
THE BLUE BANNER

Volume 7, Issue 4

For Christ's Crown & Covenant

April 1998

Goliath's Sword in Righteous Hands: The Reformed Doctrine of Resistance to Tyrants by Richard Bacon

[EDITOR'S NOTE: THIS ARTICLE PREVIOUSLY APPEARED IN *THE CHRISTIAN STATESMAN* AND IS REPRINTED HERE BY PERMISSION. "GOLIATH'S SWORD IN RIGHTEOUS HANDS," *THE CHRISTIAN STATESMAN*, VOL. 141, NO. 1 (JANUARY - FEBRUARY 1998) PP. 8-13]

The examination of a Reformed or Calvinistic doctrine of resistance to tyrants must begin and end with the clear statement that resistance of whatever kind is *not* the norm. Thus Calvin stated, "...with hearts inclined to reverence their rulers, the subjects should prove their obedience toward them, whether by obeying their proclamations, or by paying taxes, or by undertaking public offices and burdens which pertain to the common defense, or by executing other commands of theirs."¹

Calvin even goes so far as to remind us that obedience to bad kings was sometimes required in the Scripture.² "But if you conclude... that service ought to be rendered only to just governors, you are reasoning foolishly. For husbands are also bound to their wives, and parents to their children, by mutual responsibility. Suppose parents and husbands depart from their duty... Shall either children be less obedient to their parents or wives to their husbands? They are still subject even to those who are wicked and undutiful."³

Yet in God's providence the godly must admit that there are *times* when God would use a *de jure* magistrate to restrain or even overthrow a *de facto* magistrate. Thus young King Joash was hidden in the temple from wicked Queen Athaliah for six years. At the end of six years of wicked rule by Athaliah, the priest Jehoiada raised up

King Joash. Queen Athaliah claimed that the act was treason, but it had the full blessing of God and his church officers.⁴

Though such instances are rare, resistance to existing government even to the point of assassination was not unknown in the Bible.⁵ Still, far preferable to resistance by assassination is resistance by flight. Not only do we have the example in the New Testament of persecuted preachers fleeing Jerusalem in Acts chapter 8, one of the greatest Old Testament examples used this method of resistance at two key points in his life. This article will have space to deal with only one of them in detail

We will examine David's activities in two lights: first, the occasion of his flight from Saul; and second, the lessons we might apply from his flight.

The occasion of David's first flight was *a clear and present danger to his life*. Though it may be argued that David's flight from Saul *could* be justified because 1 Samuel 13:14 removed *de jure* authority from Saul, the fact remains that David continued to acknowledge Saul as in some sense the "Lord's anointed" as late as 1 Samuel 24:9-10 and 1 Samuel 26:9. We must look beyond a mere *theoretical* removing of God's approval from Saul to find justification for David's resistance and for the lessons we might learn from it.

Some American Evangelical Christians cite 1 Peter 2:13-14 as though *every* ordinance of man save those which bear *directly on the preaching of the gospel* must be

¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV.xx.23

² *Institutes*, IV.xx.26-29

³ *Ibid.* IV.xx.29

⁴ 2 Chron 22:10-23:21

⁵ We might also instance Ehud and Eglon in Judges 3

obeyed (Acts 5:29).⁶ Yet submitting to every ordinance of man must involve obeying a summons to appear. But flight is a resistance to the summons to appear. Flight, then according to such reasoning, must be a failure or refusal to submit to every ordinance of man. As Rutherford freely admits, “Flying from the tyranny of abused authority is a plain resisting of judgment.”⁷

David’s behavior with respect to Saul, as well as his confession, were strictly godly (see Psalm 18:20-24). It was not the seeming removal of *de jure* authority from Saul in 1 Samuel 13:14, but his plot to kill David in 1 Samuel 19:1ff which forms the background for David’s justifiable flight. Saul’s desire, as it is reported to us in inspired Scripture, was “to slay David without a cause” (19:5). When Saul then laid aside his plan to slay David on that occasion, David demonstrated a willingness to appear before Saul “and he was in his presence, as in times past” (verse 7).

Saul’s promise was short-lived, however, and it became necessary once again for David to flee from Saul. “And Saul sought to smite David even to the wall with the javelin; but he slipped away out of Saul’s presence, and he smote the javelin into the wall: and David fled, and escaped that night.” (verse 10). On this occasion we should note that David’s flight from Saul, predicated on information from two witnesses - Jonathan and Michal, was in order to *save his life* in the face of ungodly persecution. The point should not be overlooked that David had firsthand witnesses *plus corroborating evidence* in the form of Saul’s javelin. David did *not* simply flee to avoid prosecution for breaking a just and equitable law.

