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For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled. (2 Corinthians 10:3-6)

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The Church Irrational by John Robbins

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Many observers have lamented the lack of discernment among professing Christians, the disappearance of “antithesis” in the thinking of contemporary Christians, and the worldliness of the churches. Some writers have made livings decrying the lack of discernment, though their own claims to discernment are frequently exaggerated; other observers, more Biblical, have tried to analyze the problem and suggest how it might be solved. One of the most discerning among the latter group is Dr. Jay E. Adams, who wrote *A Call for Discernment: Distinguishing Truth from Error in Today's Church*. Dr. Adams cites four factors that he believes contribute to the present lack of discernment by Christians:

- (1) disappearance of church discipline
- (2) continuum thinking replacing antithesis
- (3) de-emphasis of systematic theology
- (4) liberation of the laity.

These four, he writes, “are sufficient to demonstrate that many closely-connected factors play a part.”¹

Now, Dr. Adams' many books are among the best written by a Christian in the past 30 years. He has attempted to apply the principle of *sola Scriptura* to

psychology and counseling.² However, his analysis of the causes of the present lack of discernment by Christians and churches seems confused. Dr. Adams does not discuss the fundamental reason for the worldliness of the churches; and at least one reader is baffled by the inclusion of factor 4, the “liberation of the laity,” for it seems to have nothing to do with causing the contemporary lack of discernment. “Parachurch organizations,” which Dr. Adams and many others decry, are no worse theologically than the churches. The name of every erring parachurch organization can be matched by the name of an erring church. More importantly, and more fundamentally, Christians ought not to appear to endorse a view of the church that implies ecclesiastical totalitarianism. The institutional church is only one institution among many in a free and Christian society: There are also families, schools and colleges, businesses, charities, clubs and social organizations, political parties, and governments. All of these are parachurch organizations, and all of them are legitimate. None of them requires permission from the institutional church to be organized or maintained.³ Let us not advocate ecclesiastical totalitarianism in order to avoid what Dr. Adams calls “anarchy.” Let us recall that

² Martin and Deidre Bobgan have provided the most detailed and cogent criticisms of both secular psychology and counseling in the churches. One cannot discuss this subject intelligently without having studied their work.

³ When Christ said, “I will build my church, and the Gates of Hell will not prevail against it,” he was not speaking of any institutional church. The Gates of Hell have prevailed against thousands of institutional churches in the past two millennia. They have become apostate and in most cases have disappeared. The churches to which Paul wrote his letters—Ephesus, Corinth, Thessalonica, Rome, Galatia, Philippi, Colosse—no longer exist as Christian churches. The Gates of Hell prevailed against the Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church, and the Lutheran Church. Christ's church is not to be confused with any visible organization.

¹ Jay E. Adams, *A Call for Discernment*. Woodruff, South Carolina: Timeless Texts [1987] 1998, 40.

just as Marxists find the free market “anarchic,” and fascists find elections and parliaments anarchic, so ecclesiastical totalitarians, such as the Roman Catholic Church-State, find parachurch organizations anarchic.⁴ In the New Testament there are at least two passages that are relevant to any discussion of parachurch organizations:

Now John answered him, saying, “Teacher, we saw someone who does not follow us casting out demons in your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow us.”

But Jesus said, “Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in my name can soon afterward speak evil of me. For he who is not against us is on our side.” (*Mark* 9:38-40)

Most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the Word without fear. Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from good will: The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the Gospel. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice. (*Philippians* 1:14-18)

In the first passage, taken from the *Gospel of Mark*, Christ makes it clear that institutional connections are relatively unimportant. What is important is in whose name the work is being done. He forbids the disciples from interfering with these parachurch activities. The second passage from *Philippians* informs us that the motivation for preaching the Gospel is relatively unimportant to Paul—even if the Gospel is preached out of selfish ambition, a sinful motivation, Paul rejoices. So

⁴ By using the word *anarchy*, Dr. Adams falls into the trap of the Romanists. The alternatives are not anarchy or tyranny over the laity (and I am sure Dr. Adams was not advocating tyranny; he was simply decrying parachurch organizations); the Biblical model is education of the laity by their elected teachers, *whose teaching the laity always have the right and the duty to judge*. When there were no parachurch organizations, because the church was a totalitarian institution that not only constituted civil governments, congregations, and families, but claimed a monopoly on salvation as well, there was far less discernment in both church officials and church-goers than there is today. The institutional church justifies its hegemony by claiming that only it has discernment. See, for example, chapter 26, *War Against the Idols* by Carlos M. N. Eire. The Roman Church-State, of course, finds all non-Roman churches, as well as parachurches, anarchic.

neither organizational connections nor motivations are the central issue; the important consideration is the message preached. The matter of parachurch organizations is a red herring. If the churches do not proclaim the Gospel, God will make rocks preach. The important question is: What is being preached? Paul and Christ commanded that the Gospel be preached, and they rejoiced when it was preached, even by men who were not of the company of the disciples or by men who were acting out of sinful motives. Neither Jesus nor Paul criticized or made any effort to stop this incipient parachurch activity. Instead they rejoiced. Their focus was on the doctrine and its dissemination.

Luther understood the importance, to the well-being of both the church and the churches, of doctrine and of ordinary Christians’ right to judge doctrine. He wrote:

Once the right to judge doctrine is taken away from the hearers, what can or may a teacher not dare though (if that were possible) he were worse than Satan? Conversely, if judging doctrine is permitted, aye, commanded, what can or may a teacher dare though he were more than an angel from Heaven...? In fact, nothing would ever have come of the entire papacy if this judgment [by the hearers] had been in control. Therefore they [the popes and councils] consulted their own interests exceedingly well by claiming the sole right to this office.⁵

Let us not make the mistake of exalting the authority of church officials beyond the limited ministerial authority they are given in Scripture, simply because Christianity is perverted and distorted on every side. That is the mistake the institutional church made in the first millennium when it acceded first to episcopal arguments and then to papal Rome’s claims to rule the churches.

The other three factors Dr. Adams discusses are quite relevant to the issue of the lack of discernment in today’s churches, but rather than explaining our current predicament, they are effects that themselves need to be explained: Why has church discipline virtually disappeared? Why does everyone tend to think in a “continuum”? Why has systematic theology been de-emphasized in the seminaries and in the churches? If we answer those questions correctly, then we can explain the lack of discernment in the churches. In fact, one might turn Dr. Adams’ whole analysis on its head and argue that it is the lack of discernment that explains the

⁵ *What Luther Says*, Plass, editor, 1234.

disappearance of church discipline and the contemporary de-emphasis on systematic theology. Dr. Adams has drawn our attention to many trends within the church, but he seems not to have explained the cause of any of them. And he is one of the best theologians among those who discuss the lack of discernment among churchgoers.

The Definition of Discernment

Before we get too far into a discussion of discernment, it might be wise to define our terms.⁶ According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, “to discern” is

to separate (things, or one thing from another); to distinguish and divide...to recognize as distinct, to distinguish or separate mentally (one thing from another)...to perceive the difference between...to distinguish or discriminate between ...to distinguish (one thing or fact) by the intellect.

“Discernment” is “the act of discerning or perceiving by the intellect; intellectual perception or apprehension... discrimination, judgment, keenness of intellectual perception; penetration; insight...” The Hebrew words used in the Scriptures, *nakar* and *shama*, mean “to scrutinize” and “to know.” The Greek words *anakrino* and *diakrino* mean “to separate thoroughly,” “to discriminate.” Arndt and Gingrich lists these meanings for judge (*krino*): “separate, distinguish, think, consider, decide, hale before a court, condemn, administer justice, see to it that justice is done, pass judgment upon, criticize, find fault with.” These definitions show how closely related discernment and judging are, and thereby provide us a clue to the proximate causes of today’s lack of discernment.

