
Pro Rege

Volume 16 | Number 3

Article 2

March 1988

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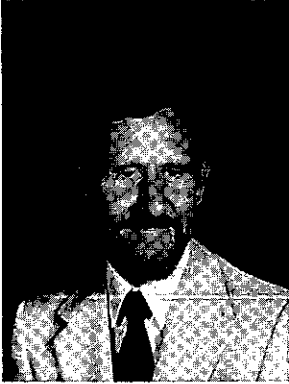
Voskuil, Louis J. (1988) "History: Sound and Fury Signifying Nothing?," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 16: No. 3, 2 - 12.

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History: Sound and Fury Signifying Nothing?

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Evangelical historians have made considerable progress in the last two or three decades in reflecting on how their discipline relates to the faith they profess. There has always been significant Christian historical writing, but self-conscious reflecting on the discipline and articulating some principles of interpretation have come only recently. We have not always been very clear whether our focus is on God's working in human affairs or on human historical action. Nor have we done very well with the relationship between those two kinds of meaning in history. Many Christian history teachers continue to vacillate between the two different kinds of interpretation

without adequate awareness of the different kinds of methodology required. At times they point out what seems a powerful, often miraculous break-through of the transcendent God into human affairs to save His people or advance His Kingdom. For the rest, the secular textbook has often set the direction of interpretation. The obvious theological and historical problems involved in such an approach have produced a reaction in others to the point where their teaching or writings reveal little difference from those of their secular colleagues, though one would expect world view to have its influence.

There has been a considerable advance in

Christian historiography in recent years, however. In November 1967 at Greenville College, the Conference on Faith and History was founded. In its annual meetings it has helped foster a more self-conscious discussion on Christian interpretation. Its journal, *Fides et Historia*, is a record of increasing quality and sophistication. Several books within the Reformed tradition illustrate the progress: *Is There a Christian History*, ed. G. Marsden and H. Riensträ; *History and Historical Understanding*, ed. C.T. McIntire and R. Wells; *The Roots of Western Culture* by Herman Dooyeweerd. As theology of history, Langdon Gilkey's *Reaping the Whirlwind* is both inspiring and provocative; Hendrikus Berkhof's *Christ, the Meaning of History* is well worth the study.

In the essay that follows I shall address some of the questions raised in recent discussions, questions that seem to me to need further discussion and clarification. I write primarily as a teacher struggling to make sense teaching history to students. To most of us whose time is largely taken up in the classroom and preparation for it, the value of theory comes at that point. I owe a considerable debt to many colleagues over the years. If this essay is helpful to someone else, it is because of my enriching experience with a community of scholars.

History as God's Redemption?

Christian historians who reflect on their discipline quickly encounter a perplexing problem. In its confession of the providence of God, Reformed Christianity has always affirmed that every historical event is a God-related event, that every sparrow which falls is known to God. Woven through the totality of events, in both the significant and the seemingly trivial, is the story of the coming of God's kingdom, the story of creation, fall, and redemption, a story which culminates in the visible second coming of Jesus Christ and the establishment of His New Heavens and New Earth. It is a story which gives hope and meaning to the lives of God's people on earth; it is desperately needed in our violent and technological society where

God seems removed from life. That story of the Kingdom is difficult to relate to the mundane events of everyday life, however. After centuries of artificial and facile identification of God's providence in human affairs, of pious Christians moralistically tracing God's finger in prosperity and judgment, many Christian historians are understandably reluctant to do very much, if anything, with either the concept of God's providence or the theme of the coming of the kingdom in the specific pursuit of their calling.

There are obvious reasons for such reluctance. While the evangelical confesses that God is active in human history—indeed, without His sovereign control and direction of events, there is no hope that His many promises on which His people build their lives will come true—it is another thing to discern that activity in ways that mesh with the methodology of historical studies. Perhaps the most fundamental reason for our difficulty is that the final mystery is not yet revealed. At times the manifestations of righteousness are clear, but evil is often triumphant. Throughout history Christians under persecution have struggled with the reality of Christ's Lordship in history.

