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and the same function. After the Fall and especially after the conditional divine interventions classically referred to as the covenant with Adam and the covenant with Noah (a situation still further complicated by further covenants between then and now), that univocality is gone by definition. There is no self-evident reason to assume that the will of God has the same meaning for a Jew as for a Gentile in the age of Moses, when tabernacle worship and circumcision are not expected of the nations.⁸ There is no self-evident reason to assume that the obligations of Christians and pagans are the same in the New Testament when one decides and acts within the reestablished covenant of grace and the other does not. There is no reason to have to assume that the moral performance which God expects of the regenerate he equally expects of the unregenerate. Of course, on some much more elevated level of abstraction, our minds demand that we project an unique and univocal ultimate or ideal will of God. But it is precisely in the nature of his patience with fallen humanity that God condescends to deal with us on other levels. The well-intentioned but uninformed heathen, the informed but rebellious child of the believer, the regenerate but ignorant, the educated victim of heretical teaching, the teacher, and the bearer of a distinct charisma all stand in different moral positions.

On the level of normative social ethical discourse, this awareness means that the substance of the Christian testimony to a pluralistic social order will not be identical with the claims of discipleship for the disciples of Jesus Christ; a relevant moral witness to the authorities in a Western democracy will be different from that to a pagan monarch. There is not one timeless pattern of pertinent social norms. The hermeneutic we need must be dialogical and congregational, renouncing claims to leverage from outside the historical flux.

A Personal Epilogue

There is one more level upon which one can attempt to gain hold on the substance of a debate. One can ask very subjectively, "Do they understand me? Do they speak to me?"

When I ask whether I am understood, my answer is, "not really." I perceive that I am being read and heard through a filter, whether I meet that in historical terms as the definition of Anabaptism which is in the Reformed confessions, or whether I identify it in logical content as the axioms stated above.

The other question is whether the alternative view which is being commended to me has something from which I can learn, because it appeals to the New Testament or to some other independent reference in a way that reaches past established confessional differences to or from the New Testament. Thus far this is not the case. What I hear my Reformed interlocutor asking me to accept is not some particular biblical text or even some particular biblical theme⁹ but rather a system of definitions adding up more or less to the same thing as the axioms stated above.

There is a strange ambivalence in that criticism. On the one hand, I am told that I am wrong because my position implies a systematic dualism and total withdrawal from the social struggle, and it is wrong to withdraw from the social struggle.

But then when I say I also consider it wrong to withdraw from social struggle because Jesus was "politically" involved, as were William Penn and Martin Luther King, Jr., I get two contradictory answers. One is that I am logically cheating because I ought to want to withdraw according to the Reformed image of what my position implies. I do not defend their image of what I ought to believe. Instead of seeing that as a challenge to the accuracy of their image, they challenge my representativity. The other is that they wish I would withdraw, because they do not want my Jesus and me in the real arena with real alternatives. They want me to affirm the irrelevance which is their a priori pigeonhole for me (and, more importantly, for the Jesus of the Gospels). My acceptance of withdrawal as the price of my faithfulness is needed for them to explain lesser-evil calculations as the price of the "responsible involve-

¹ Article XXXVI; article XXXII uses the same phrase with regard to baptism. We set that aside for present purposes: millions of Baptists are Reformed in their social ethics, showing that the link between ecclesiology and social strategy is not always close.

² Cf. my *The Priestly Kingdom* (Notre Dame University Press, 1984) p. 131f.

³ Add to this anomaly the awareness that the sociology of the ethnic enclave, typical of most Mennonite experience from 1650 to 1950, is a form of establishment, rather than an implementation of the radical missionary vision.