The First Cause of the Lack of Discernment

The Bible provides several answers to the question: Why do people lack discernment? The fundamental answer, the will of God, is an unpopular and an unpalatable answer, and modern men will not hear it. The pagan Greeks and Romans had several similar proverbs: “Whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad.”⁷ Publius Syrius (42 BC) wrote: “Whom Fortune wishes to destroy she first makes mad.” Lycurgus (820 BC) wrote: “When falls on man the anger of the gods/First from his

mind they banish understanding.” The seventeenth-century English poet John Dryden echoed these proverbs in *The Hind and the Panther* (1687): “For those whom God to ruin has designed/He fits for fate, and first destroys their mind.” Removing the pagan meanings from the sayings, we arrive at some pretty sound theology: “Whom God wishes to destroy he first makes foolish.” Or to put it another way, “Whom God wishes to destroy, he first makes undiscerning.” That is exactly what passages such as *Romans 1* teach:

They are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools.... And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind...undiscerning....

The Apostle Paul, writing to the Thessalonians, warned:

The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs and lying wonders, and all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. (*2 Thessalonians 2:9-12*)

The consistent message of the Bible is that God gives knowledge and wisdom to those who are to be saved; and withholds knowledge and wisdom from those who are to be destroyed. Consider these verses:

Then you shall say to them “Thus says the Lord: ‘Behold I will fill all the inhabitants of this land—even the kings who sit on David’s throne, the priests, the prophets, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem—with drunkenness! And I will dash them one against another, even the fathers and the sons together,’ says the Lord. ‘I will no more spare nor have mercy, but will destroy them.’” (*Jeremiah 13:13-14*)

With him are wisdom and strength; he has counsel and understanding. If he breaks a thing down, it cannot be rebuilt; if he imprisons a man, there can be no release. If he withholds the

⁶ To show what lack of discernment currently prevails, this writer was recently reproached by a professed Christian who called his concern for the clear definition of terms the “Socratic fallacy.” Well, gentlemen, if defining terms be fallacious, let us make the most of it.

⁷ These words are from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s 1875 *The Masque of Pandora*. The anonymous Latin version is “Quos [or Quem] deus vult perdere prius dementat.”

waters, they dry up; if he sends them out, they overwhelm the Earth. With him are strength and prudence. The deceived and the deceiver are his. He leads counselors away plundered and makes fools of the judges. He loosens the bonds of kings, and binds their waist with a belt. He leads princes away plundered and overthrows the mighty. He deprives the trusted ones of speech and takes away the discernment of the elders. He pours contempt on princes and disarms the mighty.... He takes away the understanding of the chiefs of the people of the Earth, and makes them wander in a pathless wilderness. They grope in the dark without light, and he makes them stagger like a drunken man. (*Job 12:13-25*)

You have hidden their heart from understanding.... (*Job 17:4*)

All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. At the end of the twelve months he was walking about the royal palace of Babylon. The King spoke, saying, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?"

While the word was still in the King's mouth, a voice fell from Heaven: "King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you! And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever he chooses."

That very hour the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar; he was driven from men and ate grass like oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws.

And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to Heaven, and my understanding returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored him who lives forever: For his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the Earth are reputed as nothing; he does according to his will in the army of Heaven and among the inhabitants of the Earth. No one can restrain his hand or say to him, "What have you done?"

At the same time my reason returned to me.... (*Daniel 4:28-36*)

These passages clearly show that discernment is an intellectual function, and that God controls the minds of all men, giving understanding and discernment to those whom he favors, and withholding understanding and discernment from those whom he is punishing.

In *Proverbs*, it is the man who understands, the man who gets wisdom, that lives and prospers; it is the man who does not understand, the foolish man, who dies. God confuses their minds, makes them undiscerning, so that they cannot tell right from wrong, true from false. Discernment is the intellectual ability to judge correctly. To judge is to evaluate a particular (person, group, event, or idea) according to a general principle or standard. To those whom God wishes to save, he gives light; to those whom he wishes to punish, he sends confusion. A typical passage showing that intellectual light is from God is *Ephesians 1:15-18*:

Therefore I also...do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that you may know....

Another is *Ephesians 4:17-23*:

This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardening of their heart.... But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard him and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus; that you...be renewed in the spirit of your mind....

This teaching—that knowledge, wisdom, discernment is from God—is repeated in many verses of Scripture. Here are just a few:

But there is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty gives him understanding. (*Job 32:8*)

Who has put wisdom in the mind? Or who has given understanding to the heart? (*Job 38:36*)

Therefore, give to your servant [Solomon] an understanding heart to judge your people, that I may discern between good and evil....

Because you [Solomon] have asked this thing...understanding to discern justice, behold, I have done according to your words; see, I have given you a wise and understanding heart.... (*1 Kings* 3:9, 11-12)

My son, if you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you, so that you incline your ear to wisdom and apply your heart of understanding; yes, if you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding; if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. (*Proverbs* 2:1-6)

These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. (*1 Corinthians* 2:13-15)

It is clear from Scripture that all knowledge, wisdom, and discernment come from God alone. It is equally clear that it is God who withholds knowledge, wisdom, and discernment from people. God darkens the minds and hardens the hearts of men; he withholds his knowledge and wisdom and sends delusions and lying spirits to men; he diminishes the ability of some men to judge correctly, not merely of those he wishes to destroy eternally, but those whom he wishes to destroy temporally as well:

Then Micaiah said, "Therefore, hear the Word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of Heaven standing by, on his right hand and on his left.

"And the Lord said, 'Who will persuade [King] Ahab to go up, that he may fall at Ramoth Gilead?' So one spoke in this manner, and another spoke in another manner.

"Then a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord and said, 'I will persuade him.'

"The Lord said to him, 'In what way?'

"So he said, 'I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.'

"And he said, 'You shall persuade him, and also prevail. Go out and do so.'

"Now, therefore, look! The Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these prophets of yours, and the Lord has declared disaster against you." (*1 Kings* 22:19-23)

With some individuals, such as Nebuchadnezzar and the demoniacs, God's withholding of knowledge and wisdom and his restoration of understanding and discernment are sudden: "Then they came to Jesus and saw the one who had been demon-possessed and had the legion, sitting and clothed and in his right mind" (*Mark* 5:15; *Luke* 8:35). In these cases God acted suddenly, darkening and enlightening minds in an instant. But God's usual method of operation is gradually to darken the minds of those he intends to abase and destroy, and gradually (after the sudden change of regeneration/resurrection) enlightening the minds of those whom he intends to save. He darkens minds both objectively and subjectively. Objectively, he sends famines of the preaching and hearing of the Word of God:

"Behold the days are coming," says the Lord God, "that I will send a famine on the land--not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, seeking the Word of the Lord, and they shall not find it." (*Amos* 8:11-12)

He gradually darkens minds, not only of isolated individuals, but also of whole societies; he hides his Word in dark sayings and parables,

And the disciples came and said to him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?"

He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries⁸ of the Kingdom of Heaven, but to them it has not been given. For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. Therefore, I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: 'Hearing you will hear and

⁸ The Greek word means secrets, not paradoxes or contradictions.

not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive, for the heart of this people has grown dull, their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their heart and turn, so that I should heal them.’” (*Matthew* 13:10-15)

The lack of discernment is the lack of wisdom and knowledge. It is an intellectual deficiency. Professed churches and professed Christians lack discernment today because they do not know or believe the truth. They profess to, but they do not. Those who decry the lack of discernment in today’s churches usually fail to attribute that lack to its first cause: the purpose, plan, and providence of God. Further, they fail to indicate how God carries out his plan, how he darkens minds, how he withholds his light and his face. Objectively this darkening is the dearth of preaching and publication of the Word; subjectively it is the rejection of revealed truth, including, at the present time, the revealed truth about logical thought.

Logic and His Enemies

It is on the latter cause that I wish to focus, for this rejection of logic—this misology—explains in large part the lack of discernment, the de-emphasis on systematic theology, the prevalence of what Dr. Adams calls “continuum thinking,” and even the disappearance of church discipline. Another part of the explanation—the dearth of preaching of God’s Word in today’s churches—is discussed elsewhere in this volume. These two causes—the hatred of logic and the suppression of the Word—are the proximate causes of today’s lack of discernment. The ultimate cause is, of course, the will of God.

