

THE TRINITY REVIEW

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.

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Joseph's Apes

John W. Robbins

In his book, *Westminster's Confession: The Abandonment of Van Til's Legacy*, Gary North, one of the leading spokesmen for the movement known as Theonomy or Christian Reconstruction, writes the following paragraphs about Joseph. They appear under the heading, "The Blessings of Serfdom."

Joseph, acting as the head of a pagan State, provides us with an acceptable model for a civil magistrate. The key question is this: In what circumstances is his model judicially legitimate: In a pagan State or a Christian State? I argue that his model is valid only in the former case. *Pagans who break God's civil laws deserve to be enslaved politically since they are enslaved religiously.* This is the message of Genesis. Joseph did the righteous thing in extracting everything from the Egyptians in the first two years: their land, their animals, and their money. Then, when they faced starvation in the third year, he gave them a choice: either perpetual bondage to Pharaoh, plus a perpetual obligation to pay 20% of their increase in taxes, or else starvation.

This rate of taxation was double the rate that Samuel said would constitute God's judgment against Israel (*I Sam.* 8:15, 17)... The text shows that Joseph made the Egyptians pay dearly to stay alive. He

bought their lands in the name of the State. He brought them into permanent slavery. He bargained sharply.

There was another quite obvious alternative: *Joseph could simply have given away the food, year by year.* The people would have retained their land and their legal status as free men. Later Joseph gave food to his family; he did not enslave them.... I argue in my commentary on Genesis that what Joseph did was tyrannical: not immoral but righteous, for he brought a pagan, God-hating nation under God's negative sanctions in history. *He enslaved them.* (Gary North, *Westminster's Confession: The Abandonment of Van Til's Legacy* [Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991], 274-276.)

When I first read these paragraphs, I was astounded at both the fallaciousness of the argument and the audacity of the conclusion: A ruler who enslaves his people is an "acceptable model for a civil magistrate." He is righteous, not in spite of his tyranny, but precisely *because* he is a tyrant. This endorsement of tyranny by a leading Theonomist and Reconstructionist deserves our complete attention.

The Argument Examined

Later in this essay I will discuss the question of whether Joseph was actually a tyrant, but for now that question is quite irrelevant. What is relevant, and what is extremely important, is what Dr. North thinks Joseph did, for that is what he is defending. North quite obviously thinks that Joseph was a tyrant, and it is that tyrannical Joseph that he defends. Dr. North obviously believes that Joseph "enslaved" the Egyptians. He says so repeatedly, with emphasis. He said that what Joseph did was "tyrannical." He took the Egyptians' land, their animals, and their money. Moreover, in doing these things, Joseph was "not immoral, but righteous."

Why does Dr. North believe that imposing slavery and tyranny is righteous? Because the Egyptians were "pagans." Since they were "enslaved religiously," they deserved to be enslaved politically. And because they deserved to be enslaved politically, Joseph was righteous in doing it. This is an obviously invalid argument, for which we should be grateful, since its conclusion is very dangerous.

We may grant that unbelievers, those who are enslaved religiously, in a sense deserve to be enslaved politically; for they deserve death both temporal and eternal. Indeed, all men, both Christians and pagans, deserve death, both temporal and eternal, biological and spiritual. So in that sense, all men, not just pagans, "deserve" to be enslaved politically.

1. The first problem with North's argument and conclusion is that the argument applies not just to pagans, but to all men. All men are sinners, and all deserve death. North's argument, if valid, would justify, not just an ancient African despotism, but the complete slaughter of the human race in 1991. His argument, if valid, would prove too much.

2. The second problem is this: North's argument assumes that governors ought to judge the religious beliefs of their subjects and mete out punishments according to the truth or falsehood of those beliefs. Therefore it is not only permissible to enslave "pagans," the enslavement of "pagans" is positively

righteous and moral. They are only getting what they deserve.

3. The third problem arises from the second: If it is righteous and moral for governors to enslave their subjects, then the civil laws of the Old Testament, such as those found in *I Samuel* 8, must not apply to governors. Thus, there is no Biblical restriction on the power of governors.

