

THE COVENANT INTERPRETATION OF CULTURE

I. THE CONTEMPORARY INTERPRETATION OF CULTURE

The study of human culture is a relatively new field of investigation. Before the days of Auguste Comte there were few who were interested in humanity in the mass. Historians tended to think in terms of battles and kings, while the economists thought primarily of the individual and the state. It was in the nineteenth century, however, with its interest in social phenomena which traversed all national boundaries, that the situation changed. People began to think in terms of society and even more in terms of civilizations and cultures. The result today is a plethora of books appearing on the market dealing with "patterns of culture", "theories of human culture", "history and trends of culture". Men are trying to obtain an over-all view of man and his activities in the hope that by such a view many of society's problems may be solved.

When we examine a number of the interpretations of human culture which have been developed we find that they all have a similar pattern. For one thing they are usually immanentistic. The character or pattern of any one particular culture, we are told, is determined entirely by forces inherent in its own environment.¹ In fact we are not infrequently assured that a culture is entirely a matter of the physical surroundings—climate, soil, etc.—in which it dwells.² Others, while admitting that culture is partially influenced by physical surroundings, would maintain that there is also the factor of social modification resulting from human thought and action.³ Thus culture becomes more than merely the product of physical forces. Man has a part in its development.

Yet, despite the place that the social or intellectual factors are given in the analysis of various cultures, culture remains something arising entirely in and out of this world. Culture is kept strictly in man's grasp and under his control. Moreover, the proper interpretation of culture is entirely of man, for it

¹ R. Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (New York, 1947), chap. i; J. Feibleman, *The Theory of Human Culture* (New York, 1946), chap. iv.

² Montesquieu in his *Esprit des Lois* and Buckle in his *History of English Civilization* laid the foundation for this view.

³ Shaw, *Trends in Culture and Civilization* (New York, 1932), pp. 15 f.

results from man's collection and analysis of the brute facts of man's existence. Thus culture is fundamentally humanistic both in its origins and in its interpretation.

II. THE NEED FOR A CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING OF CULTURE

Such a position, of course, is one which a Christian must find hard to accept. Fundamental to any Christian interpretation of life is the creative, providential and redemptive activity of the sovereign Triune God. Over even human culture, God is the sovereign Lord; and it, as all other created facts, has no meaning apart from Him. Yet while a Christian would thus object to the usual interpretation of human culture, if one should ask him to explain, from a Christian point of view, the rise of human culture, he would probably be in a quandary. Relatively little has been done towards developing a Christian interpretation of culture. It is true that we have the work of such men as Kuyper, Dooyeweerd, Vollenhoven and Van Til along with others; but there seems to have been no real attempt to work out systematically a Christian statement of the meaning of culture. There have been studies of "common grace", the Christian view of the state, law, art, philosophy, etc., but there has been no study which really seems to pull all the threads together. What we need at the present time is a truly Christian exposition of the origins, development and purpose of human culture.

This means that we cannot merely adapt some humanistic theory of culture to a Christian point of view. We must have an approach to culture which is basically and specifically Christian. This means that any semi-Christian, wholly Marxian, Hegelian or existential position is fundamentally unsound. We must always keep in mind that there is no common ground of interpretation between the Christian and non-Christian points of view. They start from different premises, use different methods and thereby reach very different conclusions. This would seem to demand of us, therefore, a specifically Christian interpretation of human culture. We must seek a Christian over-all view of world cultures and their development.

While we have said above that we do not possess such a philosophy of culture, we must point out, on the other hand, that there have been efforts made in this direction. Augustine of Hippo, in his *City of God*, in a sense laid the foundation for