Today, logic—usually denigrated as “mere human logic”—is suspect, not only in humanist circles, but also, perhaps even more so, in religious circles: It is despised and rejected in liberal, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Arminian, Neo-evangelical, and charismatic churches, and in many professedly Reformed churches as well.⁹ All contemporary churches have been influenced by the world on this point. In “The Church Effeminate” I traced some of the effects of anti-intellectualism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, leading to the

feminization of the churches in the twentieth century. But the effects of modern misology—the hatred of logic—have been far more extensive than the feminization of the churches. It is because church officials and churchgoers disdain “mere human logic” that systematic theology is de-emphasized in both seminaries and churches, and unsystematic theology is preferred. It is because seminary professors and students detest “mere human logic” that “practical” books, and in seminaries and churches “practical” courses, are preferred to doctrinal courses. It is because church officials and churchgoers despise “mere human logic” that they prefer “continuum thinking” to making distinctions and judgments. They are religiously and piously opposed to precision and clarity.¹⁰ It is because church officials and churchgoers decry “mere human logic” that church discipline has disappeared, for the exercise of just discipline requires the most rigorous application of our rational powers of definition, distinction, and judgment. Church discipline requires clarity and precision, two godly qualities decry by modern churchmen. Those things which modern churchgoers and church officials find offensive about Christianity—its claim to be an exclusive religion; its claim to have a systematic monopoly on truth and salvation; its insistence on clarity in written and oral expression; its demand for clear definitions of terms; its demand that judgment be done righteously, according to defined and objective standards; its requirement that Christians discriminate between right and wrong, good and evil, godly and ungodly; its requirement that Christians be a distinct people, separate from the world—they find all these things offensive because of their deep-seated and sinful antipathy to logical thought.

This antipathy is itself due to their hostility to God, who is the *Logos*, the Logic who lights the mind of every man:

In the beginning was the *Logos*, and the *Logos* was with God, and the *Logos* was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him [the *Logos*], and without him nothing was made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men...the true

⁹ For a recent example of this misology, see Douglas Wilson, *The Paideia of God*, 1999, especially chapter 6: “The Great Logic Fraud.” Wilson, a leader in the “Classical-Christian” school movement, is a disciple of Roman Catholic medievalist Dorothy Sayers; Anglican medievalist C. S. Lewis; and a motley crew of rock groups of the 1960s and 1970s, whom he frequently quotes. It is not surprising that his writing demonstrates deep-seated hostility toward logic.

¹⁰ A defense of imprecisionism is Vern Poythress, *Philosophy, Science, and the Sovereignty of God*, who bizarrely apes precision by numbering his paragraphs to the third decimal place. Dr. Poythress is a student of Cornelius Van Til and a member of the faculty at Westminster Theological Seminary. See *Clark Speaks from the Grave* for Gordon Clark’s discussion of the irrationalism of Dr. Poythress.

light which gives light to every man who comes into the world. (*John* 1:1-4, 9)

The world and the worldly church hate “mere human logic,” because it is the image of God in man, and they hate God:

There is none righteous, no not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all gone out of the way; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one. (*Romans* 3:10-12)

Because the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. (*Romans* 8:7)

God is a rational being, and man, his image, is also rational. God was not joking or waxing metaphorical when he invited sinners, through Isaiah, “Come, let us reason together.” Because man is God’s image, his logic is God’s logic, and God and man can reason together. God’s truth and man’s truth are not two different truths; the concept of twofold truth, in which one thing can be true in theology and its contradictory true in philosophy, or in which two contradictories can both be true in theology, is medieval and modern Antichristian nonsense. God’s logic and man’s logic are not two different logics; the notion of polylogism—many logics—is nonsense. The divine *Logos* lights the mind of every man, John wrote. Since the *Logos* is not created, the light of the *Logos*, logic, is not created. Man’s arithmetic and God’s arithmetic are not two different arithmetics; the notion of many arithmetics is mathematical nonsense. There are many examples of addition, subtraction, division, and multiplication revealed in Scripture, and in every case, God’s revealed answers are man’s answers. Truth, logic, and arithmetic are one truth, one logic, and one arithmetic; they all are uncreated; they all originate with God, who is truth itself, for they are the way God himself thinks. Whatever man has of them, he has from God alone, because he is made in the image of God, and because God reveals himself to men. There is no such thing as “mere human logic,” just as there is no such thing as “mere human arithmetic” or “mere human truth.” Man is logical because he is the image of God—he has the capacity to think, to reason, as God thinks and reasons. John says that the divine *Logos* lights the mind of every man; Peter and Jude describe beasts as “without logic”: *aloga*.¹¹ They are not the image of God.

“Postmodernism,” which is merely a trendy name for the ancient idea of epistemological relativism—the idea of the Greek sophist Protagoras that “man is the measure of all things”—is also the view of those who assert epistemological relativism in their theology. Postmodernism in the churches—even many of the professedly Reformed churches—takes many forms:

Men cannot know God’s truth, but only an analogy of God’s truth.

Man, being finite, cannot understand the infinite.

God cannot be understood.

God is “Wholly Other.”

Logic is created and is not the way God thinks.

There is an “infinite qualitative difference between man and God.”

God’s knowledge and man’s knowledge do not coincide at any single point.

Truth is not propositional but personal.

God and the medium of conceptuality are mutually exclusive.

To *think* God is not to think *God*.

Life is deeper than logic.

Such pious platitudes are relativistic, agnostic, and Anti-Christian to the core. They explicitly deny the central and fundamental idea of propositional revelation—“You shall know the truth.” Christ did not say, “You shall know an analogy of the truth”; nor, “You shall encounter truth”; nor, “You shall know something approximating truth”; nor, “You shall know probable truth.” The pious platitudes of the religious irrationalists implicitly deny the doctrines of the omnipotence of God and of man as the image of God; and they make nonsense of all of Christianity, for they make it all unknowable. It is this rejection of the ontological and epistemological status of logic, this pious theological agnosticism, that lies at the root of the lack of discernment, the lack of judgment, and the worldliness of today’s churches.

The Creative Logos

God is a rational being, the architecture of whose mind is logic. How the *Logos* functions in creating the universe is made clear in *Genesis* 1: He speaks; he distinguishes and judges; he separates; and he names.

“In the beginning was the Word,” and the Word, naturally, speaks: The statement “God said” appears nine times in *Genesis* 1 alone. In the act of speaking God reveals his rationality: The laws of speech are the laws of logic. The rules of grammar are derivative from the principles of logic. For a word—any word, human or divine—to mean something (and every word of God

¹¹ See 2 *Peter* 2:12 and *Jude* 10.

means something, for God does not talk nonsense), that word must also not-mean something else. When God says, “Let there be light,” *light* does not mean *dark*; or *bees*, or *matter*; *let* does not mean *do not let*, *write*, or *rent*; *be* does not mean *buy*, *destroy*, or *eat*. *Bereshith*, the Hebrew word translated “in the beginning,” does not mean in AD 2000 or even one second after the beginning. This is the logical law of contradiction: Not both A and not-A. If sounds and written symbols do not obey this fundamental rule of logic, they are mere noises in the air or mere scribbling on the paper; they are not words; they are not speech. God can and does speak because, as John tells us, God is Logic.

Second, the *Logos* distinguishes and judges: The statement “God saw” appears seven times in *Genesis* 1 alone. Of course, God’s seeing has nothing to do with physical vision. God has no rods and cones, no retinas, no optic nerves or eyeballs. “Saw” is a figure of speech for “understood.” We use the same metaphor in English when we exclaim, “Oh! I see.” In the act of distinguishing, God reveals not only his rationality, but also the rationality of the creation, which is implied by John’s statement that “All things were made through him [the *Logos*], and without him nothing was made that was made.” The laws of logic are not merely the laws of God’s own thinking and God’s own speech, but of the entire creation as well. All creation is rational because the Word of God who created it is rational. Life is not deeper than logic, as the poets and romantics tell us; Logic is deeper than, and created, life. Those are pagan views that teach, as the German Romantic Goethe did, “in the beginning was the deed”;¹² or as Democritus did, “in the beginning was matter and motion”; or as contemporary scientists do, “in the beginning was the Big Bang.” It is those pagan views that make logic, not the designer and creator of the universe, but an effect, an evolutionary byproduct of blind, purposeless, and unintelligent events. It is the pagan view that makes the universe—and man in it—irrational. Those movements within the churches for the past two thousand years that have gloried in uttering gibberish, deceptively calling their gibberish “tongues,” that is languages, are merely imitating the gibberish uttered by pagan savages, who in their hatred for God and logic attempted to suppress the truth of God in them, by attempting to deny and destroy the human capacity for rational thought and speech, by asserting that gibberish is speech.

