

the **CALVIN** **Orum**

Anti-Semitism
Also in America?

Modern Ideologies--
and God's Kingdom

On Death
A Monologue

Christian Marriage
Its Social Implications

Thanksgiving
In Prose and Verse

The Sabbath Symposium

Readers Voices

Letters

Reviews

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**TWO DOLLARS
A YEAR**

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The Sabbath Symposium

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IT requires labor, as well as space in the printed page, to set forth what appear to the present writer to be inconsistencies in Dr. Pieters' review of the Sabbath discussion in the August-September issue of THE CALVIN FORUM. It is to be regretted that so much of this article will have to be devoted to these inconsistencies. If, however, progress is to be made and if issues are to be set in clear light, it is necessary that obscurities and inconsistencies be removed. Dr. Pieters has done much to bring the issues into clearer light, and he has compelled those who differ with him to examine anew the basis of their belief. He cannot be accused of lack of candour. But I do find myself under the necessity of pointing out inconsistency, if not self-contradiction, in some of his argument.

Inconsistencies

At the outset I must express regret that in my article of May, in speaking of the alleged silence of the New Testament, I may have made it to appear as if those whose arguments I was attempting to answer failed to acknowledge the references to the Sabbath in the four gospels. But what I had in mind was just the type of argument Dr. Pieters himself bases on the omission of any reference to the Sabbath in the decree of the Council at Jerusalem (Acts 15) and on the alleged silence of the epistles. The point precisely is that a certain kind of silence within the New Testament is used as an argument to show that the New Testament does not provide us with evidence to establish the permanent obligation of the fourth commandment. I was intent upon showing that this type of argument fails to take proper account of the other statements there are in the New Testament, statements which constitute evidence that the Sabbath law is regarded by the New Testament as invested with permanent validity and authority. In a word, the silence there is in certain parts of the New Testament has no right to be construed, in the matter that concerns this debate, as silence on the part of the New Testament as a whole.

Dr. Pieters says that with the rest of my first article he has no quarrel, "for it is devoted to showing how important is the weekly day of rest." He continues: "Certainly it is; but the question under debate in this discussion is whether our observance of it is to be based upon the Fourth Commandment" (p. 23). From even superficial reading of my first article, as well as of the second, surely nothing should be clearer than that the argument for the weekly day of rest was based upon the fourth commandment. Dr. Pieters has no ground upon which to suggest or insinuate that this was not precisely the question debated in the article concerned. If Dr. Pieters can say in one line that with the article (apart from the exception stated) he has no quarrel and in another that he objects to any plea for basing the day of rest upon the fourth commandment, then he has missed the whole point of the article. And I must disavow responsibility for this.

Dr. Pieters says that it is a misunderstanding of his position to aver that he accepts the continuance of the moral principles involved in the other nine commandments but denies it with regard to the fourth. Now, no one needed to be in any doubt that Dr. Pieters holds that abrogation covers the whole decalogue. This he made abundantly clear in the issue for February on pages 136 and 137. But in the February issue and in his latest article he also distinguishes between the moral principle involved in a commandment and the commandment itself. He says emphatically that while "all of the commandments are abrogated, in their strictly legal significance . . .

any moral principles contained in them abide with undiminished authority" (August-September issue, p. 23). The distinction he draws is obvious, and there was and is no misunderstanding.

But if we are to believe Dr. Pieters' own statements we must draw the conclusion that he accepts the continuance of the moral principles involved in the other nine commandments but denies this with regard to the fourth, continuance, of course, on the grounds on which he contends permanence and universality may be established, to wit, that they belong to the moral law that existed before Sinai and have been re-affirmed in the New Testament as moral principles of the Christian life. We shall quote his own words:

"Under the New Covenant the people of God must look for moral obligation, not to something authoritative under the abrogated Old Covenant, but to the teaching of our Lord and of the holy apostles. That instruction coincides at almost all points with the commandments of the Decalogue, but, as we have seen, not with the Fourth Commandment.

"However, here arises an objection that must be considered. As every Bible reader knows, the apostles do quote all the other nine commandments as divine and authoritative. How can that be reconciled with the idea that they lost their authority with the death of Christ? The answer is not difficult, and is indicated at once when we ask the question: 'Did these commandments originate the duties required in them, or were they duties before the time of Moses?' Certainly the latter. Therefore they were a part of the Moral Law before the Decalogue was given, and being such, they remained a part of the Moral Law after the Decalogue was abrogated. It is as such that the apostles affirm and teach them, and in doing so they naturally employ the old and well known form of words. So far as the apostles do this, the Christian is bound to accept the said commandments as authoritative, not now because they were proclaimed at Sinai, but because of their original moral quality and their re-affirmation by the apostles. At the risk of repetition, we may state it thus:

"Whatever in the Decalogue is binding upon us is so binding, not at all because it is there, but because it has been re-affirmed by Christ and the apostles as a moral principle of the Christian life.

