

**SEEING THROUGH THE GLASS DARKLY:  
FOUR MENTALITIES AND MODELS REGARDING ETHICS  
AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY<sup>1</sup>**

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**Introduction**

How do we integrate the Christian faith and business? In part, the answer to this question depends on our starting point. Of course we want to begin and end with Scripture. But even Scripture admits "we see through a glass darkly."<sup>2</sup> Because our vision is clouded and because God's Word was given to us in physical form in a different time and place, I believe we have difficulty separating our cultural influences from our interpretations of Scripture. For instance, some in the Dutch Calvinist American subculture are positive toward the possibility of redeeming culture.<sup>3</sup> Others are not. Scripture does not seem clear on how much of God's Kingdom is present now as opposed to some time in the future. Some believe Christians were saved before time and others that people can be saved during their lifetime.<sup>4</sup> For these reasons and others, some Dutch Calvinist Americans are more optimistic, extraverted, and offensive toward culture and others are more pessimistic, introverted, and defensive. On the other hand, some put greater emphasis on saving souls while others place more emphasis on reforming the institutions of culture regardless if there is anyone saved in them. The point of this paper is to show the influence of culture on the integration question as well as to show various mentalities and models regarding ethics and social responsibility. To make this demonstration more clear, the novel *Babbitt* is discussed and critiqued from each of four mentalities.

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<sup>1</sup> I thank the four anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments.

<sup>2</sup> I Corinthians 13:12.

<sup>3</sup> James D. Bratt (1984), *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing House), pp. 43-54.

<sup>4</sup> Compare John 3:16ff and Romans 8:28-30. I realize that Scripture may be clear and it is human error that makes it seem not clear.

## Four Historic and Four Contemporary Mentalities<sup>5</sup>

Historian James Bratt<sup>6</sup> noted that there were “four mentalities” of Dutch Calvinism in America at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (see Table 1 below). Two were optimistic, extraverted, and offensive. First, they were optimistic: both the RCA (Reformed Church of America) Westerners and the Positive Calvinists believed that they could make a positive difference in the world. They believed they could discern good from evil and they believed that the world was getting progressively better as it became progressively more Christian, if not in the number of converts, in its policies and practices. Both were extraverted: in addition to the good they saw flowing from redemption they saw good retained from creation. All, they believe, was created by God and all, then, was basically good despite the Fall.<sup>7</sup> The world, therefore, could be a measure of goodness of these Christians: success in the world's eyes could be success in God's eyes. Both were offensive: both intended to bring whatever had fallen away from Christ's Lordship back again. The difference was that the RCA Westerners focused on the wayward souls of humans and the Positive Calvinists focused on wayward institutions.

Two Dutch Calvinist mentalities were pessimistic, introverted, and defensive. Both the Confessional and the Antithetical Calvinists were pessimistic: neither saw the world getting progressively better and likely saw it getting progressively worse. They may even have questioned their ability to discern good from evil. They assumed even that the Church was in radical need of reform.<sup>8</sup> Both were introverted. Instead of measuring their success by worldly standards, each tried to measure their success by standards internal. The Confessionals (as their

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<sup>5</sup> Please note that I am generalizing and sometimes hyperbolizing in order to make the point that there are alternative ways of thinking about integrating faith and business.

<sup>6</sup> James D. Bratt (1984), *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing House), pp. 43-54. I will attempt to put these mentalities into my own words based on my own experiences.

<sup>7</sup> The Fall is recorded in Genesis 3.

<sup>8</sup> It seems that no matter how much we question our abilities, we all still come to the conclusion that we are right and someone is wrong.

name implies) attempted to measure themselves by the creeds and confessions of their forefathers.<sup>9</sup> The Antithetical Calvinists tried to measure their success by these and their own cultural standards. Both were defensive: given their pessimism and general fear of the world and its influences, both turned inward. The difference was that the Confessionals focused on their own souls and the Antithetical Calvinists on their own society.

A point of controversy between the Antithetical Calvinists and the Positive Calvinists was the doctrine of Common Grace. The Positive Calvinists followed Abraham Kuyper and believed that without Common Grace, the human race would not have survived the Fall of Adam and Eve. They also held that even evil people were capable of doing good and that there was a basic goodness in the arts and sciences and almost any human endeavor. The Antithetical Calvinists would have no part of this: following Herman Hoeksema they surmised that the only grace was Saving Grace. Only the saved, they believed, with the help of the Holy Spirit, were capable of doing good. A point of controversy between the Confessionals and the RCA Westerners was the relationship between faith and worldly success. The RCA Westerners apparently believed that faith and the Scriptures could be a means to success. The Confessionals would have no part of this.