Not only are evil and good inextricably mixed in this present world, but the antithesis of the old versus the new reaches deep into the Christian heart. People often do good things from sinful motivation and evil things from good motivations. As theologians often put it, we are today in the "now, not yet" stage of history. Christ is triumphant, his victory is sure, but the Apocalypse is still a future event.

A further complicating factor: in the Old Testament, God's people were identified nationally and their prosperity and woe were, in a general sense, related to God's saving action and their covenantal response. Such a neat paradigm is no longer available to us in the age of the new covenant. God's people today are scattered throughout the nations as His church, the church of the wheat and the tares. In the church who is the church? Further, in the Christian era, since we have seen the revelation of God in Christ, there is no longer any direct correlation between righteousness and prosperity,

evil and judgment. God works for the good of his people in ways that are often mysterious and painful and frustrating. Even in the Old Testament era, at least on the individual level, the Psalmist had difficulty understanding the prosperity of the wicked. Complaints against the workers of iniquity rise again and again. Where is God? How can one make sense of faith and life?

Even on the national level in the Old Testament it is difficult to shape theological truth into a historical methodology able to trace God's Spirit in history clearly. For example, if one had reasonably good and sufficient historical data for the invasion of Israel by Sennacherib, without the direct revelation of Isaiah 10, 11, 12 and II Kings 18 and 19 where the reader is told what God is doing, the historian would never come to the conclusion of the prophetic explanation on historical or theological principles alone.

The problem is compounded as one attempts to interpret non-Biblical history. How does one come to terms with Nazi Germany, and its downfall? Was their defeat the result of God's judgment? If so, how did that whole series of events advance His kingdom? If Hitler's fall is a sign of kingdom victory, what is the meaning of the related subsequent rise to superpower status of Soviet Russia? Without the prophet at our back, it becomes very difficult to say anything very specific in relation to the kingdom about even such major historical movements. Mark Noll assessed, accurately, I think, what contemporary evangelical historians have done with providential history in light of the problems:

Christian historians in the modern academy have made the implicit confession that history is not theology. This confession means that they construct their accounts of the past from facts ascertained through documentary or material evidence and explained in terms of natural human relationships. By eschewing providential history, academic Christian historians have affirmed that a scholar working with the

data of historical research cannot know God's mind for past events in the way inspired writers of Scripture did, and they have assumed that the primary purpose of history writing is not apologetics or evangelism.¹

I am a little uneasy, however. Have we left the theme of providential history a little too easily? Are we left with only a negative stance on that theme? Is that all there is? Is there no point of connection between God's action and the everyday affairs of humans that we can do anything with in our historical work?

Herbert Butterfield vehemently opposes leaving the issue there, for it leaves the Christian community with an untenable vacuum, given its theology:

Of all the factors which have operated to the disadvantage of religion and the undermining of the religious sense in recent centuries, the most damaging has been the notion of an absentee God who might be supposed to have created the universe in the first place, but who is then assumed to have left it to run as a piece of clockwork, so that he is outside our lives, outside history itself, unable to affect the course of things and hidden away from us by an impenetrable screen.²

And further:

Nothing is more important for the cause of religion at the present day than that we should recover the sense and consciousness of the Providence of God—a Providence that acts not merely by a species of remote control, but as a living thing, operating in all the details of life—working at every moment, visible in every event. Without that, you cannot have any serious religion, any real walking with God, any genuine prayer, any authentic fervour and faith.³

Perhaps a little overstated, Butterfield's "preaching" makes a point that should not be ignored.

