
AGAINST THE GRAIN

The Necessity of the “Maverick” Among the Lord’s People

by

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It is a startling and rarely acknowledged fact that there would be no Christian gospel left to preach today if there had not been a myriad “mavericks” among the Lord’s people throughout their pilgrimage in this Gospel Age. A true “maverick” is not a trouble-maker but a blessing to the Church. Every assembly should have one (at least). They keep us on our toes, remind us of our roots and provide us with a model demonstration of Christian courage. As all believers are called to be heroes of the faith, they should take their lead from these pioneers of truth who have been raised up by the Lord in every age. In the following study we examine this phenomenon, giving instances from Scripture and the annals of history.

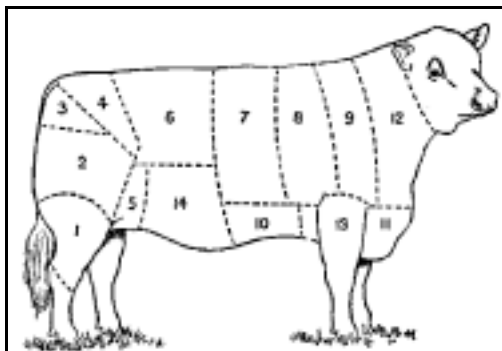
INTRODUCTION: Defining our Terms

Before commencing our study - proper, it would be helpful to define the term “maverick”. The word is derived from the sir-name of a Texas cattle-raiser, Samuel Maverick (c.1840), who would not brand his cattle, and it began to be used to refer to any stray animal without an owner’s brand. Eventually it came into popular usage to describe anyone who does not generally conform to traditional norms.

Within the Church, the present writer has seen the term increasingly being used by members of the religious establishment to refer to someone by whom they feel most threatened, who cannot easily be labelled or pigeonholed, and who eschews the prevailing slavery to men and their systems of teaching. From the establishment standpoint such a maverick is viewed as a troublemaker — whereas the maverick himself regards his maverick behaviour as necessary for the health of the Church. How far each of these views represents the truth, we will shortly discover.

We fully realise that those desiring to discredit the central thesis of this study may cite the inclusion of the destructive heretic under the title of maverick, thus demonstrating that mavericks — far from being a desirable or necessary element in the Church — are actually a scourge. For the purposes of clarification, therefore, we would wish to define a true maverick among the Lord’s people as follows:

An orthodox believer who refuses to be a slave to the traditions and systems of men and who is prepared, if necessary, to take a firm biblical stand against the religious establishment of the day for concerns which are essential to the furtherance of truth, justice and the universal cause of God in Christ.



BRANDED FROM HEAD TO FOOT

This is the sad condition of many believers today, who so readily shackle themselves to the flawed beliefs, traditions and systems of men, rather than solely to the inspired commandments of God (cf. Matt.23:8-10).

The primary purpose of this study is to ascertain whether such a maverick is justified in his purpose and, if so, what function does he serve in the work and historical development of the Lord’s people? Before we further pursue our enquiry of the maverick as he occurs among the Lord’s people, let us take a brief look at the precedent offered to us by the position and purpose of the maverick in secular history, and the relevant lessons which can be learned.

I. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MAVERICK IN SECULAR SOCIETY

The Lord Jesus made the enigmatic statement that the children of the world are wiser in their own generation than the children of light (Luke 16:8). In the outworking of God’s “common grace” through the institutions of this world, and the traces of light of God’s Law which remain in the unregenerate heart, unbelievers have generally proved themselves to be extremely shrewd and resourceful in the way that they go about their chosen business.¹ But within the institutions of the world, in the wake of any great advancement or

¹ By ‘common grace’ (referred to by some Puritans as “restraining grace”, or by Calvin as the “*generalem Dei gratiam*”) we mean the manner in which the Lord exercises dominion over the fallen world system of government, civil law, industry, etc., in

innovation, there is the inevitable occurrence of a repeated gradual downcurve tendency to ossification and stagnation. This is an endemic process in human affairs — a consequence of the effects of the Fall, occupying a similar status to the Second Law of Thermodynamics in regard to the degeneration of energy in the universe. In the present age the only thing in the cosmos which is not prone to decline and degeneration is the true Church and kingdom of God — against which the effects of the fall and the gates of hell can never prevail. Although we only have the *firstfruits* of the kingdom of God, present in grace rather than glory, the body of Christ is pure and spotless.

Yet, presumably in order to prevent an early total decline in human affairs, the Lord has ordained that certain people will be raised up, under the auspices of what may be called common grace, in the field of secular human affairs to tackle this repetitive problem of the stagnation and ossification in secular culture. These innovators have generally been despised in their time and made outcasts of society — misunderstood and feared as too *avant-garde*. Such men indeed often appear to have come before their time — in all fields: the arts, sciences, engineering, business endeavours, etc. Ironically, later in history, when their contribution comes to be fully appreciated, men will often build monuments to these mavericks and revere them. This process of the maverick in secular affairs — men and women who are prepared to take a stand against the establishment for the cause of truth and justice — has been interestingly charted by researcher Colin Wilson in his books *“The Outsider”* (1956) and *“Religion and the Rebel”* (1958). Although as a Christian, one cannot accept the full sweep of Wilson’s thesis, they are nevertheless interesting studies. Indeed, a complete existentialist conceptual framework has been developed out of the study of the maverick/outsider which came to have a great influence on the novels of such authors as Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus.

Another very interesting illustration of the maverick in secular culture occurs in the constellation of what we now know as Russia. Here, though, he is actually placed on a pedestal and held in an almost superstitious awe. Known officially as the *yurodivy*, such a person was an integral part of the court of the Czar, whose role was to act as the conscience of the realm. As one musicologist has described this phenomenon:

“The *yurodivy* is a Russian religious phenomenon, which even the cautious Soviet scholars call a national trait. There is no word in any other language that can precisely convey the meaning of the Russian word *yurodivy*, with its many historical and cultural overtones. The *yurodivy* has the gift to see and hear what others know nothing about”.²

It is precisely this ability “to see and hear what others know nothing about” that forms a basic characteristic of the maverick, both Christian and secular — although they plainly manifest in radically different ways. In the English Medieval period, a similar role to that of the *yurodivy* was the well-known figure of the court jester, who could say things to the monarch, in an esoteric or

lampooning fashion, without fear of losing his head! The Russian *yurodivy* was a tolerated anti-establishment figure, whose formidable critical faculties and insight into human affairs was officially recognised by the civil powers. For instance, the *yurodivy* was able to be wholly honest with, and extremely critical towards, the Czar without any fear of retribution. He held what amounted to an almost ‘prophetic’, protected status in society. Many would say that the composer Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975) and the writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn (1918-) have been among the more recent representations of the *yurodivy* in Russian culture.