The theological foundation separating the positive views from the negative views was the concept of Common Grace. The theological foundation separating the individual views from the corporate views was the controversy over when Christians were saved. The Confessionals and the RCA Westerners believed that Christians were saved during their lifetime -- after believing. Hence they were called the "Infralapsarians." The Antithetical Calvinists and the Positive Calvinists believed that Christians were saved before time: predestined. Hence they were called the "Supralapsarians." Therefore, according to the "Supra" view, there was less need to focus on

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<sup>9</sup> That is, by the Three Forms of Unity: the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort, and the Belgic Confession.

saving individuals: they already were or were not. It was best, then, to work with what is left to "reclaim" the world. Biblically, it seems these two put more emphasis on the "cultural mandate."<sup>10</sup> The Confessionals and the RCA Westerners, on the other hand, seemed to put more emphasis on the "Great Commission."<sup>11</sup>

**TABLE 1: FOUR DUTCH CALVINIST AMERICAN MENTALITIES**

	INFRALAPSARIAN	SUPRALAPSARIAN
OPTIMISTIC, EXRAVERTED, and OFFENSIVE	"RCA Westerners"	"Positive Calvinists"
PESSIMISTIC, INTROVERTED, and DEFENSIVE	"Confessionals"	"Antithetical Calvinists"

I have built upon Bratt's work and, based on my own experiences and other reading, made contemporary the four mentalities (See Table 2 below). Instead of RCA Westerners, I prefer to call those optimistic, extraverted, and offensive, and individual-focused the Charismatic Reformers, or Synthesizers.<sup>12</sup> I think the spokesperson and model citizen for this movement is Richard DeVos. In his book *Compassionate Capitalism*, he focuses on helping individuals realize their dreams (of being successful). His starting point is to say that all people are image-bearers of God and all people have been given dreams by God. If one has the right friends and the right biblical principles, there is no limit on the possibilities for success. In short, his method is to find synthesis between God's Word and business principles and it has been very nicely and successfully integrated into a multi-level marketing company. Another notable spokesperson in

<sup>10</sup> Bratt did not explicitly say this, however it seems accurate from my experience. The Biblical foundation is for this idea is Genesis 1:28.

<sup>11</sup> Again, Bratt did not explicitly say this. The Biblical foundation is Matthew 28:16ff.

<sup>12</sup> I am borrowing liberally terminology from H. Richard Niebuhr's classic. See H. Richard Niebuhr (1986, paperback), *Christ and Culture* (HarperCollins).

this camp is the RCA-trained Reverend Robert Schuler of the Crystal Cathedral and the "Hour of Power." Note that both of these men are very charismatic.

Instead of Positive Calvinists, I prefer to call those optimistic, extraverted, and offensive and institutionally-focused the Thinktank/PAC Reformers, or Conversionalists. Instead of charisma and emotion, logic and method are the friends of the Thinktank/PAC Reformers. For example, Shirley Roels, in her article "Business Goals and Processes,"<sup>13</sup> methodically offers a series of questions for business owners and managers to ask in order to redeem not their lives, but their businesses. Taking a positive view of the relationship of Christianity and business, she says profits can be an indicator of effectiveness in meeting people's needs. To Thinktank/PAC Reformers, God is a God of order. Some cannot help but see God in accounting!

Thinktank/PAC Reformers also take a positive view of wealth -- with a catch. John Schneider, in his book *Godly Materialism*, explains that Christians can enjoy wealth as long as they pursue justice in society. He is one scholar who says that Jesus was not poor but middle class, as if the point of the Bible was to help us not feel guilty about our wealth.

Calvin College, of course, attempts to be leader of this perspective. It sees no difficulty in being both "academically excellent" and "distinctively Christian" simply because in order to make a difference in the world, one must understand the world. Since the world is God's, being academically excellent puts the Christian one step closer to God and therefore better able to make a positive difference. Coincidentally, being academically excellent also gives the college and its graduates more distinction and power. Thinktank/PAC Reformers tend to believe that the best way to redeem the world is from the top. A recent addition of Calvin's alumni magazine noted on its cover that six Calvin graduates were in the Michigan legislature.