Even in David’s flight from Saul’s ungodly persecution, however, he continued to seek out the possibility of reconciliation. “David... said before Jonathan, what have I done? What is mine iniquity? And what is my sin before thy father, that he seeketh my life” (1 Samuel 20:1)?

Another aspect of David’s flight was that it was not characterized by vengeance seeking. David did not use his flight as an opportunity to war against Saul, except

⁶ 1 Peter 2:13-14, “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well.” Acts 5:29, “Then Peter and the [other] apostles answered and said, we ought to obey God rather than men.”

⁷ Samuel Rutherford, *Lex, Rex or The Law and The Prince*, (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Pub. 1982 reprint of 1644), p. 159a.

defensively to preserve his own life. In fact, David pursued his calling of fighting the Philistines as much as possible — thus his deliverance of the village of Keilah. When Saul would have pursued David to Keilah, David simply departed the village.⁸ In fact, David spread his skirt over the wilderness such that the people of the Paran wilderness regarded David’s army as a wall around them. “They were a wall unto us both by night and day, all the while we were with them keeping sheep” (1 Samuel 25:16).

Much of David’s trouble with Saul seems to have been based upon a smear campaign by certain men in Saul’s presence. David had already escaped an attack from Saul, yet there was still a group at Saul’s court which deliberately fomented trouble between Saul and David. “...and David said to Saul, wherefore hearest thou men’s words, saying, Behold David seeketh thy hurt” (1 Samuel 24:9). Some people are not happy unless they are keeping enmities stirred up.

Eventually David, unable to be reconciled with Saul, came to terms with Achish of Gath. Achish granted David the frontier town of Ziklag which became David’s new base of operations. David found that he could actually continue his calling of destroying God’s enemies more profitably appearing to fight for Achish (1 Samuel 27:8-12). Achish gained so much confidence in David that he would have taken him into the battle of Gilboa on the side of the Philistines had the Philistine warlords been willing to allow it.

Scripture does not gloss over the sins of the children of God, including David. When David was guilty of sin (e.g. adultery with Bathsheba, killing of Uriah, numbering of the people), Scripture plainly tells us so. Yet no sin is imputed to David in his flight from Saul. In fact, David was blessed by Ahimelech and given Goliath’s sword. David did not arm himself for the purpose of overthrowing Saul’s government or of usurping Saul’s throne. David had Goliath’s sword, but respecting Saul, it was strictly a defensive weapon.

The lessons for Christians today are as follows:

Flight is resistance and must be justified on the same basis as any other kind of resistance to authority.

Whether lesser threats justify flight, a threat to one’s life “without a cause” certainly does.

⁸ 1 Samuel 23:13

Flight does not justify the attempted overthrow of an existing government.

The threat must be verifiable and not simply a perceived threat.

The fugitive has some remaining responsibility to attempt reconciliation.

As much as possible the flight should also be accompanied by furthering one's calling.

Though one may feign friendship with foreign powers he should not actively help them to subjugate his home country.

We see from David's example that Paul's statement in Romans 13:2 cannot be taken in an absolute sense. Clearly there is some point at which civil powers not only *may* be resisted but *should* be resisted as well. As James M. Willson stated in his exposition *Civil Government*, "For in truth, there are occasions when it is not merely lawful, but a matter of high and imperative duty, to resist authority."⁹ In fact, we conclude with Willson that "The principal standard by which this institution [of civil government] is to be measured is the Word of God."¹⁰

1. Flight is resistance and must be justified on the same basis as any other kind of resistance to "the powers that be."

The point has been made that David did not base his resistance upon Samuel's judgment against Saul in 1 Samuel 13:14, "Now thy kingdom shall not continue, ... because thou has not kept [that] which the Lord commanded thee." But neither was David's resistance based on Samuel's judgment in 1 Samuel 15:23, "Because thou [Saul] hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from [being] king."

It is certainly true that the prior narratives of Saul's rebellion form the *backdrop* for David's flight, but nowhere does David use these narratives as his justification for resisting Saul's summons to appear. In fact, on the two occasions that were presented to David to assassinate Saul, David continued to refer to Saul as the "anointed of the Lord" (or Meshiach Yahveh). We must look beyond the statements of Samuel, then, to find the justification for David's resistance to authority.

