What Is Wrong With the Antioch Declaration

In late November of 2024, a declaration appeared on the internet, called the Antioch Declaration, requesting signatures. The authors, calling themselves "collaborators", are Joseph Boot, Jeff Durbin, Andrew Sandlin, James White, Douglas Wilson, and Tobias Riemenschneider. It appeared amid ecclesiastical controversy involving these same parties, and also political controversy that got Wilson's name into the editorial pages of many newspapers. This paper, however, will not attempt to chronicle these controversies or explain them but to examine the text of the Declaration itself.

The Declaration announces itself as the expression of "confessionally Reformed, Lutheran and Evangelicals believers from a broad range of churches." One supposes that "confessionally" is meant to identify not just the Reformed group but the whole list. The confessions, though, are not identified and, as many Evangelical churches write their own and post it on their websites, this seems only to exclude Campbellites and others of the "no creed but Christ" persuasion. As the sentence continues to say that the purpose is to "identify and resist a rising tide of reactionary thinking emerging on the fringe of our own circles" it seems that a much more definite group is in mind but one that cannot be effectively characterized, or they do not want to do so. It appears that this matter has been muddled by editing after the initial release of the Declaration. The failure to identify the "fringe" also allows it to be confused in the reader's mind with any extremist he may have previously encountered. Such confusion appears to be intended.

In any case, the Declaration immediately attracted a large number of signers. This included a large proportion of Federal Vision proponents and a few R2K. Also among the signers are Jeffery Epstein lawyer and massage recipient Alan Deshowitz, who also defended *Deep Throat* actor Harry Reems on the grounds that the First Amendment protected his performance and that the consumption of pornography is not harmful. Also among the signers is singer and actor Tom Waits. According to Wikipedia, his confession is as follows: "With the God stuff I don't know. I don't know what's out there any more than anyone else." Perhaps some of these signatures are fake.

The name "Antioch Declaration" is related to the matter recounted in Acts 11, where Peter associated himself with those demanding continued adherence to Jewish ceremonial law and was rebuked by Paul. The Declaration recasts this as not a matter of law and gospel but of racial identity and inclusion.

The Declaration opens bizarrely with the denial that "the Kingdom purposes of Christ and requirements of His Word can be equated with the seating positions of political actors during the French Revolution". This refers to the origin of the expression right and left, then designating different factions within the radicals of the Revolutionary assembly. The purpose of the statement appears to be that the authors do not want the labels applied to them, but neither are they able to argue this in terms of the actual meaning of these terms today. It is an evasion maneuver. The sentence continues the denial saying that the modern antithesis between right and left is not "equivalent to the antithesis that God established in the Garden of Eden between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, the kingdom of darkness and kingdom of light." This seems to be more sand in our eyes, as no one is arguing such an equivalence.

The authors follow this with "the modern neo-pagan secular project is bankrupt and desperately trying to hold the social order together by means of a fraudulent narrative and anti-Christian worldview" and then referring to this group as "secular elites". What this neo-paganism is they do not say, but oddly with the label "secular" they exclude Satanists and other occultists from this group, even though such individuals are very active in the culture through control of and participation in popular media and financial institutions.

They continue in the next affirmation to say that this puts "some young men in the West" in the "unhappy position of reacting by choosing between opposing sets of lies." If one set of lies comes from these neo-pagan secular elites, where does the other set come from? And why has no one been offering the truth as an alternative? Let us be blunt about what is hiding behind this language. Someone has been trying to provide the truth, as they see it, as an alternative and this is just those referenced at the beginning as "reactionary thinking emerging on the fringes of our own circles." The alternative is Christian nationalism. In contrast to this, the authors of this Declaration for the past forty years have been failing to offer an alternative. What they have offered is Christian statism without nations, in order to accommodate a central part of the ideology of the secular elites. We can refer to this ideology as the Post-war Consensus. Here is an early example of the accommodation: Gary North, in his *Political Polytheism*, advocated open borders. The Christian part of his scheme as that, while everyone could move into the country, voting rights with be restricted to those affirming the Trinity. In fact, the great majority of those invading under Biden administration policy would affirm the Trinity. Effectively, what North advocated is much like what is being attempted now.