"The Fourth Commandment, however, has not been so re-affirmed, and therefore has no authority as a rule of conduct in the Christian life. That is what Calvin taught, and that is scriptural to the highest degree" (February issue, p. 137, *Italics mine*).

It is surely obvious that here a clear line of distinction is drawn between the moral principles expressed in the other nine commandments, on the one hand, and the fourth commandment, on the other. In other words, Dr. Pieters holds that moral principles of the abiding moral law are involved in the other nine commandments, but no such principle underlies the fourth. Yet in his latest article he says:

"I hold that *all* of the commandments are abrogated, in their strictly legal significance, as commandments to be obeyed by God's people, but that any moral principles contained in them abide with undiminished authority. *Herein I admit no distinction between the Fourth Commandment and the rest*" (p. 23).

The italics at the end are mine. Dr. Pieters will have to reconcile the italicised statement with the position taken in the other quotation. I cannot find coherence in these two positions.

Again, in dealing with apparently conflicting attitudes on the part of the apostles, he says:

"As careful and thorough exegetes, we must seek some general principle that will bring harmony into these apparent conflicting attitudes, and such a principle may be found, I think, if we consider them, as referring to the moral principles of nine of the commandments, speaking, naturally, in the terms to which their readers were accustomed, without asserting their continuance as law. As to the Fourth Commandment, either they did not recognize any abiding moral principle in it, or were afraid that if they urged the keeping of it they would be misunderstood to teach that it was a Christian duty to obey it as it stands" (p. 24).

On the basis of the position taken by Dr. Pieters in his article for February, my argument in reply was that, if permanent authority attaches to the moral principles expressed in the other nine commandments, because they were in operation before Sinai and have been re-affirmed in the New Testament, then, on the very same grounds, a principle of permanent authority may also be discovered in the fourth, for the reason that the Sabbath law existed before Sinai and has been re-affirmed by Christ. This part of my argument I may remind readers was, however, *ad hominem*. I still insist that it holds good if Dr. Pieters adheres to his own statements in his article of February, and that he will have to make rather radical revision of some of his own statements quoted above if he is to bring consistency into the formulation of his position.

The Change of Day

The omission on my part to adduce the evidence in support of the position that the weekly Sabbath has been changed in the Christian dispensation from the seventh day of the week to the first calls forth Dr. Pieters' question, "May we take this as a tacit admission that, in his judgment, no proof of that assertion can be adduced?" The answer is, of course, that the omission implies no such admission. It was stated in the article for June-July that many questions of the greatest importance had to be left untouched, so far as my contributions were concerned. This was one of them. Professor Kromminga made brief allusion to the evidence in support of the assertion concerned in his article for April. In his latest article he has developed the argument and has given, in the judgment of the present writer, one of the most cogent pieces of reasoning that we possess. Professor Kromminga does not cover the whole field—he himself would not claim that—but within the brief compass devoted to the subject he has made us his debtors for an eminently worthy presentation of considerations frequently discounted but, nevertheless, of the greatest weight. I cannot claim to be able to add anything new to what Professor Kromminga has written and to what other representative treatments of the subject contain. I would simply refer to the admirable treatment of the subject by Daniel Wilson in his book, *The Lord's Day*, and to B. B. Warfield's summary of the evidence in his masterly article, "The Foundations of the Sabbath in the Word of God." However, if Professor Kromminga had not dealt with this phase of the discussion in his last article, an important hiatus would have been left in this particular series of articles, and Dr. Pieters was justified, at the time he wrote his last article, in calling attention to it.

The Decision of the Jerusalem Council

Dr. Pieters' use of the omission of any reference to the Sabbath law in the decision of the Council at Jerusalem (Acts 15) merits some further comment. There are, of course, difficulties both textual and exegetical in this passage, but it might be out of place to discuss these now. It must, however, be carefully noted that the particular findings of the Council are all negative in form. This of itself should caution us