The Christian evangelical community has become, for all practical purposes, on the level of daily life, either naive in its interpretation of God's redemptive action or essentially deist. Since the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century and the control humans have acquired over the physical world with the advent of industrial technique, life seems immersed in an autonomous context. We have hedged our lives about with highly efficient methods of procuring food, shelter, and clothing, with extremely sophisticated medical care and with insurance policies to shelter us from catastrophe. When occasionally something of the transcendent world breaks through and confronts us with the ultimate issues of life, the trauma is almost beyond repair. We resort to desperate prayer and affirmations about God's love that often seem rather strained, though sincerely and profoundly confessed. We affirm with Paul that "to live is Christ and to die is gain," but until we are sufficiently scarred by life's sorrows, our acceptance of Paul's statement comes hard. Our definitions of happiness, or contrariwise, of tragedy, are often so informed by what we expect of life according to the values of our society, that we create false problems concerning "God's working all things for our good." If Christians had a livelier sense of their lives being immersed in the coming of God's rule, of being surrounded by God's love, of their immortality in Christ, they would be more at peace and probably more obedient. We need a more apocalyptic, eschatological awareness and need to see the connections of that awareness to our cultural activities. We need to put our confession and experience together more successfully. Since history is, at one level, that vision of God acting, we must ask what we can do with it in our writing and in our classes. Can Christian history teachers help deliver our students from contemporary evangelical deism? Can we help them toward a lively sense that "our lives are hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3) and toward the freedom and the courage that such awareness brings?⁴

Earlier I cited Herbert Butterfield in his call for a lively consciousness of God's active providence in our lives. Occupying a prominent position at Cambridge during his active career, he has published a variety of works which have established his place in the profession. C.T. McIntire claims that his greatest contribution lies in the areas of historiography and the history of historical study and writing.⁵ Perhaps Butterfield, then, provides us with the connection between historical inquiry and our sense of Christ as the Lord of history which we are seeking.

Presumably to maintain the scientific respectability of the discipline, Butterfield claimed that historical methodology (technical history) has "a certain validity of its own, a certain minimum significance that is independent of philosophy, race or creed."⁶ Limited by the historical apparatus and the nature of the concrete evidence they must use, historians are restricted to the "mechanism of historical processes," to a kind of "mundane and matter of fact" explanation.⁷ To this historical explanation, people of various beliefs come with their interpretations. Historians tell us, as they work their craft, "that certain things did happen, that they happened in certain order, and that certain connections exist between them."⁸ But this is insufficient—for the full story humans depend on the decision they make about their religion:

Nothing can exceed the feeling of satisfaction that many people have when they meet some such system which helps them through the jungle of historical happenings and gives them an interpretation of the story seen as a whole. In such cases our interpretation is a thing which we bring to our history and superimpose upon it, however. We cannot say that we obtained it as technical historians by inescapable inferences from the purely historical evidence.⁹

In *Christianity and History*, Butterfield makes a number of very sensitive observations about judgment in history, Providence and the

historical process, the church in history, the problem of human sin, and the like. In his chapter on human personality, a major theme in his writings, he helps us understand humans in culture, partially bridging the gap between the realm of the technical historian and the interpretation required by one's religion.¹⁰ But by making a disjunction between technical history and one's interpretation of the results, he posits a formal dualism between technical history and religious interpretation which actually prevents him from establishing the integral connection between God's redemptive activity and the discipline of history he so badly wants to make. The kingdom remains too much a matter of Christian consciousness which one holds in faith along side one's technical work. While there is clearly a certain methodological validity to that division, Christianity offers almost nothing to the historian in the pursuit of his technical work.

