

Closing Argument by Mr. Irons (Charge # 2)

January 10-11, 2003

BD IV:C.3.a: "After all the evidence has been presented, the accused may make his final argument with respect to the evidence and the law of the church." This is followed by deliberation and voting: Specification 1, Specification 2, and then the charge itself.

I. The evidence (in light of the law of the church)

Specification 1: "That you have, on numerous occasions, publicly called into question the teaching of the Westminster Standards regarding the moral law."

It is not true that I have called into question the teaching of the Standards regarding *the moral law*. See, e.g., my "Response to Charge Two" (page 20, paragraph 2).

Patrick Fairbairn on WCF XIX:2:

We should, however, mistake such language did we suppose it to mean, that there was either any formal promulgation of a moral law to Adam, or that the Decalogue, as embodying this law, was in precise form internally communicated by some special revelation to him. It was a brief and popular style of speech ... Understood after this manner, the language in question is quite intelligible and proper, though certainly capable of being misapplied (if too literally taken)" (*The Revelation of Law in Scripture*, pp. 46-48).

Specification 2: "That you have denied that the Decalogue, as a summary of the moral law, continues to have binding authority over the Christian."

This specification is also false. I affirm WLC # 98 which states that the moral law is "summarily comprehended" in the Decalogue. I affirm that the moral requirements summarily comprehended in the Decalogue remain binding for the New Testament church, although not in the precise covenantal form in which they were promulgated on Mt. Sinai.

The Westminster divines taught this:

- WLC # 97: Believers have been "delivered from the moral law as a covenant of works" and are now "bound to Christ."
- WCF XIX:6: The blessings and curses of the Mosaic covenant show believers what we deserve for our sins and what blessings we may expect for obedience, "although not as due to them by the law as a covenant of works."
- WCF XXI:7: The Sabbath has been "changed" to the first day of the week.

The Mosaic covenant is not the covenant mediated between Christ and his church. "By calling this covenant 'new,' he has made the first covenant obsolete" (Heb. 8:13). Bolton: "Our divines in general reckon this to be one part of our freedom in Christ, that we are freed from the law as a covenant" (p. 98)

Ernest Kevan on "Law in the hands of Christ" (in *The Grace of Law*, pp. 184-87). Anthony Burgess, Thomas Manton – both appealed to 1 Cor. 9:21, where Paul teaches that the NT believer is

- not *hupo nomon* (under the Mosaic Law)
- nor is he *anomos theo* (without law in relation to God)
- but *ennomos Christo* (subject to law in relation to Christ)

Kevan on *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*:

Although the historical fact of *The Marrow* controversy suggests that many at that time thought that the author was an Antinomian, the perspective of later years acquits him of such a charge ... Provided the pitfalls of Antinomianism on the one side and of Neonomianism on the other be avoided, the conception of the Law "in the hands of Christ" is unexceptionable. *It implies no change in the demands of the Law, nor in the obligation of the believer to recognize its binding authority, but signifies a different administration of it, with a different and deeper motive than is found outside of the experience of Christ* (pp. 186-87).

II. The law of the church (in light of the previously established evidence)

A. The standard Reformed position (1600 to 1953): there is some sense in which the Decalogue republishes the Adamic covenant of works (Fairbairn: "the Cocceian school").

Two variations:

Majority (8 inch circle): Decalogue a more "legal" administration of the covenant of grace than the administration we are now under

Minority (10 inch circle): Decalogue a typological covenant of works pertaining to earthly blessings and curses in the land of Canaan (*The Marrow*, Bolton, et al)

B. John Murray's "recasting" of covenant theology (1953 +):

"It would not be ... in the interests of theological conservation or theological progress for us to think that the covenant theology is in all respects definitive and that there is no further need for correction, modification, and expansion. Theology must always be undergoing reformation ... It appears to me that the covenant theology, notwithstanding the finesse of analysis with which it was worked out and the grandeur of its articulated systematization, *needs recasting*" (*The Covenant of Grace*, pp. 4-5).

(1) Murray rejected the traditional (and Confessional) description of the pre-fall Adamic administration as a "covenant of works" (*Collected Writings*, vol. 2, p. 49).

(2) Murray denied that the Mosaic covenant was a covenant of works *in any sense*:

"It has been thought that in the Mosaic covenant there is a sharp antithesis to the principle of promise embodied in the Abrahamic covenant and also to the principle of grace which comes to its efflorescence in the new covenant, and that this antithetical principle which governs the Mosaic covenant and dispensation is that of law in contradistinction from both promise and grace ... This interpretation [of the Mosaic covenant] has exercised a *profound influence upon the history of interpretation* and it has cast its shadow over the exegesis of particular passages" (*Principles of Conduct*, pp. 195-96).

"The view that in the Mosaic covenant there was a repetition of the so-called covenant of works, *current among covenant theologians*, is a grave misconception and involves an erroneous construction of the Mosaic covenant" (*Collected Writings*, vol. 2, p. 50).