4. The fourth problem arises from the third: If the Old Testament civil laws restricting the power of governors do not apply to (some) governors, then Christian Reconstruction (Theonomy) is false, because it is contradictory. Theonomy teaches that the Biblical civil laws are applicable to all governors even today.

5. The fifth problem arises from the fourth: North says that pagans who break God's civil laws deserve to be enslaved. But this argument depends on the premise that God's civil laws apply to all societies, pagan included. However, if God's civil laws apply to all societies, including pagan societies, then tyranny can never be righteous or moral.

This brings us to the central fallacy of the argument. The question is not, What do the citizens deserve? but rather, What may governors righteously do? Did Joseph, or does any ruler, have the authority to enslave his people? Whether the people "religiously" deserve it or not is irrelevant. The question is: Does a ruler have the authority to enslave his people? Or, to put the question in North's terms, May a ruler righteously enslave his people?

God may and has used governors, wicked tyrants, to punish sinners. That is a clear teaching of Scripture. God used the wicked nations surrounding Israel to punish Israel during the time of the judges. The whole of God's prophecy through Samuel in *I Samuel* 8 consists of a warning that by rejecting God and demanding a king, the people would be getting the tyranny they deserved. What formerly they suffered at the hands of the surrounding pagan nations, they now would suffer from home-grown tyrants.

It is an equally clear teaching of Scripture that the rulers who do such things are wicked, not righteous. The kings of Israel and Judah were wicked, almost without exception. The kings of the lands surrounding Israel were wicked. They were neither righteous nor moral, even (indeed, especially) when giving a sinful people the punishment they deserved. The issues of whether the people deserve punishment and whether rulers may enslave them are two entirely separate issues. North has inexcusably confused them.

This confusion stems from another, more serious confusion: that between governors and God. It is this confusion that underlies the whole of North's defense of tyranny, for it explains why he thinks rulers are justified in enslaving pagans, why rulers are authorized to give people what they deserve, and why they are righteous and moral for acting like tyrants. Dr. North's argument presumes a deification of governors.

Joseph is righteous and moral, North argues, because "he brought a pagan, God-hating nation under God's negative sanctions in history. *He enslaved them.*" In short, Joseph is righteous *because* he was a tyrant. Gary confuses God's purposes with Joseph's purposes, God's motives with Joseph's motives, God's prerogatives with Joseph's prerogatives, and God's authority with Joseph's authority. A similarly confused argument could be used to justify (declare righteous) every tyrant in history.

But even Joseph did not confuse himself with God. In *Genesis* 50:19 he says to his brothers in order to reassure them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God?" Joseph then distinguishes between his brothers' purpose in selling him into slavery and God's purpose in causing them to do so (verse 20). Joseph, for all his sins, did not make the mistake of confusing himself with God. That mistake, and other like it, is what makes this writer wary of the Theonomic movement: In their eagerness to impose the law of God on society, some of the movement's leading spokesmen seem to confuse themselves (as well as Joseph) with God. Joseph then becomes a "model civil magistrate," and he is to be

commended precisely because of, not in spite of, but *because of* his tyrannical acts.

(The position of the Theonomists on the power of civil governors is schizophrenic: In this same book, for example, North spends several pages quoting and approving the libertarianism of J. Gresham Machen and condemning the New Deal liberalism of some other faculty members at Westminster Seminary. That is a Biblical position. The Bible severely restricts the power of governors. It does not defend tyranny. But the Reconstructionist movement praises both tyranny and libertarianism.)

One of the fundamental logical fallacies that North commits is the naturalistic fallacy: attempting to derive an *ought* from an *is*. The fact that Joseph, who was undoubtedly a man of faith (see *Hebrews* 11:22), did something, does not mean that his action was right. Yet apparently because Joseph was not explicitly condemned by God for his actions, North concludes that what he did was righteous and moral. (The same fallacy informs North's hermeneutic and affects his exegesis, for he defends Rahab on the basis of a lack of condemnation of her lying.)

Calvin warns against such faulty reasoning in his commentary on *Genesis*:

But it may be inquired again, whether his [Joseph's] dissimulation, which was joined to a falsehood [lying to his brothers], is not to be blamed.... Whether God governed his servant by some special movement, to depart without fault, from the common rule of action, I know not, seeing that the faithful may sometimes piously do things which cannot lawfully be drawn into a precedent. Of this, however, in considering the acts of the holy fathers, we must always beware; lest they should lead us away from that law which the Lord prescribes to all in common. By the general command of God, we must all cultivate sincerity. That Joseph feigned something different from the truth, affords no pretext to excuse us if we attempt anything of the same kind.