Georges Florovsky sees more connection between the two dimensions of history. In "The Predicament of the Christian Historian," he argues that although the historian may maintain that humans rather than God are the proper subject for a purely historical study and understanding, ultimate questions cannot be avoided:

No historian can, even in his limited and particular field, within his own competence, avoid raising ultimate problems of human nature and destiny, unless he reduces himself to the role of a registrar of empirical happenings and forfeits his proper task of "understanding."¹¹

In interpreting human life a historian cannot avoid facing the challenge of Christ, God in history: the "response prejudices the course of his interpretation, his choice of measures and values, his understanding of human nature itself."¹²

It was the Judeo-Christian tradition that really discovered the historic dimension. By understanding life in the context of unfolding time, with a beginning and an end, the course

of which is guided by the will of God, Christianity gave events a unique significance. The Incarnation, the Cross and Resurrection, and the coming of the Holy Spirit are

eschatological events: unique and "ultimate," that is decisive, "critical" and crucial, wrought once forever, *ephhapax*. In a certain sense they are also *final events*, the accomplishment and fulfillment of the Messianic prophecy and promise. In this sense, they assume their significance in the perspective of a past history which they "conclude" and "fulfill." *They are eschatological because they are historical*, that is, because they validate retrospectively the whole series.¹³

Because, in this sense, history is God's history, human history acquires meaning; with a task and a purpose imbedded in the eschatological movement of God's history, human action is justified and stimulated. History is no longer an endless cycle of the cosmic pattern or a chaotic flow of chance events. Modern existentialism with its discovery of our "historicity" underscores our temporality and final extinction; it is not really historical but a relapse into Hellenism.¹⁴ All modern ideologies, Marxism a prime example, which affirm an imminent meaning of a linear direction are living off the Christian vision.

It seems to me that Florovsky's insistence that one's position on ultimate questions has significance at every level of historical understanding sets a direction we need to explore. What follows are some important consequences of his position.

I think it is necessary, at some point, to teach our students a theology of history which freely admits the necessity of faith as a starting point, but which also demonstrates that the vision of faith makes sense of life. Peter's sermon at Pentecost, a striking interpretation of recent events, provides a direction for our thinking. At that time, from an observer's point of view, the enemies of Christ had triumphed; the man

of Nazareth was dead, his followers in disarray, the crowds dispersed. The glorious kingdom which Christ's followers had expected was not in evidence and there was no earthly reason to expect anything more to come. The evidence was not there. There was, it is true, a wild rumor among his followers that there had been a resurrection from the dead, but where was

What we shall find, I think, is that on the one hand each of these three moments—divine constitution, divine judgment, and divine restitution or renewal—appears in its biblical form as apparently increasingly *incredible*; it is a truth about history and ourselves that is steadily more difficult to

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this Jesus? The world saw no living Christ. And yet, in his sermon, Peter tells the Jews that Jesus of Nazareth,

delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. And God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power (Acts 2:23,24).

Appearances were not reality; apparent defeat was actually the victory of God. Meaning in history, for the Christian, depends on a reality, perceived by faith, beyond history as well as in history. The secularist will call this position a failure of nerve, an unwillingness to face the hard facts of reality. We do have to admit the necessity of faith. Like Elisha's servant, our spiritual eyes must be opened. For such eyes, however, the Christian gospel not only gives us hope for the future but is validated by experience. Langdon Gilkey comments:

recognize and, to be honest, which we don't *want* to recognize. Still, on the other hand, we shall see that a closer and more careful look at the real situation shows each to be increasingly validated by that real situation.¹⁵

He goes on to argue that "every creative movement or epoch in history believes in divine constitution.... Likewise every culture has the experience of and belief in estrangement, alienation and guilt."¹⁶ Furthermore, "in a sense too, hope is universal, at least whenever a culture or community is on the rise...."¹⁷ Gilkey's observations are to the point. The explicit Christian teaching of the themes of the kingdom of God—creation, fall, redemption—finds echoes even in non-Christian experience in various ways. Our perception of the meaning of life resonates with general human experience.