While all creation cannot and does not imitate God in thinking and speaking, all creation does obey the laws of

¹² This is the “translation” of *John* 1 that Goethe offered in *Faust*.

logic. A dog is a dog, not a cat or a car. A thing is itself. This is the logical law of identity: A is A. It is also the name of God: “I Am that I Am.” Those theologians and philosophers who assert that logic is an effect of creation (their counterparts, the evolutionists, make logic an effect of evolution; both agree that logic is an effect, not a cause), make God illogical. Logic is not an effect; Logic is the cause, John tells us, of the universe. Because the universe was created by the *Logos*, animals and plants reproduce after their own kinds. In distinguishing, the *Logos* reveals that the creation is not an amorphous, undefined, ineffable lump—indeed, *Genesis* 1 is the account of God transforming the formless void into a *cosmos*, an ordered universe.¹³ The *cosmos* is the creation of the *Logos*. Logic is not an effect of the *cosmos*. In judging, the *Logos* reveals that one thing differs from another—that “good” differs from “bad,” and that “very good” differs from “good.” It is not the original formless void that God pronounced good, but the creation that had distinctions and separations made by the *Logos*. From this we ought to learn, *inter alia*, that there are several forms of unity, and not all of them are good. These acts of rational discrimination, in which one thing is distinguished from another, in which “good” is distinguished from “bad,” and “very good” from “good,” are acts of the *Logos*. These acts of distinguishing are acts of evaluation and judgment. They are acts of discernment.

The Bible is filled with such pairs of opposites. Here are just a few:

- Light/darkness
- Day/night
- Seas/dry land
- Good/evil
- True/false
- Right/wrong
- Obedience/disobedience
- Christ/Belial
- Righteousness/lawlessness
- Life/death
- Heaven/Hell
- Election/reprobation
- Blessing/cursing
- Narrow way/broad way
- Godly wisdom/ worldly wisdom
- God’s righteousness/self-righteousness

¹³ The political philosopher Leo Strauss wrote: “Creation is the making of separated things, of things or groups of things that are separated from each other, which are distinguished from each other, which are distinguishable, which are discernible” (“On the Interpretation of *Genesis*,” *L’Homme*, 1981, 10).

Grace/merit
Belief/works.

These opposites cannot be synthesized; they cannot be integrated; they are forever “either-or,” not “both-and.” There is no continuum; there are dichotomies; there are antitheses.

Third, the *Logos* in *Genesis* 1 separates: The statements, “God divided,” “let it divide,” “to divide,” “God gathered,” “be gathered,” occur six times in *Genesis* 1 alone. God divides the light from the darkness; he divides the waters under the firmament from the waters above the firmament; he gathers the waters under the firmament together, thus dividing the seas from the dry land; he divides the day from the night. By separating one thing from another, God displays his rationality as well as the rationality of the creation. It is only such divisions that give form, structure, and unity to the creation; and each division that God makes, makes a more intricate structure, a more complex unity, possible. Separating the seas from the dry land makes possible the creation of sea creatures, plants, and land animals. Without these separations and divisions, there could be no structure in creation, and no plan, no cooperation of parts, no function. All would be a formless, meaningless mass. In creating, God is making the world conform to the patterns in his mind, as *Hebrews* says.

Finally, the *Logos* in *Genesis* 1 names: The statements “God called” and “God named” appear five times in *Genesis* 1, and God names all the creatures he makes—grass, herbs, seeds, trees, days, years. In giving names, God is not only revealing his rationality and the rationality of the creation—the fact that concepts and propositions can be used to refer accurately to things (an idea that some professing Christian philosophers deny)—God is also revealing his dominion over all things, including man, whom he names. Divine dominion is, first of all, intellectual mastery, for it is by the Word that the universe is created and by the Word that each part named. At other places in Scripture, God names individual men: Abram becomes *Abraham*; Sarai becomes *Sarah*; Jacob becomes *Israel*; Elizabeth’s son becomes *John*; Mary’s son becomes *Jesus*.

When we come to chapters 2 and 3 of *Genesis*, it is man, the image of God, who performs the functions that God performed in *Genesis* 1. Adam is commanded to speak and to understand, to distinguish between obedience and disobedience, to judge between good and evil, to name the animals, and to separate his children into families. Adam names his wife *Eve*. Adam and all men, as

rational creatures, are commanded to exercise judgment. We are commanded to distinguish good from evil, to discriminate one thing from another, to discern what is true and what is false; to make judgments about all things. We are commanded to act as rational creatures, to use the gift of rationality that God has given us.

Judgment

Because we are creatures with the gift of rationality, made in the image of the rational God, the *Logos*, refusing to judge is impossible. All declarative statements—the cat is black, abortion is murder, chocolate is poison—are judgments. All our knowledge consists of such judgments. This is the sense in which Paul uses the term in *1 Corinthians* 1:10, where he writes:

Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

The word *judgment* is used in Scripture many times with this meaning:

I will praise you with uprightness of heart when I learn your righteous judgments....

With my lips I have declared all the judgments of your mouth. (*Psalms* 119:7, 13)

The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. (*Psalms* 19:9)

Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out! (*Romans* 11:33)

The verb *to judge* has three meanings, one more fundamental than the others. The more fundamental meaning is *to distinguish*; the first derivative meaning is *to evaluate* according to a standard; and the second derivative meaning is *to condemn* or *to acquit*. The attack on judging must be seen, first and most importantly, as an attack on the faculty that understands, that distinguishes—an attack on the image of God in man. It is an attack on the rational faculty, and implicitly an attack on God, who is Truth himself. The Holy Spirit, writing through Paul, says that all Christians ought to be perfectly joined together “in the same mind and in the same judgment.” They are to agree on the same propositions, to have the same beliefs, to hold the same faith, to believe the same doctrine. The Christian faith—sometimes called Christian doctrine or Christian theology—is a collection of

judgments, a system of propositions such as “Jesus Christ is both God and man”; “Christ died according to the Scriptures and rose again after three days according to the Scriptures.” Those are some of the judgments that all Christians are to believe. It is their agreement in these judgments that creates, or better, is, the unity of the church. Paul repeatedly exhorts us to be “like-minded,” to “not be conformed to this world, but [to] be transformed by the renewing of your mind,” to “be of the same mind toward one another,” to “stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel.” There is no command in Scripture to have one organization or one institution, but to have one mind, the mind of Christ. Christians are to be unified in their doctrine, in their judgments.

Moral judgments, which are condemned by many today, must be understood as a species of the genus “judgment.” Some theologians, pathetically following the lead of the world, have attempted to separate “moral judgments” from “cognitive judgments,” as if morality were not a matter of knowledge, but a matter of feeling, desire, or emotion. When we make a judgment, for instance, that “murder is sinful,” we are stating a truth. It is as intellectual an act as solving a quadratic equation. When we make a judgment, “Joseph Stalin was a murderer,” we are stating a truth. Moral judgments are a form of judgment, and as such they are either true or false. If moral judgments are made correctly, that is, according to the principles of God’s Word, including a rigorous application of the laws of logic, then they are true judgments. Because we are rational creatures, we do not have the ability to avoid making judgments. Because we are rational creatures, we do not have the ability to avoid making moral judgments. The question is not whether we will make judgments or not, but whether the judgments we make will be righteous judgments or not. Rationality is the ability to judge. To be rational is to make judgments, including moral judgments. Therefore, to refuse to make moral judgments is impossible, for even those who misquote Christ’s words, “Judge not,” judge that those who make moral judgments are wrong. All moral judgments are judgments; that is, they are matters of true and false, right and wrong.