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<sup>13</sup> See Max Stackhouse, Dennis McCann, Shirley J. Roels, and Preston N. Williams (1995) *On Moral Business: Classical and Contemporary Resources for Ethics in Economic Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans).

Instead of Antithetical Calvinists, I prefer to call those pessimistic, introverted, and defensive and institutional-focused the Anti-social Reformers, or Separatists. The Anti-social Reformers detach themselves from culture and try to reform it by strengthening and protecting their own through separate institutions. McCarthy et al.,<sup>14</sup> for example, in *Society, State, and Schools*, describe the philosophy of confessional pluralism and the need for state-supported separate school systems. Unfortunately, I can find no other contemporary examples of this view.

Instead of Confessionals, I prefer to call those pessimistic, introverted, and defensive and individual-focused the Vocational Reformers, or Paradoxicals. Vocational Reformers detach themselves individually (as opposed to collectively) from culture, but attempt to be agents of renewal by focusing on their individual callings within an evil world. While the Charismatic Reformers help others achieve their dreams, the Vocational Reformers believe that they must abandon their dreams if they want to get closer to God. Once done (although this is a never-ending, ongoing process), they believe that they are better able to follow God's plan for their lives.

Vocational Reformers have no apparent standard for measuring whether they are meeting the needs of others although they see the necessity of using profits as a measure. However, instead of ends, they focus on means: are they loving and do they accept whatever God has provided them regardless of the outcome. Instead of seeing culture (including business) as good, they see it as evil. Yet they don't desire to live in communes or cubicals. They want to reform the world but attempt to practice contentment. A very small mustard-seed could be their logo. In short, they embrace paradox. To live with it they seek God's calling, their vocation, for their lives every day, in big things and little. They see Scripture as a series of stories about

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<sup>14</sup> Rockne McCarthy, Donald Oppewal, Walfred Peterson, and Gordon Spykman (coordinator) (1981), *Society, State and Schools: A Case for Structural and Confessional Pluralism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans).

conversions and callings, callings which many times seemed to defy logic and worldly notions! An example of such a reformer is Rev. M.Craig Barnes<sup>15</sup> who believes God converted him and called him away from his own plans with cancer when Mr. Barnes would not accept or seek those plans voluntarily.

**TABLE 2: FOUR CONTEMPORARY MENTALITIES**

	INDIVIDUAL-FOCUSED	INSTITUTION-FOCUSED
OPTIMISTIC, EXTRAVERTED, and OFFENSIVE	<b>“Charismatic Reformers/Synthesizers”</b>	<b>“Thinktank/PAC Reformers/Conversionalists”</b>
PESSIMISTIC, INTROVERTED, and DEFENSIVE	<b>“Vocational Reformers/Paradoxicals”</b>	<b>“Anti-social Reformers/Separatists”</b>

### ***Babbitt*: A Case Study**

The publication of *Babbitt* by Sinclair Lewis in 1922 coined a word: “Babbitry.” Even today, the dictionary tells us that a Babbitt is “a business or professional man who conforms unthinkingly to prevailing middle class standards.” Furthermore, social historians such as Loren Baritz claim that George Babbitt is “now so hard to find because he is everywhere. It is no longer possible to snicker. He owns the world.”<sup>16</sup>

Because George Babbitt owns the world, he is a good literary figure to study. Because he claims to be a Christian, he is a good figure to study at a Christian college. Because he sells real estate services along with traditional middle class values, he is a good figure to study in a business class. Because he is an example of who not to be and, paradoxically, who we are, he is particularly worthy of study. So who are we?

<sup>15</sup> M. Craig Barnes (1997), *When God Interrupts: Finding New Life Through Unwanted Change* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press).

<sup>16</sup> Loren Baritz (1998), “Introduction” in Sinclair Lewis’ *Babbitt* (New York: Penguin Putnam), p. xiv.

This part of the paper will answer this question and more. It begins with a brief summary of the story of George Babbitt for those who are unfamiliar with the novel. It then discusses who we are and what we have created through the eyes of Sinclair Lewis. It ends by critiquing *Babbitt* from the perspective of the four Christian mentalities listed above. The point is to show how culture can influence mentality and how mentality can influence strategies (views of ethics and social responsibility) regarding the integration of faith and business.

