant era of American culture, when 'science' was more popular and the educated classes could more easily confront it. . . . The ignorance of the public no longer keeps it away from politics, but it does keep it away from science. In a technologically mysterious culture even the educated take the magic of their electric toasters and their atomic strategy for granted; they are more helpless before it than the primitive before the unorganized powers of nature, for modern man has no magic to exert." Maybe, then, modern science is like the genie out of the bottle; to make Christ lord of it might have meant never opening the cap.

IF RIEFF PROVIDES AMPLE warning about the threat posed by modern science, Wendell Berry has important cautions about technological progress. Readers familiar with Berry's critique of industrialism know his views can sound as reactionary as they are merciless. For instance, the following question comes at the end of an extended passage pointing out the hollowness of industrialism's achievements. "When else in history," he asks, "would we find 'educated' people who know more about sports than about the history of their country, or uneducated people who do not know the stories of their families and communities?" For good measure he adds that even "English sparrows do not let loose into the streets young sparrows who have no notion of their identity or their adult responsibilities."

Still, as arch as Berry appears, his fundamental concern for evaluating technological developments is one that should be common to Calvinists who are supposed to value the covenant and passing on the faith from one generation to the next. "If one's motives are money, ease, and haste to arrive in a technologically determined future," then the answer to the question of whether to adopt a technological innovation "is foregone, and there is, in fact, no question, and no thought." But if "one's motive is the love of family, community, country, and God, then one will have to think, and one may have to decide that the proposed innovation is undesirable." Neo-Calvinists might deem a choice between God and a new computer just another form of fundamentalist anti-worldliness. But such a thought shows little acquaintance with the real costs (other than financial) of technology.

EVEN IF HE COULD ADMIT TO some of the problems of science and industry noted by Rieff and Berry, the neo-Calvinist would invariably appeal to the Christian school as a way out of the dilemma. Surely, if taught and studied from a Christian perspective men and women can make science and technology conform to God-honoring standards. But here Stanley Hauerwas' sober appraisal of Christian education should bring even the sturdiest of neo-Calvinists to his knees. "In truth," he writes, "we must say that as Christians we have not thought hard about what intellectual difference Christian convictions make for what is considered knowledge." The curriculum at Christian schools looks like that of any other school, whether public or private. Of course, administrators will appeal to "campus atmosphere" or the convictions of faculty. But it is not clear what difference those convictions make "for the shape of the curriculum and/or the actual content of the courses." In the end, Hauerwas wonders if Christian schooling is no more than a baptized way of giving "students power they otherwise would not have." This power is not only that of having a job, but also comes from being introduced to the "culture of a civilization which underwrites and legitimates those who rule through education." Accordingly,

Christian education does nothing to correct the faults of science and technology but rather adds to the problem.

In fact, if Wendell Berry is right, Christian schools simply do in the name of the lordship of Christ what modern primary, secondary and higher education has been doing for the last century, that is, educating children so they will not return home to be of service to their family, church, and community after schooling. According to Berry, the Bible assumes a normal succession in which children complete the work or vocation of the parents. This is the pattern taught in the stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Solomon, and the prodigal son. But the old pattern has been repudiated by modern educators, Christians included. "Young people," Berry laments, "still grow up in rural families and go off to cities, not to return. But now it is felt that this is what they *should* do. Now the norm is to leave and not return."

CONSEQUENTLY, SCHOOLS, Christian or public, no longer pass on the cultural inheritance of students (do Christian schools even teach the Westminster Shorter or Heidelberg catechisms?). Instead, children are educated "to *leave* home and earn money in a provisional future that has nothing to do with place or community." Parents with children at school "find themselves separated from their children, and made useless to them by the intervention of new educational techniques, technologies, methods, and languages." Meanwhile teachers tend to regard parents as "a bad influence and wish to take the children away from home as early as possible." It would be comforting to think that Christian schools are better than this. But what is likely is that the schools neo-Calvinists have spawned merely put the band-aid of piety (increasingly an evangelical one) over the wound created by the urban-industrial way of life.