There are many other aspects of the maverick in secular society which could usefully be brought to our attention; but our purpose is to show the place of the maverick in the history of the Lord’s people rather than the children of the world. However, the parallels are most apposite, as we shall shortly come to appreciate.

II. THE OCCURRENCE OF THE MAVERICK AMONG THE LORD’S PEOPLE

Although these remarks about the maverick in secular culture may not seem immediately significant to the purposes of our study, we are at great pains to show that there is a direct parallel of great import. For the occurrence of the maverick among the people of God has its roots in very similar causes, while he also shares the same gift as his secular counterpart of being able “to see and hear what others know nothing about” — except that this is applied in a peculiarly Judaeo-Christian context. In other words, the maverick who operates among the Lord’s people has all the insights of the secular maverick, but with the added dimension of the spiritually-imparted gift of Discernment.

In just the same way that the institutions of secular, common-grace-inspired culture have a natural, fallen-world-induced tendency to stagnation and ossification, so the various manifestations of the Church in the world — especially if they have become absorbed into the secular establishment — display a similar propensity for such endemic decline. This tendency to spiritual decline and conformity to the mere standards of the world has happened on a continuous basis for as long as the Lord’s people have been represented in the world by a Divinely constituted body of people. The entire O.T. Scriptures bear witness to such corruption as it affected the people of Israel from the time of their Exodus out of Egypt onwards. By the time of our Lord’s Incarnation — with the exception of a faithful remnant — Israel was officially represented by an establishment religion which was barely recognisable as that which God originally intended His people to exhibit. This was the culmination of one and a half millennia of cumulative apostasy. Similarly the past two millennia have been marked by repeated degeneration of the New Testament *ekklesia* as a result of either a predilection for the empty form of religion, or too compromising a relationship with the civil authorities.

In the time of the Old Covenant, the decline most often occurred when the division (ordained by God for the sake of purity, Exod.33:16) between Israel and the surrounding nations became blurred. During the New

preserve society from a premature occurrence of the demise prophesied in Scripture. The primary manifestation of this ‘common grace’ is what we have come to refer to, somewhat euphemistically, as ‘civilisation’.

² Solomon Volkov, *Testimony*, (Faber, 1979.), p.xxvii.

Covenant, this has also most often occurred when the division (ordained by God for the sake of purity, 2 Cor.6:17-18) between Church and the world has been blurred. One of the primary manifestations of this has involved the Church being drawn into the affairs of the secular state in an increasingly unbiblical capacity. As one historian has well said:

“As long as the Church had remained separate it had been a powerful witness for Christ in the world, and was constantly drawing converts into its holy fellowship. When, however, already weakened by the adoption of human rule in place of the guidance of the Spirit, it was suddenly brought into partnership with the State, it became defiled and debased”.³

One high spot of such compromise in the New Covenant era occurred with the creation of the Vatican as a powerbase. But Protestantism cannot point a wholly innocent finger in the direction of Rome; for it has repeatedly attempted to manipulate the state through various political machinations and liaisons, not to mention the formation of an “establishment” Church — the repeated apostasy of which can be seen to this very day.⁴ As the same historian astutely observes:

“The first three centuries of the Church’s history prove that no earthly power can crush it. It is invincible to attacks from without. The witnesses of its sufferings, and even its persecutors, become its converts and it grows more rapidly than it can be destroyed. The following period of nearly two hundred years shows that the union of the Church and the State, even when the powers of the mightiest empire are put into the Church’s hands, do not enable her to save the State from destruction; for, in abandoning the position which her very name implies — of being “called out” of the world, and of separation to Christ — she loses the power that comes from subjection to her Lord, exchanging it for an earthly authority that is fatal to herself”.⁵

This importance of being “called out” is absolutely crucial to our study. For the Greek word which is uniformly translated as “Church” in all the Bible versions is none other than *ekklesia* — a term which very definitely refers to those who are **called out** by the Lord for separation from the world and faithfulness to Christ. The commonly-made distinction — although, admittedly, a good term of convenience — between a *visible* and *invisible* Church is, therefore, one which finds no support in the New Testament Scriptures.⁶

The Church of Christ is a body of divinely constituted people who are sojourners, pilgrims and strangers as they travel through the wilderness of this world. Yet they are also required to be heralds of the Gospel and

providers of an exemplary model of godliness and genuine spirituality. History has shown that these characteristics frequently become faded and eventually obscured as man superimposes his own traditions and concerns on the body of Christ — a factor of decay which has affected both Roman Catholic *and* Protestant streams of Christianity.

Accordingly — parallel to the timely appearance of the maverick/yurodivy in secular culture as an alarm to be heeded — we have the emergence of the Christian maverick, one whose God-given role is to recall the *ekklesia* to her divinely-appointed office as an exemplary body distinct from the secular institutions of the world. Before we give examples from history of this character — the Christian maverick — we would wish to provide a template to which we will refer repeatedly. For what is of great interest to our study is that there are very definite patterns followed — both in terms of the descent into religious establishmentarianism and in its response to those who dare to question its authority.

III. THE BEDROCK OF RELIGIOUS ESTABLISHMENTARIANISM

Having already noted the tendency to religious establishmentarianism wherever the earthly manifestations of the Church do not adhere to New Testament guidelines for their constitution, let us now briefly note the foundations on which this decay is erected. We will not here go into the various historical manifestations of these characteristics — that will be reserved for the appropriate later pages — but we are outlining the principles behind the degeneracy of Christian religion.

1. CONFORMITY TO THE WORLD’S VALUES

It must surely be agreed that the “rulebook” for the Church is the Scriptures. It is in the Bible that we find our norms and examples. Now, it is true that there is much in the secular world which can be admired in its own place — for its beauty, intelligence, skill and civic sagacity — but the norms of the world must never become regulative for the Christian.⁷

One can observe, for instance, the manner in which the Church has divided itself into denominations, sects and factions, in very much the same fashion as the political parties of the world carry on their business!