⁹ James M Willson, *Civil Government*. (Phila.: Wm. S. Young, 1853), pp. 35-36.

¹⁰ *ibid.* p. 48.

2. Whether or not lesser threats justify flight, a real threat to one's life *without a cause* certainly justifies flight.

Significant to this understanding is the phrase "*without a cause.*" Obviously someone who is summoned to appear before the magistrate to answer for a capital crime is required to appear. Otherwise we would have to conclude that those who are accused of the most heinous crimes in a society are the very ones who are also free to flee from giving an answer.

David's life would have been threatened in an unlawful way had he obeyed the summons to appear before Saul. So too a Christian placed in a similar situation to David's must remember the requirements of the sixth commandment. "The duties required in the sixth commandment are, ... avoiding all occasions, temptations and practices, which tend to the *unjust* taking away the life of any."¹¹

3. Though flight is a justifiable remedy against the tyranny of existing governments, flight does not of itself justify the attempted overthrow of the existing government.

David did not attempt the overthrow of the existing order, even though it might be argued that at a military level David was a "lesser magistrate." David's response was not greater than the threat. A general rebellion against authority structures can be more harmful than the threat it is intended to answer. David's six hundred man "militia" may have been perceived by Saul as a civil threat, but it was not in reality.

Further, not only does David's example exclude the overthrow of an existing order, it also precludes seeking of personal vengeance. Many well-meant uprisings have been deprived of God's blessing at just this point. It is one thing to preserve and defend one's own life or the lives of others. It is quite another thing to march on the capital under force of arms. The Rising at Pentland in November 1666 is just such an attempt at revenge. It was born in frustration as much as justice and ended in ignominy and defeat.

4. The threat to one's life *without a cause* must be verifiable and not simply a perceived threat.

David had witnesses close to Paul. Both Jonathan and Michal reported to David concerning Saul's threats. Importantly, however, was the corroborating evidence

¹¹ WLC 135

— Saul’s actual attempt upon David’s life. “And Saul sought to smite David even to the wall with the javelin; but he slipped away out of Saul’s presence, and he smote the javelin into the wall: and David fled, and escaped that night.” (1 Samuel 19:10)

Many today, whether from a general willingness to believe the worst or some other motive, are ready to turn against lawful authority based on little more than innuendo or rumor. Of course not every one of David’s band of six hundred had the *same* provocation David had, but David’s flight and then his gathering of the six hundred had its genesis in an overt act of the king and was testified to by witnesses. In fact, it is to David’s credit that he was slow to believe an evil report concerning Saul.

5. The fugitive has some remaining responsibility to attempt reconciliation with the magistrate.

It would have been easy enough for the dispute between David and Saul to become a sort of blood feud. David prevented such a feud from happening by being quick and available to reconcile. Jonathan worked a seeming reconciliation early, “and Saul hearkened unto the voice of Jonathan: and Saul sware, as the Lord liveth, he shall not be slain. And Jonathan called David, and Jonathan shewed him all those things. And Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence, as in times past.” (1 Samuel 19:6-7)

Further David seems to be motivated more from a desire to reconcile than merely from abject fear in the incidents at En-Gedi and again in the wilderness of Ziph. In the first instance David proclaimed, “know thou and see that there is neither evil nor transgression in my hand, and I have not sinned against thee; yet thou huntest my soul to take it.” (1 Samuel 24:11b) This seems even more salient in David’s comment to Abishai in the wilderness of Ziph. “As the Lord liveth, the Lord shall smite him; or his day shall come to die; or he shall descend into battle, and perish.” (1 Samuel 26:10) A similar injunction is found just before Paul’s exposition on the civil magistrate in Romans.¹²

¹² “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.” Romans 12:19-21.

6. As much as possible the flight should be accompanied by furthering or pursuing one’s calling.

Whether we regard David’s calling as a warrior or whether we consider him a lesser magistrate, we find him pursuing his calling even while a refugee. Apparently David protected the ranchers in the wilderness of Paran against sheep and goat rustlers. He sent his men to one of the larger ranchers in the area to receive tribute — and even the rancher’s hired hands were able to admit regarding David’s armed band, “the men were very good unto us, we were not hurt, neither missed we anything, as long as we were conversant with them, when we were in the fields: They were a wall unto us both by night and day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep.” (1 Samuel 25:15-16 cp v.2.)