IT MIGHT BE PERMISSIBLE, THEN, to conclude about neo-Calvinism what Richard M. Weaver did of modern man. "Having been taught for four centuries, more or less, that his redemption lies through the conquest of nature, man expects his heaven to be spatial and temporal, and, . . . he expects redemption to be of easy attainment." Weaver calls this outlook the "spoiled-child" syndrome. It may be overdone to accuse neo-Calvinism of the same mentality. But to read Weaver on what happens to men and women once they embrace the city and its culture makes it reasonable to think that the appeal of urban and corporate power and wealth has similarly infected neo-Calvinists. "The spoiling of man," Weaver wrote, "seems always to begin when urban living predominates over rural. After man has left the countryside to shut himself up in vast piles of stone, . . . after he has come to depend on a complicated system of human exchange for his survival, he becomes forgetful of the overriding mystery of creation." Weaver adds that it is an "artificial environment" that causes man to "lose sight of the great system not subject to man's control." "It is the city-dweller, solaced by man-made comforts, who resents the very thought that there exist mighty forces beyond his understanding; it is he who wishes insulation and who berates and persecutes the philosophers, the prophets and mystics, the wild men out of the desert, who keep before him the theme of human frailty."

OF COURSE, THE PROBLEM IS not strictly with neo-Calvinists but also with their ministers whose duty it is when they ascend the pulpit to display in some measure, the demeanor of the loin-cloth-wearing and honey-and-locust-eating John the Baptist. Still, we wonder if neo-Calvinism might be substantially different had its proponents remained on farms in western Michigan, southern California, Iowa, and Ontario, rather than leaving for the not so big cities of Toronto and Grand Rapids.

In the end, the problem with neo-Calvinism may be that it is only a "world-and-life-view." As the anthropologist Talal Asad has it, nothing could be more useless in modern times than perpetuating a Christian outlook or point of view. Again, it may be reassuring to regard a Calvinist perspective as every bit as forceful as that of science, Marxism, feminism, egalitarianism or the Republican party. But a Christian viewpoint and, most other ideologies, for that matter, can hardly stand up to the forces of science, technology, modern education, the nation-state, and very big business. In other words, religion is marginal to modern society no matter how profound its perspective may be. According to Asad, "religion is indeed now optional in a way that science is not. Scientific practices, techniques, knowledges, permeate and create the very fibers of social life in ways that religion no longer does. In that sense, religion today *is* a perspective . . . but science is not." What we need then is not to cultivate a way of thinking about or interpreting all aspects of reality. Instead, we need a Christian way of living that proceeds from careful thinking capable of making hard choices. But if our way of life is no different from those of our non-Calvinist neighbors, the lordship-of-Christ-over-all-areas-of-life lingo looks like so much window dressing.

In other words, after clearing away the smoke and breaking the mirrors that advocates of progress constantly peddle, the neo-Calvinist project of taking everything captive for Christ appears almost as naive as it has been unsuccessful. At the very least, we need to admit that a Christian world view is a contested entity that has been used too much to bless the urban-industrial order. A world view that promotes caution about if not retreat from the developments of urban-industrialism, though often ridiculed as fundamentalist, Luddite, or even worse, Amish, may be equally Christian and worthy to bear the name.

BUT ONCE WE ADMIT THAT THE Christian-world-and-life-view is not singular but plural, neo-Calvinism might lose some of it cache. If we can't know that the dilemmas of urban-industrial existence are easily fixed by the lordship of Christ, then why bother with a Christian world-and-life view? If, in fact, we recognize that life in this world is hard and not so easily made sense of, and that Christians will have to live out their vocations with great uncertainty, then believers might resort to the resources of the church, the one institution that has a genuinely Christian-world-and-life view. Such a retreat would take us suburbanites down a few pegs in the world order and make us not much better than the Israelites who wandered in the wilderness or those first Christians who met in secret because they were pariahs in the Roman Empire. And then what would happen? We wouldn't be so comfortable. SCARY! *SC 88*

How Soon They Forget

Had he lived Charles Hodge would have turned 200 years old last month (Dec. 27). The bicentennial of his birth gave Princeton Theological Seminary a reason to sponsor a conference on Hodge's significance, a gathering that indicated well the anomalies of U. S. Presbyterianism.