⁴ Nicholas Wolterstorff characterizes Mennonites as seeking to create "a holy commonwealth in a separated area" (*Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, Grand Rapids, 1983, p. 19); an inappropriate reference especially in lectures presented in Amsterdam, where Mennonites since 1600 have typically been about as separated as Quakers in Philadelphia. Another specimen—to demonstrate how widely abused is the typology—is an interview in the *NRC-Handelsblad*, the Dutch equivalent of the *Wall Street Journal*, 29 November 1984, in which A. Oostlander, research director of the Christian party (CDA), claims that the InterChurch Peace Council (IKV) represents "an ancient dutch phenomenon with deep roots in national history," namely the Anabaptist movement, which "turned its back on government." Oostlander is wrong on every count. a) The IKV is made up mostly of non-pacifists, mostly Reformed and Roman Catholic, who under the pressure of actions taken by the Reformed Church of the Netherlands since 1952 is critical of the nuclear arms race policies of NATO; b) The Anabaptists of the sixteenth century did not turn their back on government; government outlawed them and burned them at the stake; c) What Oostlander dislikes about the IKV is not that it turns its back on government but that it is becoming politically powerful. This is thus an excellent specimen of the way in which, far from using historical types as an instrument of authentic ecumenical communication, the reproach of Anabaptism is a tool of intra-Reformed polemics.

⁵ Franklin H. Littell: "The Radical Reformation and the American Experience" in Thomas M. McFadden, ed., *America in Theological Perspective* (New York, Seabury, 1976), pp. 71-86; and "Christian Faith and Counter-Culture," *The Iliif Review*, Vol. XXX, No. 1, Winter 1973, pp. 3-13.

⁶ I have been watching with interest the Reformed social think tanks at Grand Rapids, Pella, Toronto and elsewhere for some years now. What is most striking to me is the absence of any head-on recognition that if one recognizes or even advocates democracy, as it exists in pluralistic North Atlantic society, the classical theocratic language of the Reformed vision is more anachronistic than is the "sectarian" language of the Anabaptist model. As Nicholas Wolterstorff wrote, "In one way we have all become Anabaptist . . . the sixteenth-century Anabaptists urged the abolition of a sacral society. . . . That heritage of Anabaptism is the policy we all embrace . . ." (*Reformed Journal*, October 1977, p. 11). To negate "sacral society" is vaguer and easier than to affirm democracy, which Wolterstorff would also do, but either way is to say it lets other people run the place.

⁷ Meredith Kline sees JHWH's threat to avenge any attack on Cain (Gen. 4:15) as an earlier version of the same revelation. That would bring us one covenant earlier, but still would be a salvation-historical intervention (Kline calls it "oracle") rather than an order of creation knowable to reason. It does not (like the Noachic covenant) name man as the executor of JHWH's vengeance. It would authorize only punitive vengeance, none of the other functions of the civil order. It would call literally for the vengeance taken to be collective, i.e., sevenfold. It would make the escalation of human autonomy through city-building and technology to the war cry of Lamech look like a fulfillment of JHWH's intent. It would make no difference to the question of what the New Covenant in Jesus' blood does with Genesis and Moses. Nonetheless, Kline's effort to found the notion of a divorce mandate for the civil order is more serious than most.

⁸ Since the adjustment to the Jewish-Christian schism, whereby rabbinic thought largely abandoned "mission" to the "Christians," it is generally affirmed that gentiles can have access to "the world to come" if they live according to the Noachic covenant. Cf. David Novak, *The Image of the Non-Jew in Judaism*, Toronto, Lewiston, Edwin Mellen Press, 1983.

⁹ With the exception of Meredith Kline, note 8 above.

Abandoning the Typology: A Reformed Assist

by Richard J. Mouw

Professor Yoder thinks that the differences between Anabaptist and Reformed Christians have been rather consistently misrepresented, especially on the part of Reformed thinkers. He demonstrates his convictions regarding these matters by means of two strategies. First, he argues that the common notion that the Reformed-Anabaptist cultural-theological debate constitutes a "classical dilemma" does not provide us with the best account of the historical developments bearing on these disputes. Then, having offered this argument "from the outside," he moves "inside" the discussion. Here he argues that if the issues at stake are properly

construed, then Reformed criticisms of the Anabaptists often miss the mark; Reformed people, in attempting to make an effective case against the Anabaptist cultural perspective, would have to provide different sorts of arguments than they seem to think are necessary.

I am in basic agreement with Professor Yoder on these matters. This is not to say that I have become an Anabaptist. But I do endorse, in general terms, his account of the actual shape of the debate between the two camps. The continuing differences between the two groups ought to be understood, I am convinced, along the lines he suggests.