Because we are rational beings made in the image of God, we cannot avoid making moral judgments. Moral agnosticism, which says we cannot know what is right and wrong, what is true and false, in matters of ethics and morality, is as self-contradictory and Antichristian as theological agnosticism. The Greek root of *agnostic* is *agnosis*, which literally means, “without knowledge.” Its Latin equivalent is *ignoramus*. Agnosticism is not a

position; it is a confession of ignorance; and ignorant people, particularly those who are proud of their ignorance, are not to be learned from; they need to be taught. Unfortunately agnostics—some of whom are arrogant, ignorant people—control both the churches and academy. As we have seen, ignorance of the truth, in their view, is commendable, for it shows we are humble, finite creatures. When moral agnostics teach that one must never judge others or their actions, they are attacking knowledge and truth; when they teach that distinguishing good from evil is evil, they are making a moral judgment. It is impossible to avoid making intellectual and moral judgments; the only question is whether such judgments will be made correctly or not.

Judging ideas, men, and their actions is an extremely serious matter. Here is Christ’s statement about judging that is so often misquoted by religious moral agnostics:

Judge not, that you be not judged, for with what judgment you judge, you will be judged, and with the same measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, “Let me remove the speck out of your eye”; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will clearly see to remove the speck out of your brother’s eye.

Do not give what is holy to the dogs, nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces. (*Matthew 7:1-6*)

It will be well worth our while to analyze Christ’s statement, for Christ does not endorse moral agnosticism; he does not command us not to judge *simpliciter*; and his statement clearly shows both how we are to make moral judgments and the purpose for making them.

The first thing to note is that Christ concludes this statement by commanding us not to give what is holy to the dogs—expecting us to judge what is holy and what is not, and who are dogs and who are not. He repeats the idea: Do not cast your pearls before swine; and he expects us to judge which things are pearls and which are not, and who are swine and who are not. All this requires judgment, and moral judgment is an intellectual act. One cannot obey Christ’s injunctions here without making moral judgments. The moral agnostic would have us believe that there are no dogs and there are no

swine—"I'm OK; you're OK"; "There's no such thing as a bad boy"—and there are no pearls, nor anything that is holy. The moral agnostic cannot obey Christ.

Now Christ not only expects Christians to make moral judgments; he tells us how to make them: "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment" (*John 7:24*). The sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden was to judge according to appearance; their sin was not the fact that they judged; nor was it the fact that they used their own human faculty of judgment in deciding whether to obey or disobey God. As rational beings, we all must constantly use our own judgments; that is included in the idea of rationality.¹⁴ The sin of Adam and Eve was not in judging, but in using the wrong standard to make their judgment. Rather than judging by the standard of God's propositional revelation, they choose to judge by the evidence of their senses, "according to appearance":

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. (*Genesis 3:6*)

The sin of Adam and Eve was not their use of private judgment, as some totalitarian theologians have suggested, but their abandonment of propositional revelation as the only standard by which to make all judgments. Adam and Eve did not believe the Word of God, and their unbelief separated them and all their children born by natural generation from God.¹⁵ Judging by appearance was also the sin of the Jews in *John 7*, when Christ commanded them to "judge righteous judgment," not according to appearance. Making moral judgments is a serious affair. We must use the Word of God as our only standard in making such judgments, and we must labor to understand that Word, praying that God will give us wisdom in applying the principles of his Word to specific men, ideas, and events.

Unlike the first Adam, the second and last Adam, according to Isaiah, will not judge according to appearance:

There shall come forth a rod from the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the

Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. His delight is in the fear of the Lord, and he shall not judge by the sight of his eyes, nor decide by the hearing of his ears, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the Earth. (*Isaiah 11:1-4*)

Notice that in all these passages it is not judging *per se* that is condemned, but judging according to the wrong standard. That is also how we should understand Paul's words in *Romans 14*:

Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls.... But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.... So then each of us shall give account of himself to God. Therefore let us not judge one another any more, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.

In this passage Paul is speaking of "doubtful things"—things about which brothers may differ. When there is no clear statement of Scripture, or no clear inference from Scripture, by which to judge, we must indeed not judge; we must recuse ourselves, for in those cases we would be making our own opinions our standard of judgment. It is that sort of judging that Paul condemns in this passage; he does not condemn judging according to the Word of God. Paul commands Christians—such as the Christians at Corinth—to judge church members for their scandals. It is not judging, but incorrect judging that Paul condemns. The misinterpretation of Paul's words has caused the virtual disappearance of church discipline.

James' warning against unlawful judging in the fourth chapter of his letter is the same:

Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?

James has in mind the judge who establishes his own opinion as his standard of judgment. By adopting a standard of judgment other than the Word of God, this

¹⁴ The Roman Catholic Church-State rants and rails against private judgment; what it really fears is rationality.

¹⁵ This, by the way, is why belief alone unites us to Christ.

sort of person judges the law itself. But James reminds us that there is only one Lawgiver, and no mere man (or group of men) has the competence to establish his own opinions as law.

Many commands are given to us to forsake our own imaginations and our own ideas, and instead to think God's thoughts, revealed to us in Scripture alone, and to bring all our thoughts into captivity to Christ. But nowhere in Scripture is there a command to forsake logic, to abandon the mind, or to spurn the gift of rationality.¹⁶ In fact, in order to bring all our thoughts into captivity to Christ, we must become not less and less rational, but more and more rational, for Christ is the *Logos, the logic and wisdom of God*. Scripture in hundreds of passages praises knowledge, wisdom, and understanding, and urges—commands—all men to seek them ardently. The book of *Proverbs* and *Psalms* 119 show that clearly. The central concern of Scripture is epistemological: How can we know God? But those who think that God (or the universe) is illogical or irrational think that men ought to be so as well. Such ideas are not only Antichristian, they are self-stultifying: No one can applaud the virtue of irrationality without using the very laws of logic he despises. To speak—even to think—the misologist must use the law of contradiction. He cannot win the war against logic and rationality; he cannot even declare it. As soon as he formulates a thought, he has lost the war, and the *Logos* has won. That is why the fellow who says silently in his heart, let alone out loud, that there is no God, is a fool: He must use the Logic that lights every man even to think that there is no Light.

Now this is a very important matter. The lack of discernment in today's churches, the reluctance to make distinctions, the antipathy to rendering moral judgments—all of this means that proper distinctions are not being made and righteous judgments are not being rendered. *It does not mean that distinctions and judgments are not being made at all*. Insofar as anyone thinks at all, he must make distinctions and render judgments. Just as the irrationalist is fatally ignorant of the fact that he must use rationality to propound irrationalism, so the moral agnostic—the man who is opposed to making judgments—is fatally ignorant of the fact that he must make moral judgments in order to state his position. The judgment the moral agnostic unwittingly makes is this: "Judging others is wrong." But the moral agnostic does not stop

with that judgment; he eagerly adds another: "Those who judge others are wrong." And in these two moral judgments we can see clearly the self-stultifying, self-contradictory nature of the notion that one ought not to make moral judgments. If those who judge others are wrong, as the moral agnostic asserts, then moral agnostics are wrong, for they judge those who make judgments. That is why the Bible neither condemns nor commends those who make no judgments—for there are no such people—but instead condemns those who make false judgments, who call good, evil, and evil, good:

Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil, who put darkness for light, and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter. Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight. (*Isaiah* 5:20-21)

By refusing to distinguish good from evil, right from wrong, true from false—that is, by attempting to abandon logic and rationality—a person merely succeeds in making evil judgments. He calls good, evil, and evil, good. It is the man who makes perverse judgments that the Bible condemns. Ironically, the most censorious men are those who condemn anyone who makes a moral judgment.