The next significant affirmation is to deny "that neo-pagan secularism with its utopian religious motive arose as a consensus after World War II. Rather, it manifests itself as the political outworking of the so-called Enlightenment during the French Revolution". This, they say, worked its way into the hearts and minds of people in the West, becoming dominant by the time of the two world wars. These authors are not adept at history.

A much better guide is the little book by Pierre Manent, *An Intellectual History of Liberalism*. The Revolution was intoxicated with Rousseau's idea of the general will. The will of all, absurdly, finds its expression in the state when it is controlled by a tiny group of fanatics. Here is the paradox: "The only way to be certain that this will is realized, that the public interest does not merge with any particular interest, is to place the public interest in contradiction with *all* private interests and to measure the realization of the public interest by the contradiction it poses to all private interests. The unity of all will be made perceptible by the oppression of all. In this sense, it is not absurd that Robespierre thought he had fulfilled Rousseau's idea."

But why did the French Revolution take this direction? One has to remember that it took place in a Roman Catholic country, where another paradox had been working.

> The remarkable contradiction embedded in the Catholic Church's doctrine can be summarized in this way: although the Church leaves men free to organize themselves within the temporal sphere as they see fit, it simultaneously tends to impose a theocracy on them. It brings a religious constraint of a previously unheard of scope, and at the same time offers the

> emancipation of secular life. Unlike Judaism and Islam, the Church does not provide a law that is supposed to govern concretely all of men's actions in the earthly city.

Unlike Judaism, Islam, and some protestant societies, which offered theonomic theocracy, Roman Catholocism was theocratic and secularizing at the same time. The French Revolution then took place in a society where the overthrow of the old order did not leave in place a transcendent source of values.

For Manent there were two cycles of liberalism with little resemblance to each other. One was Enlightenment contract theory. Political thought had based itself on political models that took their premises from the alleged strictures of nature. Then, with the breakdown of Rousseau's ideal in the failure of the terror and the Napoleonic wars, the second cycle began. Henceforth political thought would be formed by theories of history. The nature of historical explanations of authority is that they are dialectical. Some type of polarity of values is set up, and these poles are used to curb any excess movement in one direction or its opposite, that is, the opposite in terms of the polarity. The continuity of history, however, is interrupted by revolution. "In Europe the nation, for a century and a half, was the only political form capable of incarnating this double premise, that of *history* and that of *revolution*."

Thus the 19th century and into the 20th was dominated by national political and cultural theories. But this is the contrary of the Post-war Consensus with its focus on global orders and the deconstruction of nations. In between there was the transformation. Imperial and financial interests, in the hands of elites, plotted and began WWI (the world didn't "stumble into it"). It was not the product of liberalism. But those in power mobilized the people into it by appeals to nationalism which was the form in which liberalism also was embodied. In some areas, especially the former Austrian empire, this led to a temporary triumph of nationalism, in that various nation-states were formed from the remains of the empire. WWII left the managerial elites decisively in power. They used the concepts that were available and conducive to their ends to gradually redirect political and social ideals to serve their own ends.

WWII was much more than the "cultural tipping point" for the "secular narrative and its myth of religious neutrality" as the Declaration's next affirmation claims. Rather, it stands alongside of the French Revolution as the end of a cycle of liberalism and the appearance of something new. What that new thing is has become ever more apparent and in the current woke theory we see the denial of religious or any other neutrality as even a possibility. The authors are merely chanting a Van Tillian shibboleth. Not that the denial of neutrality itself is new, as it was long expressed in the Marxist saying, "The more innocent they are, the more they deserve to be shot." (And that is how woke people see you.)

The next affirmation needs to be quoted in its entirety.

> We affirm that a contradictory and pervasive thread of self-doubt and self-loathing has also formed an essential part of this secular narrative following the horrors of World War II. Thus, when the reactionary right challenges the "post-war narrative" they are not necessarily breaking free of it—this is a reflex that the post-war narrative itself has nurtured. The narrative thrives on an unstable mix of white imperiousness and white guilt.