One sees this conformity to the values of the world to a very great extent in the churches. The manner in which hyper-congregationalism has occurred in so many churches is a mirror of the democratic model of secular government, which stands over against the theocratic roots of the Church. Another example of conformity to the world’s values can be seen in the fact that very often

³ E.H. Broadbent, *The Pilgrim Church*, (Pickering & Inglis, 1931), p.23.

⁴ Observe, for instance, the Protestant “establishment” Church organisations of Scotland and England to witness this phenomenon. Looking further afield to Europe, the “established” churches of Scandinavia and Germany (Lutheran), and the so-called “Reformed” churches in the Netherlands and Switzerland have all become similarly infested with compromise. It is no exaggeration to say that every single denomination that has ever been formed — whether Presbyterian, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, Episcopalian — has either degenerated into theological liberalism on the road to apostasy or has fossilised into an obscurantist sect fit only for cranks and weirdoes.

⁵ E.H. Broadbent, op. cit., p.29.

⁶ It is acknowledged that this distinction was blurred in reference to the Lord’s Old Covenant people, the covenant of which was made with an earthly nation made up of both believers and unbelievers. The New Covenant, however, is one which is made in Christ’s blood — shed only for those who have believed in previous times and who now constitute the *ekklesia* in this Gospel Age (cf. Eph.5:25).

⁷ Unless, of course, they are civil laws which are in complete conformity with the Word of God — and even then, we must not conform to them because the world does them, but rather because they are commensurate with Divine Truth.

a man will be judged to be good eldership material, not because of his loving heart, spirituality and acquaintance with the Word, but because he has a good standing in the community, a “good” job, is always well-groomed (in the middle-class sense) and his father was an elder before him. This may be a somewhat superficial example, but it is part of the general degeneracy into a soft establishmentarianism, which substitutes the values of the world for the teachings of the Word of God, making social “respectability” the primary criterion for eligibility in the churches. We are not suggesting that one should avoid being socially respectable but, rather, that social respectability in itself is no qualification for a role of responsibility in the churches. However, contrary to these secular values, Jesus said: “Woe to you when all men shall speak well of you! For so their fathers did to the false prophets” (Luke 6:26).

1. BLIND ACCEPTANCE OF MANMADE THEOLOGICAL AND ECCLESIASTICAL SYSTEMS

Hand in hand with conformity to the traditions of man goes the acceptance of systems of Church order and theology as shibboleths and articles of faith. These various systems, creeds and confessions will eventually take on a higher significance than the very Word of God. So very often, among the Lord’s people, the traditions of men actually become substituted for the edicts of God, as the Lord Jesus noted (Matt.15:1-9). Paul must have been aware of this tendency when he exhorted the Roman believers not to be conformed to the world but rather to be transformed by the renewing of their minds (Rom.12:2).

2. COMPROMISE OF THE BIBLICAL ANTITHESIS

Another layer in the bedrock of religious establishmentarianism involves the clouding of the biblical antithesis between the children of God and the offspring of Satan which was set in force by the Lord in the wake of the Fall of our first parents in Eden at the beginning of history (Gen.3:15).

The people of God have always been designated as an exemplary force which stands distinct from the world system and its structures. This has been most necessary in order to provide a paradigm to which the children of the world can aspire and, ultimately, be attracted. This does not mean that the Lord’s people become an esoteric enclave hiving off into monasteries, desert hideouts and caves. Neither does it mean that there is no structure in the churches themselves. But it does involve setting forth the Church as a spiritually-based organism rather than a worldly organisation. The quintessence of salt and light is that they are rooted in the profound spiritual relationship which exists among believers and which must shine out into the world (Matt.5:13-16), as a separate organism from the world. When that distinction becomes blurred and the Church becomes subsumed into the powerbase structures of secular culture, that shine fades most rapidly — whether it involves Romanists or Calvinists, Jesuits or Protestants — as history bears witness only too well. As Prof. Albertus Pieters has put it so well in an exposition of Romans 13:1-7:

“There are two independent sovereignties, both ordained by God: The Church and the State. The State is as truly a divine institution as the Church. The State is the trustee of the law; the Church the trustee of the Gospel. The State bears the sword for the forcible restraint of sin; the Church holds the secret of the only true remedy for sin. The State compels men to abstain from the grosser forms of open sin; the Church inspires them with a hatred of secret sin and a love for holiness. Both are necessary in this fallen world; and neither has the right to interfere with the other.”

Dr. D. M. Lloyd-Jones put his finger on this recurring problem when he answered the question: “*What went wrong with the Puritans who had been in the ascendancy during most of the period [1640-1662]?*” by stating that

“the first cause...was the admixture of religion and politics. That was the thing that seems to me to bedevil most of Puritan history....To mix politics with religion in the Church is always a danger. May we learn the lesson of 1640-1662 and keep clear of any such worldly entanglements! Let us fight the battle of the Lord with spiritual weapons”.⁸

Therein lies the essential difference between the children of the devil and the children of God — the latter use spiritual weapons and develop their organisations on spiritual foundations rather than become embroiled in secular politicking. What we must realise is that the *ekklesia* is the result of special grace, whereas the secular civil powers are the result of the so-called “common grace” which — through the suppressing of evil and anarchy, and the retention of some small traces of light within man in the wake of the Fall — the Lord has ordained for the safe passage of His children through the world.

IV. THE MAVERICK AT THE HANDS OF THE RELIGIOUS ESTABLISHMENT

In just the same way that the above circumstances can be shown to form a consistent representation of the bedrock of religious establishmentarianism, so there is also a consistent response of the religious establishment — which has departed from the true pathway through this wilderness world — towards the one who dares to highlight the apostasy. Before looking at this pattern at various times in the history of the Lord’s people, let us trace some of these responses to the maverick among the Lord’s people as they have shown themselves on a regular basis down through the centuries. We will not presently give direct examples of these responses in action — that is reserved for later sections. But we record them here in order that the diligent reader can refer back to them to gain a measure of their consistency.

