**L’Abri – Covenantalism and the Social Order**

***By Dr Adi Schlebusch***

*Social order class. Discussion on covenant and social order apt because when I started Pactum Institute I chose this name specifically to emphasize this aspect. So its something I am really excited about.*

Although its basic principles are as old as creation itself, what we have come to know as the Federalist political tradition finds its origins in the Reformation in Zurich, in particular with the successor of Zwingli, Heinrich Bullinger, the most thorough and systematic covenant theologian of the period. As the Presbyterian historians Charles McCoy and Wayne Baker describe in their book *The Fountainhead* *of Federalism: Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenantal Tradition*:

In the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, the era when the institutions of the modern world were taking shape, federal theologians dealt with political as well as ecclesiastical issues and political philosophers concerned with societal covenants dealt also with religious issues. Heinrich Bullinger and Samuel Rutherford were primarily religious leaders but did not hesitate to spell out the political implications of their theological federalism. On the other hand, political thinkers like Johannes Althusius focused on the political order but included much that would now be regarded as in the domain of theology.[[1]](#footnote-2)

In his *magnum opus*, *Politica* Althusius beautifully lays out the covenantal or Federalist social ontology—the divinely ordained structuring of society— as follows:

*Q. What is Social ontology? Study of being or nature of things.*

It cannot be denied that provinces are constituted from villages and cities, and commonwealths and realms from provinces. Therefore, just as the cause by its nature precedes the effect and is more perceptible, and just as the simple or primary precedes in order what has been composed or derived from it, so also villages, cities and provinces precede realms and are prior to them. For this is the order and progression of nature, that the conjugal relationship, or the domestic association of man and wife, is called the beginning and foundation of human society. From it are then produced the associations of various blood relations and in-laws. From them in turn come the sodalities and assemblies, out of the union of which arises the composite body that we call a village, town or city … It is necessary, therefore, that the doctrine of the symbiotic life of families, kinship associations, assemblies, cities, and provinces precede the doctrine of the realm or universal symbiotic association that arises from the former associations and is composed of them.[[2]](#footnote-3)

In contrast to liberalism’s primacy of the individual as the absolute standard and justification for authority, law, and order,[[3]](#footnote-4) the Federalist understanding of social ontology fundamentally relates the individual to the family and to broader familial and ethnic or ancestral relationships in which he finds his social place and identity. This recognizes that the God-given social order is not made up of individuals, but of families.

In describing “the conjugal relationship, or the domestic association of man and wife” as “the beginning and foundation of human society,” Althusius leaves us with a very important clue as to how Socio-Political Covenantalism functions in practice. Federalism is rooted in that very first covenant established upon creation between God and mankind at creation. God, the source of all being, establishes order (including social order) through creation (Genesis 1:2). The divinely-ordained institution of marriage then functions as the foundation of human society precisely because God has ordained it to be the framework for procreation and the means of human survival. When God ordains man and wife to be “no longer two, but one flesh” (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:8; Ephesians 5:31), it is not only to emphasize the holiness and intimacy of the marriage relationship, but it is also a divine socio-ontological ordinance. God has ordained the family and not the individual to be, properly, speaking, the basic covenantal unit upon which human society is to be built. If this basic socio-ontological structure becomes disrupted, as Christ’s enemies attempt to do by virtue of the state’s sanctioning of and the propaganda made for no-fault divorce, sodomite unions, and the welfare state which consumes those functions normatively endowed to the (extended) family itself, then all of society falls apart. This is the result of the West having chosen to go down the path of individualist rationalism instead of communitarian associationalism.

Throughout the West we have long been witnessing the disruption of the Neo-Babelist New World Order consuming all of the smaller, yet more basic spheres of human society. It isolates individuals from their spouses, their children, their parents, their neighbors, churches and all of their kinsmen.

*Q. Why do you think the communist state has an interest in isolating individuals from their families, tribes, communities and nations? Why does the church want atomized individuals​? Vacuum – state fulfills all roles famiy, church – healthcare, education.*

which leaves the modern Western individual is functionally left with no other option than to surrender and forfeit, in classical Rousseauist fashion, his rights to the all-interfering and seemingly all-powerful state. This is accompanied by indoctrinating populations, first with the ideal of multiculturalism and thereafter with the complete integration of the masses aimed at shaping a new, artificial identity based in the state alone as itself as opposed to the organic social order shaped and sanctioned by these covenantal social structures created by God to this end. This amalgamation entails a radical depersonalization of mankind itself, that is, a rebellious onslaught on the image of God in man by integrating each atomized individual into an impersonal mass and artificial herd lacking any identity or rootedness. As the Dutch Reformed political theorist Groen van Prinsterer (1801—1876) notes:

[t]he proponents of this sociable order ordained by the state, of this society not of clans and families, but companies and pelotons are, in terms of the implementation of their system, content with the peace and liberty of the government—with the liberty and omnipotence of those who take care for the discipline of society and are the heads of the herd who provide us with this new grazing.[[4]](#footnote-5)

Within the Federal political tradition, all social units were thought of as communities, families, or peoples. In premodern times, even cities were thought of as compromising a people or an *ethnos* on their own. In *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos* it is noted that cities and towns have a right to expel or ban civil rulers, because cities do not in the first place belong to the greater whole, “since cities don’t consist of stones heaped together but of nations, and every nation belongs to God, to whom they owe loyalty above all else, even the king.”[[5]](#footnote-6) Federalism necessitates the principle of subsidiarity: a mechanism that aims to ensure the liberty of citizens from the interventions of the central government, by emphasizing that socio-political matters ought to be handled by the smallest, lowest and least centralized authority.[[6]](#footnote-7) In other words, the family, as the social structure most basic to society, takes precedence. It is the family which sanctions the expansion of social order and the creation of the extended spheres of human existence. It is only those duties and functions which the family is unable to perform, that is then delegated to the extended family or clan, and only then to local government. And finally, it is only those duties which the lesser magistrates are unable to perform (think of national defense, for example) that can, if absolutely needed, thereafter delegated to the national or federal government. Not the state, not the school and not even the church has authority over the sphere of the family nor the right to usurp the duties of family government, which is primary to the social order. The social order does not begin with the whole who keeps the parts together, but begins with the pre-existing parts which constitite the whole, and between whom legitimate co-operation is only possible by means of the process of covenanting together. For Althusius, however, this covenant or *pactum* is not a type of once-off abstract social contract by which free and equal individuals come together to form a society, but rather the fruit of an ever-present human need for association arising out of the way we were designed by God, and by which smaller associations form the basis of larger associations.[[7]](#footnote-8) But importantly, for Althusius

smaller associations, far from being subsumed, retain their own functionality and integrity, while the greater associations, up to and including the commonwealth, only foster this independent activity, not subsume it, and indeed, are required by higher law to respect the law-orders of the lesser associations rather than infringe upon them.[[8]](#footnote-9)

The principle of subsidiarity, in which smaller associations are given both ontological and political precedence, is rooted in Scripture. Acts 6:1-7 teaches that the care for those in need is primarily the duty of the family itself and should, as far as possible, be conducted within the sphere of the family. This is confirmed by 1 Timothy 5:8: “But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” Furthermore, biblical law also teaches the subsidiarity principle in Exodus 18, where Jethro advises Moses not to centralize the judicial system, but to allow families to handle judicial matters by themselves as far as possible. Moses, as federal civil authority, was only to handle matters delegated to him by the families and clans. Subsidiarity is furthermore rooted in the reality and practice of human existence itself. Our daily activity as social beings revolve around our interaction with those in our most immediate vicinity. Subsidiarity also naturally prioritizes the most intimate of our relationships. Ideally speaking, even healthcare should be taken care of on a local community level, with institutions such as the local church and the extended family taking the lead. The education of children is also a family matter. Subsidiarity protects individuals, families and communities against government tyranny. In practice, the role and function of the state is, after all, never threatened by the father executing his duties as head of the household, but the authority of the father in the household is most certainly threatened by government overreach.

The reason Federalism works so fruitfully in practice is of course precisely because it operates in accordance with the creation ordinances of God, while rebellion against God’s natural order always leads to disaster and chaos. As Ruben Alvarado describes it.

*Q. By the way, apart from Bret, does anyone know who Ruben Alvarado is?*

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The modern release of the individual from traditional ties of class, religion, and kinship has made him free; but, on the testimony of innumerable works of our age, this freedom is accompanied not by the sense of creative release but by the sense of disenchantment and alienation.[[9]](#footnote-10)

Putting Federalism in practice, which is something we can actually do as families, communities, and churches, is absolutely key to restoring sovereignty to those spheres upon whose autonomy the government and corporations have infringed.