What we Christian history teachers need to do, it seems to me, is to teach a theology of history to our students at a logical specified place in the curricula of our schools. While

rightly rejecting a naive, easy identification of God's actions in human affairs, admitting the mysterious, now, not-yet, incredible nature of His presence, we ought to show how the general recognition of divine constitution, judgment, and restoration in historical experience supports the Christian vision of God's redemption, a validation that may save our students from the secular hopelessness of our age and foster a greater obedience in cultural endeavors. It is a crucial task but one which requires a different methodology than the kind of historical inquiry which studies human cultural activity. It further provides a critical meaning context for the latter kind of study and insights foundational to the understanding of cultural analysis. The Christian community needs a sophisticated theology (or philosophy) of history supporting our cultural studies. Gilkey puts the challenge to us and points the way in *Reaping the Whirlwind*:

Thus theology, in speaking of human existence, its problems and their redemption, must speak of change, of social process and of history realistically and intelligibly if it is in our time to have any relevance or creativity. Correspondingly—no human can exist serenely and creatively amidst temporal passage without raising questions about the historical future, about the direction and course of that passage and so about the nature and meaning of history itself.¹⁸

I suspect that evangelical theology has been so preoccupied with the future from an eschatological framework that insufficient attention has been given to the meaning of God's saving actions in relationship to human culture in temporal passage. On the other hand, Christian historians have concentrated on the analysis of culture and pretty much turned their backs on the theology of history. The neglect of the relationship between the two different ways of understanding history, both legitimate and necessary, cripples our cultural endeavors and weakens our hope.

History as Human Culture

Does the response one makes to the ultimate questions of life really relate to the daily decisions one lives by? One has only to think about that question for a few moments on a very mundane level to realize that the answer has to be in the affirmative. In the Old Testament era, for example, the Israelite's relation to God was expressed by obeying a whole system of regulations and statutes covering all the fundamental areas of life. Even in the freedom of Christ, decisions about relationships, task, money, recreation, diet and the like grow out of larger commitments and beliefs. The same connections are true for the decisions made by cultural communities, and, for the way any particular historian interprets the meaning of a culture's experience. Gilkey's statement on this question leaves no ambiguity:

Every cultural whole, as every tribe, has a "way of life" expressed in terms of significant social and religious symbols, which give meaning and value, as well as form and structure, to all its activities. If that way of life is not so valued, then participation in it has no meaning, people within it die inwardly, and the community crumbles. As a society is constituted by its symbolic structure, so internally *eros* toward that shared system of meaning is a fundamental factor in all social and political affairs.¹⁹

This characteristic of cultural functioning, for the Calvinist, is the expression of humans made in God's image. It is their faith coming to expression on the cultural level, whatever that faith may be. So while a theology of history ought to link human temporal passage to the story and meaning of redemption, human cultural activity is carried on in light of the decisions made about that story. It is to history as human culture that I turn my attention now.

Within my memory the word *culture* commonly meant a high degree of education and appreciation for the arts. One could become cultured, could acquire culture. Increasingly,

however, the word has come to mean the whole way of life that a particular people has developed. It is the total constellation of behavior, institutions, products, and values that results from a people's creative response to reality. The phrase, "way of life" is singularly appropriate. Historians are interested in more than just the end product, however. They are interested in making culture, the process; without that dimension, little would distinguish them from the anthropologist. In looking briefly at cultural formation, we should keep several points in mind: culture is the whole fabric of a people's life; it is creative—humans form out of free choice; it is communal—the life of a group; and, for the historian, it is developmental.²⁰

In seeking an understanding of how culture functions useful for historical analysis, I find very helpful the definition of G. Linwood Barney utilized by Bruce Nicholls in *Contextualization: A Theology of Gospel and Culture*. Barney suggests:

Each culture is a series of layers the deepest of which consists of ideology, cosmology and world view. A second layer which is closely related and probably derived from it is that of values. Stemming from both of these layers is a third layer of institutions such as marriage, law, education. These institutions are a bridge to the fourth and surface layer of material artifacts and observable behavior and customs. This surface is easily described and more easily changed. Each layer is more complex and abstract, and it is more difficult to define the functional relationships between them.²¹

Contained in Barney's statement are a number of insights helpful for historical study. I find his model particularly helpful in assessing how world view and cultural values function in the life of society. As humans create culture, their religious loyalty reveals itself as a dynamic system of ideas, values, and beliefs that shapes the institutions, habits, and artifacts of society.

