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Sectarians All

SUPPOSE A HISTORY PROFESSOR at an evangelical liberal arts college were teaching a course on American church history. His course did not follow the world religions approach but instead covered the religious traditions most numerous and most influential in America (though those are not synonymous) and so slanted the course to Protestants, Catholics and Jews. For the final exam the professor asked students to describe the teaching and practice of the average observant Catholic before Vatican II. If a student answered the question by ignoring Roman Catholic worship (the Mass), customs (fish on Fridays), institutions (parochial schools), and teaching on justification, but answered instead with a description of an Irish immigrant in Boston who bucked the repressive pedagogy of local nuns, complained about never understanding the Mass, then went to Boston University, joined InterVarsity, attended Park Street Church, and read his Protestant Bible daily during his “quiet time,” should the professor give the student a passing grade? Such an answer would not be surprising given the historic anti-Catholic bias among Anglo-American Protestants. But wouldn’t the professor be delinquent in his duties as a professor

of history to approve such an answer? In other words, is it possible for a Protestant to hold that a Catholic is “good” even if he believes his practices idolatrous?

LET’S TAKE ANOTHER EXAMPLE. This one from real life. J.I. Packer was one of the original Protestant signers of “Evangelicals and Catholics Together,” the first statement (1994) that called for a joint mission of Roman Catholics and evangelical Protestants in a limited number of endeavors. In an article he wrote explaining his decision (*Christianity Today*, Dec. 12, 1994), Packer applied the very language of “good Catholic” to those with whom Protestants ought to cooperate. Now Packer does not spell out exactly what such a good Catholic looks like. But the reasons he gives for not being able to become a Roman Catholic are helpful. For instance, Rome has a “flawed” understanding of the church, its sacramental theology “cuts across” the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith, the “Mary cult,” the doctrine of purgatory, and the “disbursing” of indulgences all “damp down” biblical teaching about assurance of salvation. What is more, papal claims to infallibility make the “self-correction” of the church impossible. So the communion of Rome is still “unacceptable” to Packer. But the Catholics who are willing to sign a declaration with Packer, despite his reservations and objections, are “good” Catholics. These Catholics most likely are ones who do not observe the faith in ways that Packer deems flawed or, at least, are not strict about them. Ironically, then, Packer’s assessment of Catholicism should fail to earn an A-grade on an undergraduate American church history final exam but is supposed to be persuasive to evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholics as the

first step in ecumenicity.

WHY DOESN’T SUCH AN understanding of Catholicism earn the strong rebukes of condescension and paternalism? Isn’t Packer saying, in effect, that a good Catholic is one who has given up distinctively Catholic teachings and practice? What is more, why isn’t Packer criticized for harboring the kind of anti-Catholic sentiments that used to inform America’s progressive reformers who desired the assimilation of all immigrants to the United States into WASP culture? Liberal Protestants have a long history of including Roman Catholics at their gatherings and institutions who resemble themselves, that is, believers who have given up the more particular aspects of their tradition in order to fit in to American Protestant norms. That kind of treatment used to be called “illiberal” by Roman Catholics, such as when John Gilmary Shea in the 1880s accused the Puritan tradition of being “narrow-minded, tyrannical, and intolerant” of those who “refused to submit to their ruling.” But now, thanks to the wonders of modern ecumenism, Catholics who are not concerned about Rome’s historic teachings and practice are considered “good.”

THE POINT HERE IS NOT SO much the problems of recent Catholic and evangelical statements (though we do dissent from those affirmations). Rather our concern is with the understanding of religious traditions and their truth claims that undergirds not simply such statements as “Evangelicals and Catholics Together”

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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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but also Bible-only evangelicalism, New Life Presbyterianism, and proponents of "mere Christianity." Underneath all of these expressions of Christian faith is, it seems to us, is the Enlightenment's hostility to tradition, history, and particularity. This is an especially important concern to the editors of the *NTJ* because we have been accused of narrowness, rigidity, and sectarianism in our effort to defend not simply the theological truths of the Reformed creeds and confessions (specifically the Westminster Standards) but also the Reformed practices articulated in our creedal statements. In other words, from Packer's perspective, or that of the evangelical undergraduate, we here at the *NTJ* are "bad" Presbyterians because we are unwilling to let go of such practices as Reformed liturgy (it does exist -- just see Evelyn Underhill's discussion in *Worship* [1937]), the sanctification of the Lord's

Day, Reformed sacramental theology, Presbyterian polity, and the avoidance of the liturgical calendar. We feel like ethnic Americans who are being forced to assimilate to the demands of a melting-pot Christianity. If we retain our distinctive ways we will be un-American or, worse, Amish.