Not only did David protect the local populace from marauding nomads who might steal their cattle, he also later used Ziklag as the base of operations to fight against the enemies of Israel. “And David and his men went up, and invaded the Geshurites, and the Gezires, and the Amalekites: for those [nations were] of old the inhabitants of the land, as thou goest to Shur, even unto the land of Egypt. And David smote the land, and left neither man nor woman alive, and took away the sheep, and the oxen, and the asses, and the camels, and the apparel, and returned, and came to Achish.” (1 Samuel 27:8-9)

This is not a justification for every refugee to take the law into his own hands. We must remember that David’s calling at that time of his life was no longer tending his father’s sheep. He was a military hero with an unbroken string of victories, beginning with his victory over Goliath in 1 Samuel chapter seventeen. Thus when David followed his God-given vocation it took the form of fighting against Israel’s enemies and keeping safe the citizens of Israel in *their* several callings. It would be a terrible wresting of Scripture to attempt to use David’s flight in order to justify armed rebellion. This brings us to the seventh and final principle we may learn from David’s flight.

7. Though one may feign friendship with foreign powers, he should not actively help them to subjugate his home country.

David defended himself and his cohort from Saul’s aggressive attempts to kill them. But when David had the opportunity to overthrow Saul, usurp his authority

and end his life, he chose not to do so. David “stayed his servants ... and suffered them not to rise against Saul.” (1 Samuel 24:7) David explained to Saul, “[some] bade me kill thee: but mine eye spared thee.... Know thou and see that there is neither evil nor transgression in mine hand, and I have not *sinned* against thee; yet thou huntest my soul to take it.” (vv. 10-11)

Though David had opportunity to kill Saul, he made a conscious moral decision not to do so. Though he could have ended the persecution against him with the same knife he used to cut Saul’s skirt, he determined merely to “cut off the skirt of Saul’s robe privily.” (v. 4) It was clear throughout David’s fugitive years that he meant no harm to the established order.

Later, when Achish gave David the border town Ziklag, David *could* have used his position to raid Judah. Instead he used Ziklag as a base of operations to attack Israel’s enemies. Achish, in fact, seemed inclined to believe that David would “make a road” against Judah. David very handily managed to situate himself in the rear of the Philistines for the battle of Gilboa. Had the lords of the Philistines allowed him to remain there as Achish suggested, the battle of Gilboa could have turned out quite differently.

David did not make himself the enemy of the people of Israel nor of the existing order. Nor is a Christian today free to make himself an enemy of his country. Whatever organizations one may wish to join in order to add his voice to existing protests against unjust government, it seems out of keeping both with David’s example and with the admonition of Paul in Romans Chapter thirteen to attempt the overthrow of an existing government.¹³

So Christians today undoubtedly see the injustices round about them in American society and others as well. Yet we do not wish to make ourselves a part of the problem. We should not add to the chaos of living apart from God’s law. Rather, we are called upon in this day as David was in his to resist tyranny and bad government by lawful means. We should not be involving ourselves with groups which call for the overthrow of the existing order; we should not be motivated by vengeance; we should continue as much as possible to remain true in

¹³ Of course this does not preclude an indigenous population throwing off a colonial power, such as Israel and the Midianites. Nor does it preclude the restoration of a *de jure* magistrate against a usurper, such as Absalom or Athaliah.

our callings and to glorify God by keeping his commandments.Ω

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Dr. Robbins received the Ph.D. in Political Philosophy from Johns Hopkins University in 1973. His background includes being founder and President of the Trinity Foundation, lecturer at Sangre de Christo Seminary, the Westminster Institute, Foundation for Economic Education (FEE), the Chesapeake Theological Seminary, the Heritage Foundation, and Director of the Freedom School. Dr Robbins maintains memberships in the Evangelical Philosophical Society, the Evangelical Theological Society, the National Association of Scholars, and the Association of Private Enterprise Educators. He is author or editor of a dozen books, including *Who is Ayn Rand* and *Without A Prayer: Ayn Rand and the Close of her System*.