### **Who Was George Babbitt?**

George Babbitt is a fictional character in a novel written by Sinclair Lewis, a novel nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. George Babbitt is a real estate salesperson. When we first meet George, he is asleep on the sleeping porch of his house in the suburb of Zenith called Floral Heights, dreaming again of the "fairy child." We soon learn why he has these dreams of escape. He awakens to the rattle of a milk truck in a standardized house with a standardized family in a standardized neighborhood in a standardized city, etc. In short, his life is meaningless.

As he drives to work we begin to understand why his life is so meaningless. He has completely conformed to someone else's values, the values of the city's "good ol' boys." For instance, he is heartened by the fact that the neighborhood academician confirms his political views. He thinks that those who don't think like him or dress like him are "bums." He ego is fortified by the fact that he works in an impressive office in a city with an impressive skyline. He is uplifted by his up-to-date water cooler. But he gets excited about these things because all of his cronies do.

As much as he is heartened by the fact that other important people think like him (which means he thinks like them), he is constantly dreaming of the fairy child or of fishing trips with

his buddy Paul. Strikingly, Paul confides that he is more than a bit dissatisfied with life. For instance,

Good Lord, George, you don't suppose it's any novelty to me to find that we hustlers, that think we're so all-fired successful, aren't getting much out of it? You look at me as if you expected me to report you as seditious! You know what my own life's been.<sup>17</sup>

And later,

After twenty-four years of that sort of thing (being married to a spoiled-brat of a wife named Zilla), you don't expect me to fall down and foam at the mouth when you hint that this sweet, clean, respectable, moral life isn't all it's cracked up to be, do you? I can't even talk about it, except to you, because everybody else would think I was yellow. Maybe I am. Don't care any longer....<sup>18</sup>

Eventually Paul would shoot his wife. After Paul went to jail, George was in such desperate straits that he decides to find a fairy child in the flesh. He found one in one of his renters. Babbitt also decided to become more "radical" and think for himself. He eventually befriends Seneca Doane, a radical lawyer/friend of labor. But George didn't have the emotional or financial strength to be a non-conformist. After he began losing business and a prized stenographer, and when his wife needed emergency surgery, George went back to being his old self, the conformist. At the end to the novel George decides to live a life of freedom through his son, who had the courage to be his own person.

The publisher summarizes *Babbitt* the following way.

George E. Babbitt, a conniving, prosperous real estate man from Zenith, Ohio, revels in his popularity, his success, and, especially, in the material rewards they bring. He bullies his wife, flirts with other women, and patronizes the less successful. But when his best friend is sent to prison for killing his wife, Babbitt's middle-class complacency is shattered, and he rebels, seeking a more "meaningful" life. His small revolt is quickly defeated, however, by public opinion and his own need for acceptance. Babbitt captures the flavor of America during the economic boom years of the 1920s, and its protagonist

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<sup>17</sup> Sinclair Lewis (1991, orig. 1922), *Babbitt* (New York: Putnam Penguin), p. 58.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

has become the symbol of middle-class mediocrity, his name an enduring part of the American lexicon.<sup>19</sup>

### **Who Are We?**

Now that George Babbitt has been formally introduced, we can begin to understand who we are.<sup>20</sup> Babbitt was a “foot soldier in a national enterprise that was changing the nature of middle-class work from muscle to intelligence, from production to service.”<sup>21</sup> We are the same.

To be successful in our endeavors, we need money. We obviously believe that money makes the "world go 'round." To get money, we must conform to the values of those above us on the economic food chain and we must persuade those below us to accept these values as well. Further, we must all agree that meaning comes from being upwardly mobile and that success equals power and money. If not, the system won't work. For instance, we must conform to the values of our banker if we want a loan. We must also conform to the values of our customers or persuade them that our values are more beneficial if we want them to buy (so that we can repay the loan and have a profit for ourselves.) We conform because we are afraid of not being accepted by those who can influence our business. We encourage others to conform through our propaganda. Underlying it all is the myth that money is salvation and that being on the top of the heap is heaven.

But conformity makes us unhappy. We eventually begin to dislike our lives because we are not ourselves. Our individuality is lost in the roles we play. Ironically, we become insecure when we don't measure up to society's standards. So in an effort to feel secure, we buy large

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<sup>19</sup> Sinclair Lewis (1996) *Babbitt* (New York: Viking Penguin). The summary was on the bn.com (Barnes and Noble) web site. Publisher's error: Paul may have attempted to kill his wife. He did not actually kill her.

<sup>20</sup> By "we," I mean traditional, middle class Protestants.