On a number of occasions I have protested against what I have labelled, for lack of a better terms, the "Mennophobia" of many of

my fellow Reformed Christians. The deep hostility toward Anabaptists is expressed openly, as Professor Yoder notes, in Reformed confessional documents and in other writings from the past. My own denomination has officially declared that those of us who are required to subscribe to the Reformed confessions of the sixteenth century are not bound by the "incidental historical references" of those documents—and the "detesting" of the Anabaptists has been explicitly singled out as an example of those non-binding "incidentals." Making hatred non-binding, however, is not the same as condemning it as improper. Thus a detesting of the Anabaptists—no longer ecclesiastically compelled, but now merely optional—continues to occur in the Reformed community.

Of course, the detesting flows in both directions. When Calvin and other sixteenth century Reformers accused the Anabaptists of an unhealthy perfectionism, they were not completely off-base in their charge. The horrible programs of persecution which Reformed people launched against the Anabaptists—and what they did was surely horrible—were often stimulated by Anabaptist claims that the Calvinists and Lutherans were nothing but thinly disguised papists—or in other words, given the parlance of the day, tools of Satan himself. A properly revised narrative of our ecclesiastical pasts will require all of us to reformulate our confessional stories.

But this is not the place, nor am I the person, to deal with those pastoral matters. Nor is this the appropriate occasion to carry on what Yoder rightly calls the "one unfinished friendly debate" between him and me. Suffice it to say that in my *Politics and the Biblical Drama* I was motivated by some of the same concerns that move Yoder in this present discussion. I wanted, among other things, to demonstrate to those Reformed people who were wont to dismiss Yoder's case in *The Politics of Jesus* as advocating "Anabaptist withdrawal," that Reformed Christians must deal with the questions of Christian political action precisely where Yoder issues the challenge: by beginning with a non-negotiable commitment to the way of discipleship—to the waging of "the Lamb's War." If in the process of arguing that case I employed and perpetuated old stereotypes, I am sorry. This present discussion can at least serve as an occasion for me to make it clear that I want to join John Yoder in attempting to bring the Reformed-Anabaptist debate to a new and more honest level of mutual exploration.

The Historical Challenge

Professor Yoder convincingly presents historical evidence for calling the long-standing "Reformed-versus-Anabaptist" typology into question. I am not an historian, so I can do little to add to this case. But it is interesting to note that some verification for his contentions can be found by looking at intra-Reformed debates.

Discussions about "Reformed-Anabaptist tensions" often fail to account for the fact that each of the communities being discussed is itself quite pluralistic—so much so that the tensions between the two traditions are not experienced in the same light or with the same intensity at every point on the spectrum within each community.

My own denomination, the Christian Reformed Church, has been fed and shaped by two dissenting factions within the Reformed community in the Netherlands. The first faction has its roots in the Secessionist movement, which in 1834 broke from the established Reformed church in Holland. The Secessionists were deeply pious folk who placed a strong emphasis on preserving the Calvinist soteriological teachings of the past. They viewed themselves (and rightly so) as victims of a strong alliance between church and state in the Netherlands, and they exported this distrust of the cultural status quo to North America, by means of the emigrations of the 19th century.

These Secessionist Calvinists expressed their strong sense of separation from the world in two ways. First, they nurtured a piety in which there was a central emphasis on avoiding attachments to the values of "the present age." Second, in their theological reflection they gave an important place to the idea of "the antithesis"—i.e., a radical opposition between elect and reprobate. In its most extreme form, "antithetical Calvinism" fostered the notion that elect and reprobate, since they operate with radically different presuppositions, share little or no intellectual common ground.

The second dissenting faction stemmed from the movement

headed by the Dutch statesman Abraham Kuyper who, during the 1880s, led another major movement out of the established Reformed Church in Holland. This group soon merged with the church body that had been formed by the earlier Secessionists. But the Kuyperians were of a somewhat different character. Their leadership was urbane and well-educated, not inclined to relinquish the reins of cultural leadership to the children of darkness. Kuyper initiated a major effort at ecclesiastical reform. He also founded the Free University and established a Christian political party which he represented in the Dutch parliament; for a few years around the turn of the century, he was Prime Minister of the Netherlands.