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WITHOUT A DOUBT: A PARTIAL REVIEW OF JOHN W. ROBBINS' *WITHOUT A PRAYER* BY RICHARD BACON

[Editor's note: Dr. John W. Robbins will be the guest speaker at the second annual Blue Banner Conference to be held in Rowlett, TX on May 25-27, 1998]

Some of us "grew up" reading Ayn Rand. At some point in high school between reading Robert Heinlein's *Stranger In A Strange Land* and J.D. Salinger's *Catcher In The Rye*, I picked up a copy of Ayn Rand's *Anthem*. *Anthem* tells of the rediscovery of ego. The remainder of my high school years included *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*. Rand's works had a singular appeal to me in the 1960's. In a world in which everything was seemingly being relegated to a matter of relativity, Rand was *sure*. She was sure her opinions were more than mere opinions. She was not always right as it turned out, but she was always certain.¹ Such a thing appealed to some of us in the sixties.

Rand claimed that her system, which she called "Objectivism," was based upon human reason. Granted, her definition of "reason" was such that it often seemed to drift from rationalism to empiricism back to rationalism again, she was clear that "man *qua* man" is autonomous. One must never be influenced by faith or force — the twin destroyers of human thought and endeavor.

If we are properly to estimate the influence that Rand's Objectivism has exerted upon this generation, we must consider that her protégé Nathaniel Branden very early developed the now-rampant "psychology of self-esteem." This false psychological theory has now not only overtaken much of humanist psychology, it has also replaced biblical psychology in many quarters of the professing church. We should consider that an early contributor to the *Objectivist Newsletter*, Alan Greenspan, is now head of the Federal Reserve Bank. In the 1970's

a political party (The Libertarian Party) was founded based at least in part on Rand's "objectivist oath."²

For me personally, the key idea that brought me to reject both Rand and her system was a fallacy which she called "the fallacy of the stolen concept." She maintained that every false philosophy, old or new, is made of contradictions and stolen concepts.³ The stolen concept fallacy consists of using a concept while denying an earlier concept upon which the "stolen" one logically or epistemologically depends.

Yet amazingly, the entire Objectivist system is based upon *that very fallacy*. John Robbins demonstrates that if Ayn Rand had been consistently reasonable, she would have advocated ideas opposed to and even contradictory to the ideas she actually set forth. As one example, Rand advocated the principle of limited civil government; but according to her own presuppositions she should not have done so.

John Robbins, who holds a doctorate from Johns Hopkins University, has written a definitive Christian answer to the philosophy of Objectivism. It is clear to anyone who has read Rand or been involved with Objectivism to any degree that Rand and her philosophy cannot truly be divided.

Yet Robbins does an excellent job of dealing with the message rather than the messenger. Robbins' criticism of Rand lies in her failure to be reasonable. Historically, Rand dismissed any criticism of her or her philosophy as mysticism or as anti-intellectual. Robbins' critique is neither.⁴ Instead, Dr. Robbins deals with Rand's system at the philosophical level of epistemology, theology, ethics, and political theory. His approach is apogogic. That is to say, he takes Rand's first principles (axioms or presuppositions) and then demonstrates that deductions from her axioms result in contradictory conclusions.

¹ Given the fact that most of her work has been fiction, it would be more accurate to say that her *heroes* were certain. Thus, Rand stated "An error made on your own is safer than ten truths accepted on faith . . ."

² "I swear by my life and my love of it, that I will never live for the sake of another man, nor ask another man to live for mine."

³ Ayn Rand, *Philosophy: Who Needs It* (Indianapolis and NYC: The Bobbs Merrill Co., Inc., 1982), p. 26

⁴ Robbins' earlier work, *Answer to Ayn Rand* (1974) also went unanswered.

Rand regarded epistemology as the most important branch of philosophy. This review thus deals primarily with Robbins' response to Rand's epistemology. Further, she regarded human reason as the means by which man knows. Reason, according to Rand, integrates the "material" (perceptions we suppose) provided by the senses. Rand, without any argument or explanation, asserted that man is born a *tabula rasa* (a blank sheet). All information must come via the senses, according to Rand and all varieties of empiricism.

But it is altogether unexplained (and inexplicable for the empiricist) how "knowledge" that a baby's mind is a *tabula rasa* could have come from sensory experience alone. If something were already in the mind which allowed man to integrate his perceptions, then *not all knowledge* comes through the senses, for at least the knowledge of how to integrate sense perceptions does not come from the senses themselves. But if there is nothing which allows or enables man to integrate his perceptions, then we would never be able to identify our perceptions as belonging to something "out there."