<sup>21</sup> Introduction, *ibid.*, p. vii.

vehicles and toys. We become involved in affairs to “bandage our psychic wounds.”<sup>22</sup> But nothing works. We still feel we need to “prodigal” ourselves.

In particular, Sinclair Lewis describes us in the following ways. First of all, our city skylines are dominated by office buildings, not churches.<sup>23</sup> We behold these towers as temple-spires of the religion of business.<sup>24</sup> On the hills around the city are our homes. It seems that they are built for laughter and tranquility,<sup>25</sup> but they are a front. As adults we are no longer “greatly interested in the possible and improbable adventures of each new day.” We escape from reality until our alarm clocks ring.<sup>26</sup>

External things stimulate us mostly; for instance, if our neat yards are perfect we too are perfect.<sup>27</sup> Our god is technology.<sup>28</sup> We crave the latest and fastest. We are concerned with the way we dress.<sup>29</sup> Never do we wish to look like a “busted bookkeeper.” Our houses and cities, though modern, look just like that of our neighbors, inside and out.<sup>30</sup> But they are not homes.<sup>31</sup> We fit other people’s standards. We want others to perceive us as professional. For instance, when we sign business documents, we make sure we use the “correct flowing business-college hand.”<sup>32</sup> In short, we want to be looked at in a certain way. We don’t want to be laughed at.

Not only do we conform to others’ values, we help others as long as they conform as well. For example, we are Good Samaritans as long as the party we are helping does not look “like a bum.”<sup>33</sup> We invite only appropriate guests to dinner.<sup>34</sup> We help our customers by

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. xi.

<sup>23</sup> Sinclair Lewis (1998, orig. 1922), *Babbitt* (New York: Penguin Putnam, Inc.), p. 1.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 13ff.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

disciplining them; in other words, we get them to see things our way.<sup>35</sup> We don't want them to think on their own.

Politically, we equate redistribution of wealth and unions<sup>36</sup> with socialism. We believe that our economic success has to do with our hard work. We think everyone deserves what they have if they don't have as much as we do.<sup>37</sup> We don't understand racism.<sup>38</sup> We don't act unless our economic interests are threatened, and then we search for more palatable justification for acting.

In dealing with others, we are not unreasonably honest.<sup>39</sup> We respect people who are richer than us even if they had to cheat a little to get there.<sup>40</sup> We look for experts to confirm our beliefs.<sup>41</sup> If our beliefs are confirmed, then our beliefs are objectively true. If someone disconfirms what we believe, they are a "hack."

We believe that the sole purpose of business is to make money for ourselves.<sup>42</sup> We think we are better than average but have an inferiority complex when we compare ourselves to those of a higher social-economic standing.<sup>43</sup> We "use every known brand of trickery and cruelty to insure the prosperity" of our children<sup>44</sup> and we think of religion as a means to the end of making money.<sup>45</sup>

In short, we are shallow and hollow people. Externally we look alive. Externally we are frequently stimulated. Internally we are dead.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 191.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 214.

## What Kind of Culture Have We Created?

Sinclair Lewis does not paint a very flattering picture of us. He also portrays some unsettling hypotheses about the kind of society we have created. One I call The Babbitt Curve. The other I have dubbed The Negative View.

Consider the following:

“Course I don’t mean to say that every ad I write is literally true or that I always believe everything I say when I give some buyer a good strong selling-spiel. You see – you see it’s like this: In the first place, maybe the owner of the property exaggerated when he put it into my hands, and it certainly isn’t my place to go proving my principal is a liar! And then most folks are so darn crooked themselves that they expect a fellow to do a little lying, so if I was fool enough to never whoop the ante I’d get credit for lying anyway! I got to toot my own horn, like a lawyer defending a client – his bounden duty, ain’t it, to bring out the poor dub’s good points? Why the Judge himself would bawl out a lawyer that didn’t, even if they both knew the guy was guilty! But even so, I don’t pad out the truth like Cecil Rountree or Thayer or the rest of these realtors. Fact, I think a fellow that’s willing to deliberately up and profit by lying ought to be shot”!<sup>46</sup>