PTS is not alone in this, but of late the oldest Presbyterian seminary in America has been experiencing the side effects of a Reformed outlook that values respectability almost as much as the assurance of God's pardon. David Calhoun's recent history of Princeton provoked some of these symptoms. His narrative covered the rise and fall of a school that better than any other Presbyterian seminary taught the five points of Calvinism well into the industrial age when the doctrines of total depravity and limited atonement obtained a place in H. L. Mencken's cabinet of horrors "but little removed from cannibalism." But while the library promoted Calhoun's history, faculty and student responses were less enthusiastic, even to the point where the bookstore (according to our sources) would only display the books when asked by folks in the archives. Bookstore personnel must have thought the contemporary Princeton community would not be much of a market for history that trumpeted Old Princeton's theology.

THEN CAME HODGE'S BIRTHDAY and another opportunity to assess the theology and piety that informed the school prior to the reorganization of 1929. But rather than looking to the church, outside of which ordinarily there is no salvation (according to the Standards), the sponsors of the Hodge conference beckoned for help from the academy, outside of which there is ordinarily only disrepute. Intellectual historians primarily were asked to do for Hodge what the faculty at PTS and leaders of the PCUSA are incapable of doing, namely, saying that he was an important nineteenth-century intellectual, certainly not on the order of Jonathan Edwards, but at least more intelligent and interesting than Billy Sunday and Dwight L. Moody.

What the folks who attended the conference learned, however, was that Hodge really wasn't all that intelligent and interesting, intellectually speaking. Unlike Horace Bushnell and Nathaniel William Taylor, Hodge was not creative; he did not use his Calvinism to interact originally with the philosophical developments of his day. As Bruce Kuklick (an intellectual historian at the University of Pennsylvania) put it after a morning session on the second day of the conference, Hodge does not speak to us (i.e. the academy). He has nothing compelling to say about the enduring questions. In other words, Charles Hodge is no Jonathan Edwards (as if Edwards' answers to the university's enduring questions speak to the identity politics and vocational mission of the modern academy).

WE GRANT THAT THE VALUE OF teaching Charles Hodge to first and second year students at the University of Virginia or to the members of a graduate history seminar at Johns Hopkins is not readily apparent. His answers to questions about the true, the good, and the beautiful were drawn somewhat narrowly from Reformed rather than American sources. In other words, Hodge was not a public figure who fits in the American intellectual tradition of pragmatism. But the conference looked for Hodge's significance in the wrong place.

Hodge's place in American church history remains firmly fixed in the sectarian (i.e. churchly) realm of Calvinism. And even though Hodge dropped the ball on occasions, he bore a major part of the burden of keeping Calvinism alive in the United States at a time when New England Calvinists (so-called) collapsed the doctrines of sin and grace into the tenants of civic virtue and public service. To be sure, the Dabney's and Thornwell's of the Presbyterian world helped. But Hodge oversaw the construction of a tradition of Calvinism that still survives (in places like the OPC and the PCA), thus outliving even the theological descendants of Bushnell, Taylor and Edwards put together. At a time when Hodge's *Systematic Theology* is still assigned to seminary students, Bushnell and Taylor are virtually out of print while Edwards persists thanks largely to his reputation as America's greatest philosopher.

Yet, the problem for Hodge was that he was not content with being simply a sectarian intellectual who cultivated plants in the Reformed vineyard. He also aspired to being a public theologian who wrote about a variety of national issues, often in a responsible way, but nonetheless from an outlook that assumed the church's responsibility for public life. That public spirit would ultimately cost the theological tradition at Princeton Seminary when it sacrificed Calvinism for the PCUSA's public relations efforts.