Scripture repeatedly commands Christians to "test," to "try," to "judge," and to "prove" all things. For example, in *1 Thessalonians* 5:21, Paul commands us to "test all things; hold fast what is good." *Isaiah* commands us in these words:

And when they say to you, "Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter," should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living? To the Law and to the Testimony! If they do not speak according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them. (*Isaiah* 8:19-20)

John tells us, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (*1 John* 4:1). And in his *Gospel*, "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment" (*John* 7:24). In *Proverbs* we are commanded: "Open your mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy" (31:9). Paul, giving instructions for church meetings, says, "Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge" (*1 Corinthians* 14:29). Scripture commands us to be skeptical of everything except

¹⁶ The command in *Proverbs* 3:5 to "trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding" is not a command to become irrational, but to accept truth as a gift from God, rather than relying on one's own observations and opinions.

the written Word of God, and to judge all things by that Word. The Bereans were commended for testing even an apostle's preaching by the written Word.

In all this, Christians are exercising their rationality. In his letters, Paul repeatedly makes moral judgments. For example, in *Romans* 1 Paul writes: "professing themselves to be wise, they became fools." In *1 Corinthians* 5 he writes, "And you are puffed up." In verses 11 through 13 he gives further instructions:

But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person. For what have I to do with judging those who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore, "put away from yourselves that wicked person."

Here Paul's command to judge—to distinguish and evaluate certain persons in the church as fornicators, covetous, idolaters, revilers, drunkards, and extortioners—is followed by a command to separate from such men. It is a command to exercise church discipline. But the moral agnostics in the churches, because they are opposed to rendering moral judgments, are opposed to discipline and to separation as well, a point to which we shall return shortly.

Paul continues his discussion of judging:

Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters [now]? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more [then], things that pertain to this life? (*1 Corinthians* 6:2-3)

Here Paul expects Christians to judge; he demands that they judge. Paul himself calls men "foolish" (*Galatians* 3:1), "dogs" and "evil workers" (*Philippians* 3:2), as well as "saints."

But what is the motivation of the moral agnostic who urges us not to judge others and who condemns us for doing so? It is not benevolence or tolerance. One motivation is quite clear: The moral agnostic wants to escape judgment himself. He thinks that if no one is permitted to judge others, then he himself will escape judgment. Paul explains in *Romans* 1 that sinful men suppress the truth (which they know innately) in

unrighteousness, for they do not like to retain God in their knowledge, because the wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness. Men, "knowing the righteous judgment of God, that they who practice such things are worthy of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them." The proscription of moral judgment is a futile attempt by sinners to escape judgment. Paul says that moral agnosticism is futile, whether one condemns or approves the sinful practices of others:

Therefore, you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? (*Romans* 2:1-3)

One motivation that lies behind moral agnosticism is the desire to escape the judgment of God for one's own beloved sins. Its purpose is to allow the unrepentant sinner to escape uncondemned and unpunished. When a moral agnostic argues that we must not judge between good and evil, his advice, when followed, benefits only the evil and harms only the good. To refuse to judge righteous judgment is not neutrality or tolerance; it is an attack on the good and a sanction to the evil.

There is a related but slightly different motivation as well: Whenever a person makes a judgment, that judgment discloses his own values, his own standard, and opens him to judgment by others. If a man would not judge, the moral agnostic believes, then he would not reveal his own values, and he would escape the judgment of others in this way as well. The Bible's statement of the principle that in judging one discloses one's own values is found in the *Gospel of Matthew*:

A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the Day of Judgment. For by your words you will be justified and by your words you will be condemned. (*Matthew* 12:35-37)

Once again Scripture teaches that the moral agnostic cannot escape judgment by refusing to judge, for he

cannot refuse to judge. Rational creatures must judge, and we will all be held accountable for the judgments we make, the words we speak, the thoughts we think. The moral agnostic condemns moral judgment because he hopes to avoid responsibility for his own sins. He does not want to be held accountable by God or by anyone else. He desires to be a law unto himself, a completely irresponsible, a completely lawless, being.

Black, White, and Gray

One of the most common forms moral agnosticism takes is illustrated in the statements: “There are no blacks and whites, only shades of gray”; and “There are two sides to every issue.” Moral grayness, we are told, applies to everything: persons, ideas, actions, events, principles, movements, and organizations—to every ethical issue. “There are no blacks and whites” is the ethical counterpart to the epistemological falsehood: “All truth is relative.” The ethical statement, in fact, logically depends on the epistemological statement, for moral judgments are a species of the genus judgment. Both statements are hopelessly contradictory. The statement, “All truth is relative” is proclaimed as an absolute truth, true for all people at all times, thus contradicting itself. If it is true that “all truth is relative,” and this is a truth, then it must be false that “all truth is relative.” On the other hand, if truth is absolute, then it is false that truth is relative. In either case, the statement “all truth is relative” is false. Similarly, if it is true that “there are no blacks and whites,” then there can be no gray, for gray is nothing but a mixture of black and white. Those who parrot, “There are no blacks and whites” intend the statement to be understood as white, that is, as a correct statement, without any mixture of error or evil. If the statement itself were gray, then it would be partly wrong, and nobody would be required to believe it. Those who assert, “There are no blacks and whites, only shades of gray” do not intend the statement to be an evil statement or a false statement, or a mixture of right and wrong. They want us to take it as white, even while they deny the existence of white. Moving from metaphor to literal language, if there were no goods or evils, no rights or wrongs, nothing true and nothing false, there could literally be nothing at all—including the principle that “there are only shades of gray.”

Before one can evaluate or judge (as we have already seen, judgment cannot be avoided; the only question is whether one will judge correctly or not) a person, an idea, or an action as “gray,” that is, before one can legitimately conclude that it is a mixture of good and evil, one must have distinguished good and evil in the

person, event, or action, and judged them to be so. But if one has already distinguished—discerned—the good and evil, there is no excuse for maintaining that there is only gray. That is as black a lie as one can imagine. Nor is there any excuse for choosing some evil along with the good—nor for denigrating the good by calling it gray, nor for condoning the evil by calling it gray. If by saying, “There are two sides to every issue,” one simply means that it is wise and prudent to hear all arguments before deciding a matter, that is quite true—but it is not what the users of the platitude usually mean. They mean that there are two sides to every issue, and both sides are right. There is no right or wrong; there are only “right” and “right.” There is no true or false; there are “true” and “true.” We ought not to judge anything good or bad, right or wrong, for there are two sides to every issue.

Moral agnostics, like their theological cousins, do not state their agnosticism tentatively; they do not humbly say, “I do not know,” for that would be a candid admission of their ignorance. But it is not their ignorance that they are admitting. They are actually boasting of their omniscience. They are asserting that no one can know. They say (translating their words into their actual meaning), usually quite loudly and boldly, “No one knows, and no one can know.” They are very dogmatic about their agnosticism. And they are very arrogant in accusing anyone who claims to know of arrogance and pride. Usually they interrupt by exclaiming, “You don’t think in terms of black and white, do you?” And the victim of such an attack, if he is unsure of his own epistemological and moral principles, is frequently intimidated by the confident tone of the agnostics who are stating an objection so obvious, a principle so absolute—there are no blacks and whites—that only a fool would not know it. Rather than be intimidated, what the victim must do is translate the agnostic objection into literal language: “You don’t think in terms of right and wrong, do you?” or “You don’t think in terms of good and evil, do you?” or “You don’t attempt to distinguish between good and evil, do you?” or “You don’t dare to judge something good and something evil, do you?” or “You don’t try to tell right from wrong, do you?” When the platitudinous objection is translated into clear, literal English, one can begin to understand how evil the idea of moral grayness—of moral agnosticism—is. It is not good men who use such ideas; it is those who cherish their sins and want to avoid their just condemnation. Moral agnosticism, like theological agnosticism, is not an independent position;

it is disguised evil—unbelief masquerading as ignorance; sin masquerading as neutrality.¹⁷

The Sin of Silence

Since the Christian is commanded to test all things by the written Word of God, he must be prepared to do so. The fear of men, the doctrine of moral agnosticism, and the popular condemnation of judging must not induce him either to agree with the world or to remain silent. Whenever the Christian is confronted with any situation in which the Bible and its doctrines are attacked, he must speak up. How he speaks up will depend on the situation, but that he speaks up is his duty.

Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.... Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell.... Therefore, whoever confesses me before men, him I will also confess before my Father in Heaven. But whoever denies me before men, him I will also deny before my Father who is in Heaven. (*Matthew 10*)

In some situations, a simple objection, such as “That is not what the Bible says,” or “That statement is not true,” may suffice. Other situations will call for more extended responses, rebuttals, and refutations. But in all situations in which the faith is under attack in the presence of a Christian, the Christian must speak up. He cannot adopt a neutral position by remaining silent, expressing neither agreement nor disagreement, for to be silent when falsehood is taught and truth denied is not neutral—it is an alliance with falsehood and treason to truth. In such a situation, silence speaks loudly: “There is no difference between right and wrong; there is no difference between true and false.” To fail to object when error is taught and truth denied is to condone error by treating error and truth as if they were the same. If Christ is under attack and a Christian keeps silent, he has not maintained his neutrality, he has denied Christ.

¹⁷ The sin of the church at Laodicea seems to be of this sort: “And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, ‘These things says the Amen, the Faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: ‘I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth’ ” (Revelation 3:14-16).

It is imperative not only to know, to discern, and to judge, but to speak as well; it is required not only to apply Biblical principles to all thoughts and actions, but also to express that judgment when Biblical ideas are being denied. And it is required not only to express our judgment, but to defend it as well. Luther wrote:

Confessing Christ is the most important activity in Christian life; on it one must venture life and limb, goods and honor. The evil spirit does not so severely assail him who believes aright and lives a good life in seclusion and by himself. But to come out into the open and spread, confess, preach, and extol one’s faith for the good of others also, that he cannot bear.¹⁸

In defending the faith a Christian must keep his focus on what is most important: doctrine and ideas. He must not allow himself to be distracted by personal attacks, either on himself or by him on others. Again Luther:

I am not concerned with life but with doctrines. Evil life does no great harm except to itself. But evil teaching is the most pernicious thing on Earth, for it leads hosts of souls to Hell. Whether you are good or bad does not concern me, but I will attack your poisonous and lying teaching which contradicts God’s Word, and with God’s help I will oppose it vigorously.¹⁹

There is another reason why we must always discern and always speak: Keeping the lines sharply drawn between good and evil, white and black, truth and error, is vital, not only to the well-being of those who might hear us, but to our own well-being. If we fail to exercise our judgment, as natural-born sinners we slip back into the moral twilight in which all principles and actions are gray. “Solid food,” the writer of *Hebrews* says, “belongs to those who are full of age, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (5:14). If we do not exercise our senses (that is, our rational faculties, not our nose and ears), then we will not be able to discern, to tell right from wrong, true from false, good from evil. By failing to judge and to speak up we not only deny Christ, we harm our neighbors and ourselves. By not exercising our rational faculties, we regress or fail to develop, to grow as Christians. We lose the ability to tell right from wrong.

¹⁸ *What Luther Says*, Plass, editor, 597.

¹⁹ *What Luther Says*, 1224.

The Sin of Collaboration

As we have seen, one of the functions—the basic function—of rational minds is to know. Knowing requires one to distinguish and to separate things that are different. The laws of logic involve the discernment of A and not-A, where A represents any word and any thing. The law of identity, A is A—a thing is itself—requires that we identify a thing. The law of contradiction, not both A and not-A—a word, in order to mean something, must also not mean something—requires that we distinguish between something and all other things. The law of the excluded middle, either A or not-A, eliminates “continuum thinking” and the morass of moral grayness. Logic is indispensable in knowing and discerning.

All that we have said above about the lack of discernment, the dearth of knowledge, the condemnation of judging, and the moral grayness that are prevalent in church and society applies to very practical problems: Which church should one attend and join, if any? Which charities should one support financially, if any? Which denomination should a congregation join, if any? Whom should we cooperate with in evangelism, if anyone? In political action? Many people do not think about these questions at all. The notion that there are some Biblical, theoretical principles that help us make practical decisions is foreign to many people. They have adopted the pragmatic view: Do whatever works.

If it were true that there are no blacks and whites but only shades of gray, it really would not matter which church one joins. Sometimes those who are concerned about the doctrines their church is teaching are told, “There are no perfect churches, so you might as well stay here.” Do you, dear reader, discern the “only shades of gray” dogma in this statement? It is as if one were to argue, “There are no perfect women (or men), so it doesn’t matter whom you marry.” Or “There are no pure foods, so it doesn’t matter what you eat.” The “no perfect churches” argument is a variation of the “only shades of gray argument.” It is designed and intended to prevent one from examining the doctrine of the church, to thwart discerning truth and error in the church’s teaching. Many people buy that argument. People who would not think of acting so foolishly in hiring employees or eating food check their minds at the church door, along with their coats. We have been told for centuries that Christianity is a matter of heart, so many Christians do not use their heads.²⁰ We applaud foolishness and imprecision in religion as piety or true spirituality or theo-

logical profundity. It is nothing of the sort. Foolishness in religion is a sin greater than foolishness in business or family. The stakes are much higher in matters of theology than they are in matters of finance.

Now there are principles, Biblical principles, that answer the questions I raised above about cooperation and collaboration with others. The first principle is this: Do not collaborate with anyone, Christian or non-Christian, for a non-Christian purpose. What do I mean by “non-Christian purpose”? It is an aim or goal that is not explicitly Christian and stated as such by the organization. Providing relief to hurricane victims, for example, is a non-Christian purpose, if that relief is not given in the name of Jesus Christ, together with the Gospel. Christ did not say that it is the giving of a cup of cold water that is good, but the giving of a cup of cold water “in Christ’s name.”²¹ The purpose must be explicitly Christian. Now as citizens we all must cooperate with governors; we are told even to go the extra mile if they make us go one mile.²² Slaves are instructed to obey their masters.²³ Those are instances in which cooperation is compulsory. In the family, Christian spouses are not to leave non-Christian spouses, but to cooperate with them. The marriage contract is legally and morally binding. Children are to obey, that is, cooperate with, non-Christian parents. Employees are to obey their employers. But even in these situations cooperation extends only to purposes that are not sinful. If a governor, a spouse, an employer, or a parent commands one to do something sinful, one is to disobey—to refuse to cooperate.

In the economy, Christians are free to cooperate with anyone when they engage in trade; they are not required to trade only with other Christians. That is one of the implications of Paul’s teaching about meat offered to idols. But cooperation and collaboration are two different things. In a market economy one cooperates daily with people one does not even know. Cooperation does not require even acquaintance with others, let alone unity of purpose. The buyer intends to purchase the wares for his own good. The seller intends to sell the wares—for his own good. God has so structured the market economy that producers and consumers, unknown to each other, cooperate with each other, though their purposes might be as different as night and day. There is in the economy a division of labor such that each person

²¹ “For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in my name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward” (*Mark* 9:41).

²² *Matthew* 5:41.

²³ *Colossians* 3:2.

²⁰ Of course, the Bible makes no distinction between the heart and the head. See “The Church Effeminate.”

benefits, though he may not even know most of the persons with whom he cooperates.

Collaboration, unlike cooperation, requires unity of purpose. One may collaborate with persons unknown, say in a large political or social organization, but only for a common purpose. The principle governing collaboration is: Do not collaborate in any purpose, project, or organization that has a non-Christian purpose. We are not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers.

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God.... Therefore, Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. (2 *Corinthians* 6:14-17)

Notice that the reason that Christians are not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers is fundamental: Light and darkness, righteousness and lawlessness, Christ and Belial have nothing in common. The reason there is to be no collaboration is not to avoid personality conflicts, but because the systems of thought to which believers and unbelievers belong are antithetical to each other. Now both believers and unbelievers, because they are sometimes logically inconsistent with their most fundamental beliefs, may have some views in common; both may believe in God, for example. James tells us that the devils believe in one God, and they tremble. But Christians are not free to join organizations established for ecumenical purposes simply because the devils are monotheists, although some recent religious writers have advocated an alliance of all monotheists to oppose atheists.²⁴ It is not some incidental overlapping of views that is important, but the different thought systems to which believers and unbelievers belong that require them to remain separate.