The concept of world view, long a staple in

Reformed thought, mentioned here by Barney, has entered into the discourse of evangelical Christian circles in a variety of ways. In general the concept is a valuable insight; it implies the connectedness of cultural life and the foundational role of belief. The term has come to be used very ambiguously, however. Barney's usage helps to clarify the application of the term to culture. He points to two closely related layers of values and beliefs as operative in culture, the second deriving from the first. That distinction makes sense in my study of cultural unfolding. His first layer appears to have in view the same kinds of fundamental beliefs that Sire elucidates as world view in *The Universe Next Door*.

According to Sire, a world view provides answers to the following questions: What is prime reality? Who is Man? What happens to man at death? What is the basis of morality? What is the meaning of human history?²² As Barney's definition suggests, while the world view points a general direction for culture and is foundational to culture, it does not usually translate directly to decisions concerning specific cultural choices. Before it shapes cultural behavior, world view must be translated in the light of historical experience, the level of technological development, geopolitical setting, and the like, to a secondary set of values which do become operative in shaping cultural behavior. The point becomes clear, I think, as one contemplates the differences between a traditional society and an industrialized society, both based on the same world view. The latter culture would have to make drastically different decisions than the former about education, political structure, technology, environment, social relations, and the like, though holding to the same foundational beliefs.

In his study, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew*, Will Herberg helps us define that secondary level of values which directly shape human culture. He argues that every functioning society has a common religion which supplies an overarching sense of unity—even in a society riddled with conflicts.²³ In American society he identifies the "common religion" as the

American Way of Life, at bottom "a spiritual structure of ideas and ideals."²⁴ A little later he defines the American Way of Life as "an organic structure of ideas, values, and beliefs that constitutes a faith common to Americans" which is "genuinely operative in their lives."²⁵ What he defines so succinctly as the common religion of American society are our cultural values. He clearly recognizes its spiritual character; it is the pulling, shaping, motivating factor of our response to the created reality around us.

What Herberg finds as common religion operative in functioning societies, the Old Testament understands as covenantal response to God. Deuteronomy, the book of covenant renewal, commonly speaks of the Way that God's people ought to walk, that is, in His commandments, ordinances, and statutes. Deuteronomy 10:12 is a call from Moses to the Israelites to recommit themselves to that Way in covenant obedience. Later Christ echoes the call in his summary of the law (Mt. 22:37). Behind the call to covenant faithfulness is the assumption that one's walk is the expression of what one believes, what one is committed to. It is hardly surprising then to find in functioning cultures the kind of spiritual values that Herberg finds in American society.

One important inference in his definition we should not miss: if the conflicts are so great that there is no common religion, the society in question is experiencing crisis—revolution, perhaps, or fundamental change of another type. For example, the conflicts of late eighteenth century France were too great and the structure too rigid; revolution was the result. A new society came into existence, though with pain and great travail. England, characteristically, worked slowly through some of the conflicts by fits and starts, and changed from an Anglican-defined, traditional, aristocratic society to an industrialized welfare democracy over a period of a century.

A common phenomenon in contemporary societies that complicates cultural analysis is the fact that in most societies a plurality of world views exists side by side, each world view giving rise to differing cultural values.

Such a situation contains the potential for serious conflict and disruption, Lebanon and Ireland being notable contemporary examples. While such conflict is common, it is not inevitable. World views may be compatible; a particular world view which has developed from the legacy of an earlier and still surviving world view, may share a wide range of cultural values which produce a sufficiently common set of institutions and common behavior so that a stable society may result. Something of the sort apparently existed at the time of our founding fathers. I understand the deist enlightenment was a major step in secularizing the Christian world view, but this view, at the formal level, retained many of the values of Christianity. It was possible for the new nation to affirm cultural values common to both world views, though with different foundations.