ON THE ONE HAND, OUR CLAIMS are very modest and have to do with the simple methods used by historians (when not under the influence of modern literary theory that turns the meaning of words into jello). Presbyterianism may be historically defined as arising at a particular time and standing for certain convictions (predestination) and practices (infant baptism). Like it or not, the first proponents of any group, whether religious, political, or educational, set the standards for all who will follow in their name. So, if a later group bearing the name Presbyterian no longer believes in predestination and no longer baptizes their infants, do we still call them Presbyterian, or might we conclude that something akin to denial or stupidity is underway? The same goes for Agrarians or Unitarians. If someone claims to be an Agrarian and yet promotes the Internet and invests heavily in Texaco, calling into question his claim would not be irresponsible. Or if you find a Unitarian who believes Jesus Christ is the second person of the Trinity we might have some reasonable justification for concluding this person has departed from the teaching of William Ellery Channing, no matter how much we might be heartened by the expression of orthodox belief. In other words, tradition in a historical sense matters for Protestants as much as it does for Catholics. We may not believe in a magisterium but we do believe that Protestants may not rewrite the past.

ON THE OTHER HAND, WE WANT to make the immodest claim that the doctrine of *sola scriptura* is dangerous and not a separate doctrine in the Reformed tradition. By this we do not mean that we deny what the

Westminster Confession says (and what was the formal principle of the Reformation) that "the Supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined" is "the Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture." Our problem is with those who isolate the doctrine of *sola scriptura* from all other doctrines, as if the Bible exists without any interpretation, or apart from all confessional or creedal statements. In other words, we deny the biblicism that often masquerades under the banner of "the Bible only." Technically speaking, which is the way the proof-text-approach to the Bible usually runs, "the Bible only" will not give us the Bible only since Scripture itself does not list its own table of contents. This means that even *sola scriptura* requires some human effort and interpretation. That is why Zacharias Ursinus wanted the *Heidelberg Catechism* bound at the front of Bibles published for the laity, and why the Geneva Bible came with notes (not unlike the NIV Bible for Women). Proponents of "the Bible only" want to protect God's word from human hands, and so want to avoid going through any human tradition before arriving at the pure teaching of Scripture. But such a desire for a direct communication from God, which "the Bible only" appears to give, will not settle what the Bible only means. As George Marsden remarked several years ago, the doctrine of inerrancy might preserve the authority of the Bible but it could not even settle the question of the Trinity since, for example, some nineteenth-century Unitarians believed an inerrant Bible revealed an Arian Christ.

CHRISTIAN HISTORY IS littered with Protestant groups who have pitted the Bible against man-made creeds. Pietism was arguably the first to do serious damage to the necessity of confessions for the health of the church. Pietists argued that the gospel had atrophied and died because the doctrinal precision advocated by scholastics extinguished real piety. They also believed that bickering over church polity had vitiated the body of Christ,

and that ritualism and clericalism were stifling worship. "Back to the Bible" became the pietist slogan (and continues to be a reliable index to extant Pietists). As James Tunstead Burtchaell observes in a forthcoming book on Christian higher education in America, "by turning from the cumulative tradition of biblical commentaries, symbolic definitions and theological disputation, and by drawing upon Scripture as a basis for doctrine and morality, the adherents of reform did not successfully set aside the thoughts of man in favor of the thoughts of God" (as if such a Gnostic denial of creation is ever possible by creatures). Instead, Pietists "simply exchanged the agenda of the sages of the past for the agenda of the preachers of the present." Untethered to the wisdom of the past, Pietism quickly degenerated – SURPRISE! – into rationalism, which is simply another tradition, but one which interprets the Bible according to the lights of what is reasonable and responsible, rather than one cultivated and sustained by an interpretive community (i.e. the church). According to Burtchaell, "Pietism was surely not an early, soft variant of the heathen gentility of the later rationalism which followed close upon it, but there was a kinship between them." Pietism and rationalism both "deplored the confessional particularities of the churches, referring to them contemptuously as 'sectarian.'"