Kuyper himself made much of the antithesis between belief and unbelief. But this emphasis never functioned in this thinking as a basis for justifying cultural withdrawal. To many of those who sympathized with the earlier Secession, Kuyper's programs exhibited an unhealthy triumphalism; the Kuyperians, they thought, placed too high a premium on "horizontalist" forays into worldly territories. Some of the Secessionists made their case in pietistic terms, while others argued against Kuyper by a direct doctrinal appeal to the antithesis. But in any case there has been, as a consistent presence in this community, a nervousness expressed about a Calvinism that places too much stock in cultural activism.

The point I want to illustrate by this brief (and much too unnuanced) piece of ecclesiastical history is that something *like* the so-called "Reformed/Anabaptist tensions" actually occur *within* the Reformed community. And the fact is that when the going gets tough in one of the open debates that regularly surface in my confessional community, there will very often come a moment, as the Calvinist antagonists really begin to slug it out with each other, when the more culturally activist Calvinists will reach into the rhetorical arsenal and hurl out the ultimate insult: they will accuse their more pietist or doctrinalist Reformed opponents of being "Anabaptists."¹

There are, of course, different ways of explaining this phenomenon. One is to suggest that since—on the standard typology, which Yoder and I are both rejecting—the Anabaptist position is the most detestable of alternatives to the Reformed position, it is quite likely that Calvinists would use the most insulting label that comes to mind when they really get angry with each other. But the fact is that this label is used by Reformed people to refer to actual tendencies which they observe within their own community. This suggests that the Anabaptist position is not one that Calvinists denounce because it is so alien to their own views, but rather because it represents very real tendencies that they fear within themselves.

It only remains to be argued that these tendencies are very natural ones, given the essential characteristics of the Reformed orientation. And I think that this is indeed the case.

Calvinism is well known for its stark portrayal of the human sinful condition. It is perhaps no accident that the first letter in TULIP stands for "Total Depravity," since it is this negative assessment of human abilities that gives everything else that is distinctive about Reformed doctrine its poignancy. The Calvinist emphasis on God's absolute sovereign control over the process of salvation has to be seen against the backdrop of its insistence that human beings are completely incapable of initiating, or making any interesting contribution to, that process.

Once Calvinism has begun with this negative assessment of the present human condition, any teaching that seems to modify this assessment, by attributing, say, some sort of positive noetic or ethical or volitional ability to human beings, will need special explaining. And the fact is that Calvinists have regularly gone out of their way to provide such explanations.

Recently I joined two of my Philosophy colleagues in teaching a course on "Philosophy in the Dutch Reformed Tradition." Dutch Calvinists have sustained a strong interest in systematic philosophical thought. We discovered that in these philosophical explorations, Dutch Calvinists regularly credited (following the example of Calvin himself) non-Christian thinkers with having made positive contributions to a proper understanding of reality. But inevitably this kind of admission required extensive explanation on their part, since they had begun with strong endorsements of the ideas of depravity and antithesis.

My own impression is that these efforts at explanation are quite

legitimate. I find the qualified Calvinist endorsement of specific non-Christian philosophical contributions to be necessary and satisfactory. But my point is that Reformed people do have to *work* a bit at providing such explanations. They do not come easily—certainly not automatically. Having arrived at such explanations, after the appropriate Calvinist hard work, it is not pleasant to be required by the antithetical Calvinists on one's rear flank to provide an obvious and convincing Reformed rationale for the philosophical moves that one has made. Again, one may be confident that one has indeed *made* appropriate moves; but it is awkward nonetheless to be asked to trace one's steps from the "T" in TULIP to one's nuanced epistemological proposals. And once one has had to defend these nuances against antithetical *Reformed* opponents, the confrontation with the radical epistemology of many Anabaptists is simply more of the same.

In short, Yoder's historical analysis is given further credence by evidence that Reformed-Anabaptist debates are mere variations on the kinds of disputes that occur *within* the Reformed community. And these intra-Reformed discussions do not result from the importing on the part of some Calvinists of "alien" Anabaptist themes. The themes are generated by the very logic of the Reformed position itself.