1. RIDICULE

These responses are given in order of their occurrence; for there is a very definite pattern of increasing intensity, dependent upon the resistance of the maverick to the pressures from the religious establishment. The first thing that occurs is ridicule. The maverick is made to feel ridiculous in his actions — as if he was

⁸ D.M. Lloyd-Jones, *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors*, (Banner of Truth, 1987), pp.60-61. This entire section, from pp.58-71 is a brilliant analysis of where the Puritans went radically wrong in their thinking in relation to the civil state.

somehow out of step with all “sensible” people. Not only is he ridiculed to himself, but he is often deliberately ridiculed in front of others.

2. DEFAMATION

If ridicule does not coerce the maverick into submission to the religious establishment, then the next line of attack is public and private defamation of the maverick's character in order to damage his influence and standing. Such character assassination begins with false rumours being spread about the maverick: anything will do — his morality, doctrine, family responsibility, background, achievements — so long as it undermines people's readiness to listen to the truths which come from his mouth. If the rumours are not effective, then he can always be publicly destroyed through the media.⁹

3. PERSECUTION

When the ridicule and the defamation prove to be of no effect, then the persecution can begin in earnest. Torture, imprisonment, denial of necessities are but some of the methods used.

4. LIQUIDATION

If none of the above methods work in the suppression of the maverick, then the final resort is complete liquidation.

We will have occasion to refer back to all the above as we deal with individual cases in different eras of the pilgrimage of the Lord's people through this world.

V. THE MAVERICK IN THE BIBLE

The necessity for mavericks among the earthly manifestations of the Lord's people did not really arise until the Lord began to deal with them as a corporate nation. This commenced with the inauguration of the people Israel as a law-covenanted nation at Sinai. The giving of the Law provided the perfect opportunity for those who wished to ignore the spirituality which lay at back of it and would instead rather concentrate on going through the motions of the dotting of i's and the crossing of t's. Religious establishmentarians just love the outward form of religion: they especially revel in the enforcement of their outward forms and beliefs on as many others as they can coerce into it. The more people who do as they do, the better they feel about their husk of a religion.

Essentially the religious establishmentarian camp is made up of unbelievers. In the Old Covenant era the nation Israel — God's chosen people at that time — was an admixture of unbelievers and true believers, with the latter as a small minority or remnant throughout the entire period of that covenant's operation. It was for this reason that the so-called “revivals” which took place during this period were only short-lived — usually for as long as the life or faithfulness of the leader who inspired them.

In the New Covenant era, the *ekklesia* with whom this Covenant is cut does not consist of one solitary nation made up of both believers and unbelievers, but rather of a trans-national, multicultural group *consisting wholly of regenerated people* who have no real place in

this world, being sojourners and pilgrims here until the time of the renewal of all things. Therefore, although the unbelievers among the Old Covenant people were in the group by right (for the covenant was made with the entire nation), when they are found among the New Covenant people they are total impostors. Unfortunately, because of the establishmentarian approach of so many influential churchmen at various stages of the Gospel Age, coupled with their faulty concept of the *ekklesia* as a carbon copy of the nation Israel, these impostors and hypocrites have been allowed to predominate and dictate the Church's agenda for the greater part of Church history.

It is out of the remnant of believers among both Old and New Covenant peoples that the maverick has been drawn — the one who would call the Old Covenant nation or New Covenant Church back to faithfulness and repentance. We shall now briefly examine the role of the maverick in both these eras, with examples drawn from the biblical data.

1. THE MAVERICK IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

In many ways, the maverick in the Old Covenant era had his job cut out for him because of the predominance of unbelievers in the nation Israel. As just one example of their propensity for apostasy, when Moses went up the mountain for a short while to commune with God (Ex.32:1-10), he had barely been gone for a moment when almost the entire nation was orgiastically worshipping a dumb metal idol — and that after having borne witness to the most astonishing miracles ever performed in the history of the universe!

Because of this preponderance to apostasy — in which even the genuine believers could also occasionally acquiesce (witness Aaron's wimpish compliance in relation to the above-mentioned golden calf incident) — the Lord raised up certain mavericks who could “*see and hear what others knew nothing about*” — that is, the Prophets. As examples of the maverick raised up to combat establishmentarianism and its resulting complacency, we will give just two illustrations. Elijah the Tishbite and Jeremiah of Anathoth.

Elijah is introduced to us, in the biblical narrative, as making a dramatic and sudden appearance before King Ahab (1 Kgs.17:1), to whom he declared that there would be no rain except at the prophet's word. The “*outsider*” status of the maverick is emphasised (and exemplified) by his adaptability to even the most harsh and extreme conditions — which he will inevitably have to suffer as a result of his character and message. Both Elijah and Jeremiah experienced such situations.

A vivid illustration of the kind of treatment received by mavericks in the wake of their pronouncements against the religious establishment occurred when king Ahab — an apostate if ever there was one — had a meeting with Elijah prearranged by Obadiah. As the Word states:

“Then it happened, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said to him, ‘*Is that you, O troubler of Israel?*’”
(1 Kgs.18:17)

It is a singular fact that the establishment will always

⁹ An interesting, highly publicised, example of this occurred in the Church of England a few years ago when the author of the preface in Crockford's Clerical Directory, which criticised the then Archbishop Runcie for the decline in Anglicanism, was publicly censured by the Bishops in such a vile and hurtful manner that he took his life soon afterwards in tragic circumstances. Some have suggested that more sinister background pressure was brought to bear on this unfortunate man.

characterise the maverick as being the troublemaker, when the truth is that the need for the maverick has only been occasioned in the first instance by the trouble brought on the people of God by a corrupt religious establishment.¹⁰ This is an ironic inversion under which the maverick will always have to suffer, and which is a source of great anguish to him. This is yet another mark of mavericks: although they are always given great strength by the Lord to carry out their commission, they often suffer from the most crushing despair as a direct result of the understanding they have of the depths of human depravity and blindness even among their own people (e.g. 1 Kgs.19:4ff.; Jer.20:7-18).

In the repeated decay of the nation Israel, one can see the bedrock of religious establishmentarianism: conformity to the values of the world (the gods and morality of the surrounding heathen nations), acceptance of the outward traditions of men over and above the commandments of God, and a blurring of the biblical antithesis enshrined in Gen.3:15.