AND THAT PUBLIC SPIRIT MAY explain why the successors to Hodge's sectarian side, the OPC and the PCA, failed to recognize the bi-centennial of their theological patriarch's birthday. (As we go to press we have yet to hear of any commemorations sponsored by any of the churches or conservative Reformed seminaries.) Still, Calvinists in the U.S. owe a great debt to Hodge. The academy's inability to justify his significance only proves where his real importance lies and suggests why Christians may want to stop looking to the university for empowerment and affirmation. *SC 88*

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39 Alexander Hall

Trash Radio

Things have certainly degenerated when Don Imus turns out to be the voice of wisdom on the radio. We are referring to the show on weekday mornings, "Imus in the Morning," broadcast on WFAN out of New York and syndicated across the US of A. The I-man, as he is called, was a diskjockey with whom many forty-something New Yorkers grew up. After a bout with the bottle and the powder he retooled and now conducts a show that is best described as David Lettermen meets Guglielmo Marconi. I-man and his cohorts are extremely cynical, irreverent, adolescent, crude, and, yes, funny.

Anyway, Imus was the only broadcaster heard in one American home last summer who kept Lady Di's death in some perspective. He interviewed two newspaper columnists who both cautioned against the perils of celebrity culture and advised people to be more concerned about the neighbor across the street who dies and who has actually been in one's home, rather than some media creation whose only appearance in one's home is on the cover of *People* magazine. Imus himself also made fun of some reporters who were canonizing Diana because of her recent charity work. She was, as he pointed out, having an affair with an Italian playboy. How saintly is that?

BUT IMUS COULD NOT SILENCE the inanity of other radio hosts. Dick Morris, the former Clinton advisor who moved the President to the center on family values matters all the while paying a hooker to suck his toes for sexual pleasure (don't ask and be sure to keep the *NTJ* off the coffee table), now has his own talk show. After Di's death Morris was lamenting the loss of such a virtuous woman, even comparing her to the saintly Mother Theresa. (Some astute callers accused Morris of twisting the news about Diana in order to spin questions about his own character. He kept blaming her tragic life on the media and celebrity, as if the media, whose ranks he has just joined, made him fornicate.)

If that was not enough, Scott Simon, NPR's male counterpart to Susan Stamford, read an obituary for Mother Theresa on the Saturday morning show he hosts. In it he compared Lady Di to Theresa, making much of the fact that Di had in her last months turned to the Mother for counsel and emulation, and that the two most popular women in the world had died within days of each other. An epiphany? Pretty close. Simon concluded by saying that Mother Theresa was "the word of God made flesh."

WHICH LEADS US TO WONDER why the mainstream media will treat as fanatics and crackpots (which they are) those believers who conclude that tragedies such as earthquakes and the AIDS epidemic are acts of God's judgment, and yet will venture into religion with equal fanaticism but this time to show how loving and kind the deity is. Whatever happened to that great and high – almost holy – wall of separation? Whatever happened, for that matter, to codes of journalistic propriety? Why doesn't the press just butt out of religion altogether, leaving their snide insinuations about some of the faithful to themselves and their pontificating on the newsroom floor? It just shows how little difference there is at the end of the day between talk radio and NPR.

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Speaking of Canonization

The death of Mother Theresa has occasioned much talk in the press about the process of canonization and the status of saints within the Roman Catholic Church. Judging from responses to the death of Princess Di, if the editors of the *NTJ* were in charge of things (and if we didn't already believe in the sainthood of all believers) we would select the Pope for sainthood rather than Mother Theresa. *Ecumenical News International* recently reported the official responses of various church leaders to Diana's death. It was downright embarrassing. (Why didn't any of these clerics feel the need to respond to the almost simultaneous death of Phillies star and longtime broadcaster, Richie Ashburn?) Unfortunately, Mother Theresa did not distinguish herself. Among her comments was the line that Diana was "a very great friend in love with the poor. She was an ordinary housewife. She was a very good mother." Doesn't discernment count in the making of saints? Compare those sentiments to the sensible and dignified response of John Paul who, reports *Ecumenical News International*, in a "telegram sent from Rome, presented condolences to Queen Elizabeth II." Maybe the real criteria for becoming a saint is whether you think Diana was one.