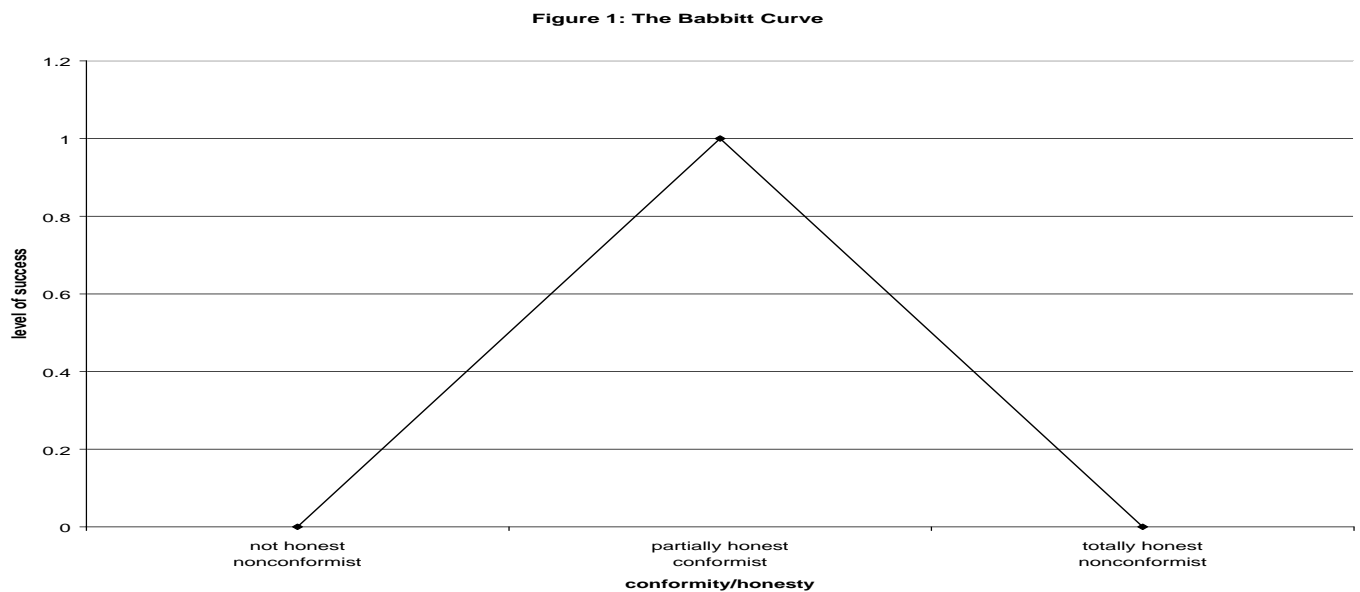
Sinclair Lewis implies we have created a culture in which it pays for a sales person to be a conformist. But, according to Lewis, conformity implies that one is not “unreasonably” honest. I call the relationship between level of sales, income, or material success and level of conformity and honesty The Babbitt Curve (see Figure 1). On this curve there are heroes and scoundrels. One scoundrel is George Babbitt. George is prosperous and got that way by conforming to the expectations of his peers. Because he was honest only when it was “reasonable” in the context of a socially acceptable occupation (Real Estate men are professionals!) he sits on the apex of the curve. (Assume the vertical axis is represented by level of material or income or sales success and the horizontal axis is represented by level of honesty/conformity.) Another scoundrel is Healey Hanson, the bootlegger.<sup>47</sup> Hanson was a non-conformist and he was usually dishonest. He belongs on the far left of the curve – at a low level of honesty and a low level of material

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<sup>46</sup> Lewis, *ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

success. A hero in the novel was Seneca Doane. Seneca Doane could have been more successful had he not condemned himself by being honest and by not conforming to the values of the social elite.<sup>48</sup> Doane was a radical lawyer who wanted the poor to have a greater share of wealth (their fair share?), such as having the “meetings of the Garment Workers held at the Ritz, with a dance afterward.”<sup>49</sup>



Sinclair Lewis also has an interesting hypothesis about the prospects of society redeeming itself. This hypothesis I refer to as The Negative View. Lewis was pessimistic because he saw human nature as basically flawed. Human beings are weak: they conform to what those in power deem is socially acceptable. And what they deem as socially acceptable is sometimes evil.

For instance,

"What do I (George Babbitt) care what anybody thinks? And let me tell you right now – I want you to distinctly understand I never was a wild crazy kid, and when I say a thing, I

<sup>48</sup> Lewis, *ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 287.

mean it, and I stand by it and – Honest, do you think people would think I was too liberal if I just said the strikers were decent?"<sup>50</sup>

And,

All of them [the members of the Good Citizens League] agreed that the working classes must be kept in their place; and all of them perceived that American Democracy did not imply any equality of wealth, but did demand a wholesome sameness of thought, dress, painting, morals, and vocabulary.<sup>51</sup>

In fact, in one of his later novels,<sup>52</sup> Lewis shows how society would ultimately destroy itself. Fascism was to Lewis always a threat<sup>53</sup> because people seemed to have a natural desire to conform to the opinion of others in order to feel secure.