The existence of a post-war narrative is introduced with some hesitation, placing it first in scare quotes and then repeating without. The problem, in part, is that one of the authors, James White, has been denying the existence or even meaningfulness of "Post-war Consensus". They mention, instead, a narrative, and they say that this narrative generates its own challenge. The insinuation, then, is that to challenge the narrative is to fall into something like the liar's paradox where you defeat your own claims. Finally this narrative "thrives on" a white imperiousness and a white guilt. This seems to mean that those who challenge the narrative are white people who are motivated by racism and guilt. How this is so is not explained at all. The authors do not feel any obligation to explain it. We are in the midst of wokeness here.

Here the Declaration moves from pseudo-history to an attempt to define the relationship of theology and historical action. We deny that any particular view of the Allied leaders, their strategies, or tactics during World War II should be a test of Christian orthodoxy." The key phrase here is "should be a test". This contains an ambiguity. It could mean, to make a historical view a standard, like the Bible or a confession. It could also mean that a person's orthodoxy may not be tested by his view of historical acts, in this case of one side in one war, however horrendous this view is. The ambiguity could hardly be other than deliberate. The second meaning, however, would reopen Lessing's big ditch. Johann Gottfried Lessing (1693-1770) had spoken of the "ugly great ditch" between historical truths and metaphysical truths. Lessing was concerned with the possibility, which he denied, of inferring theological truths from the facts of history. The Declaration wants to block movement in the other direction, from theological truths to inferences about history.

The Declaration executes this maneuver by introducing another distinction. "We FURTHER deny that this civic *adiaphora* may be expanded to cover malice, vain glory, race-baiting, antisemitism, treachery, bitterness, or hatred. These issues are entirely distinct." That is, a view of about goals, methods and actions of the Allied side in WWII is "entirely distinct" from moral issues. This is the myth of neutrality with a vengeance. The moral issues are reduced to motivation, and theology is said to be neutral about actions when seen objectively without taking into account their motivation, which ought not to be included. Yet this neutral zone is only available to the Allied side and views about the Axis may well be made a test of orthodoxy.

History, however, does not allow any such immaculate exemption of Allied actions from those of the Axis. Around 1981 I worked with a professor of Japanese studies who had direct knowledge of an archive in possession of the United States government that documented atrocities committed by the Japanese against the Philippine people. These documents were suppressed by the US government in the interest of cementing post-war alliances and diplomacy. The professor told me that, despite all that was publicly known about Japanese atrocities in the Philippines, what was in that archive was so much worse that even at the late date of the then early 1980s the release of the documents would cause public opinion to force the Philippine government to break diplomatic relations with Japan. There are also the other better known cases, of operation paper-clip and of exempting Japanese medical experimenters from war crime prosecution in order to get their research. Thus we find that Allied aims make the Allies accessories of the Axis, in the sense of hiding their war crimes, and the two are not separable in reality.

Next in the Declaration there follows a denial that Hitler's beliefs can be reconciled with Christianity. This is probably only included to smear their opponents by the insinuation that this is

what they are claiming, another instance of not bringing the identity of the "fringe" into focus.

In an article that may come from James White, the "glut of evidence", "firsthand testimonies of eyewitnesses", and the science of history are invoked to substantiate the Holocaust narrative. This article has drawn heavy criticism, citing the 9/11 even narrative, the COVID epidemic narrative, etc. as all massive lies trumpeted as proven by evidence and science. Thus the claim that the Holocaust narrative is beyond question is also suspect. The point definitely is that this narrative may not be investigated, because the investigations reject the certitude of the narrative which is absolute.