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Books and (Publishing) Culture

We know, we know, we know: you shouldn't judge a book from its cover. But if you do, you are likely to confuse Michael Horton's latest (*In the Face of God*, published by Word) with Bill Hybels' latest (*The God You're Looking For*, published by Nelson). We were struck by many dust jacket similarities: the same white-on-black typeface set off against a soft beige background that included a blurred and vaguely human image. This was before we noticed that

both were the product of the same designer, David Riley + Associates of Corona Del Mar, California.

Of course, authors generally don't choose their own covers. And our friend Michael Horton would be too kind to suggest that we might face this predicament also if we published as widely as he. Moreover, all similarities end once the prose begins, as Hybels' formula for encountering God is precisely the "greasy familiarity" that Horton condemns. Still we chuckle at the prospect of readers picking up the wrong book by mistake. Then again, has anyone ever seen Horton and Hybels in the same room at the same time?

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Not by Tobacco Alone

In our continuing effort to improve the quality of church pot-luck suppers and OLTS meetings, we offer a simple and delicious dessert recipe, given to us, appropriately, by a pastor's wife.

Filled Shortbread

Cream: ½ lb butter
Add: 1 cup sugar
1 egg
2 tsp vanilla extract
2 cups flour

Spread half of the batter in an 8 x 8 pan. Spread a half cup of jam on top (raspberry, grape or apricot). Cover with the remaining batter (needn't be smooth.) Bake at 325 degrees for 45 minutes. Cool and cut into small bars.

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Is (or Was) Sam Walton Your Neighbor?

A report on NPR about a sermon by a priest in the Church of England prompted some thoughts about the implications of the Eighth Commandment. The news service copy indicated that this priest had told his parishioners that shoplifting from supermarket chains was not stealing. His reasoning was that such chains were putting the village food markets out of business and, thus, destroying the social fabric of English town life.

This priest's teaching is not what we would prefer to hear in the pulpit. It does appear to be something of a stretch to say that shoplifting is not theft. And, no doubt, the character of English town life changed long before supermarkets and malls began to show up in the UK. Just ask the Luddites. But his admonishment does raise some interesting questions about how we observe the Eighth Commandment.

FOR INSTANCE, AMONG THE SINS forbidden by this commandment, according to the Westminster Larger Catechism, are "oppression" and all "unjust or sinful ways of taking or withholding from our neighbor what belongs to him." Which might mean that chains like WalMart, McDonalds and Winn Dixie, may actually excessively burden and deprive our neighbors who run local businesses from what would normally belong to them were it not for the consolidation of wealth in corporations and their ability to buy goods in mass quantities and distribute those goods throughout the world. As long as our only consideration in purchasing any item, from food to houses, is simply the lowest price, we will always be suckers for chains and the services they provide.

WHICH RAISES ANOTHER question about who exactly is the neighbor in view in the Eighth Commandment. Is some corporate executive who lives in Downers Grove, Illinois really the neighbor of someone living in Southeastern Pennsylvania? In other words, what kind of economic obligations do we have to real neighbors, the people with whom we share a specific geographic space? Not lying to or having an affair with the wife of the owner of the local food market is good. But how much love and respect do we show to that owner if we travel by car to buy groceries from the Giant Supermarket five miles away?

As Wendell Berry has argued, the health of real local communities depends upon real and viable local economies where "work ought to be good," "satisfying and dignifying to the people who do it, and genuinely useful and pleasing to the people for whom it is done." In other words, the problem with chains, national or multi-national, is one of scale. Their reach with regard to their own advantage is everywhere while their accountability with regard to those whose lives they affect is nowhere. American conservatives are inconsistent if they are only concerned about a big central government while also promoting big business. As Berry also writes, "a supranational economy . . . would inevitably function as a government far bigger and more centralized than any dreamed of before." If it is clear that to be free we need to limit the size of government, it is "foolish to complain about big government if we do not do everything we can to support strong local communities and strong community economies" ("Conserving Communities," *Another Turn of the Crank*).