HOW HISTORY HAS REPEATED the same pattern. The no-creed-but-the-Bible mentality that Nathan O. Hatch documents so well (*Democratization of American Christianity*) within two or three generations gave way to liberal Protestantism. Conservative Protestants are prone to think that liberal Protestants were wicked men who drank, danced, chewed and denied Christ and the Bible openly. But much like evangelicals, Protestant liberals were guardians of middle-class respectability and morality. What is more, they gained considerable leverage against their confessional rivals by trumpeting the slogans of "Back to Christ" and "Back to the Bible." This genteel variety of primitivism

(Pentecostalism was a less genteel form) not only freed liberal Protestants from the creeds to which they had subscribed but also gave room to maneuver in the wider world of modern science and learning. Gone was the Christ of Chalcedon and the imputation of Christ's righteousness. In their place came the Christ who stood at the apex of evolutionary development and the righteousness secured by following Christ's Golden Rule.

AMERICAN PRESBYTERIANS have been big suckers for Bible-onlyism because of their embrace of the Enlightenment. Unlike their counterparts in the Netherlands, American Calvinists developed no anti-revolutionary ideology. They not only endorsed Enlightenment politics when advocating the valuable principle of limited government. But in the euphoria of the American Revolution, a revolt inspired by the Enlightenment (of a the moderate Scottish sort), Presbyterian clergy also endorsed an Enlightenment view of history. According to the American Protestant reading of Christian history the Reformation was a forerunner to the Enlightenment; both Protestantism and science were responsible for dispelling ignorance, superstition, bigotry and intolerance and for advancing the cause of truth, reason, knowledge and progress. In this unfolding of western civilization, Catholicism, which was responsible for the "Dark Ages," was the villain. For that reason, American Protestants had no trouble including a tepid version of their religion in public schools but objected vigorously to either parochial schools receiving tax funds or granting Catholics privileges in the common school. In *The Soul of the American University* George Marsden identifies this outlook as "the Whig Ideal." Protestantism was synonymous with "the advances of civilization and the cause of freedom," that is, freedom not only for civil liberty but also for scientific inquiry. In contrast, Catholicism "represented absolutism, suppression of individual development, and suppression of free inquiry."

UP TO THE FUNDAMENTALIST controversy confessional Presbyterians perpetuated this Whig outlook. But thanks to contacts with Dutch Calvinists, who knew the downside of enlightened politics, and owing to the leaven of Cornelius Van Til's apologetics, conservative Presbyterians and some evangelicals saw the incompatibility between the Enlightenment ideal of autonomous inquiry and the Christian notion of submission to revealed truth. It became much easier to admit that "nothing is neutral." The lone natural scientist or scholar, many conceded, was just as prone to a prejudiced reading of the facts as any cleric, Roman Catholic or not.

STILL, THE ENLIGHTENMENT lives on. Van Til's insights about presuppositions and the bias of the human heart have only penetrated so far into the American Presbyterian brain. Some Van Tillians continue to appeal to the doctrine of *sola scriptura* in Whig fashion and pit traditionalism (i.e. "rigid" and "sectarian" adherence to the Presbyterian creeds and directories for worship) against the Bible only. It is as if once the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit has regenerated the blind and prejudiced human heart the regenerated individual, in autonomous and rational fashion, can plumb the depths of the Bible and do so free from the prejudice and bigotry of strict subscription. So much for the contamination of the human soul that continues after conversion.

EVEN WORSE, SO MUCH FOR THE naivete, blindness and pride of the Enlightenment's faith in reason and the possibility of arriving at objective, global, cosmopolitan truths to which everyone in the world agrees once the right methods of inquiry have been adopted. Some Van Tillians make it seem that once the switch of regeneration is flicked on everyone who picks up the Bible will read it the same way. Which is another way of denying

the history of the Christian church in all its variety and the claims of all those professing Christians throughout the ages who believe they are biblical. The Bible-only approach, in good Enlightenment fashion, presumes the possibility of escaping all the prejudice, bigotry and darkness of the past and arriving at an unprejudiced understanding of the Christian religion. In effect, nothing is neutral except for the Bible, which is an ironic twist considering how divisive the Bible is compared to the homogenous assessment given by some conservative Presbyterians to such human sciences crying out for Christian interpretation as history, chemistry and even politics. And without the aid of the past the regenerated individual may now sit down with his Bible alone (no notes, please) and figure out the two natures of Christ, the bondage of the will, the nature of the atonement, and the imputation of Adam's sin, for starters.