And again:

Here, not by words only, as before, but by the act itself, Joseph shows himself severe towards his brethren, when he shuts them all up in prison, as if about to bring them to punishment: and during three days torments them with fear. We said a little while ago, that from this fact no rule for acting severely and rigidly is to be drawn; because it is doubtful whether he acted rightly or otherwise. Again it is to be feared lest they who plead his [Joseph's] example should be far removed from his mildness, and that they should be proved to be rather his apes than his true imitators....

This leads one to the final question, Was Joseph the tyrant North thinks he was?

Was Joseph a Tyrant?

North believes Joseph was a tyrant and praises him for his tyranny. What exactly did Joseph do in Egypt?

1. Joseph became a dictator: "... without your [Joseph's] consent no man may lift his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt" (41:44).
2. Joseph married the daughter of a pagan priest (41:45, 50). Hengstenberg says this priest of Heliopolis was the highest in Egypt.
3. Joseph falsely accused his brothers (42:9, 12, 14, 16).
4. Joseph swore by Pharaoh (42:15, 16).
5. Joseph imprisoned his brothers (42:17).
6. Joseph kept Simeon as a hostage (42:24).
7. Joseph tormented his father (42:36; 43:14; 44:22, 29).
8. Joseph framed Benjamin (44:2).

9. Joseph collected all the money in Egypt and Canaan (47:14).

10. After being begged to do so by the people, Joseph took all the animals in Egypt for Pharaoh (47:17).

11. After being begged to do so by the people, Joseph took most of the land of Egypt for Pharaoh (47:19, 20).

12. After taking control of the land, Joseph moved all the people into the cities (47:21).

13. Joseph did not take the land of the pagan priests (47:22).

14. The pagan priests received their food free from Pharaoh (47:22).

15. Joseph imposed a twenty percent tax on all the people except the pagan priests (47:26).

Calvin argues that the facts that the people offered their land and animals to Joseph to avoid starvation and later thanked him for saving their lives are evidence that he was not really a tyrant. But Calvin also seems to misunderstand what the text says on two crucial points. He writes; "[S]eeing that they [the people] had been at liberty to lay up, in their private stores, what they had sold to the king, they now pay the just penalty of their negligence." But the text does not support the idea that their grain was originally sold to the king or that they were at liberty not to deliver it to the king.

The account says, "Let Pharaoh do this, and let him appoint officers over the land, to collect one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt in the seven plentiful years" (41:34). Joseph's imposing a 20 percent tax after the famine would seem to indicate that he imposed a 20 percent tax before the famine as well. In any event, there is no evidence for Calvin's contention that the delivery of the grain to Pharaoh was voluntary. That being the case, the reason for his defense of Joseph vanishes.

It seems, then, that Joseph did engage in tyrannical acts, although his tyranny was tempered by what

Calvin calls "mildness." Joseph's acts of despotism, however, were sins, not virtues to be praised. That is one lesson the Reconstructionists need to learn.

Seminaries and Accreditation

Dwight F. Zeller

The subject of seminaries and accreditation is one which I am asked about frequently. I should be able to speak on this subject. If I cannot it is only because I have not thoughtfully observed what has been going on around me. I have attended eight different seminaries, from which I have four different seminary degrees, and I have been on the staff of two other seminaries. It is not my objective to put down anyone else, but to express what I have observed.

When this subject comes to the minds of many, they think that a seminary is either accredited or it isn't – that is, it is either a member of some academic group that accredits schools or it is not. There is a false assumption in this way of thinking. The mistake is in thinking that a seminary must be a member of an academic association to be accredited.

Seminaries are a part of the Christian Church. This is true whether a seminary is a part of a denomination or not. They are Church schools. Their only function is to train students to minister more effectively in the Church. Seminaries do not exist in order to train students to function in the academic world. Therefore, it is the Church which is the primary accreditation body for any seminary. That accreditation from the Church may come through a denomination, or from individual Churches. The first question which should come to our minds about accreditation is, "Is the school responsible to the Church and does the Church recognize or accredit it?"