Inside the Typology

As Professor Yoder turns to an "internal" discussion of the received typology, his strategy seems to be along these lines: he states what he takes to be crucial Reformed theses—i.e., theses which are necessary for the coherence of Reformed social thought, but which Yoder as an Anabaptist rejects. Yoder shows, however, that his reasons for rejecting key elements of Reformed thought, as contained in these particular theses, suggest a somewhat different set of Reformed-Anabaptist disagreements than the state of affairs dictated by the traditional typology.

For example, on the received reading of the differences between Calvinists and Anabaptists, Calvinists believe that we ought to be transforming culture while Anabaptists adopt an anti-cultural stance; and more specifically, Calvinists urge Christians to participate in civil government while Anabaptists oppose such participation.

But these portrayals of the differences do not capture the way in which Yoder experiences the tensions between Reformed and Anabaptist Christians. He sees Anabaptists as opposing the Calvinist *mode* of cultural transformation. Reformed people act as if the biblical mandate to shape cultural activity in obedience to God's will were a crystal-clear matter, and that it, furthermore, applies with equal weight and clarity to all areas of cultural activity. Anabaptists do not dissent from the notion of a biblical cultural mandate as such, but they do resent having Calvinists tell them exactly what it means to obey that mandate.

The question of involvement in civil government turns out to be a case in point here. If "political involvement" means a willingness to participate in the processes of public administration, or a holy desire to influence public policy in the light of biblical standards of righteousness, then there is no principled disagreement between Reformed and Anabaptist. The real argument gets going only at that point where the Calvinist insists that people who refuse to wield the sword are, by virtue of that refusal, denying the legitimacy of all "political involvement."

Here again, Yoder is correct in his account. At least he is correct in general terms; I am not sure that Reformed Christians have to endorse everything that Yoder claims is required for the "coherence" of the Reformed position. But in general terms he has it right. Indeed, his formulations, if taken seriously, can serve to advance the discussion of substantive issues.

Many of the points which Yoder attributes to the Reformed perspective are endorsed by Abraham Kuyper, when he explains why he refuses to distinguish between "general moral ordinances, and more special *Christian* commandments":

Can we imagine that at one time God willed to rule things in a certain moral order, but that now, in Christ, He wills to rule it otherwise? As though He were not the Eternal, the Unchangeable, Who, from the very hour of creation, even unto all eternity, had willed, wills, and shall will and main-

tain, one and the same firm moral world-order! Verily Christ has swept away the dust with which man's sinful limitations had covered up this world-order, and has made it glitter again in its original brilliancy. Verily Christ, and He alone, has disclosed to us the eternal love of Christ which was, from the beginning, the moving principle of this world-order. Above all, Christ has strengthened in us the ability to walk in this world-order with a firm, unflinching step. But the world-order itself remains just what it was from the beginning. It lays full claim, not only to the believer (as though less were required from the unbeliever), but to every human being and to all human relationships.²

If accepting the kinds of emphases embodied in these remarks is required for maintaining a coherent Reformed position, then I am not a very coherent Calvinist. My discomfort has to do with some of the same issues raised by Yoder in explaining why he rejects the Reformed cultural perspective as such. I find Kuyper—in this passage at least—much too confident in his celebration of a "world order" which remains intact since the original creation.

More specifically, I have, first of all, metaphysical qualms about this celebrative mood. The Bible gives us reason to think that sin actually perverted the creation in significant ways. The theology of the "principalities and powers," which Professor Yoder has done much to sensitize North American Christians to, is one important vehicle for understanding this distortedness. More generally, biblical Christianity must promote an awareness of the "cursedness" of the fallen creation. To be sure, Jesus came to the creation to lift the curse of sin, a transaction that has been completed in principle by means of the work of the Cross. But as the writer to the Hebrews observes, while God placed all things originally under the dominion of humankind, "as it is we do not yet see everything in subjection" to human beings—"but we see Jesus, . . . crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death" (Hebrews 2:8-9).