### **The Vocational Reformers' Reaction to Lewis' Hypotheses**

Vocational Reformers will likely accept both of Lewis' hypotheses and much of what he said. They will likely believe that if Christians are Christ-like, they will not be conformists nor will they likely have sales, income, or material success. Instead of seeing Christ as middle class, they will see Christ as an outcast with a very small band of "ne'er-do-wells." This is because Christians will practice grace in word and deed in a particular way.

In terms of deed, Christians must be detached from material possessions.

You have heard it was said "Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth." But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.<sup>54</sup>

How can Christians be wealthy in this world with such an attitude? Pastor M. Craig Barnes says that if "Christians are truly willing to leave everything to follow him [Christ], then

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 302.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 369.

<sup>52</sup> Sinclair Lewis (1935), *It Can't Happen Here* (New York: Doubleday).

<sup>53</sup> James Lundquist (1973), *Sinclair Lewis* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing), p. 43.

<sup>54</sup> Matthew 5:38-41 (NIV).

they will, in fact, eventually leave everything."<sup>55</sup> Author Ayn Rand (not a Christian) describes how society would implode if it operated according to the philosophy of "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need."<sup>56</sup> Ironically, such a philosophy seems to be one closely followed and later abandoned by the early Church!<sup>57</sup> The point is that Vocational Reformers realize that every person and every system and everything is evil and therefore easy to let go of.

In terms of word, Christians must present the Gospel.

Then Jesus came to them and said. "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age."<sup>58</sup>

Practicing grace in word and deed come together when Christians follow God's will for their lives by asking God to reveal His plan to them and fill them with His Spirit on a daily basis. There can be no other way to be a Christian in an evil, fallen world. God has a plan for each and every person.<sup>59</sup> It is the Christians responsibility to be vulnerable to it. For example, Christian business owners may be called to take advantage of their businesses. They may be called to practice "non-random, opportunistic acts of love."<sup>60</sup>

Such a mentality has interesting implications for the teaching of ethics and social responsibility. If ethics are norms for behavior and social responsibility is about the firms' obligations to society, the Christians' ethic is to find their calling. The firm's social responsibility will take care of itself.

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<sup>55</sup> M. Craig Barnes, *When God Interrupts: Finding New Life Through Unwanted Change* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press), p. 17.

<sup>56</sup> Ayn Rand (1957), *Atlas Shrugged* (New York: New American Library).

<sup>57</sup> Acts 4:32-35.

<sup>58</sup> Matthew 28: 18-20 (NIV).

<sup>59</sup> Ephesians 2:10.

<sup>60</sup> Steve VanderVeen (1995), "Take Advantage of Your Business," *The Banner*, December 18, pp. 12-15.

To get to the point of being willing to leave everything and asking to be filled with God's Spirit, Christians must experience dread and anguish.<sup>61</sup> Christians must see the evil and hopelessness in themselves and in the world. For instance, they must see Babbitt in themselves. They must see the paradoxical relationship between Christ and culture. They must see that honesty does not pay<sup>62</sup> and that it is not advantageous to disclose that they are followers of Christ.<sup>63</sup> They must see the wrong-headed eschatology of advertising<sup>64</sup> and the fact that much of advertising is manipulation.<sup>65</sup> In short, they must see The Negative View as well as The Babbitt Curve.

### **The Anti-Social Reformers' Reaction to Lewis' Hypotheses**

Anti-social Reformers will likely accept The Negative View and The Babbitt Curve with some modification. They will see The Babbitt Curve not as a curve or an upward sloping line, but a downward sloping line. It is likely they see the world as a dishonest place and believe that totally honest, non-conformists would have no chance of surviving outside of their world. Anti-social Reformers, like Thinktank/PAC Reformers (see below), hold strongly to the possibility that institutional reform is possible. However, Anti-social Reformers, like Vocational Reformers, see the "outside" world as basically evil. Unlike those of other mentalities, Anti-social Reformers see it as their ethic to form their own institutions and organizations. Such organizations would then have the social responsibility to serve their constituents, for example, by doing business with "their own" as much as possible.