Someplace in our history this way of thinking has gone by the board. We have come to think that the only real accreditation is from secular academic organizations. What has happened to "I believe in the...holy catholic church"? For many seminaries this has been changed to "I believe in the secular academic accreditation associations."

Let us look at the situation from a Biblical perspective. Both Paul and Jesus exhorted us time and again to beware of the "world." I have counted nine times in the New Testament where we are directly warned to keep away from the "world." The secular seminary accreditation associations are a part of the world system. They certainly are not a part of the Church, and they are not Christian. To align a seminary with one of these organizations is to deliberately affiliate with a system that is based on the standard of the "world."

Who are these secular accreditation associations? The only national organization that is exclusively organized to give secular accreditation to seminaries is the Association of Theological Seminaries. This group is composed of Jewish, Roman Catholic, and Protestant seminaries. Some seminaries are members of regional accreditation associations. These are associations which accredit secondary schools, colleges, and professional schools. These organizations are not Christian, but are secular academic organizations – they are part of the "world system."

Many times I have been told by those associated with seminaries that to join either ATS or a regional association does not require a school to change its position. That may be true, but it is also true that the seminary has deliberately chosen to associate itself with an organization which is not and cannot be Christian. It has asked for and pays to have input from the world. These associations ask that a seminary write its own purpose statement, and state that they will be judged by that purpose statement. If a seminary is Christian and Biblical, that purpose statement should indicate its Christian and Biblical objectives. If the statement does not have this included, it certainly is either not Christian or is seeking to conceal its identity. If a seminary has a good Christian and Biblical purpose statement, how

can it be expected that those who deny the essentials of the Christian faith (Christ's deity, his atoning death and bodily resurrection), and who do not hold to the truth of the Scriptures, will be able to evaluate a seminary that has these as its objectives? We would not do this in any other area of life. For instance – would someone who believes in the sanctity of marriage be able to get counseling from someone who believes that infidelity and divorce are possible options? Whether it is a seminary or a couple seeking counsel, to expose one's self to the "world" is not to conform to the Biblical injunctions against worldliness.

How has this worked out in practice? This is not to say that there are not good Christian schools that are members of secular accreditation associations. But the test is not how many may be members of such associations, but what happens in time to these seminaries. I do not have definitive studies to back up any statistics on this subject. Even if one did there would be some subjectivity involved. I will give a general observation: I do not know of any seminaries that have joined a secular accreditation association that have maintained a position on the inerrancy of the Scriptures for more than 30 or 40 years after they started such an affiliation. Many may still have in their confessional statements an affirmation of their belief in the truth of the Scriptures, but that is not the real test – the real test is what is being taught in the classrooms. This is not to say that because a seminary has joined one of these associations it will go bad. The joining of such an association is only symptomatic of the seminary's deliberate choice to conform to the world.

In recent times two seminaries that have been members of the Association of Theological Seminaries have had teachers who became liberal – they no longer held to the truth of the Scriptures in their original autographs – and the seminaries have sought to revive their Biblical positions. But since the seminaries were members of ATS they were put on academic probation for not allowing academic freedom.

There is another side to this issue. Often schools claim that they need to join the secular accreditation

associations in order to assure their students and constituents that they are "up-to-snuff." They need the association in order that their students may have their credits accepted elsewhere. What is actually being said is that accredited seminaries like Iliff School of Religion (which disclaims being exclusively Christian) or Union Seminary in New York are "up-to-snuff" academically.

Many of the seminaries that are members of these secular accreditation associations are ungodly, as well as academically very poor. To want to be compared to them only lowers one's own position. The courses and excellence that are needed to make a seminary effective do not need to be evaluated by the world. Their standard is different from that of the Christian. One seminary which I attended which is a member of ATS required students to have only four weeks of Greek and four weeks of Hebrew in order to receive the Master of Divinity degree. This seminary professed to be evangelical, but did not hold to the truth of all the Bible. Seminaries are in the business of training students to be technicians in the Scriptures. How can a seminary do this without teaching the languages in which the Scriptures were written? To fail to teach students –in seminary--to have a working knowledge of the Biblical languages is unacademic, but that is all right with the secular accreditation association. So, to claim that a seminary is joining a secular accreditation association in order to make it academically acceptable does not prove that the school has higher standards for the training of its students.