One can also see exemplified in these two prophets (and, indeed, in all the other Old Testament prophets) the classic responses of the religious establishment to the maverick: ridicule, defamation, persecution and liquidation. In Elijah's case, although Jezebel attempted desperately to liquidate him, it never actually materialised; in the case of Jeremiah, not only was he thrown down a shaft in an unsuccessful attempt to destroy him, but he was probably later stoned to death on the banks of the Nile after delivering his final devastating sermon to the recalcitrant Israelite mob who had determined to ride out the post-Babylonian captivity era in Egypt (Jer.43:1 – 44:30).

We see clearly that the prophet in the O.T. was functioning as a real outsider — a maverick living close to the edge, with few friends, destined to a life of loneliness, low kudos, bereft of any respect from the establishment of the day, and always forced to live in abject dependence on the Lord from day to day. Perhaps this is more of a model for the true disciple of the Lord than we care to admit, having had our concept of discipleship spoiled by generations of establishment Church effeminate “kitten-on-a-chocolate-box” Helen Steiner Rice sentimentality and respectability.

2. THE MAVERICK IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Without wishing to be disrespectful, we can assert that by far the greatest and most table-turning, provocative maverick that has ever been among the Lord's people was none other than the Lord Jesus Himself! Although the life and work of our Lord is recorded in what we call the New Testament scriptures, as well as being the herald and inaugurator of the New Covenant, the fact is that He was really the last of the prophets living under the Old Covenant and, as such, came to deliver the final promise of destruction of the Lord's ancient covenant people which would be fulfilled in AD.70. In other words he was the final prophetic word from the Lord (Heb.1:1-2) — the culmination of all that Elijah and Jeremiah had represented in their own day.

By the time of our Lord's incarnation, religious life in the hands of the officials had truly degenerated into a stale legalism and reliance on the outward symbols and

ceremonies as efficacious in themselves to purge sin (Rom.9:31-32; 10:3). The officials themselves were total hypocrites, and when the Son of God was born into the midst of this, the scene was set for a head-on confrontation. Jesus' preaching against this apostasy was so dynamic that many of the common people thought that He was actually a resurrected Elijah, Jeremiah or John the Baptist (Matt.16:14)! Even His disciples thought they had another Elijah with them, as they demonstrated by asking Him to call down fire from heaven, just as Elijah had done on the bands of soldiers who came at the behest of Ahab to arrest him.

And before we deal at greater length with the Lord Jesus, we would do well to consider John the Baptist as yet another classic example of the biblical maverick: Living in extremely unorthodox conditions, with an equally unorthodox diet and mode of dress, he had no qualms speaking the stark truth to the Pharisees and other religious establishmentarians of the day who came out to the wilderness to hear what this extraordinary man had to say (Matt.3:7-12; Lk.3:7-20). Jesus equated him with Elijah (Matt.11:13-14). In the end, his outspokenness (Mk.6:17-18) cost him his head (Matt.14:3-12).

With the Baptist all the hallmarks of the maverick at the hands of a religious establishment come right to the fore. He was maliciously defamed (they said he was demon-possessed, Matt.11:18), persecuted (Matt.14:3), and eventually liquidated (Matt.14:10). And all by those who were the arch religious fundamentalists of the day! We may well wonder how many even evangelical churches today — if John the Baptist were to reappear among them — would go to great lengths to ridicule, defame, persecute and liquidate, to ensure that this voice crying in the wilderness should no longer be heard among them. Home truths are never required in the bland towers of respectable establishmentarianism.

In John the Baptist, we have a model of Christian discipleship. For those who follow in Jesus' footsteps can only expect to suffer in their lives at the hands of the religious establishment. When the Lord Jesus appeared among men with the greatest ever spiritual message, the smug men who formed the religious establishment of the day believed that they already knew all there was to be known, that they already did all there was to be done, in order to be right with God and His Word. And they were willing to go to any lengths to protect their interests and authority — even to destroy the one who came as the pinnacle of their religion. The situation has changed little even today. Dare to criticise the religious establishment — of whatever hue and colour — and you will pay dearly for the act.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the model of the maverick at the hands of the religious establishment. The Jewish doctors and theologians of the time had conformed to the values of the world, had reduced the spiritual requirements of God and the essence of His Word to a theological and ethical *system* of rules and regulations, and had blurred the biblical antithesis between the children of God and the children of the devil beyond recognition. When the Lord Jesus Christ exposed all this, they did what such men do to all mavericks: “*laughed Him to scorn*” (ridicule), said He “*has Beelzebub*” and was “*a wine-bibber and a glutton*”

¹⁰ For a psycho-spiritual analysis of this “Troubler of Israel” phenomenon today, see the article in the next issue of *Diakrisis*.

(defamation), smote, bruised and wounded Him (persecution), and finally, when all this failed to stop Him speaking the Truth, they “nailed Him to a tree” (liquidation).

Such will be the fate — in one way or another, figuratively or literally — of every child of God who dares to stand for the Truth against the religious establishment of the day. But, in imitation of his Master, he will endure his cross, scorning the shame, for the sake of the joy that is set before him in the age to come (cf. Heb.12:2). Religious establishmentarianism — although it still hypocritically pays lip service to it in its preaching — has taken that cross (which every true child of God should bear) out of Christianity. The apostolic directive to those who would be faithful to the Word tells us to “go forth to Him, **outside the camp, bearing His reproach**” (Heb.13:13) — a directive which the religious establishment has chosen to ignore by becoming part of the establishment. If the Son of Man had nowhere to lay His head, why should it be any different for us?

VI. THE MAVERICK IN THE EARLY CHURCH

The real departure of the Church from the tortuous pathway walked by all those faithful to Christ occurred with the melding of Church and state in the reign (AD.324-337) of the Roman Emperor Constantine. As the Church became part of the establishment it began a steady decline into the most appalling corruption. The joyful proclamation of the Gospel and the regeneration which results from it were eclipsed by a new method of propagation: the power of the state. Dr. J.L. Mosheim, in his excellent ecclesiastical history, says of this period:

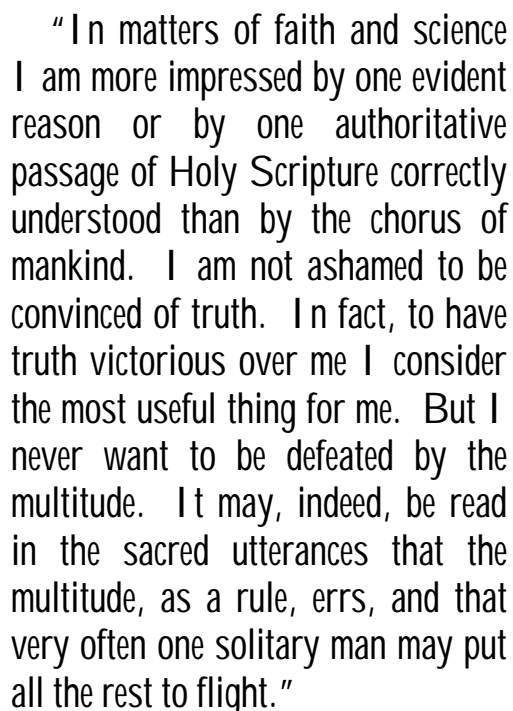
“There is no doubt but that the victories of Constantine the Great, the fear of punishment, and the desire of pleasing this mighty conqueror, and his imperial successors, were the weighty arguments that moved whole nations, as well as particular persons, to embrace Christianity”.¹¹

The true *ekklesia* — instead of being at the spiritual hub of Constantinianism — then became a real threat to the evolution of the Church-state idea. This was really the moment when the manifestation of the *ekklesia* on earth ceased to represent Christ and instead began to represent the devil in all his malice. In his brilliant analysis of this phenomenon in “The Grand Inquisitor” scene in “*The Brothers Karamazov*”, Fyodor Dostoevsky has the Roman Catholic Inquisitor frankly admitting this to an imaginary Jesus who has “dropped in” on the Inquisition. The Grand Inquisitor says to the Lord Jesus:

“We have corrected your great work and have based it on *miracle, mystery, and authority*. And men rejoiced that they were once more led like sheep and that the terrible gift which had brought them so much suffering had at last been lifted from their hearts.....Why, then, have you come to meddle with us now?.....And would I conceal our secret from

you?.....Well, then, listen. We are not with you but with *him*: that is our secret! It’s a long time — eight centuries — since we left you and went over to *him*. Exactly eight centuries ago we took from *him* what you rejected with scorn, the last gift he offered you, after having shown you all the kingdoms of the earth: we took from *him* Rome and the sword of Caesar and proclaimed ourselves the rulers of the earth, the sole rulers, though to this day we have not succeeded in bringing our work to total completion”.¹²

Jesus firmly rejected the wielding of power through the state when he refused the kingdoms of the world from Satan. He knew only too well that there is a gulf fixed between the things which belong to Caesar and



“In matters of faith and science I am more impressed by one evident reason or by one authoritative passage of Holy Scripture correctly understood than by the chorus of mankind. I am not ashamed to be convinced of truth. In fact, to have truth victorious over me I consider the most useful thing for me. But I never want to be defeated by the multitude. It may, indeed, be read in the sacred utterances that the multitude, as a rule, errs, and that very often one solitary man may put all the rest to flight.”

William of Ockham,
1285-1347

those which belong to God. It is, therefore, very strange that the folly of Constantine’s state-Church has persisted to this day in the minds of men as something to be welcomed. Any Church which becomes part of the establishment — the secular world — automatically loses its right to be called the Church.¹³

In fact, this merger of Church and state enabled heresies to be much more easily disseminated. Accordingly, from the moment that the state-Church idea was embraced, there arose the need for a continuing maverick — one who would take a firm stand against the religious establishment of the day for concerns which he regards as essential to the furtherance of truth, justice and the universal cause of Christ.

¹¹ F.L. Mosheim, *An Ecclesiastical History, Ancient and Modern, from the Birth of Christ to the Beginning of the Eighteenth Century*, (Blackie, Fullarton & Co., 1827), Vol.I, p.91. This two-volume work is well worth obtaining, if it can be found in second-hand bookshops. Mosheim was R.L. Dabney’s favourite Church historian, and he recommended him to his students.

¹² Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, (Penguin Books, 1958), pp.301-302. The section on “The Grand Inquisitor” is one of the most brilliant pieces of writing ever to fall from the human pen, and will have you sitting on the edge of your seat gasping with amazement at Dostoyevsky’s genius and insight into the sheer corruption of human power — especially that wielded by the ‘dignitaries’ of the church.

¹³ The word “secular” comes from the Latin *saeculum*, meaning literally “of this age”.

As one example of such a man, we would cite Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria (AD.c.296-373). It is no exaggeration to say that the stand that this man took against a heresy which threatened the Christian faith — perhaps more than at any other time in history — ensured that there would still be a faith to teach. G.K. Chesterton wryly observed that “*The Church has gone to the dogs at least five times — but each time it was the dog that died!*”.¹⁴ Arianism was one of the largest and most vicious of those dogs but, due to the maverick stand of Athanasius *contra mundum* (against the world), that particular dog eventually died.

When the first General Council of the Catholic Churches was summoned by Constantine at Nicaea in Bithynia (AD.325), the principal question before it was that of the doctrine taught by Arius, a presbyter of Alexandria who maintained that the Son of God was a created being, not equal to the Father. Over 300 bishops were in attendance from all parts of the Empire, and the Council was opened in great state by Constantine. On this occasion, the Council decided that the teaching of Arius was false and the Nicene Creed was framed to express the truth of the real Divine Nature of the Son and His equality with the father.

Although this decision was correct, the way of reaching it — by the combined efforts of the Emperor and the Bishops, and enforcing it by the power of the State, manifested a real departure of the Catholic Church from the doctrines of Scripture. Such arrangements place the Church at the whim of the state ruler. Athanasius was present at the First Council of Nicaea, and was a powerful force in defending the Truth against error. But thereafter he became the target of considerable politicking as the Arian party attempted to reverse the decision made at the First Council. This Arian reaction was headed by Eusebius of Nicomedia who worked on the Emperor's sister, Constantia, and, two years after the Council of Nicaea, Constantine, altering his view, received Arius back from exile. In the reign of his son Constantius, every single post of Bishop was filled with Arians! The Government, having now become officially Arian, persecuted the Christians as it had formerly done to the Arians! Such is the error of placing Church power in the hands of the state.

Subsequently, through forty-six years and five exiles, Athanasius actively promoted the Truth in the spirit of Christ, despite the awful calumny of the religious establishment. He was defamed in the most scurrilous fashion — the Meletans, for instance, concocted four ridiculous charges against him, including the murder of a certain Arsenius with the intent of getting Arsenius' severed hand for the practice of black magic!¹⁵ There are no lengths too great or too preposterous to which a religious establishment under threat will go in order to destroy its enemy, the maverick.