Robbins ably points out that a *tabula rasa* mind is simply a contradiction in terms. A mind cannot simultaneously be conscious of *nothing* and yet still be said to be conscious. As even Rand admitted ". . . a consciousness with nothing to be conscious of is a contradiction in terms . . ."5

Not only is Rand's account of the working of the mind defective (how does the mind pull itself up by its own bootstraps?), so also is her accounting of the existence of universal concepts in the human mind. Rand gave no account of what sensations are not the (assumed) relationship between a world "out there," human senses, and human percepts. The fact is, whether Rand or any empiricist cares to admit it, we do not begin with sensations but with propositions when constructing an epistemology.

Robbins points out in his book that Rand, by her own definition of faith (which definition was quite derogatory), posited *faith* in the senses. In her *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology* [hereafter OE], Rand proclaimed "For the purposes of this series, the validity [sic] of the senses must be taken for granted . . ."6

Robbins responds to Rand: "But this writer, heeding Rand's own warnings about faith, refuses to take it for granted. If Rand had been logically consistent, she also would have refused."7

Rand's inability to account for universal concepts is explained by her attempt to begin her epistemology at the sensational level. We can be sure something exists, she claimed, because we can *sense* it. Thus for Rand, "It may be supposed that the concept 'existent' is implicit even on the level of sensation," and "The building block of man's knowledge is the concept of an 'existent' — of something that exists."8

Concepts, according to Rand, are formed by a "mental focus that takes out or separates a certain aspect of reality from all others."9 This mental focus seems to be prior to language, for Rand claims a child is able to form the *concept* of a table or chair *prior to* his subsequently learning the designations "table" and "chair."10

Yet Rand also claims, "words transform concepts into (mental) entities; definitions provide them with identity."11 As Robbins aptly points out, Rand places us on an epistemological "merry-go-round" with this supposed account of words and concepts.

For an empiricist, concepts depend upon abstractions from similar perceptions. Thus Rand claimed, "If a child considers a match, a pencil, and a stick, he observes that length is the attribute they have in common, but their specific lengths differ. The difference is one of measurement. In order to form the concept 'length,' the child's mind retains the attribute and omits its particular measurements."12

Hopefully even Rand's putative child could see the problems with this explanation. Her explanation might at least explain *something* if she were to posit three pencils which were identical in every way *except* their lengths. Such a supposition would then allow her to assert as she did that length is "the attribute" which is different among the three items. In point of fact, a match, a pencil, and a stick could conceivably share several attributes in common: color, hardness, shape,

7 Robbins, p. 33.

8 OE, p. 11 cited in Robbins, p. 42.

9 OE, p. 15 cited in Robbins, p. 59.

10 OE, p. 12 cited in Robbins, p. 59.

11 OE, p. 16 cited in Robbins, p. 59.

12 OE, cited in Robbins, p. 60.

5 *Atlas Shrugged*, cited in Robbins, p. 30.

6 OE, p. 9 cited in Robbins, p. 33.

woodenness, etc. But even assuming that Rand could identify length as the *only* distinguishing attribute, she must still engage in circular definition.

Basically, Rand identified as “length” that attribute of any individual [‘existent’ in Rand’s terminology] which can be quantified by a unit of length, without also specifying the quantity of units. Thus her definition of the concept of *length presupposes the concept* of length as well as the measurability of whatever it is that we conceive length to be. Rand is here guilty of the fallacy of the stolen concept.

It is possible to go into considerably more detail, as Robbins’ does in his critique of Rand’s epistemology. But while possible, it is not necessary. Despite Rand’s claims to the contrary, the fact remains that her epistemology is subject to all the criticisms to which empiricism has always been subject.Ω

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Richard Bacon. \$2.95.**

“Not often does one find a treatise that can employ centuries-old documents to address effectively a contemporary problem. Richard Bacon’s *The Visible Church and the Outer Darkness*, however, does just that. This is an accurate and interesting booklet that calls Presbyterians back to their heritage and that calls upon all Christians to take seriously the doctrine of the visible church.” Dr. Frank J. Smith, author of *The History of the Presbyterian Church in America: The Continuing Church Movement*, and co-editor of *Worship in the Presence of God, A collection of essays on the nature, elements, and historic views and practice of worship*.