Even though seminaries say that they join these association for academic purposes, that is often not the real objective. By joining these secular associations a seminary then becomes eligible for grants and matching grants from companies and foundations. Once these monies become part of the seminary's budget they do not want to let them go. These funds appear to come with no strings attached. But when the seminary must maintain its accreditation with a secular accreditation association in order to continue getting these funds it is obvious that membership does not come without obligations.

Another reason why seminaries join these groups is to get students. Many people think that they must go to a seminary that is a member of a secular accreditation association. They would not want to graduate from a "non-accredited" school. They would not be as well thought of. Really the situation may be closer to being the other way around. Prospective students – most of whom know little about this subject – should be seeking to find a seminary that is not a member of a secular association, but which is a school which has a reputation in the Church for producing students who are effective ministers of God's Word.

Let us look at it in a little different light. Would you like for your denomination or individual congregation to be a member of the National Council of Churches? If you are a member of that organization you do at least subscribe to an affirmation that "Jesus is Lord." No one comes to your Church and evaluates it, and you would not want anyone to. Most of us would not want the stigma of being associated in any way with the National Council of Churches because of its liberal reputation. But for a seminary to join a secular accreditation association, it is requesting the secular world to evaluate it, and it is paying to have it done. It is asking for the stigma of an organization which is worldly. For a seminary to join one of these associations will do more harm to the Church or Churches it serves than for the Church or Churches to join the National Council of Churches.

A well known Church historian who taught most of his adult life in seminary predicted that the seminary where he taught has a life expectancy of holding to the truth of the Scripture of about 40 years. He has proven to be correct. Why have we gotten our seminaries so associated with the secular world that we have a sure formula for them to lose the faith on which they were founded? The answer is really very simple. Man tends toward sin. The Bible from cover to cover teaches that. But for some reason we have not applied that to seminaries. Seminaries tend toward sin. If a seminary does that which is natural, it will turn to the world and sin. It will lose its firm Christian faith. We must realize this and always be on our guard to preserve those seminaries that are sound. This will mean that the

seminary that wants to keep from going bad will have to sacrifice in many areas, but our Lord has never promised the way would be easy. It will also mean that it will be misunderstood by many, but again, the world has frequently misunderstood Christ and the Christian.

I do hope that this short article will help those who do not know what the present situation is with seminaries and accreditation. This is a situation which the Church has not addressed, but it is an internal problem that has plagued the Church and will continue to do so until we have the courage to be Christian and Biblical in this particular area.

Letters to the Editor

Our series of three essays on revivalism by Herman Hanko and Charles Hodge (*Trinity Reviews* 79, 80, and 81) stirred up some thought and controversy, as we intended them to do. We received only two letters from pastors, one who has written to us before and revealed his contempt for truth, and the other from a genuinely Christian man in Illinois.

Mr. Wilson, who thinks the Hanko essay was "convoluted b.s." (is this one of those modern theological terms?), says that he will stick with Edwards. He obviously doesn't know what Edwards wrote about the Great Awakening after he had time to think about it. Wilson demands to be removed from our mailing list--no more convoluted b.s. for him, just straight b.s.

Covenant Community Church

Dr. Monte Wilson Pastor

Dear Sirs:

I have just read your latest offering to Reformed thinking. I can't imagine a more perfect article to hinder people from coming to a sound Reformed faith than such convoluted b.s. as, *Ought the Church To Pray for Revival?* Gratefully, with such rationalistic faith as yours, we don't have to worry about your tribe increasing to any

proportion where you might actually influence the direction of the Church. Please take me off your mailing list; I'll stick with Whitefield, Edwards, & Lloyd-Jones.

Monte E. Wilson

Florida

Grace Bible Church

Russell Warner Pastor

Dear Sirs:

I was delighted to receive and read your May/June 1991 #79 issue. I have for years declared the error of revivalism, have taken criticism over the same and believe me am delighted to see such a stand in print. Please keep me on your mailing list.

R. L. Warner

Illinois