any subsequent work. He drew out quite clearly the fact that there are two kingdoms, God's and man's, which appear in the world of human thought, relations and actions. The medieval thinkers, adopting this point of view, attempted to develop a culture centred on what they considered to be God's Kingdom, the visible Church. In this they were, on the surface, surprisingly successful for a matter of five centuries; but they failed ultimately because in reality their view was based more on the tradition of the Roman Empire than on that of the New Testament. At the time of the Reformation, Calvin laid the ground-work for a truer approach to the problem, his principles being partially worked out during the following centuries in a number of countries. The most important expression came in political theory as in *Vindiciae contra Tyrannos*, Rutherford's *Lex Rex* and similar works. In more recent times a political philosophy has been expressed by Abraham Kuyper in his Stone Lectures on *Calvinism*, in his *Ons Program* and in his *Anti-revolutionaire Staatkunde*. The only difficulty is that none of these writers seems to have gone far enough afield to deal with the whole field of culture on a unified basis. Much of the ground-work has been done, particularly in the field of theology, i.e. in the formulation of the doctrine of "common grace". But despite these advances, no unified principle of direction has been presented.

Yet, despite this lack, when we turn back, particularly to the seventeenth-century writers, we find that they seem to have laid a solid foundation for us in the doctrine of the Covenant. While we may not necessarily follow them in all their views, the fact that they regarded the relation of ruler to subject as being under a divine covenant is an indication of their point of view.¹ If we take this idea, giving it expansion and direction, it would seem that we may find a real touchstone for the understanding of human culture. The "covenant-idea" in this way becomes the principle of human thought and human activity. The attempt of this article will be to lay down a ground-work for such a method of thinking. It makes no claim to finality, but is rather tentative and a groping in the direction of a Christian analysis of culture.

¹ H. J. Laski (ed.), *A Defence of Liberty Against Tyrants* (London, 1924), p. 71.

III. THE COVENANT INTERPRETATION

The "covenant principle" stands at the very centre of the whole Christian revelation, facing us wherever we turn. It is God's way of revealing Himself to man¹. There is the Covenant of Works before the Fall, while after the Fall, the basis of God's saving operation is to be found in the Covenant of Grace. What is more, we find various other covenants subordinate to and involved in the Covenant of Grace scattered throughout the Scriptures. A good example of such covenants is the Covenant of Nature in Genesis viii. Here both man's relation to man and man's relation to nature are established by God, as the basis of man's culture.

Thus it would seem that men such as the anonymous author of the *Vindiciae contra Tyrannos*, George Gillespie and others were not very far off when they talked in terms of covenant relationships as the basis of civil government. They realized of course that a covenant of this kind was imposed by God upon men, in order that they should do His will in this world.² But if this be true in the sphere of political organization, should it not be just as true in the field of economics, sociology, art and music? It would seem that for a true Christian interpretation of culture we must turn back to the concept of a divinely constituted covenant, for this would seem to be the basis of all human thought and social activity—for it is the essence of God's dealing with men.

We find the covenantal view of culture right at the commencement of the Scriptures, given in what is known as the Covenant of Works. By it, God placed man in a definite and particular relationship with Himself. He did not ask Adam to come to an agreement but rather He imposed on him a command, promising life or death according to the way in which he acted. In this way God impressed upon Adam the fact that he must make God the centre of all his life and thought. That he was to walk by faith alone was shown by the prohibition to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God gave no reason for His denial of this. He simply demanded Adam's unquestioning

¹ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, vii. 1.

² Cf. *Vindiciae*, p. 70: "Then, therefore, all kings are the vassals of the King of Kings, invested into their office by the sword, which is the cognisance of their royal authority, to the end that with the sword they maintain the law of God, defend the good, and punish the evil."

submission. If Adam truly believed God, he would obey and live. If he was disobedient, death would be the result.

This covenant, however, was not merely a matter of man's relations to God. By the very act of creation as well as by the covenant itself, cultural factors were involved. For one thing, man's dealings with nature and his attitude towards it were prescribed. Nature—physical nature—was God's possession and man by his creation and by the covenant was given the position of lord of creation. He had the work of naming the creatures and of tending the garden in which he had been placed. This he was to do, not for himself, but for God who had bestowed upon him in the covenant his duty. In this way he would have a true attitude of stewardship which reached its focal point in requirements laid down regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Here man's dealings with nature, or a part of nature, would be the test of his actual attitude towards God. Thus we may say that man's relationship to God was to depend upon the way in which he fulfilled his covenant obligations to nature.