OF COURSE, ONE PROBLEM WITH the anti-traditionalist outlook of "no creed but the Bible" is that it is itself an interpretive tradition. The desire to return to a pure gospel unadulterated by creeds or human authorities is about 300 years old and has demonstrated a remarkable consistency through the years. But because of Bible-only Christians' hostility to tradition they can't spot the one they follow. The result is an uncritical and unaware outline that functions as trump in any card-game of rival traditions. According to Bible-only logic, if it comes from man then it can't come from God and so must be a tradition. Never mind that God sets up men with legitimate authority to rule over others, such as those found in the visible church. The Westminster Divines are just as fallible as the Pope and so must not be obeyed uncritically, an interesting and no doubt uncomfortable position for anyone who has subscribed to the Westminster Standards.

THE OTHER PROBLEM WITH Bible-only Christianity is that it never

delivers what it promises. It is supposed to provide an unprejudiced reading of the Bible that will unite all true believers on the essentials of the faith. Does it not seem a tad audacious and perhaps a bit prejudicial for some individuals, freed from the interpretive constraints of ecclesiastical accountability, to sit down and determine just what is essential in the Bible? Where would we find those essentials? In the Epistle to Jude or maybe one of the Synoptic Gospels? Isn't this exactly what Marcion and Thomas Jefferson had in mind when they cut and pasted the Bible according to their understanding of what was essential and genuine? Aside from its audaciousness, the effort of Bible-only believers to arrive at a "mere" expression of the gospel nurtures its own form of rigidity, narrowness and intolerance. The inclusive center is never sufficiently broad to include Mormons and Unitarians, suggesting that some intolerance is worthwhile. Meanwhile, the Bible- only creed excludes those believers whom professors of history might describe as "good" Presbyterians, "good" Lutherans, "good" Anglicans, "good" Catholics, and, yes, "good" Amish. When liberal Protestants told fundamentalists that all Christians were one in the Lord, Walter Lippmann observed that the liberal approach was akin to telling fundamentalists, "smile and commit suicide." Which only proves the rule that those who live by the ideals of tolerance and sensitivity are generally intolerant and insensitive. Or to borrow Richard John Neuhaus' rule, when orthodoxy is optional, orthodoxy is soon proscribed.

THE POINT, THEN, IS THAT THE Bible never exists in an "only" state. It must always be interpreted. At which point the interpretation of the "Bible only" needs to be held up against the Bible as interpreted by the various Christian communions. But the Bible as understood by those communions, we believe, will always be superior to the interpretive strategy of the Bible-only Christians because the former recognize

the importance and necessity of the visible church while the latter places all authority and wisdom in the autonomous individual. Though liberal economic and political thought lauds the virtues of the individual, Christians who confess the doctrine of original sin should be wary of modernity's handling of ancient texts. Christ gave to his people the church and her ministry for a reason, not simply to edify but also to restrain. The church is necessary for rightly understanding the Bible. Despite her divided state, she is an interpretive community that checks and balances the excesses of private interpretations (including Quiet Times). This may sound like a Roman Catholic sentiment. We would deny this. We still believe that churches err and have erred. And we believe that the Bible is the place to go to resolve religious controversies. Quoting the *Shorter Catechism* will not. But this does not mean that each generation has to start from scratch, as if the history of the church, her controversies, her various creeds and varying communions do not exist. Nor does it mean that the church as an interpretive community has no authority because it is human while the Bible is divine. As the *Confession of Faith* puts it, the "decrees and determinations" of the church should be received with "reverence and submission" not simply because they agree with the Bible but also because the "power" of the church is "an ordinance of God, appointed thereunto in his word" (31.ii).