But let us take another narrative, supported by eyewitness accounts, of the suffering inflicted by the atomic bombs on Japan. In this case White recently told us (on his podcast Alpha & Omega Ministries, Nov. 14, 2024, at 51:10) that rather than suffering there had been no chance for this to occur. "Believe me, Hiroshima and Nagasaki were more merciful than Bremen, because Hiroshima and Nagasaki vaporized people instantly. Bremen just cooked them." A search of Youtube will bring up many accounts of what really happened to the population that was not at the center of the explosions. White prefers to make up his own "history" because the needs of his narrative overcomes "scientific" history. White went on to point out that at the time few people shared his criticism of the Bremen fire-bombing. "At the time" neither did he, as he was not yet born. Futher, "at the time" few people were in possession of the facts and context in the way he now is.

The Declaration says: "We deny that it is possible to recover an ethic that honors our fathers and their momentous sacrifices while actively and openly dishonoring them." What is this "dishonoring"? This must be read in the context, which is the denial that it is possible to attach any theological judgment to "that any particular view of the Allied leaders, their strategies, or tactics during World War II". This article now extends this from the Allied leaders to "our fathers". The historical critique of World War II must be prevented because the discovery of what "our fathers" did would dishonor them. The Declaration's authors can speak for themselves about what their fathers we up to. My father was in the United States Army in WWII and was posted to England. There he was compelled to attend "orientation lectures" put on by Jewish officers, where they they said that the Germans were "a degenerate race" and that they "needed to be exterminated". Soldiers were told to hate the Germans. My father spoke out against this indoctrination. He also came to the defense of a Christian nurse who was being subjected to sexual harassment by Jewish officers. The final straw for the Jews was when they discovered my father engaged in street evangelism and charged him with "disgracing the uniform". The Jews determined to punish him by shipping him back to the United States, which worked out well for him, as he did not have to go ashore at Normandy with his unit. I don't think my father's principled stand is in any way threatened by investigations of the Holocaust narrative. Rather, it is the authors of the Declaration, who say that there cannot be a criticism of Allied aims and action on the basis of Christian principles, who would dishonor my father.

The following affirmation accuses the targets of this Declaration of aping godless influential figures "for the sake of clicks, followers and the ephemeral notion of 'influence.'" Here we are getting close to the motivation for this Declaration. Once viewing themselves as the young and rising wave of new leaders, the authors now find themselves set aside by another generation, while at the same time being the targets of a large and recent campaign by Big Eva (against the "Moscow mood"). They are now employing Big Eva's tactics against what they are calling the "fringe" of their own

movement. This is followed by the claim to be the faithful Christian shepherds "naming and fighting the wolves which prey on the flock." Notably, this Declaration does not name names. To do so would defeat their tactic of being ambiguous about just whom they are going after.

There follows a series of articles condemning scapegoating for blaming for "cultural ills" on particular groups, with the Jews being particularly singled out. Also, the claim is made that Jesus alone is the true and final sin-bearer. There are so many ideas being confused here that a detailed analysis must be provided.

First, the practice of scapegoating refers to an innocent party bearing and removing the guilt of some group. This is opposite to picking out a guilty part as responsible. The second confusion is over what such a guilty party is responsible for. We have in the Old Testament many cases of judgment falling because some sinful group in Israel was tolerated, not removed. Thus, they are blamed for divine judgment, not for the "cultural ills". The West, particularly during the Middle Ages, was habituated to think in this way through exposure to Biblical materials which repeatedly exhibited this pattern, so people looked for the bad guys who must be behind disasters. A further point is, that in the New Testament, a judgment on Israel is proclaimed, which fell in 70 AD, after "the final and perfect scapegoat in Christ Jesus" had been provided. These are distinct things. It is also noteworthy that those promoting a partial-preterist eschatology, that puts emphasis on the place of 70 AD in interpreting the Bible, are highly represented among those who have signed this Declaration.

From this, the Declaration proceeds to a denial that "Jews are in any way uniquely malevolent or sinful, that Judaism in its multifarious expressions is objectively more dangerous than other false religions, or that it represents an exceptional threat to Christianity and Christian peoples." This seems to mean that the authors of the Declaration have in mind the entity of religious Judaism. The focus on Jewish cultural subversion that seems to alarm the authors is to the secular members of an ethnic group, which are more typically atheist. This reveals another basic flaw of the Declaration which is confusion over who they are talking about under the names of Jews.