Yet this is not the only cultural factor which appears. Man from the beginning had responsibilities not only to nature, but also to his fellow-men. This was brought out very clearly when Adam was given a wife—bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. His dealings with her were to be under the same control as were his dealings with nature. He was to be guided by God's will, revealed in the fact that she was part of him and was to be his helpmeet. For this reason he was to love Eve as himself. But in this very fact, Adam was now given a new relationship never before known to him. From himself and Eve were to come forth the human inhabitants of the world, who would likewise be bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh. Thus all men were to be brothers, and that in itself demanded that they should love each other as themselves. This is the most fundamental social requirement. Cain seems to have realized this when he rebelliously turned against God with the words: "Am I my brother's keeper?" In his defence he condemned himself, for he knew that, by God's covenant obligations laid upon man, man is his brother's keeper. This is what we might call the social requirement in the Covenant of Works.

Yet there was an active force in this covenant relationship—temptation. In this connection we must note that temptation came from outside man. Moreover, it came *via* nature itself,

and in a sense also *via* man. The serpent approached Eve and tempted her to eat of the forbidden fruit. There was no direct temptation to break with God, but rather it was indirectly through the cultural and social elements or phases of the covenant, that man was tempted to rupture his covenant relationship with God. He was tempted to look upon nature, personified in the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, as being outside the scope of God's covenant, and he was also tempted to regard Eve, who offered him the fruit, as an entity independent of God. Man failed to see that his relationship with God involved also his relationship to nature and other men. If he had resisted the temptation he would have seen this even more clearly than before. Moreover, if he had resisted he would have been able to go on, in God's favour and grace, to develop on the basis of the covenant with God, a perfect culture and civilization. The covenantal implications for culture would have been worked out to the full extent, and a true, because God-centred, interpretation of culture would have resulted.

The one obstacle to the development of such a culture was sin. Man was tempted and fell from his first estate. The fundamental fact in this was that he broke with God. Ceasing to recognize Him as the centre of the universe, he held himself up as the principal object of value. This meant the loss of faith and the complete destruction of man's true and proper orientation. Man now became totally self-centred. That fact immediately had important cultural effects both in the realm of nature and society.

Sin meant the breakdown of man's relationship to nature. For one thing, nature now became a thing accursed, producing thorns instead of fruit, and yielding sustenance to man only in return for man's death-dealing labour. That God should so have treated man is only natural, in that, since man had turned his back on God by claiming nature as his own in taking of the forbidden fruit, God was going to prove to man that nature was not his by right, but only for use and by grace. Ever since, man has been vainly trying to prove that nature is his to treat as he pleases, and just as certainly God has shown him that this is not so. Man has tried to exploit nature, treating it as though he owned it outright. Yet time and time again he has been brought to a halt. The Mosaic law stressed the fact that the land belonged to no one but God. Today God takes other means to bring that home to our sluggish hearts, such things as the

man-made dust-bowls of United States and Canada being good examples of the way in which He forces this salient fact upon our minds. But man still refuses to regard nature as a trust from God, and instead looks upon it as something to be exploited for his own profit.

The same seems to be true with regard to the relationship between man and man. No sooner had man sinned than lust, and shortly afterwards hatred, entered. No longer did man accept the view that since God was the Creator of all, therefore he had the obligation to love his fellow-men. Instead, there came into man's social relationships division, conflict and disintegration. The harmony of society was gone, leaving only man's greed, jealousy and hatred.

Because of the break-down of man's faith and obedience, his whole life was turned from its true focal point—the Sovereign Triune God. This in turn eventuated in the collapse of human culture. Neither man's relation to nature nor his relations with his fellows remained normal. Exploitation of both nature and man became the individual's fundamental drive. Selfishness and greed became the dominants in the new culture, which because of this was not, and is not, a true culture. Moreover, no matter how influential the grace of God may be, history as such knows and can know no culture without the irrational and anti-covenantal element of sin. Thus all cultures have within them the seed of their own destruction.