It might be argued that such a society is syncretic and ought not to be stable. That may be the case logically but at that point in history, the leaders of colonial society either did not understand the implications of their beliefs with rigorous logic or shared a formal consensus at the functional level. In his definition Barney points out that "each layer is more complex and abstract, and it is more difficult to define the functional relationships between them." It is a crucial warning against oversimplification. It is not always possible to detect a direct relationship between world view and all the operative cultural values. Where a plurality of world views exists, it is probably not possible to sort out the relationships between the two lower layers of the paradigm. The historian or researcher of any discipline will probably do most of the investigation and analysis at the second level where influence is more susceptible to empirical analysis.

Plurality of world views can also occur peaceably when differing positions divide the cultural turf in order to live compatibly. Rousseau advocated such a position in *The Social Contract* where he laid down a set of social sentiments to which all people would adhere on pain of exile or even death. He left room, however, for freedom of belief; as he put it, "subjects have no duty to account to the

sovereign for their beliefs except when those beliefs are important to the community."²⁶ As he defines the social sentiments which all must hold, it becomes apparent that he is defining a civil religion which really leaves no room for other world views to possess cultural power. There is formal toleration for religious freedom, as long as religion remains more or less private and other worldly. He has solved the problem of world view plurality by pushing all but one to the periphery of society. Rousseau's scenario appears almost prophetic for American society. As secularization becomes more and more thorough, it increasingly pushes Christianity out of the public square.

While differing world views may fruitfully exist together under limited conditions, one view tends to take controlling power. It appears that there cannot be fundamental difference in the cultural values. This phenomenon constitutes a considerable challenge for the advocates of confessional pluralism, a position I share. Whose beliefs will shape society when fundamental divergence occurs? How can complete freedom be allowed to several differing communities whose foundational beliefs sharply diverge as those beliefs come to shape institutions and behavior? Governments will eventually have to legislate and enforce a particular behavior. A common commitment to pluralism does help, obviously, to make for compromise and freedom, but there are limits in every society. Evangelicals are currently feeling the pinch in a secular society. Their struggle against secularism in moral issues illustrates the problem. Unfortunately they themselves often lack either an understanding of or a commitment to pluralist freedom. In addition, their concerns are too often narrowly moral or cultic. Thus far their struggle has not produced a viable public philosophy able to solve the dilemma of world view plurality.

I have earlier suggested a point to which I need to return briefly. Cultural values do more than provide cultural unity and coherence. They give form and assign function to the various structures within which people order their lives. People cannot create institutions

randomly or according to whim, however. Reality seems to intrude; certain ways of functioning common to human beings require certain kinds of institutions. All societies have a structure for regulating the public order; all have a system of education, a means of transacting commerce, and the like. Within the fulfillment of those common needs, however, there is difference and variety in the way institutions are shaped and the way needs are met. The determining factor is that second level of Barney's model—the values, beliefs, and ideals of any given culture. The fundamentalist Islamic state, for example, gives the mullah a range of control and authority over the faithful quite different from a liberal, democratic state with its faith in the free individual. Likewise a Marxist state has a specific role in relation to Marxist teachings about the movement of the dialectic.