“Even R. A. Torrey said it would be better to belong to the worst possible congregation than to none at all. Also Calvin strongly cautions against intolerant secessionism. See his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* IV:1.1-18f. Indeed, in his Commentary of First Corinthians 1:2, he declares: ‘It is a dangerous temptation to think there is no church – where perfect purity is lacking Anyone who is obsessed by that idea, must cut himself off from everybody else and appear to himself to be the only saint in the world – or he must set up a sect of his own along with other hypocrites.’ Though not a Torreyite, Richard Bacon is both a Calvinist and a strict subscriptionist to the Westminster Standards (see Confession 25:1-5; 30:1-4; 31:1-3). All true Westminster Calvinists will read Bacon’s book with much approval.” Dr. Francis Nigel Lee, Queensland Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

In this relatively small book, the author summarizes the essence of 17th century Presbyterian ecclesiology. From the Presbyterian doctrine of the visible church, Pastor Bacon addresses two basic questions: 1. What are the duties of Christians in destitute or extraordinary times of the church, when even the best portions of the visible church on the earth are corrupt and not as they should be? 2. How do we become partakers of other men’s sins, and what sort of separation is necessary in order to prevent becoming such a partaker? In extreme cases separation from a church may become necessary,

but the author maintains that this should not often be the case, and that the scriptural answer to these two questions is not separatism.

Review of Visible Church by Hugh M. Cartwright. The following appears in the April 1993 issue of *The Monthly Record*, The Magazine of the Free Church of Scotland.

This book is partly a response to a current idea that, in the allegedly corrupt ecclesiastical situation in USA, Presbyterianism can only be maintained in independent congregations separate from the denominations. It is a protest against independency and individual separation and calls attention to the Biblical Ecclesiology of 16th and 17th century Scotland and of the Westminster Confession (WCF) with its caution against separating from a body having the marks of a true church. It underlines the authority and responsibility of church officers in the realm of discipline and indicates that private members are not to separate because of perceived laxity in discipline although they should seek its amendment. If they take Scriptural actions available to them without success, they can feel exonerated in conscience. Separation from the unworthy does not require separation from the Church as people are not necessarily partakers of the sins of others with whom they are in membership. Church officers cannot exclude members except by due process and an individual cannot virtually excommunicate whole churches because of their remissness.

It would be helpful to have more discussion of the implications of the Scots Confession’s insistence on the true preaching of the Word of God, the right administration of the sacraments of Christ Jesus, and ecclesiastical discipline uprightly administered as marks identifying the true Church and of WCF’s description of the membership of the church as consisting “of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children”. In spite of Bacon (Binnie and Bannerman) WCF is not here proposing that only one mark identifies the Church and the Scottish Church received both Confessions as compatible.

It must also be noted that 16th and 17th century divines had not lost the Biblical concept of one visible Church in the land. The relevance of their arguments against separating from the Church have to be more thoroughly worked out in relation to the present denominational situation. Mr. Bacon ministers [until

1995] in the Presbyterian Church of America, which justified its 1973 separation from the P.C.U.S. on the basis of unremedied departure from Biblical and Confessional doctrine, government, worship and discipline. We belong to a Church whose separate existence in 1843 and in 1900 was deemed essential to the preservation of the church's Biblical character.

Good reasons are required to justify separation from a Church professing Biblical doctrine, worship, government and discipline and there is a difference between a body separating to maintain a Church's position and individual persons or congregations living off. We do need to recover a high view of the Divine institution of the Church, the necessity of Church unity being manifested in government and discipline as well as in doctrine and worship and the nature and sinfulness of schism.

This book will serve a useful purpose if it promotes thorough study of the current implications of the Biblical Doctrine of the Church under the good guidance of our First and Second Reformation theologians.

Other Blue Banner Publications

A DEFENSE DEPARTED Being a Refutation of "A Brief Defence of Dissociation in the Present Circumstances." By Richard Bacon. \$3.95

In March of 1996 the Puritan Reformed Church of Edmonton AB separated from the Reformation Presbyterian Church. The PRCE had embraced the errors of the Steelites who claimed that a "church is not a properly, truly, biblically constituted church if it has not formally adopted the Solemn League and Covenant," the historic covenant between Scotland and England that led to the Westminster Assembly and its work. Ironically, while the modern Steelite apologists often call their critics promoters of papist errors, *Defense Departed* shows clearly that in raising a particular stream of history or tradition, albeit one claiming to be reformed, to the level of Scripture, the Steelites have committed the same error in kind as the papists who treat their tradition so. This paper was originally posted on the FPCR web site, and is now available in a printed format those who do not have internet access or would like a printed copy.