The only hope of culture, once sin had entered, lay with God. Man in his own sinful pride and nature, under the curse of God, could do nothing. Yet, if God were to act, it could not be by justice alone, for man would then be destroyed. Thus no sooner had man turned away from the Covenant of Works, than divine grace was introduced. "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. iii. 15). Here was God's expression of the Covenant of Grace. The old covenantal relationship was to be restored; this time not on the basis of man's works, but rather in God's grace and mercy. In this way man was to be brought back again to his focal point—the Sovereign God. This time, however, he was to come as the forgiven sinner, not as the innocent creature. Moreover, in this world at any rate, the restoration would never be complete, for some would not return, and even in those brought back would continue to lurk the seeds of sin.

The return to God meant and means that once again men begin to see themselves as they truly are. They acknowledge that God, the Creator, the Sustainer, the Redeemer, is the true Lord of all. In so doing they realize that their thinking, if it is to be truly right thinking, must commence with God and end with God. Right thinking means thinking God's thoughts after Him in every field of endeavour. Only then can man think correctly.

The Covenant of Grace, however, is not limited to thought, but also affects the application of thought, namely action. As sin and disobedience had given man a wrong slant on nature and his fellow-man, grace restores the true view. We find, for instance, that the Christian begins to realize that he, like his fellow, is under God's condemnation for sin. He also sees that it is only by God's grace that anyone can be restored. When that restoration takes place, then man begins to act, not for selfish motives, but rather it is the love of Christ that constrains him. It dominates his attitude towards his fellows. As this approach is developed, a change comes. Culture begins to take on a new form. There is a tendency towards true, God-centred culture which would appear in its full flower if only Christians in this life were more consistently devoted to their Covenant Head.

Grace is in this way the source of the changed relationship between man and nature. For one thing, while nature is cursed, God guarantees that it will respond to man's labour. The earth and all it produces is for man. Moreover, although labour is required to obtain the necessities from it, man can be sure that he will be successful in this. The regularity of the seasons is guaranteed (Gen. viii. 22), and man is told to use nature's products for himself. Man is thus given by grace the work of overcoming and ruling nature. Yet at the same time, God limited man's control. The blood of animals was not to be used, for that was the sign of life. Man had no ultimate control over nature, for the life was not his. He did but possess it in use (Gen. ix. 1-4).

The Covenant of Grace goes even farther. It lays down principles for the restoration of the proper relationship between man and man. It brings man face to face with the fact that by God's sovereign will he is living in the world with his fellows. Moreover, they are all under God's condemnation for sin, which sin has indeed brought them into conflict with each

other. This mutual antagonism can be eradicated only through the action of God by His sovereign grace. When men enter into the covenant relationship with God, they will then begin to enter into proper relationships with each other. This is the sum of all the law and the prophets: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy mind and with all thy strength, and thy neighbour as thyself." When the grace of God has restored us to the covenant relationship with God, it simultaneously brings us in principle into the covenant relationship with man. It means that we have the duty of loving our fellow, and of preserving him in this life as far as possible; for any attempt to remove man from this life is the greatest of all sins (Gen. ix. 5-7). Thus grace is not only a means of salvation, but it is the fountain from which proceeds all true social action.

IV. THE GENERAL APPLICATION OF THE COVENANT INTERPRETATION

This brings us face to face with the question of the practical meaning of the covenant idea of culture in everyday life. The covenant of nature lays upon the individual the obligation to use his physical environment, keeping in mind that it is given to him in trust, to be used to the glory of God. This is the true basis of all real stewardship of earthly possessions. At the same time, man is under obligation in every sphere of human relationships to love his fellow-man as himself. The practical application of these ideas should dominate man's existence, making effective what we have called the subordinate covenants of nature and society in practical life. They should become apparent, for instance, in the use of natural resources, in the formation and function of civil government, in the conduct of economic life and even in artistic expression. By the Covenant of Grace alone is culture given a standard or norm which will keep it from disintegration under the impact of sin.