The movement of formative power and the source of change does not proceed only from values to institutions and behavior. The functioning of institutions also relates back to the values that support them. When institutions no longer serve the healthy functioning of society, a spiritual crisis results. People lose faith; they challenge, question and search for alternative values and structures. If no change, adjustment, or reform is made, disenchantment and unfulfilled needs bring various forms of cultural distress, and in some instances violent revolution. In the twentieth century a profound illustration of this kind of crisis has occurred in a variety of ways as the colonial thrust of the developed West brought confrontation with the underdeveloped Third World cultures and the pre-industrial Orient. Colin Turnbull's *The Lonely African* powerfully illustrates aspects of the problem. Confucian China struggled to cope with western intrusion but could not adjust without fundamentally abandoning Confucianism. Tokugawa Japan was able to adapt its values to lead successfully the process of modernization and meet the challenge of the West. The story of that contemporary confrontation and the various kinds of response illustrate the two-directional link of values and institutions.²⁷

Conclusion

Historians need to pay close attention, I believe, to the link that exists between values and beliefs and institutions and behavior and their reciprocal influence. Such analysis is not merely studying an aspect or a subfield of historical inquiry. It is more a foundational study, an analysis of the cultural faith dimension of a particular people. If human cultures do act out of a common commitment to shared values, which in turn are based on their answers to the ultimate issues of life, we need to explore that commitment and the way it issues into action. It is a complicated but important study, for it helps reveal on what basis things cohere, on what foundation culture rests, and in what direction things are moving.

To understand culture as the creative, faith-driven response to the creation mandate is not only a means of interpreting the past, but, for the historian and his cultural community, their shared interpretation sets direction for cultural action. What communities believe about the ultimate issues of life and how they interpret the past in light of that belief set the agenda for the future.

Notes

¹"Practice and Presuppositions: History" (paper presented at the conference, *A New Agenda for Evangelical Thought*, June, 1987 at Wheaton College), p. 2. On the general issue of God acting in history, see M.C. Smit, *The Divine Mystery in History* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1955), pp. 11-12. Smit warns against picturing God's working in human history as supernatural intervention which, in effect, places "God in a dual relationship towards His creation." Such a procedure, Smit points out, presents us with a double evil: "on the one hand that of the historical process becoming independent and on the other the untenable pretension of being able to understand God's judgment in some historical events even now."

²"God in History," *Herbert Butterfield: Writings on Christianity and History*, ed. C.T. McIntire (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 3.

³*Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁴Crane Brinton, though denying the supernatural, has a keen awareness of Christian monism and the struggle to maintain it: "And in spite of the very important distinctions orthodox Christian thought has always made between this world and the other world, body and soul, natural and supernatural, Christianity has resisted firmly the temptation to accept a *formal dualism*." *Ideas and Men: the Story*

of *Western Thought* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), p.129, also pp. 105, 120, 123.

⁵"Introduction: Herbert Butterfield on Christianity and History," in *Herbert Butterfield: Writings on Christianity and History*, p. xxxiv.

⁶*Christianity and History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), p. 19.

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰See C.T. McIntire's defense of Butterfield on this issue in *Writings on Christianity and History*, p. xxxix.

¹¹*God, History and Historians; Modern Christian Views of History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 425.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 428.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 432.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 434.

¹⁵"Scripture, History and the Quest for Meaning," *History and Historical Understanding*, ed. C.T. McIntire and Ronald A. Wells (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984), p. 14.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸(New York: The Seabury Press, 1976), p. 4.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 60.

²⁰C.T. McIntire's brief definition is useful. See "Historical Study and the Historical Dimension of Our World," *History and Historical Understanding*, pp.37-38. See also Brian J. Walsh and J. Richard Middleton, *The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian World View* (Downer's Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), pp. 54-55.

²¹(Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1976), p. 18. Walsh and Middleton in *The Transforming Vision* use the term world view a little differently. For them "faith commitment" corresponds to the deepest level of Barney's model while world view is "a model of the world which guides its adherents in the world" (pp.32-35), a role which Barney ascribes to a secondary, derivative level of values.

²²(Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1979), p. 11.

²³(Garden City: Anchor Books, 1960), p. 74.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 75.

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 77.

²⁶Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, trans. Maurice Cranston (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 185.

²⁷The following diagram may be useful in visualizing Barney's model. The arrows indicate the two direction influence; the dotted lines between the layers show that the divisions between them are not a hard and fast separation.