Second, Kuyper seems much too confident in this passage regarding our noetic abilities. Suppose, for example, that my first concern was in fact misguided; suppose that the original "world-order" does remain intact, shining as from the beginning in all brilliancy as a testimony to the creator's good purposes. We would still have to reckon with the noetic effects of sin: have not our human minds become so darkened by sin that we are seriously deficient—even blinded—in our ability to grasp this world-order?

And third, Kuyper seems much too sanguine about our volitional capacities; he describes the work of Christ as a "strengthening" of our "ability to walk in this world-order with a firm, unflinching step." Is *this* the problem that Jesus died to overcome—a mere weakness, a human faltering?

Fourth, all this points to a general Christological weakness in these remarks by Kuyper. As one who considers Kuyper to be a hero, I am loathe to admit that in this particular passage he seems to be breathing the spirit of the very modernism which he so valiantly fought against on other occasions. Modernistic-liberal theology is inevitably led to a weak Christology because of its weak analysis of sin. We cannot properly understand the nature of the proclamation that "Jesus Saves" unless we know what it is that he saves us from. Kuyper, in describing here the work of Christ in terms of a mere "dusting-off" of the original world-order, is treading on dangerous theological ground.

I think that I am pointing here to a very basic and important theological question: Who is Jesus Christ, and how are we to understand his redemptive mission? This Christological question has to be asked against the backdrop of an analysis of the human condition. Out of his experience of the actual tensions between Reformed and Anabaptist thought, Professor Yoder reports items of theological concern which bear on a proper understanding of the human sin which Christ came to confront. And these items, as he spells them out in his response to the Reformed theses, have to do precisely with questions about the metaphysical, noetic and volitional effects of sin, and about our understanding of God's antidote to sin.

In effect, then, the Anabaptists as represented by Professor Yoder are posing questions to Reformed Christians about the radicality of human sin, and about the radicality of the work of the Savior who

came to rescue the creation from the curse of that sin. What did the fall do to the creation? What did it do to human noetic and volitional capacities? What did Jesus accomplish in his redemptive ministry? What does he call human beings to be and do? Suppose, for example, that because of the ravages of sin, God *has* in some sense "instituted" the exercise of the sword in sinful societies. How has the work of the Lamb altered the ways in which disciples of Jesus relate to this work of the sword? How will the "antithesis" manifest itself in Christian political behavior?

It seems obvious—to Professor Yoder and to me—that these are very Reformed questions. But they are also very Anabaptist questions. If so, then the main dispute between the two positions is not a conflict between radically different types. It is a family argument between Christians who claim to take human depravity and the riches of the Gospel seriously—not only in relation to very personal belief and behavior, but to the full range of human social, political and economic activities.

Toward Family Healing

Needless to say, family arguments can get very tense. Even if the traditional typology, then, is abandoned, there is still much for Reformed and Anabaptist Christians to argue about. It may be that Calvinists have been too quick to view the civil order as the quintessence of culture, and the exercise of the sword as the quintessence of the civil order. But even if these mistaken emphases are remedied, one could still hold—as I am very much inclined to do—that it is legitimate for disciples of Jesus to participate under certain conditions in governmentally-sanctioned acts which utilize the means of lethal violence. I am much more inclined to focus on the "politics of Jesus" than many of my fellow Calvinists in attempting to formulate the nature of Christian political obligation. But I am not convinced that a commitment to the Lamb's War proscribes all Christian use of violent means of problem-solving.

Having said that, though, I must also say that I believe that intense dialogue between Reformed and Anabaptist Christians is a matter of highest priority. This belief is nurtured by three concerns.

First, however legitimate and/or understandable the intra-Protestant struggles were in their original sixteenth century context, they are not as pressing today. Even if the received typology were true, it would be strange for Reformed and Anabaptist people, or for Lutherans and Roman Catholics, for that matter, to view each other as the "real" enemy, whom to struggle against is to exhibit faithfulness to the Gospel. The devils who fill the present world are no longer inclined—if they ever were—to disguise themselves as people who confess the Name of Jesus.