The principle of non-collaboration implies that Christians should not attend or join a church that does not believe and teach the whole counsel of God. Christians should not contribute either their time or their resources to any church or to any other organization that does not believe the Bible, especially the doctrine of justification by faith alone—and that includes charitable, educational, political, and social organizations. All that Christians do

is to be done in the name of Christ. To offer their time or money for any purpose which is not explicitly Christian is a violation of the principle of non-collaboration.

The laws of the Old Testament tried to teach the idea of separation—non-collaboration—to the Hebrews in many ways: no hybrid seeds, no mixed fabric, no intermarriage with unbelievers, etc. The lessons frequently failed. Many Hebrews failed to see the theological reason for non-collaboration. Three thousand years later, many still fail to understand the theological reason. God is separate from the creation; he is transcendent. God is holy, and he desires a holy—that is, a separated—people. In the Old Testament separation was political and physical; in the New it is neither: It is intellectual and institutional. Abram was called out from Ur of the Chaldees, away from his family, so that God could form a new people. God separates:

You shall therefore distinguish between clean beast and unclean, between unclean birds and clean, and you shall not make yourselves abominable by beast or by bird, or by any kind of living thing that creeps on the ground, which I have separated from you as unclean. And you shall be holy to me, for I the Lord am holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine. (*Leviticus* 20:25-26)

Christ today separates people, not geographically, but spiritually, one by one:

Do you suppose that I came to give peace on Earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division. For from now on five in one house will be divided: three against two and two against three. Father will be divided against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. (*Luke* 12:49-53)

It is not just Abram's family that is divided; in the New Covenant it is all families. Christ is building his church, and to build it, he must first separate the stones from the world and then assemble them into one building. The church cannot be assembled, it cannot be unified, unless many separations occur first.

At the Last Judgment, there will be a final separation:

²⁴ Two of these writers are John Paul II and Peter Kreeft.

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate them from one another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And he will set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on his left. (*Matthew* 25:31-33)

There is another, related reason for the principle of non-collaboration: When Christians collaborate with non-Christians in non-Christian organizations, Christianity is diluted or denied, and the false opinions of non-Christians prevail. Continued collaboration between believers and unbelievers in non-Christian organizations always leads to a further denial of truth. If the common cause in which both Christians and non-Christians are engaged is not explicitly Christian, Christians are working to further a non-Christian cause. Those persons who hold views consonant with the purpose of the organization have the moral high ground and a psychological edge; it is the Christians who are out of step with the purpose of the organization. The Christian has nothing to gain by working for a non-Christian purpose; the non-Christian has much to gain by exploiting the time, resources, and reputations of Christians for non-Christian purposes. The Christians lend an aura of respectability and rationality to the non-Christian enterprise, and non-Christian ideas and purposes benefit. Worst of all, the ideas of Christianity themselves become muddled, distorted, and perverted by such collaboration. Only unbelief can benefit from such a situation.

The cause of Christ has nothing to gain by vagueness, distortion, indirection, or irrationality. Because Christianity is the only rational religion—the only religion that teaches the truth—it has nothing to hide. Unbelief needs obscurity; it requires vagueness; it demands grayness; it has everything to hide, because it is evil. The chief work of the devil is deception, and he must hide his purposes under the appearance of genuine belief. It would do the devil no good candidly to admit that deception is his goal; people must be deceived, first of all, about deception. Paul prayed earnestly that his readers and listeners would not be deceived, and that he would teach the Gospel boldly and clearly. Boldness means no pulling of punches, no fear of men, but an intransigent allegiance to the truth of Scripture. We are also instructed to teach the whole counsel of God, not merely those parts that certain non-Christian organizations might tolerate for awhile. Christianity is a *system* of thought, a logical concatenation of premises and conclusions, not a collection of unrelated, disjointed, discrete facts. The Word of God is

also to be handled accurately, rightly divided, and taught clearly. None of these requirements can be met by Christians who are collaborating with non-Christians for a non-Christian purpose. Still less can such collaborators present the Word of God clearly in such situations, for they have already compromised their positions by joining non-Christian organizations. Unbelief, irrationality, has everything to gain by obscuring the truth of Christianity, and by confusing Christians. When Christians collaborate with non-Christians for non-Christian purposes, it is only unbelief that can gain. That is why Christians should always strive to make their doctrines crystal clear, to define their terms, to explain the ideas in the Bible as unambiguously and as precisely as possible. Unbelief has everything to gain by the lack of definition, by confusion; Christianity has everything to lose.

There is, of course, another possibility: Suppose that Christians collaborate with non-Christians in Christian organizations for Christian purposes. Many churches are in this situation: The churches are confessionally committed to Christianity, but there are non-Christians among the Christians in the church. Does the principle of non-collaboration imply that Christians should leave such churches? Not at all. In such situations, where the purpose for which the organization exists is an explicitly Christian purpose, then Christians may not only attend and join, but support and lead. In such situations, since the purpose of the organization is explicitly Christian, it is the Christians who have the moral high ground and the psychological edge; it is the non-Christian who is out of step. In such situations, there ought to be no toning down of Christianity, no compromise with the world, and if anyone leaves, it ought to be the non-Christians. That is where church discipline comes in. Of course, if we have been misled by a misunderstanding of Christ's commands about judging, there will be no church discipline. Martyn Lloyd-Jones made some pertinent remarks on the subject:

Discipline, to the Protestant fathers, was as much a mark of the church as the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments. But we know very little about discipline [today]. It is the result of this flabby, sentimental notion that you must not judge, and which asks, "Who are you to express judgment?" But the Scripture exhorts us to do so.

The question of judging applies also in the matter of doctrine. Here is this question of false prophets to which our Lord calls attention. We are supposed to detect them and to avoid them. But that is impossible without a knowledge of

doctrine, and the exercise of that knowledge in judgment.... In writing to Titus he [Paul] says, "A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject." How do you know whether a man is a heretic or not if your view is that, as long as a man calls himself a Christian, he must be a Christian, and you do not care what he believes? Then go on to John's epistles, John "the apostle of love." ...If a man come to you and does not hold the true doctrine, you must not receive him into your house, you must not bid him Godspeed and provide him with money to preach his false doctrine. But today it would be said that that is a lack of charity, that it is being over-punctilious and censorious. The modern idea, however, is a direct contradiction of the Scripture teaching with regard to judging.²⁵

Unfortunately many American Christians have ignored the Bible's instructions on discipline and non-collaboration with non-Christians. One example of this disobedience to Scripture is the Neo-evangelical movement. It repudiated the separationist—derogatorily called isolationist—theology of the fundamentalists and began to collaborate with those who were not Reformed, were not Protestant, and were not Evangelical. The evangelist Billy Graham became one of the leading Neo-evangelicals of the century, inviting theological liberals, Roman Catholics, and churchmen of all sorts to cooperate with him in his "crusades." The results of this sin of collaboration surround us: *Christianity Today*, the leading publication of the Neo-evangelicals, is a hotbed of feminism, heterodoxy, Arminianism, Pentecostalism, and liberalism; there is widespread apostasy in the Evangelical churches; feminism and socialism reign in Neo-evangelical educational institutions; the Neo-evangelicals are promoting union with Rome through Evangelicals and Catholics Together; the Roman Church is by far the largest in America, and growing rapidly; and Evangelical pastors are defecting to Rome in significant numbers. The Neo-evangelicals thought they were smarter than God and could infiltrate liberal institutions in order to win them over. By collaboration with non-Christians, they lost their Christianity.

Conclusion

Today's churches and churchgoers lack discernment because they lack knowledge and wisdom. They lack knowledge and wisdom for two reasons: There is a famine of the preaching of God's Word in America, and churchmen and churchgoers despise logic, clarity,

definition, and precision. There is a famine of preaching and hearing God's Word and a disdain for logic because God apparently intends to destroy us, either temporally or eternally or both. The only way in which to improve the situation is by repenting of the sin of unbelief, the sin of irrationality, the sin of moral agnosticism, the sin of silence, and the sin of collaboration; by begging the forgiveness of God; and by asking God, who is Truth himself, for wisdom:

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

²⁵ *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 1960, II, 164-165.