IN THE END THE CHOICE IS not between the Bible and tradition. Rather it is between traditions accountable to the visible church or those of either individualistic (e.g. private) or parachurch origins. We can never escape tradition, the dogma of the Enlightenment to the contrary. So which will it be, the Bible interpreted self-consciously by communions shaped by the history of the Christian church, or the Bible as understood by collections of autonomous individuals being swept along by the flood of Enlightenment innocence? Which is better, an observant Catholic or a "Bible-only"

Protestant? As much as we disagree with Rome and as rigidly Presbyterian as we are, we will take our chances with Packer's "bad" Catholics any day. At least with them we can agree to disagree. But with creedless Protestants, whether evangelical or liberal, we will always be disagreeably forced to agree. SC 88

The New Sabbatarians

HOW DO YOU TELL A TRUE OLD Lifer from a pretender? We used to think that a fairly reliable indicator was to raise the question of the Sabbath. Ask how should a believer sanctify the Lord's Day (and be sure to raise the thorny language of recreation from the Westminster Standards). If one responds by clearing the throat and changing the subject, you knew you were looking at a counterfeit. But a curious trend seems underway. More and more Christians are claiming the Sabbath. There has been a recent flurry of publishing on the subject in several Christian magazines. In all of these articles there is the recognition that the Sabbath is essential to the Christian life, and that Christians ignore this discipline to their great disadvantage. But don't worry, readers, because as it turns out, the Sabbath is really not that hard to observe after all.

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER Eugene Peterson of Regent College takes care to distance himself from anything that smacks of Puritan repressiveness (but he waxes redundant). Although he recognizes the Sabbath as a command and not a suggestion, he discourages pastors from imposing a "common observance" in congregations, lest it communicate "guilt-trap legalism." Moreover, the Puritans only got it half right: the

Sabbath is a day to pray and to play. When he and his wife retire to Vancouver's beautiful beaches on Sunday afternoons after church, he likes what he sees as he joins the beachcombers and kite fliers: "The outdoor playfulness always strikes a chord of harmonious response in our hearts that have so recently tuned to prayerfulness in the sanctuary." This too, is not enough, he acknowledges. "In America we have conspicuous examples of widespread observance of half-Sabbaths, prayerful Sabbaths without any play, and playful Sabbaths without any prayer. Our Puritan ancestors practiced the first; our pagan contemporaries practice the second."

BUT SABBATH-KEEPERS JUST wanna have fuh-un, and at least Vancouver knows how to play, so Peterson applauds. It's important that the watching world sees that you're enjoying yourself. Sorry, but Peterson's Sabbath chic smacks too much of Young Life spirituality.

A BETTER CASE COMES FROM Lutheran Dorothy Bass, in "Keeping Sabbath: Reviving a Christian Practice," (*Christian Century*, Jan 1-8, 1997). Unlike Peterson, Bass at least reckons that outsiders will inevitably look at Sabbath-keeping as a "dreary set of restrictions," because the joy of the Sabbath is inaccessible to those outside the community of faith. Still, she urges de-Puritanizing the Sabbath, removing kill-joy notions of rules, restrictions, and obligations. She also laments that Protestants have tended to require too many hours of worship every Sunday. We'd love to know what Protestants she has in mind.

TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY Christians, Bass continues, must "respect diversity." Peterson agrees, so neither want to prescribe Sunday as the Christian Sabbath. The result is designer sabbatarianism, where Christians discover their own Sabbath time and Sabbath-keeping practices.

DESIGNER SABBATARIANISM IS the subject of Les Parrott's "Stress and the Sabbath" (*Moody Monthly*, Sept. 1994). What do working moms and Vietnam veterans have in common? Too much stress in their lives. Stress provokes chemical imbalances within us and disorders in our families and work relationships. The author profiles several people who have found stress-busters in jogging, gardening, aerobics, and juggling (no, that was not John Frame). Some even discovered the ultimate in stress-management, Sabbath-observance. Such relaxation performs wonders for the workaholic. Parrott finds confirmation in the Scriptures: Pharaoh and Herod's hostility put Moses and Jesus both under a lot of stress, which they relieved through careful delegation and time management.

MOST CHRISTIANS ARE STILL willing to acknowledge that other disciplines in the life are meant to be hard -- that's why, after all, they are called disciplines. The benefits of diligence in maintaining teen-age chastity or raising children or writing a dissertation emerge only after the practitioner has faithfully persevered, generally through painful denial of self-gratification.