Yet while we speak in terms of the Covenant of Grace, and its cultural principles, we must realize that it does not directly influence all men. All men do not accept the Gospel. Indirectly, however, the Covenant of Grace does have a general impact upon the world. It would seem that it is because of God's saving grace that He has had mercy upon all men, by preventing sin from bringing immediate destruction upon all. Even the unregenerate man still possesses rationality, a sense of

deity, as well as many capacities and talents. Likewise non-Christians receive blessings of nature from the grace of God. But what is more, there is the influence of the covenant itself upon unbelieving man, made effective through the testimony and lives of the covenant people. Therefore, while sin is still in the world and seemingly dominating it, yet even as ten righteous men would have saved Sodom, so for the sake of the covenant people sin is restrained, gifts and mercies bestowed upon men. This is the "common grace" of God; and it is this which we must take into account whenever we attempt to interpret cultures in terms of covenant relationships.

Keeping this fact in mind, we must deal with human culture as we find it in the world today. Can we as Christians analyse cultures, known historically, in terms of covenant? To this question the answer must be Yes. The covenant idea still remains as the foundation of human social relationships, albeit not in all its pristine beauty and glory. If we examine cultures in various stages of development or decay, we shall see that they are based upon the concept of covenant. God by His "common grace" has prevented the complete blotting out of this pattern of thought among men. If, however, its practice does disappear, the particular culture involved collapses.

When we look into primitive cultures we can perhaps gain some idea of how the covenant concept is manifested. In a work such as Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture*, the covenant idea is always implicit. The dominant relationship seems to be that of the individual to his god; and this in turn determines his relationship to his fellow, and the goods and lands which he possesses. Frazer's *Golden Bough* would seem to indicate much the same form of thought.¹ Cultures are, of course, modified by their environment. They are advanced or retarded. Nevertheless the covenant relationship even unconsciously forms each one's foundation.

A culture may gradually develop economically and scientifically, becoming more sophisticated as the years go by. As a result man increasingly becomes a self-sufficient individualist who by his basic selfish drives ignores his responsibility to his fellow-man. In this way the culture begins to disintegrate.

¹ Cf. Ruth Benedict, *op. cit.*, chaps. iv-vi; Sir James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (abridged edn., London, 1922), chaps. i-viii.

Efforts may be made to arrest the break-down by the imposition of a dictatorship of some kind, but the moral basis of the culture has gone. The culture then collapses before the onslaught of another culture whose covenant consciousness is stronger.

We must stress at this point, however, that this "covenant consciousness" is not a knowledge of the Covenant of Grace. It would seem to be a remnant of the covenant idea in general. It might almost be said to be something which grows out of man's very make-up, but it is a covenant which has lost its true centre—love of God and obedience to God. As man gains increasingly greater knowledge of the world, interpreting it in a purely immanentistic fashion, he gradually throws off the covenant idea—first with his god, then with his neighbour and along with both of these, with nature itself. As a culture progresses materially so those involved increase in pride. Thus the culture deteriorates morally until it falls to pieces. The culture's covenant basis has broken down.

We are brought at this point, however, to ask the question: Are all cultures doomed to utter collapse? While this is a hard question to answer, we can say that the only hope of any culture is the restoration of its covenantal basis. This is where the Gospel comes in. Its fundamental purpose is to restore man's covenant relationship with God. This is, of course, a restoration by grace and not by works. Simultaneously, the covenant being restored with God in principle, it brings also a restoration in principle of the covenant of man with man and of man with nature. Thus to the Christian, by the inworking of the Holy Spirit, the covenant relationship is restored, the Church becoming the living embodiment of the renewed covenant. This, however, will probably affect directly only a small portion of the people belonging to the culture. Yet the influence of the covenantal restoration may be much wider in scope than merely the immediate church members. As the "covenant people" bear faithful and true testimony to the grace of God, and to the proper relationship of man to man, and of man to nature, their words are heard by those without. The hearers may not believe or accept the covenant idea, but by the preaching of the covenant message, the cultural community is influenced through the working of God's Holy Spirit and the culture's downward trend may be retarded, through the strengthening of its implicit covenant relationships.