However, a marvellous fact is that Athanasius functioned at his best when in periods of persecution. So it has always been — both corporately in the Church and in the life of the individual believer. Blessings are at their most profound during the darkest nights of the soul. The more the early Church was persecuted, the more it flourished. The more the believer is persecuted,

the more he grows. The six years of Athanasius's third exile (356-362) “*was the most stirring in spiritual and literary activity in the whole life of Athanasius*”.¹⁶ While the imperial police scoured the country for him, he actually wrote more than half his extant writings. The Lord always achieves his purpose (Isa.55:11), in spite of the connivings of the religious establishment.

Athanasius was the true maverick among the Lord's people, finding himself in a situation where the Church had become a tool at the whim of the state, where the elders and other leaders had become part of this establishment, and where the faith was under threat. As a result of his stand, he was ridiculed, defamed and persecuted. Only by Divine providence did he avoid liquidation. It was Athanasius *contra mundum*, against the world. There must have been times when he wondered if perhaps he was wrong — that if so many people, including the state and the establishment Church, were opposing him, then there must be a weakness in his thinking. But this merely goes to show that the true believer's Berean instinct, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, carries far more weight than the deceptive traditions of corrupted elders.

VII. THE MAVERICK IN THE REFORMATION PERIOD

Mavericks abound in the Reformation period. First and foremost in this era was surely Martin Luther (1483-1546), who was prepared to take a stand against the Christian religious establishment for the furtherance of the truth and the universal cause of Christ. The nailing of his famous ninety-five theses to the church door at Wittenberg in 1517 represented an important and historical break with the ecclesiastical tradition which had been built up over many years.

However, although it is widely acknowledged that Luther was a powerful Reformation force and was prepared to be a maverick in the cause of Christ, he, along with Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531), Philip Melancthon (1497-1560) and John Calvin (1509-1564), never really shook off a number of aspects of the Romanist yoke. For although they were willing to part company with Rome in matters of theology and authority, they retained many vestiges of the Vatican, including the use of state power and law to enforce Christian faith and practice according to the flavour of the day. This deviation from N.T. principles resulted in the alienation of many believers who would otherwise have been a good party to the Protestant Reformation. These believers were scattered around Europe and — although dedicated to severance from Rome — they became the objects of persecution by the newly founded Reformation state-churches because they would not go along with the teaching of the “magisterial” Reformers on such matters as Church order and baptism.

Such a process did not change whether the Romanists or the Calvinists were in power. Indeed, the “magisterial” Reformers were just as avid as their Roman predecessors in their desire to use the full force of civil law against those they regarded as enemies of the faith.

The objects of the new Reformation religious establishment's persecution were the so-called Anabaptists.

¹⁴ G.K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man*, (Hodder & Stoughton, 1924), pp.294-295.

¹⁵ J.P. Green (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Christianity*, (N.F.C.E., 1964), Vol.I., p.457.

¹⁶ A. Robertson, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, (Eerdmans, 1956), Vol.IV, p.lxxxv.

The main stream of Anabaptism had its origins in Zurich, when — after a reformation by the city council under the guidance of Zwingli — some of Zwingli's followers were dissatisfied with the pace and extent of the reforms and accused him of being too much guided by circumstance rather than N.T. practice. Under the leadership of Conrad Grebel, in conjunction with Felix Manz, Wilhelm Reublin, and Georg Blaurock, these dissidents concluded that Zwingli's view of the Church was incompatible with the N.T., insisting that the true Church is a fellowship only of those who believe in Christ and accept His call to discipleship. They rightly said that the whole idea of a state-church — as borrowed by the “magisterial” Reformers from the Vatican — was incompatible with the New Testament.

Part of the teaching of these Anabaptists, as they came to be known, involved a rejection of infant (unbelievers') baptism. Although Zwingli initially agreed with them that this was primarily a sacralist ritual practice which suited the Roman Catholic state-church ideal, he later did an about-turn and became a party to a spate of persecutions of these “Brethren”, as they called themselves. As one writer puts it:

“Zwingli feared that the spread of Anabaptist teaching, with its repudiation of infant baptism, would mean the disintegration of society; therefore he attempted to suppress the movement”.¹⁷

Imprisonments took place, and a short time later (5th January, 1527) Felix Manz was officially put to death by drowning by the authorities who decreed that such a death was fitting for one who believed already baptised infants should be rebaptised if they were regenerated. The following year at Speyer, the first imperial mandate against the Anabaptists was issued; it is highly significant that this indictment was based on the Roman Emperor Justinian's Codex of AD.529, which, in seeking to combat the Donatists, had declared rebaptism a capital offence.

One can see clearly here how the maverick among the Lord's people will always find himself in a head-on clash with the religious establishment. These simple people, who merely wished to be faithful to the New Testament, were ridiculed, had their characters and theology calumniated, became the objects of a fierce persecution which spread right across Europe, and were often liquidated in the process. Although the magisterial Reformers found their model in O.T. Israel's treatment of the surrounding nations, one would be hard pressed to show from Christ's example and the whole N.T. witness that they were justified from Scripture in this behaviour.

It has to be said here that the ecclesiastical upheaval caused by the Reformation — by the very act of standing up against Romanist dominionism — led to a widespread undertow of rebellion in the European scene. Consequently, a great many sects sprang up across the Continent which were heretical in doctrine and chaotic in church government. Unfortunately, these unorthodox, anarchic movements — such as the Peasants Revolt in 1524 led by Thomas Münzer

(c.1490-1525) — tended to give a bad name to *all* the Anabaptist gatherings, however biblical and reasonable they were in faith and practice. This resulted in the writing of a great deal of defamatory material which unfairly tarred all Anabaptists with the same brush. For example, even though the present writer has enormous respect for John Calvin's theology and stance for the truth in the Reformation period, to read his violent blusterings against the Anabaptists in his *“Institutes of the Christian Religion”*, one cannot believe that he had any real acquaintance with the character and teachings of these gentle mavericks who were just as opposed to Rome as he.¹⁸ Moreover, reading the assorted writings of the Anabaptists (those which managed to survive the deliberate destruction of most of their manuscripts), one forms a completely different impression to that of the *“frantic spirits”* referred to by the Reformer. For those who believe so avidly that God's eternal moral law is enshrined in the Ten Commandments, it is most strange that they should have been so ready to bear false witness against their neighbours (brothers) — and even murder them in cold blood — while compromising the Church at a vital part of its historical development. This is one of the great unspoken anomalies of the Reformation — although we would surely have to acknowledge the hand of Satan in this.