NOT SO THE SABBATH. IT HAS gone from discipline to therapy in the user-friendly formulas of the new Sabbatarians. Rather than a holy day of rest from everyday cares of life, the Sabbath is the private lifestyle enclave of individuals nursing their wounds from the brutalities of the public work place. The language of worship has been joined and at times even eclipsed by the language of leisure.

AND BY CHOOSING ONE'S TIME and means of Sabbath observance, the new Sabbatarians convert it into a vehicle not for identification in a community set apart from the world but for individual self-expression. Far from a "pocket of resistance" (Peterson's

term) to the idols of our age, they offer a heightened enslavement to the chief idol, the demands of the self. In a word, the new Sabbatarians are the same old consumers, exchanging the foretaste of eschatological rest into the worldly tastes of self-gratification. SC88

39 Alexander Hall

Mainline and Sectarian Presbyterians Wired Together

ONE OF THE EDITORS OF THE *NTJ* has made the case that the Orthodox Presbyterian Church is the spiritual successor to the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. The point was meant to be positive. The PCUSA which now includes the northern and southern branches of American Presbyterianism is in some way the heir of the most notable Presbyterian theologians, such as the Hedges, Thornwell, Dabney, Warfield, Vos and even Machen. To remind the OPC of her spiritual roots was part of a confessional ecumenical effort to recognize the faithful witness of Presbyterians outside the OPC, especially in the past.

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE OPC and the PCUSA can have more undesirable expressions as well. Here we have in mind the liturgical weaknesses that the OPC inherited from the PCUSA such as the decline of exclusive psalm-singing, the infrequent administration of the Lord's Supper, and the distribution of the Lord Supper in only one kind (that is, bread, but no wine – only Welches).

RELATIVELY RECENT ISSUES OF OPC and PCUSA periodicals indicate that continuities between the churches are also evident in the realm of

technology. In July 1997 the OPC's *New Horizons* featured several stories on computers and the Internet. Four months later the PCUSA's *Presbyterian Outlook* followed suit. To borrow a line from that American classic, "Home on the Range," "never was heard a discouraging word." Both churches appear to be bullish on the latest corporate raid on public utilities. The arguments were as optimistic as they were vague.

BOTH DENOMINATIONS HAILED the endless possibilities for communication. Neither offered reflection on the economic and political structures behind the Internet, let alone the effects of impersonal methods of communication or a highly unreal environment that prides its reality as being "virtual."

IRONICALLY, BOTH CHURCHES made points that implicitly should have rendered more caution about the Internet. While the PCUSA trumpeted the possibilities of the Internet for providing "access to the inspiration of the PC(USA)'s world-class preachers and the teaching of its seminary professors" an editorial on the same page admitted that the present was a "fragile time" for the denomination because of disunity in "our theology, our mission, or even our polity." So which is it? Will the PCUSA's Web page communicate the insights of her great theologians and preachers or simply be a window on the church's lack of consensus. The OPC was no less caught up in its own rhetoric. While one writer touted the camouflage provided by the Internet – the OPC's home page could look just as good as a denomination with 100 times its members – he also conceded that the Web circulated "just about anything" – "false religion as well as true." So which is it? Will Web surfers mistake the OPC for the PCUSA or the Church of Scientology?

ALL OF WHICH GOES TO SHOW that the PCUSA and the OPC, for all of their differences, though maybe not kissing cousins, are nonetheless cousins

in the same family of mainstream American Presbyterianism which, unfortunately includes too many weird uncles and children of mixed marriages. Maybe this is what the concept, "church militant," means.

Honest Abe?

AS SCHOOLBOYS GROWING UP IN the Northeast we never heard any criticism of the United States' sixteenth president, Abraham Lincoln. Every year we came to that lull in the year between the Superbowl and Easter known as February -- as Protestants we could not experience the delights of Fat Tuesday (what the repressed descendants of Northern Europe have dubbed Doughnut Day). The only events to carry us through the month were the two days off for the birthdays of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. Since then these civic holidays have been repackaged into a three-day "weekend" and the symbolism conveyed by this repackaging is appropriate to what we learned in grammar school about Abe. What the first president had started, the sixteenth merely extended; just as Washington implemented the revolutionary ideals of liberty and self-determination for the new nation so Lincoln, carried out those ideals by freeing the slaves while preserving the Union.