V. THE APPLICATION OF THE COVENANT IDEA TO OUR OWN CULTURE

Perhaps, rather than talking in abstract terms, it would be better to look at our own culture's development to see how this interpretation may be employed. When we do so, we find that first of all, its origins are both pagan and Christian. It has been raised upon the ruins of Greek and Roman civilization, both having fallen to pieces from internal weakness—the breakdown of the covenant concept. Yet the real core of our culture is Christianity, which, while using the ruins of the earlier civilization, has also been in tension with their dominant ideals. At one time Christianity dominated parts of the cultural scene, as in the Reformation period, but at most other times, particularly in the Middle Ages and since the seventeenth century, it has had a struggle to keep the covenant idea alive.

The Graeco-Roman ideal, particularly as set forth by the Renaissance, has increasingly dominated western thought and action. It might be added at this point that the Renaissance stressed the phases of thought predominant at the disintegration of the ancient cultures. These emphasized man's independence in the universe, holding that he was both its owner and its lord. All the thinking arising out of this premise regards the question of God as irrelevant, and places one's fellow-men as well as nature in a position of secondary importance.

Such thought achieved its earliest victories in the Church by means of Socinianism and Arminianism. Out of these and the Renaissance thinkers came deism, rationalism and eventually materialism. Man by the end of the eighteenth century had declared his independence of God, of his fellow-man and even of nature. The attitude for instance of a Baron d'Holbach, or even of the deist Voltaire, destroyed the idea of the covenant relationship with God. As for man's relationship with man, Rousseau tells us that all our natural rights derive from "two principles prior to reason, one of them deeply interesting us in our own welfare and preservation and the other exciting a natural repugnance at seeing any other sensible being . . . suffer pain or suffering." Shortly afterwards, Adam Smith was preaching the doctrine that "enlightened selfishness" was the proper attitude for man to adopt in dealing with his neighbour and with nature. There was, however, the restraining influence of Christianity upon such views, whether it came from Geneva, Clapham or

Herrnhut. Thus the covenant concept did not entirely disappear, although it was by no means popular.

The final attack upon the covenant idea was left for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a result of a further study of nature. Man completely rejected the idea that he must interpret nature on the basis of the covenant, i.e. by presupposing God as Owner and Redeemer. Instead he adopted the position that man could know and interpret nature truly without any reference to the Covenant God. Thus he ended by denying his covenant relationship with God, man and nature.

This view had been foreshadowed by Adam Smith, Malthus and others, but it received its clearest social statement in 1848 with the publication of the *Communist Manifesto*, while its scientific counterpart appeared in 1859 in Darwin's *Origin of Species*. Henceforth, culture was to be interpreted in terms of dialectic materialism and survival of the fittest. Nietzsche brought the climax in his "superman's will to power". Thus increasingly our culture has been interpreted in terms of materialism and a fundamentally selfish conflict. All that we are and have, we are told, came out of a conflict for material gain, along with technological organization and production, man's chief end.

In all probability this trend of our culture reveals itself most clearly in our social thought and action. It is generally taken for granted that we can understand society and its problems "scientifically", i.e. without reference to anything beyond the "facts". There is, of course, no idea of a covenant relationship, the stress being laid upon individual's rights, all of which must be protected if culture is to survive. There is little or no stress upon "responsibilities", for man would seem to be responsible to no one but himself. The result of such thinking has been exploitation of one group by another, until men began to feel that the only hope for society was increased government interference in order that its equilibrium might be maintained. Out of this has come various types of socialism; and in direct proportion to the violence of the preceding class-conflict is the thoroughness of the socialism, extending even to the dictatorships of German National Socialism or Russian Communism. It must also be noted that the violence of the conflict seems to have varied inversely to the influence and power of the Church's testimony. It is the preaching of the Covenant of Grace alone

which has helped to restrain the effects of man's rejection of the covenant idea.