Many believers today may well ask what possible contribution the Anabaptists made to the corpus of Christian truth. However, these mavericks, in common with so many others who have gone that pathway before them, serve to remind us of three things:

- ❖ The need to have the Bible as our final authority rather than the traditions, systems or politics of men.
- ❖ The importance of maintaining a real distinguishing between the two seeds (cf. Gen.3:15) — what theologians call “the antithesis”.
- ❖ That the true Christian will always be persecuted for upholding the truth.

One wonders what the Church would be like today if the “magisterial” Reformers had ‘gone the whole hog’, and thrown off completely those sacralist elements of the Roman yoke which they continued to wear. That we will never know; but it is a tantalising thought.

VIII. THE NEED FOR MAVERICKS TODAY

Because of the perennial tendency of the Church towards ossification and compromise with the world, the maverick has been a necessary protagonist and inspirer of true faith at all stages of history. The twentieth century has been no stranger to the need for the maverick and, as he consciously stands against the errant tide of history, there has been no shortage of dangerous currents for him to resist. The past one hundred years has seen the gradual widespread acceptance — by a professing Church in the throes of a great apostasy — of every heresy imaginable: an errant Bible, feminism, women ordained to a ruling/teaching ministry, interfaithism, false ecumenism, homosexuality, enthusiasm,¹⁹ the effeminacy of the New Evangelicalism,

¹⁷ J.P. Green (ed.), op. cit., Vol.I., p.194.

¹⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV.xvi.1-32.

¹⁹ By ‘enthusiasm’ we mean “*religious extravagance*” (Chambers English Dictionary). The Puritans used this term to refer to utterances and physical manifestations which were claimed to be happening under the pretence of Divine inspiration. Thus “enthusiasts” were those who readily gave vent to any religious feeling which was based on subjective sentiment rather than

compromise on every side. Especially is this the case in the establishment Church of England. Where are the mavericks within that organisation who will publicly



Bishops sleeping – Church under attack – Mavericks needed!

and credibly stand up to the evil among its leadership? It's archbishop and bishops are nothing more than politicians — and *liberal* politicians at that! They can do what they like — even deny the truth of the Bible — and no one raises a word against it. While the world attacks the Church and its teaching, the bishops enjoy a superannuated sleep in their palaces and mansions.

One of the more disturbing aspects of this modern smorgasbord of deviations from truth is the fact that multitudes who know that these things are harmful to the church never offer a protest. So tame have so many evangelicals become today that they lack the spine to be “protestants” of any kind, preferring instead to kowtow to the idea of a phoney unity. And this phoney unity is being engineered by men who should know better.

This is why the true maverick, who understands the Christian duty of being a man of courage, is so necessary at this hour. As a hymn-writer has put it:

“Who is on the Lord’s side?
 Who will serve the King?
 Who will be His helpers
 Other lives to bring?
 Who will leave the world’s side?
 Who will face the foe?
 Who is on the Lord’s side?
 Who for Him will go?...
 Fierce may be the conflict,
 Strong may be the foe;
 But the King’s own army
 None can overthrow.
 Round His standard ranging,
 Victory is secure;
 For His truth unchanging
 Makes the triumph sure...
 Chosen to be soldiers
 In an alien land,
 Chosen called and faithful,
 For our Captain’s band,
 In the service royal

Let us not grow cold;
 Let us be right loyal,
 Noble, true and bold...”

Where are the heroes of the faith today? They are scattered evenly among the people of God. They will not be ‘big names’ — for the big ones have failed us; their pride prevents them from being counted when it may hurt or when their status is under threat. But there are many unsung heroes beaver away in the calling in which the Lord has placed them. Their work will one day be counted for what it is worth (Matt.25:21 & 23).

EPILOGUE

Our brief study draws to a close. We have only drawn the skeleton of this phenomenon of the maverick among the Lord’s people, for whom there has been a constant necessity for millennia due to the imperfect nature of man and the repeated tendency of the professing Church to ossification and degeneracy. But we have the basis of a sociological and religious phenomenon which, with further study, can be traced through every era of human history as well as among the Lord’s people: the one who can *see and hear things that others know nothing about*.

Although some may balk at the concept of a “maverick” in the Church today, we have seen that the O.T. prophets themselves can rightly be called such — men raised up by God in the hour of need to recall His people from partaking in deadness, religious formalism and a decline into worldly compromise with the contemporary civil and religious powers.

One of the principal reasons that such decline occurs is that people are so easily predisposed to falling in behind other men and their notions and schemings. Perhaps that is the reason for the widespread denominational sectarianism into which the Protestant Reformation eventually faded. But we must have only one Master and Teacher, and be prepared to be mavericks in the cause of Christ, standing up — if faithfulness calls — against all the might and authority of the professing Church of the day, and even that of the civil powers, if they hurl out commands which defy the Law of God.

In truth, all genuine Christians are mavericks in this world and especially in terms of the false church which the world, under the rulership of the devil, has concocted. Like the cows of the farmer, Samuel Maverick, the maverick among the Lord’s people has no *mere man’s* brand on him. For he has the very Name of God written on his forehead (Rev.3:11-12) and, as the Lord promised all those who persevere in the face of persecution, he will eventually wear the Crown of Life.

In heaven there will be no need for, nor any occurrence of, blind conformity to outward tradition. Neither, thankfully, will there be any need for mavericks. Even so, despite his rough edges, the maverick remains a necessary prick in the crusty conscience of the recalcitrant Christian scene of our time. Ω

objective truth. Today these terms would encompass the extravagances of the Pentecostal-Charismatic movements, including the bizarre manifestations which masquerade under the title “Toronto Blessing” and “revivalism”. Incidentally, the word “enthusiasm” has a telling etymology, being derived from the Greek *enthousiazein*, a compound word meaning ‘to be inspired by a god’, which was derived from *en*, ‘in’, and *theos*, ‘a god’.