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<sup>61</sup> This follows Kierkegaard's strategy for spiritual maturity and renewal.

<sup>62</sup> Brian E. Porter and Steve VanderVeen (1999), "Does Being Honest Pay? An Empirical Study," *Christian Scholar's Review*, XXVIII:3, pp. 452-465.

<sup>63</sup> Steve VanderVeen, "Subtle Deception," working paper, Calvin College.

<sup>64</sup> Evelyn Diephouse and Thomas A. Boogart (1999), "The Eschatology of Advertising," *Perspectives* (August/September), pp. 4-5.

<sup>65</sup> Steve VanderVeen, "The Advertising is Mostly Manipulation Hypothesis," working paper, Calvin College.

## **The Think Tank/PACs' Reaction to Lewis' Hypotheses**

Thinktank/PAC Reformers will likely not see Babbitt in themselves. They will likely view *Babbitt* as hyperbole -- which to some extent it is. Furthermore, Thinktank/PAC Reformers may see The Babbitt Curve as an upward sloping line. First, being totally honest does make one a non-conformist. It also makes one wealthy. This is part of God's intended order.

Thinktank/PAC Reformers would not agree with The Negative View. Justice can be achieved, although it may take a lot of academic rigor and political power to make it happen. But if we understand God's world, we will know which levers to pull. Not to figure this out, however, would be a scandal of our God-given minds.<sup>66</sup> Gaining knowledge, therefore, is the ethic of Thinktank/PAC Reformers.

Knowing which levers to pull is only half of the story. It takes leaders to pull them. Thinktank/PAC Reformers know that people have a natural tendency to look for saviors. Thinktank/PAC Reformers could fulfill this role. Fascism may not even be a threat if the right leader is dictator! Therefore becoming a leader in society is a co-ethic of Thinktank/PAC Reformers.

Leadership is important because the social responsibility of firms is to work toward justice and effective stewardship of collective human and environmental gifts. Leadership is necessary not only because Thinktank/PAC Reformers believe effective change comes from the top, they also have a different starting point so their theories about what to do are different from the world's. Consensus, though preferred, is simply not practical. The theories of Thinktank/PAC Reformers begin from a unique "good faith" perspective: Thinktank/PAC

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<sup>66</sup> See, for example, Mark Noll (1996), *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans).

Reformers believe good faith is a prerequisite for good science, since science without faith is not science at all.<sup>67</sup>

### **The Charismatic Reformers' View of Lewis' Hypotheses**

Charismatic Reformers will not see Babbitt in themselves and they will not agree with Lewis' hypotheses. They see The Babbitt Curve as a line that is upward sloping. Like Thinktank/PAC Reformers, they see a positive correlation between level of honesty and sales, income, and material success in the world. Charismatic Reformers also have a positive attitude toward culture. They see business and the environment of business (capitalism) as basically good. In fact, Charismatic Reformers will attempt to apply biblical principles to the principles of business with the goal of bringing sales, income, and material success to themselves and others.

From this perspective the ethic is to be a cheerleader and coach for individuals who are "down and out." Another ethic is to become financially independent so that Christians can devote their lives to charitable work and funding not-for-profit organizations that help individuals succeed. A firm's social responsibility is also related to this: firms should strive to promote the American Way. Free enterprise is the economic system of choice because it allows individuals the opportunity to enjoy God's material blessings if they operate with the right principles and mentors.

### **Conclusion**

So, in the end, was Lewis correct to say that there is a positive correlation between conformity and sales, income, or material success and a curvilinear relationship between such success and honesty (The Babbitt Curve)? Was Lewis correct to say that society cannot transform itself because people have the fatal flaw of seeking safety in numbers (The Negative

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<sup>67</sup> For example, see Roland Hoksbergen (1992), "A Reformed Approach to Economics: The Kuyperian Tradition," *Association of Christian Economists Bulletin*, 20 (Fall), pp. 12ff.

View)? Was I correct in my assessment of the four mentalities? It depends, of course, on one's mentality among other things. One's mentality likely is related to one's historical subculture. Not only that, but one's current perspective in ethics and social responsibility is also likely related to both one's mentality and one's historical subculture. But who's mentality is correct? Which mentality is most consistent with Scripture? Again, it may be impossible to know, since we still see through a glass darkly. However, until we see "face to face," we can ask God through Christ to send His Spirit to guide us.