The battle of the Church against the growing trend has been a losing one. This becomes everywhere apparent. One reason is, of course, that the Church's testimony has become increasingly feeble, the concept of the covenant of grace being gradually relegated to the theological background. Moreover, modern scientific materialism has gradually been accepted as the proper scientific point of view. Only the idea of man's covenant relationship with man has any shreds left, and even these are pretty well out of date.

If this is true of the Church's thinking, how much more is it the case in non-religious thought. The covenant idea regarding nature has departed. In the social sciences, the "covenant concept" is a sign of primitivism—or perhaps Calvinism! In natural science, it is not even considered. The facts are simply there, and there is nothing more to be said about them. There are no longer any truly physical laws, for they are merely human attempts to generalize a series of unrelated experiences. Everything is irrational and chance, even the human mind and will being nothing more than the plaything and sport of fate—atoms, genes and vitamins. Thus thought generally is breaking down. True reality is to be found in the Freudian subconscious, in dreams and insanity as represented in the writing of a Gertrude Stein, or in the art of a Picasso or Dali. The human mind, as H. G. Wells said, seems to have reached the end of its tether.

It is not, however, only a matter of our thinking, but also of our acting. No longer do we have any principles of conduct by which we are guided. We have harnessed the power of the atom, but are still in doubt whether we are going to employ it for our own destruction. If we go further, carrying the irrationalism of our thought to its logical conclusion, it is very possible that we shall lose even the capacity for mass destruction. Our science may disappear as did that of the Egyptians, the Babylonians and the Greeks before us. The covenant concept of nature having been forgotten, we no longer know how to use nature, and may likewise lose the knowledge already attained.

The same is true in the sphere of social action. As we are being told increasingly that there is really no link between man and man, social relationships are coming to be regarded as necessary merely for self-protection. Since our brother no longer has any moral claim upon us, society is facing a

breakdown. In the conflict of capital and labour, the conflict of nation and nation, there is basically nothing wrong, save that they may damage *us*. The ultimate end of an attitude such as this, without some restraining power, is anarchy, the anarchy of Greece or Rome in the collapse of their cultures. By the time that appears, the covenant ideas of God, man and nature have all departed, leaving chaos to reign supreme. The human mind has then truly reached the end of its tether.

Chaos is the opposite of culture; when culture dies, civilization dies, for culture is the soul of civilization. The culture makes the civilization, for a civilization is an outward thing, something which can be seen taking its forms in the buildings, the tools and the instruments of a people. The culture, however, is that which invents and determines the use to which the tools, the buildings, the vehicles are put. Two different cultures may employ the same sort of tool for two different purposes, thereby creating two different civilizations. But if all culture is destroyed, the result is civilization's death. And when men come to the conclusion that there is nothing beyond their own minds: no sense, no reason in the universe, and can see no rationale in society or nature, they are also inclined to feel that there is no point in making or doing anything. Complete disillusionment and cynicism bring inaction, resulting in civilization's disappearance.

What then of the future? Can we say that unless a culture is fully Christian its fate is sealed? No; we must realize that there is no such thing as perfect sanctification of the believer in this world, nor is there possible the complete sanctification of a culture. Yet this is no reason for our ignoring the problem of culture. Christians must act in their cultural environment, and influence it. The Church has borne a very considerable share in the building up of western culture, preserving it from collapse long ere this, as for instance at the time of the Reformation. Today it must bring man back to his true covenant-centre—the Triune God. It must impress upon man his covenant responsibilities in this world, thus restoring to man the true moral interpretation of this universe. This is what the world desperately needs today. It is our only hope.

How is this going to be done? Primarily, of course, it will be by the "foolishness of preaching". But in this day and age we are faced with the problem of natural science, social science,

psychology and other fields of study. They are producing non-Christian theories which make specific attacks upon the Christian covenant concept. We must, therefore, bring the covenant type of thinking back to men, pointing out the covenant implications, that Christians may think in these terms, and that they may likewise influence non-Christians to follow the same pattern of thought. Only then shall we be on the way to straightening the world out even a little. Only then will men begin to see themselves as they actually are, under covenant responsibility to nature, their fellow-men and God.

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