And I would argue that in many places in the West it has actually even something we might end up needing to do for our very survival as a people. In South Africa, my own context as you know, we as Boers are demographically overrun completely, we have no functioning government, no functioning border control. Crime and corruption is out of control. So what the Orania movement is doing

*By the way do everyone here know what Orania is?*

is that it is appealing to this Federal tradition to practically establish a canton, that is, a semi-autonomous region where authority is structured on a local level where authority is delegated from below and not from above. And surprisingly the climate is ripe for that, not because our government has embraced the idea of Covenantalism and subsidiarity, but because they literally increasingly lack the capacity to actually govern the country. They literally lack the ability to continue enforcing law and order. Part of the reason they could never go through with their land reform pan to confiscate Boer farms, is literally because they can’t enforce it. Their police force and military force is increasingy becoming weaker and more ill-disciplined. So in this context, we do have the advantage that if more Boers were to concentrate demographically in the region of Orania and the central government increasingly collapses, we already have the necessary infrastructure and local government in place to guide us on our path to a free Christian nationalist republic. The government is also increasingly forced to recognize the reality of Orania and as the community grows and the government increasingly collapses a situation develops in which they are forced to recognize the realities that we’ve created. Orania is on private land and its citizens are hell-bent on protecting that. But what is interesting is that this federalist model is being explored also for other areas in South Africa where there is a high concentration of Boer people. Now I tend to be a little skeptical about the feasability of doing that in some of the larger cities such as Pretoria or Cape Town. But I am confident of its potential in a place like Orania. Furthermore, the government have themselves given legitimacy to Orania by recently recognizing its right to be an exclusive cultural enclave for Boers by recently recognizing its right to exist even at the United Nations.

Now of course I’m not saying success is guaranteed, but we do, by God’s grace, have at least a few things going for us. And in any struggle for survival – whether it be in South Africa or here in America, we always necessarily have to trust in and rely on God for deliverance. It is always up to him and we certainly can’t expect deliverance unless we repent.

And I’m going to be quite frank with you: even in America as the demographics change and things start to go the way of the third-word (and mind you, that might be closer than you think – I saw a number of potholes here in Charlotte as we drove into town!), looking into things like demographically concentrating as WASPS might be worth considering as a practical step on the path to secession. And I agree with pastor Bret when he says secession is ultimately the only path—both in South Africa as well as here in America, but in order to get there we need to build the covenantal order required to make that happen by starting, first of all, with our own families. Without healthy families, no city, community, state or nation, can even think about establishing the covenantal structures necessary for that secession to happen,

Thank you.

Questions?

1. Charles McCoy and James Baker, *The Fountainhead of Federalism: Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenantal Tradition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1992),12. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Johannes Althusius, *Politica Methodice Digesta, Atque Exemplis Sacris et Profanis Illustrata* (Groningen: Radaeus, 1610), 715. “Nam negari non petest ex pagis et urbibus, provincias, ex bisce vicro Respublicae et rega constituta. Sicut igitur cansa sua natura praecedit effectum, eoque, notior est et simplex, seu primum id quod compositum seu ortum a primo est, antecedit ordinare, ita quoque, pagi, civitates et provincia, regna antecedunt et prius quam ea suerunt. Hic enim naturae ordo et processus, ut conjungium, seu consocatio domestica viriet uxoris fundamentum et principium humane societatis dicatur, et ex hac Porro producantur consociationes consanguineorum et adsinium diversorum, ex bis vero sodalitates, collegia, ex quorum conjunctiove corpus compositum, quod pagum, oppidum, vel civitatem dicimus … Necessario igitur doctrina de vita symbiotica coniugum prpinquorum, collegiorum, ci vit atum et provincae antecedit eam, qua est de regno, vel universali consociatone symboitica priore orta est et exea composita.” [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Ruben Alvarado, *The Debate that Changed the West: Grotius versus Althusius* (Aalten: Pantokrator Press, 2018), xix. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Guilaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Vrijheid, Gelijkheid, Broederschap: Toelichting van de Spreuk der Revolutie* (The Hague: Roering, 1847), 67. “De voorstanders van dit gezellig verkeer, van staatswege verordend, van deze samenleving, niet in huisgezinnen, niet in familiën meer, maar in compagniën en pelotons zijn, bij de ten uitvoer leggen van hun stelsel, te vrede met de vrijheid van den Staat, van het bewind, met de vrijheid of het alvermogen dergenen die zorg dragen voor de discipline, die aan het hoofd der kudde staan, die met deze nieuwe soort van vetweiderij belast zijn.” [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Brutus, *Vindiciae*, 58. “inquam ergo, urbes non consitunt in lapidum coacervatione, sed in Populo. Populus vero, est Populus Dei, qui deo primum, dein Regi tenetur.” [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Peter McManners, *Green Outcomes in the Real World: Global Forces, Local Circumstances, and Sustainable Solutions* (Surrey: Gower, 2012), 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Alvarado, *Debate*, 31-33. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Ibid., 33-34. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Ibid., xx. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)