Second, whatever the merits of the debates that occurred in the sixteenth century, we have no right to look at those debates today except through the history that has flowed out of those intense disputes. For me this means that I cannot listen in on the discussions between Anabaptists and Calvinists that occurred in sixteenth century Basel and Geneva and Amsterdam without also listening to the cries of Christians whom my Calvinist forebears have brutalized and persecuted in word and in deed. The history of the Reformed-Anabaptist relationship is not merely one of words and ideas; it is made up of the flesh and blood of human suffering.

Third, even if we could ignore the past, we cannot ignore the pressing challenges of the present. It is one thing for a Calvinist to insist that there are and have been situations in which the Christian endorsement of military violence is justified. It is another thing to take an honest look at the ongoing production of weapons of unthinkable destruction. To view the present arms race with an awareness of the complicated self-deceptions of which human beings, even Christian human beings, are capable—deceptions which involve whole nations in idolatrous militaristic and nationalistic schemes—is to realize how desperately we all need the chiding and challenging and mutual correction that can be gained from intense Christian dialogue. May we abandon outworn typologies and get on with that kind of dialogue!

¹ See James D. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America: A History of a Conservative Subculture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), Chs. 7 and 8.

² Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures in Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1931), pp. 71–72.

Qumran and the Hebrew Psalter

by Gerald H. Wilson

Among the thousands of fragments of ancient religious documents discovered nearly forty years ago in caves near the ruins of ancient Qumran and known popularly as the "Dead Sea Scrolls" were numerous fragments of manuscripts containing portions of psalms known previously from the canonical Hebrew Psalter. Of the eleven caves in which manuscripts were found, seven have yielded a combined total of more than 309 different psalm manuscripts. By far the most extensive collections are those of Cave 4 (with 18 distinct manuscripts) and Cave 11 (5 distinct manuscripts). The earliest of these texts were copied in the second century B.C. while the latest are dated by paleographers to approximately A.D. 68.¹

It is hardly possible to overestimate the importance of these texts for our understanding of the canonical Psalter. In the first place, they represent the earliest known examples of the text of the individual psalms. Before the scrolls were uncovered, our earliest Hebrew Psalter texts were dated to the 9th and 10th centuries A.D. This single find pushed our knowledge of the text of the individual psalms back almost 1000 years! In a number of these Qumran manuscripts, psalms are arranged quite differently than in the canonical Psalter. Some of the canonical psalms are ordered differently in relation to each other, others are entirely absent and, in some manuscripts, "apocryphal" compositions are introduced which are not known in the canonical text.

This variation in the Qumran psalm manuscripts has sparked continuing controversy about the nature of these texts, their authority, and where they fit in a history of the canonical Psalter. For

some, the variety of the Qumran texts suggests that the arrangement and contents of the Psalter were still in a state of flux as late as the middle of the first century A.D. Others resist this conclusion and explain the variant manuscripts as liturgical adaptations of the canonical arrangement which was fixed by the 4th century B.C.²

Proponents of the late fluidity of the Psalter (especially James A. Sanders who edited the primary edition of the Qumran Psalms Scroll from Cave 11) emphasize the amount of variation encountered in the Qumran manuscripts as support for their views. On the other hand, those who accept the early fixation of the Psalter (most notably the late Patrick W. Skehan who edited the psalm manuscripts from Cave 4) play down the significance of variant data while stressing that the majority of evidence supports the canonical arrangement. A close look at the Qumran scrolls themselves reveals an unexpected circumstance which points up the complexity of the issue and may help us evaluate these conflicting claims.³

Evidence for the Arrangement of Psalms at Qumran

First, the amount of evidence which supports or contests the canonical arrangement is not always easy to determine. Most of the manuscripts are extremely fragmentary. To determine the arrangement of a manuscript, one must look for "joins" between psalms, where one psalm ends and the next begins. For example, considering the 150 canonical psalms, there are 149 "joins" between them (ps 1 with 2; 2 with 3; and so on). All the Qumran psalm manuscripts together confirm only 54 of these canonical joins (slightly more than 36% of the total). The other 95 joins (about 64%) are not confirmed. On the other hand, 26 of the 149 canonical joins (just over 17%) are contested by the Qumran manuscripts when psalms are placed in different arrangements or apocryphal compositions

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