against any hasty conclusions regarding the significance of omission of the Sabbath commandment. The situation with which the Council had to deal is rather clearly outlined for us in the chapter concerned, and, as Dr. G. T. Purves points out, the motive of the decree "was to prevent offence to the Jews who dwelt in every city, and the simplest explanation is that these four things were prohibited because they were the Gentile customs which were most abhorrent in Jewish eyes" (*The Apostolic Age*, p. 150). If this is the case—and it appears to be the most satisfactory analysis of the intent and motive of the decree—then mention or non-mention of the weekly Sabbath law does not come within relevant consideration. This matter would be extraneous to the question upon which attention was being focussed. Dr. Pieters apparently assumes that the commandment bearing upon the weekly Sabbath was among the distinctively Jewish commandments, that it falls into a different category from other commandments of the decalogue, and would, therefore, be one of those things about which the Gentile Christians at Antioch would be sure to ask. He then proceeds to insist that allusion to it would have been necessary if it were to be regarded as binding upon the Gentiles. But this really begs the question. The apostles and elders were very obviously not dealing with the whole question of the moral law and of ethical conduct—a fact that Dr. Pieters quite clearly recognizes. And since this is the case it is quite unwarranted to draw any conclusions from the omission of the Sabbath law any more than from omission of some of the other commandments. The only basis upon which an inference, such as Dr. Pieters draws, would be warranted is the assumption that in this regard the fourth commandment possesses a different character. However, so far as this debate is concerned, that is the proposition to be proved. I cannot, then, find in Acts 15 any warrant for Dr. Pieters' conclusion, and therefore plead that it is the type of argument from silence that cannot be understood as overthrowing the positive evidence we derive from both Testaments for the continued and permanent authority of the fourth commandment. Dr. Pieters' construction imports into the situation a series of assumptions we have no warrant to conclude were within the purview or consideration of the apostles and elders at the time.

Furthermore, it is not by any means to be taken for granted that we can cite murder, theft and adultery as things belonging to general morality and as well understood by the Greeks and Romans as by the Jews (February issue, p. 136). They truly belong to general morality in the true sense of that term, but who is to assure us that the Greeks and Romans had really any more intelligent and true recognition of the sanctity attaching to these commandments, as they were embodied in the Biblical revelation, than they would have had of the Sabbath commandment? Here again there is reason to believe that Dr. Pieters' unwarranted assumption is at work. At any rate, I do submit that he has taken far too much for granted in drawing so sharp a line of cleavage between the way the Greeks and Romans would have reacted to some of the other commandments and the way they would have reacted to the fourth.¹⁾

The Strictness of Sabbath Observance

Since the editor has generously granted further space in the pages of THE CALVIN FORUM, I welcome this opportunity to discuss a phase of the subject of Sabbath observance that had to be omitted previously. It has frequently been said, and it is the position formally adopted in certain sections of the Reformed Church, that, while the fourth commandment is binding in the Christian dispensation, yet it is not to be observed with the *strictness* with which it was observed in the Mosaic economy. Now, I submit that this is an unwarranted inference, and that it proceeds from failure to make an important distinction, the distinction between certain temporary and ceremonial regulations governing the observance of the Sabbath in the Mosaic economy and the Sabbath law itself as enunciated in the fourth commandment.

¹⁾ Other considerations could be mentioned which offset Dr. Pieters' conclusions, particularly the consideration that the Judaistic contention would concern the observance of the seventh day, whereas the Gentile Christians at Antioch would celebrate the first day, the Lord's day.

It is, of course, true that there were certain ceremonial requirements under the Mosaic law that no one in this controversy, so far as I am aware, holds to be binding in the New Testament economy. For example, in Exodus 35:2, 3 we read, "Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh there shall be to you an holy day, a sabbath of rest to the Lord: whosoever doeth work therein shall be put to death. Ye shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations upon the sabbath day." Here are two regulations that we do not hold obtain in the Christian economy, namely, the death penalty for non-observance and the prohibition to kindle a fire in our habitations. But the abrogation of such regulations, with the passing of the ceremonial law, in no way affects the strictness with which we observe the commandment. This may seem a strange conclusion, but it can be very easily elucidated and established.

There were many other temporary regulations governing the observance of the other commandments. For example, governing the observance of the fifth commandment, it was provided, "And he that curseth his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death" (Exod. 21:17). Governing the observance of at least two of the other commandments it was provided, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live. Whosoever lieth with a beast shall surely be put to death. He that sacrificeth unto any god, save unto the Lord only, he shall be utterly destroyed" (Exod. 22:18-20). In Leviticus 18 we have a list of abominations, and it is provided that, "Whosoever shall commit any of these abominations, even the souls that commit them shall be cut off from among their people" (vs. 29. See also Lev. 20:9-21, 27; 21:9; 24:10-16, 23; Num. 15:30-36). We have, then, abundant examples of the regulations governing, and of the severe penalties meted out to, certain violations of other commandments, and we do not hold that such regulations and sanctions are operative in the Christian economy.