If we are going to champion families, schools, and churches, we had better give some attention to economic arrangements and how big business affects the "common wealth." So the offbeat advice from the Church of England priest might be more in line with the social teachings of the Bible than it first sounded.

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Nicotine of Hippo

We recently heard a wonderful suggestion about the name of our journal, one that might help readers who want their church libraries to take the *NTJ* but fear what other church members will make of the title and its association with the evil weed. Why not tell your church librarian about what a wonderful publication the *NTJ* is, how it is chock-full of wisdom and carries a style of argumentation rarely found in religious periodicals. Don't say it's smart alecky. When asked about the

name, respond with as straight a face as possible that Nicotine is not what he or she thinks. Say that Nicotine is Augustine of Hippo's obscure younger brother, whose obscurity is almost complete thanks to the modern *jehad* against RJR/Nabisco. Add that if the church would readily subscribe to a journal named the *Augustine Theological Journal* then no one could possibly object to the *Nicotine Theological Journal*, a publication dedicated to the memory of the first Old School Presbyterian. And because Nicotine was African the *NTJ* will make your church library a multi-cultural place.

Also, make sure that when you pronounce our journal's title you put the accent on the second, rather than the first syllable of nicotine (as in ni-CO-tine), and make the last "i" short (as in "tin").

ACTUALLY, WE HAVE A BETTER way for churches to subscribe to the *NTJ* short of violating the ninth commandment (as the Reformed count them). In response to great demand (actually one EPC pastor in Texas inquired) we are now offering bulk subscriptions for congregations. Churches that order between ten and fifty subscriptions may receive the *NTJ* for $4 per subscription. The rate goes down to $3 per subscription for orders over fifty.

(By the way, we need to give credit to George and Lucie Marsden who suggested the new derivation of Nicotine but who have yet to subscribe and so should not be accused of sharing the *NTJ*'s outlook or bad habits.) *SC 88*

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Second Hand Smoke

Editorial note: *The following comes from C. S. Lewis' "Introduction" to* The Incarnation of the Word of God by Athanasius *(New York: Macmillan, 1947).*

The present book is something of an experiment. The translation is intended for the world at large, not only for theological students. If it succeeds, other translations of other great Christian books will presumably follow. In one sense, of course, it is not the first in the field. Translations of the *Theologia Germanica*, the *Imitation*, the *Scale of Perfection*, and the *Revelations of Lady Julian of Norwich* are already on the market, and are very valuable, though some of them are not very scholarly. But it will be noticed that these books are all books of devotion rather than of doctrine. Now the layman or amateur needs to be instructed as well as to be exhorted. In this age his need for knowledge is particularly pressing. Nor would I admit any sharp division between the two kinds of books. For my own part I tend to find the doctrinal books more helpful in devotion than the devotional books, and I rather suspect that the same experience may await many others. I believe that many who find that "nothing happens" when they sit down, to a book of devotion, would find that the heart sings unbidden while they are working their way through a tough bit of theology with a pipe in their teeth and a pencil in their hand. *SC 88*

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Don't Be A Lapsed Old Lifer; Renew Your *NTJ* Subscription Now (Please)

The apostle Paul wrote about doing everything in moderation, an exhortation that we believe applies as much to smoking as it does to reading periodicals. The *NTJ*, we believe, cultivates moderation by coming out only four times a year (a rate that will hardly lead to addiction), and by being moderately priced.

For those reasons we would encourage subscribers who started taking the *NTJ* a year ago to renew now at the same rate as last year ($7; $9 Canadian). In case you were wondering Old Life Theological Society t-shirts are still available for $10, while a year's subscription and one t-shirt costs $15. (At least we don't have a home page.)

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