IT CAME AS SOMETHING OF A shock, then, to read H. L. Mencken's essay on Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. He wrote in 1920 for the *Smart Set* that this speech "is at once the shortest and the most famous oration in American history. Put beside it, all the whooping of the Websters, Sumners and Everetts seem gaudy and silly. It is eloquence brought to a pellucid and almost gem-like perfection -- the highest emotion reduced to a few poetical phrases. . . . But let us not forget that it is poetry, not logic; beauty, not sense. Think of the argument in it. Put it into the cold words of everyday. The doctrine is simply this: that the Union soldiers who

died at Gettysburg sacrificed their lives to the cause of self-determination -- 'that government of the people, by the people, for the people' should not perish from the earth. It is difficult to imagine anything more untrue. The Union soldiers in that battle actually fought *against* self-determination; it was the Confederates who fought for the right of their people to govern themselves. . . . The Confederates went into battle free; they came out with their freedom subject to the supervision and veto of the rest of the country -- and for nearly twenty years that veto was so effective that they enjoyed scarcely more liberty, in the political sense, than so many convicts in the penitentiary." In other words, Mencken was calling the man, known as "honest Abe" by schoolboys across the USA, a liar.

LOTS OF CITATIONS COULD BE listed to argue that Mencken was right and that Lincoln was deceived (or deceived). One of the most candid (and scary) comes from an article in *The New Republic* by George P. Fletcher who teaches law at Columbia. Fletcher's tactic is not subtle. He states straightforwardly that the man convicted of the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City, Timothy McVeigh, understands the US Constitution in the same way that strict constructionists do. McVeigh believed that the Constitution "should be interpreted *exactly* as it was written," a notion shared by the likes of Antonin Scalia, William Rehnquist, and Robert Bork. Now before provoking the mailings from another Unabomber, Fletcher denies that "originalist" legal scholars and judges were responsible for McVeigh's act of terrorism. But he insists they view the Constitution the same way. And more important, he says, they are "fundamentally wrong."

FLETCHER EXPLAINS THAT THE purpose of the 1789 Constitution was to "charter a government of limited powers that could never become a tyrannical overlord." But times change. The republic created in 1789, in fact, "is long gone." It died with "the 600,000 Americans killed in the [War of Northern Aggression]" (regional slur

ours). In remarkable candor, Fletcher concludes that that war "decided once and forever that the People and the States do not have the power to govern their local lives apart from the nation as a whole." Even more startling is what he says about the constitutional arrangements stemming from Appomattox. "The original Constitution limits only government power; the Thirteenth Amendment is the first direct intervention into the private affairs of citizens." Thus, just as France after its revolution went through a series of constitutions and a series of republics, so the United States went through a constitutional history similar to France. In America's first republic the peoples (i.e. the states) were sovereign. But after 1865 it is the nation with "the People" comprising only one group.

DOES THAT MAKE LINCOLN America's Napoleonic? Maybe not. But he was a @#\$! good lawyer because lawyers "always seek to camouflage conceptual transformations as the continuous outgrowth of language used in the past." (Sounds like Protestant liberals who used traditional Christian terms to deny the historic meaning of those terms.) What Lincoln meant by the phrase, "by the people," was a new principle of democratic rule. The People no longer existed as the ones who guaranteed the legitimacy of the Constitution. Instead, they became simply the "voters," "office holders," and "beneficiaries of legislation."

WHY THEN HAVE SO FEW Americans been willing to acknowledge the creation of a Second American Republic? Fletcher thinks it is because of the poor state of our public schools. Here the issue is not public funding -- as if we need a national lottery -- but rather the content of history classes. The historical rupture of 1865 is not taught in grade schools or law schools. Instead, as Mencken knew well, Americans continued to believe idealistically that "the second Constitution is simply the natural continuation of the founding document." The fiction, "we the people," still exists because it is so consoling.

ALL OF THIS IS PERHAPS NOT that startling to Southerners or to those who know something of the legal stakes that went into the War between the States. But it is interesting in the context of the recent squabble over the tyranny of the Supreme Court occasioned by *First Things*' issue, "The End of Democracy." As Southerners have long known, democracy in the United States may not have died but it was mortally wounded well before *Roe v. Wade*. We believe the Christian response to such tyranny is not to take up arms either as Mr. McVeigh or our late-eighteenth- century forebears did. The only time we will enjoy real freedom is when we are ushered into the glorious liberty of the children of God when our Lord and Savior returns. But we also believe that Christians should not be so naive about our sixteenth President or the actual date of liberty's crisis in these United States.

