

Foreword

DENUDED DEVOTION TO CHRIST ARGUES THAT EARLY PROTESTANTISM, especially Reformed Protestantism, in its efforts to combat the perceived errors and abuses of late medieval Christianity by limiting the material aspect of the Christian faith, was characterized by a kind of philosophical rationalism. This is not, however, your ordinary academic book, nor one of merely historical interest. Indeed, it is a quite extraordinary book, combining academic excellence and rigor with an integrative approach utilizing philosophy and theology, both in their analytic and historical strains, to discuss passionately the theme of Christian devotion, in particular the deleterious effect of the mistrust of the material in Reformed piety and worship.

Dr. Harwood is just the man to write such a wide-ranging work of contemporary relevance. Larry, for he is a former colleague and longtime friend, is a professional philosopher whose special interest in aesthetics allows him to bring a fruitful interpretation of Reformed theology that a specialist in the early Reformation, such as I, would have missed. At the same time, he is a committed Christian who thus brings a heartfelt concern for Christian spirituality to his research. It is this happy combination of scholarship and religious dedication that makes *Denuded Devotion to Christ* a particularly important work that deserves a hearing both in the halls of the academy and the sanctuaries of the church.

The essential problem is that the reformers' quest for true religion or pure worship led to the exaltation of the "naked Christ" or what Dr. Harwood calls "naked truth." Naked truth is the notion that matter interferes with theological thought and religious piety. It identifies the spirit with the immaterial and, as Dr. Harwood effectively demonstrates, that means with human mental capacities. Shockingly, and I would add unintentionally, the reformers' passionate concern for *sola gratia* resulted in a piety that left man before God stripped of all his humanity except his mind.

How did this happen? How could it have happened? It seems to me that they failed to grasp, as we all too often do as well, the significance of John's assertion that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, that truth

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is found in the Incarnate Son of God. In particular the Swiss reformers, exhibiting the influence of the platonic strains of the humanist reformers, distrusted the material. For Christian theologians, both Calvin and Zwingli spoke too disparagingly of the body and so, contrary to their desire, linked themselves with what Dr. Harwood calls “the god of the philosophers.” In Zwingli’s case it would appear to have left the body of Jesus with the merely functional role of being something to sacrifice.

As with all insightful scholarship, Dr. Harwood’s achievement raises many questions and opens up several fruitful avenues of research which I hope scholars will follow up on. Let me just point briefly to a few in the areas of historical research, epistemology and theological anthropology and the nature of reformation.

Incredible as it may seem, with regard to historical research, there is much that still needs to be done in this already heavily investigated era. What, if any, was the relationship between Karlstadt and the Swiss Reformation? Even more broadly, how does the notion of naked truth show us new ways of looking at the connections between Renaissance humanism, especially that of Erasmus, the Swiss Reformation, and the Anabaptists? Dr. Harwood rightly exempts Luther from the temptation to bow before the god of the philosophers, but what of Melanchthon? Calvin and he, both more influenced by humanism, carried on a friendly correspondence concerning the sacrament of communion and appeared to be closer in their views than Luther would have liked. What of the Anglicans? The earlier Anglicans, such as Cranmer, were strongly influenced by Reformed Protestantism, but seemed to have largely escaped the dangers of naked truth. Why? And I do not think that it was solely because they were afraid of Henry VIII.

On an even broader scale, Dr. Harwood raises again the question of the relationship between Calvinism and modernity. He develops convincingly a very interesting connection between Calvinism’s distrust of the material and Hegel’s philosophical consciousness and the movement toward modernity. Could this philosophical tendency be played out in the socio-economic realm in unexpected ways? We should take another look at Max Weber and his school again.

In epistemology, we desperately need to understand how we know as humans. Naked truth runs the risk of seeing us merely as mental calculating machines, but the human mind is not isolated from the human body. We think as whole beings. How do we understand this without falling into

the swamp of subjectivity? Surely, Jesus' claim that he is the truth should show us the way out of this dilemma.

The epistemological issues are intimately related to theological anthropology. Naked truth limits the image of God to man's mind or mental capacities because this seems to be the most spiritual and therefore like unto God who is spirit. But does not this smack of the pagan notion of some kind of divine spark in man, something in him that he actually shares with God? The biblical notion of the image of God encompasses the whole person and his actions without allowing in any way for putting the creature on the same ontological level with his Creator.

I believe that Dr. Harwood's thesis demonstrates that reformation is always haunted by the dangers of naked truth. Certainly political ideology that leads to destructive revolutions bears this out when it seeks to tear down all human traditions and institutions and create a perfectly rational society, but religious reformation shows a similar tendency. Without a doubt, human traditions can and do become accretions that cover up and distort the faith. The religious reformer then almost necessarily thinks in terms of stripping all of this away and rediscovering the core or essence of true religion. Somehow we need to avoid the delusion that we create a pure worship by freeing devotion from the human element. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. He was seen, touched and heard. That is how God wants to be known and worshipped.

Finally, and in all seriousness, I ask, "Do we Protestants need to become Catholics or Orthodox?" I think not. The excesses and abuses that a Calvin and an Erasmus saw were real. They misunderstood those errors and so came up with a distorted solution. How do we understand the errors that they saw and how can we correct them without falling into different ones?

As an evangelical Protestant, I am concerned about the state of the evangelical church. Yes, contemporary worship does seem to want to appeal to the visual senses and involve the body more in worship. At the same time, it gives clear evidence of downplaying the place of the proclamation of the word and often is quite resistant and even hostile to serious theological critique. These are the same problems that Calvin saw in the church of his day.

The academy and, even more, the church should be grateful to Dr. Harwood for this profound study. It should be given serious consideration not only for its specific historical thesis but for its broad implications.

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Denuded Devotion to Christ raises the question of what it means to be human in the light of gospel's claim that God became man in order to bring men, not disembodied spirits, to himself.

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