The Declaration also adopts the eschatological view of "the Puritans of old … that in God's good time, multitudes of Jews will come to faith in Christ and be added to the true commonwealth of Israel, inheriting the same blessings as Gentile believers." There are several problems with this. The partial-preterists already mentioned said that the promised conversion of the Jews already occurred in Apostolic times and that, past 70 AD, they were no longer a special category in history. Thus this Puritan expectation was misplaced.

Another problem is that of identity. The Israeli writer Shlomo Sand has argued in *The Invention of the Jewish People* that those claiming this identity today are in the main the descendants of various convert groups whose history he details. Besides the forced conversions by the Maccabee dynasty of the nearby peoples, who then made up the "sinners" that the Pharisees complained about, there were some Arab tribes. During the Roman Empire people attracted to monotheism often chose Judaism over the illegal and persecuted Christianity. There also was that mix of Scythians and Turks engaged in slave trading and harvesting the East-West trade route who converted to Judaism for the advantage of an independent identity, and who ere largely the ancestors of the Eastern European Jews. Sand denies that there is evidence for any extensive deportation of Jews by the Romans from

Palestine. As for actual descendants of the first-century Jews, Sand thinks that they are most likely found within the group today called Palestinians.

The Puritans had in mind the West European people calling themselves Jews. On this basis they were scammed by a rabbi called Menasseh ben Israel. He convinced the Puritans that these Jews were about to launch an invasion of Palestine to defeat the Turks and await the messiah. In the meantime they needed a place to stay and wanted admission to England. It was, of course, just a ruse to get into England. The same ben Israel also floated the idea that the American Indians were the lost tribes of Israel, an idea taken up by some Puritans and that eventually made its way into Mormonism.

The Puritan interpretation was denied by at least some of the creators of the Federal Vision, which was heavily preterist, even though their followers today are so eager to sign the Declaration.

At an important point, the Declaration affirms that "God has ordained the existence of peoples and nations". But it does not end there. The Bible does not merely say that they exist, but also speaks of the role and significance of nations. It is those who believe the Bible at this point who as consigned by the Declaration to "the fringe". The Declaration is part of a dispute about the nature of the Kingdom vs the church, and about the role of nations in the Kingdom. It seeks to cancel those who will not adjust their theology on this matter to the demands of the Post-war Consensus.

A final and peculiar article concerns Aristotle. We are told that our model is Jesus Christ, not "the life and teaching of Aristotle". It is generally thought that this article is due to James White who has recently displayed great concern over the influence of Aristotle among Baptists. But no one is making the "life" of Aristotle the model for Christians, nor is he placed beside Jesus. This seems to be another misdirection to hide the real issue. Moreover, the "fringe" against whom the Declaration is directed are not followers of Aristotle but are just as much anti-Aristotelian Van Tillians or adherents of Reformational philosophy as are the authors of the Declaration. The real issue is that just as the "fringe" is making available an alternative to the ideas and leadership of the Declaration authors, so also the Aristotelians are offering an alternative. This takes two forms. One is that Christian nationalists of a classical Reformed persuasion (i.e. the *via-antiqua* philosophy of the scholastic Calvinist era) are being given a hearing by the "fringe" in conferences. A larger problem is that a movement is developing in Baptist seminaries that presents Thomism with its Aristotelian metaphysics as *the* model according to which Christian theology must be understood, and this retropapist movement is perceived by James White as a great danger. Thus, just as the group represented by the Declaration fears the loss of members and influence to the "fringe", they also fear loss in the direction of the Aristotelians.

It is my view that there are problems with all of these groups, and I am not suggesting that the reader should enlist in any one of them. I have laid out my objections to Reformational philosophies and Van Tillianism in *Theosophy, Van Til, and Bahnsen: How Neo-calvinism Deformed Apologetics*, and to the Thomist/Aristotelians in *Divided Knowledge: Van Til and Traditional Apologetics*. On their view of nations, however, it seems that the "fringe" is willing to acknowledge some realities that the Declaration authors will not.