Presbyterian Tracts by Blue Banner Books

Public Worship to be Preferred before Private. \$3.95. David Clarkson (Puritan). Classic puritan sermon demonstrating the priority of public worship over private and family worship.

Scriptural Worship, by Carl Bogue. The first tract in Blue Banner Books' Presbyterian Tracts series. This is a very good handout to introduce someone to the Reformed view of worship. \$1.25. Order ten for \$6.00 and 25 or more at \$0.40 each.

What Mean Ye By This Service, by Richard Bacon. Pastor Bacon has written one of the most significant and convincing responses to the advocates of Paedo-Communion. \$4.00 each. Tract Two in Presbyterian Tracts. Dr. Joseph C. Moorecraft, pastor of Chalcedon Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, calls this the best treatment of the subject of paedocommunion.

Instrumental Music in Religious Worship. By Rev. John M'Donald. A brief 4 page tract against the practice of using musical accompaniment in public worship. \$0.50. Tract Three in Presbyterian Tracts. Order ten for \$4.00. Order 25 to 100 at \$0.15 each.

The Sovereignty of God in the Salvation of my Father's Slayer. By Professor Francis Nigel Lee of Queensland Presbyterian Theological Seminary. This is the moving account of how God used the power of the gospel to bring an accused murderer to Christ. Dr. Lee was the means God used in explaining the gospel to the very man who slew his father. Tract Four in Presbyterian Tracts. \$0.50. Order ten for \$4.00. Order 25 to 100 at \$0.15 each.

Paul's Discourse on the Use of Head Coverings During Public Worship.

An Exposition of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16

By Richard Bacon

An edited transcript of Bacon's video lecture is now available in print form. \$2.95.

Blue Banner Video

Paedobaptism. Two 90 minute Tapes. \$15.95.

In these two tapes, Pastor Bacon presents the case for the underlying unity of the covenant in both testaments; the scriptural evidence that circumcision in the OT and baptism in the NT both point to the same spiritual realities; and answers to objections regarding paedobaptism. A Baptist in attendance of this series commented that not only did Pastor Bacon present the best statement of the paedobaptist position he had ever heard, but he believed he had presented the clearest statement he had heard of the anti-paedobaptist position as well. We recommend this tape series as a useful teaching tool for churches struggling with objections to paedobaptism. The series may be utilized with either a "new members class" or in pre-baptismal counselling.

Speaking in Tongues: A Reformed View of the Charimata. Video (3 tapes). \$23.95. Audio (6 tapes). \$15.00 or \$19.95 in binder.

In these three tapes, Richard Bacon demonstrates what is the clear meaning of the Scriptures regarding "tongues." Noting that it is not a salvation issue, it is nevertheless a truth issue, which can be resolved by a careful exegesis of the passages concerned.

Male Headship and Coverings. One two hour tape. \$7.95. Audio without Q/A session available for \$2.50. An edited transcript of Bacon's video lecture is now available in print form. \$2.95

In this two hour study, Richard Bacon takes a careful contextual look at First Corinthians 11:2-16. While admitting that the passage is a difficult one, it is not impossible to understand. Pastor Bacon makes a compelling case that the Apostle Paul's teaching in this passage totally undermines the modern egalitarian views espoused by feminists and others. He demonstrates that the passage requires a covering for women in public worship settings and that for several reasons.

Speaking the Truth in Love. Three two hour video tapes. \$23.95. Also available as six audio cassettes. \$15.00 or \$19.95 in binder.

In this series Richard Bacon explores both general and particular rules for God-honoring communications. He demonstrates that much which passes for

communication is actually an attempt at manipulation. Several rules are laid down for attentive listening to others as well as exposing the various ways in which we often use questions to disguise something other than a request for information. The lessons conclude with a series of manipulative techniques from which we need to repent, along with corrective measures for the proper manner of speaking the truth in love.

Church Polity. Twelve two hour video tapes. \$99.95. Syllabus included.

Biblical polity series covers the biblical basis for "jus divinum" Presbyterianism. Starting with the Westminster Assembly's basic frontispiece (Ezekiel 43:11), Richard Bacon continues through 24 lessons to cover biblical terms and figures for the church, the biblical attributes of the church, the marks or notes of a true church, foundational principles of church government, the headship of Christ over his church (including the relationship between church and state), the nature of church power and office, officers in the church, the importance and place of a confession of faith in the church, and the properly founded worship of the church of Christ.

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