But are we to suppose that the *strictness* with which we observe these commandments has in any way been relaxed? Are we to suppose that, since capital punishment is not to be meted out for such gross violation of the fifth commandment as that of cursing father or mother, therefore we need not now as strictly observe the fifth commandment as did the Jews under the Mosaic law? If for certain forms of sexual uncleanness the death penalty is not now inflicted, do we less strictly observe the seventh commandment? Are these gross aberrations any less an abomination now than they were then? The very asking of these questions contains the answer. In view of the greater light which the fulness of New Testament revelation has brought to us, the commission of these abominations is only all the more heinous. The abrogation of certain regulatory provisions and sanctions has not brought one whit of moral relaxation to us. Indeed, it would be more true to say that the abolition of these regulations and sanctions only serves to enforce the sanctity of the commandments. Or, to put the matter more accurately, it is the fulness of revelation with respect to the inviolable sanctity of the first, fifth, and seventh commandments (among others) that made possible the abrogation of certain regulatory rules and sanctions. The sanctified heart vehemently recoils from any suggestion that abrogation of the ceremonial provisions removes the strictness with which the commandments are to be applied to thought and life. But the same principle applies to the fourth commandment. Abrogation of certain regulatory provisions and sanctions? Yes. But abrogation of the strictness with which we should observe the commandment? Surely not.

It appears to me, therefore, that although this proposition—that we observe the commandment but not with the same strictness—has a long history and can *perhaps* plead the authority of even the Synod of Dort,²⁾ it is nevertheless, a confused and confusing way of stating the matter and one fraught with devastating consequences in the application of the fourth commandment to the Christian life. Consequently

2) So far as I have been able to find, the Synod of Dort said that "in the fourth precept of the Divine law there is something ceremonial and something moral. The ceremonial consists in the rest of the seventh day from the creation, and in the rigid observance of that rest enjoined specially on the Jews" (Quoted from James Gillilan: "The Sabbath," p. 94).

the answer of the Westminster Shorter Catechism to the question, "How is the Sabbath to be sanctified?", namely, "The Sabbath is to be sanctified by a holy resting all that day, even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days; and spending the whole time in the public and private exercises of God's worship, except so much as is to be taken up in the works of necessity and mercy," satisfactorily sums up what are the logical implications of the Sabbath law.

Escape from this position can be maintained on Dr. Pieters' position, that the Sabbath law has been abrogated in the Christian economy. On the position that the Sabbath commandment is still binding I can see no escape, for it is surely illogical, without support in evidence, and contrary to all analogy in the case of the other commandments, to say, that the fourth commandment is binding but not as strictly so as in the older economy. It was the British Reformers pre-eminently who perceived this, and it was they who carried to logical conclusions the principle that the fourth commandment in all its sanctity is part of Christian morality and is fulfilled in the Christian Lord's day.

It must be granted that the evidence for the transfer of the day from the seventh to the first day of the week is not as copious as is the evidence for the perpetually binding character of the commandment. But what we require in such a case is adequate evidence, and the kind of evidence argued by Professor Kromminga and others, to whom reference was made above, is evidence that is adequate.

It is surely grave misunderstanding to say—even if we should have to accuse Calvin of such—that in linking observance of the Lord's day to the fourth commandment "we obscure its reminder of the resurrection of Christ."³⁾ Does it not rather add to what is signified by the fourth commandment to have the day of holy rest invested with all the meaning that the resurrection of our Lord imparts to it? And does it not add to the observance of the Lord's day as a memorial of Christ's resurrection that it should be invested with the sanctity of a divine commandment?

3) It is not too clear that Calvin means exactly what Dr. Pieters avers on page 25 of the August-September issue. In the context of the quotation given by Dr. Pieters, Calvin is dealing with the sanction of capital punishment for the breach of the Sabbath and with the prohibition to light a fire on the Sabbath day. It may well be that it is the perpetuation of such ordinances that Calvin holds "would be putting a veil over the death and resurrection of His Son." It is admittedly difficult to determine Calvin's precise meaning in some of his statements and to reconcile apparently conflicting assertions in his various expositions on this subject.

Memoria Amoris

You remain entwined within the beauty in my mind.
Dimly I perceived you in the night
Dimly recognized a soul to trust—
Then suddenly together:
Swiftly were ensuing hours spent,
Very gracious then became our day.
With you the phalanx'd hours fled,
Decimated, in retreat, ashamed.
And, stunned, the moments cautiously returned
To contemplate us, joyous foes of time.
A transient happiness was present there,
Assuaging sweetness for the buoyant soul;
Until the shadow of a foreign night—
Gray circumstance which both we grieved—
Slyly intervened and brought the blight
Of stubborn termination—
But not blight: decree—
For fixed it was that you were not for me.

* * *

How soothing, passing by to say,
"Ah, sweet the uses of adversity." —C. V. Z.