Ollie Still Lies

SOME HABITS DIE HARD. BOTH of the editors grew up in a PD home (i.e., pre-digital) where the radio dial was set for classical music, broadcasts of the hometown baseball team, or Christian programming that included "sacred" music and preaching. Unfortunately, Christian radio usually prevailed. Which means that when in the car it is all to easy for us to listen in on the local Christian radio, not for edification (Please!), but to keep a finger on the pulse of evangelicalism.

OLIVER NORTH, AS MOST people know, has landed on his feet like so many of the Republican Party's poster boys with a talk-show that comes on during the evening rush hour. Ollie is also helping to put his kids through college by doing the voice overs for various commercials that run throughout the day. Now whatever we make of the Reagan administration's dealings in Nicaragua (the producer of some fine cigars we might add), no one can say with a straight face that Ollie told the truth during his testimony before the

Congressional committee investigating the United State's involvement in Central America. So it may be fitting to hear the line that Ollie uses when he pitches for the Cancer Treatment Centers of America. With his intense, raspy yet perky voice Ollie tells evangelical listeners that the Cancer Treatment Centers of America "are as concerned about your health as you are." Talk about gullible, not to mention cynical. Are evangelicals so captive to the Republican party as to think, in Stepford wife-like fashion, that Ollie knows medicine and is certain that this national organization of physicians and care givers are just like family? What is more, is the ad-agency producing these spots really convinced that people will believe a professional whom they have never met will care about them more than they do for themselves? To be sure, evangelicals will believe just about anyone, especially if the speaker drops the word, "God" (except for swearing). But surely in the wake of Jim Baker, Jimmy Swaggart, not to mention Oliver North, a bit of discernment about public figures has seeped into the evangelical brain. Then again, this is Christian radio where the so-called scandal of the evangelical mind can be heard twenty-four hours a day. SC88

so-called temperance propaganda of today and yesterday is based on the principle that there are certain things, edible, potable, or usable, that are intrinsically evil or have inherent in them some degrading or demoralizing element. It is alleged that the way of temperance is total abstinence from such things. This is directly contrary to Scripture. . . [Paul's] word to Timothy is that "every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused if it be received with thanksgiving, for it is sanctified through the word of God and prayer" (1 Tim 4:4, 5). Paul warns us that it is a sign of apostasy from the faith and embrace of the doctrines of demons to command to abstain from foods which God has created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. Certain types of temperance propaganda have adopted total abstinence as their motto and have urged that the witness of those who believe and know the truth is to be borne by total abstinence. The contradiction is blatant. Temperance propagandists say certain things are to be refused and scrupulously avoided. Paul says nothing is to be refused. Temperance propagandists say the Christian witness is prejudiced when believers partake of certain things. Paul says that it is by those who believe and know the truth they are to be received with thanksgiving and that it was for that purpose God created them. Temperance propagandists imply that God's blessing cannot be invoked on the use of certain things. Paul says that it is by prayer they are sanctified. Temperance propagandists say the Word of God forbids the use of certain things. Paul says it is by the Word of God they are sanctified.

CONSEQUENTLY EVERY temperance movement of whatever sort that is based upon the supposition or contention that any material thing is evil or contains within itself a tendency to evil and that therefore the use of it incites to sin is an assault upon the integrity of the Creator, and an attempt to remove the basis of responsibility for wrong from our hearts and wills to the ordinance of God. All such temperance

propaganda is based upon a principle that undermines the very foundations of sobriety and of true temperance. The Biblical conception of temperance is that of moderation and self-control. Against such temperance there is no law. SC88

Second Hand Smoke

[The following excerpt from John Murray, "The Weak and the Strong," Collected Writings, vol. 4, though not about smoking directly, does bear on the enjoyment of tobacco, especially since the author was known to enjoy a good cigar and a wee dram of Scotch.]

IT IS A BIBLICAL PRINCIPLE that there is nothing unclean of itself. The sanction by which Paul confirms this principle is most impressive. He says, "I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean of itself" (Rom 14:14). A great deal of the