

“NO INDEPENDENT SELF”

An Attempt at Clarification

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The phrase “no independent self” has been used in some Christian circles. This study attempts to consider legitimate and illegitimate usages of the phrase.

For years (almost thirty years now) I have heard certain Christians using the phrase, “no independent self.” For the most part these Christians have been in a rather small and obscure circle loosely identified as the “union life movement.” The founding father of that movement was the missionary-statesman, Norman P. Grubb (1895-1993), who in his last commercially published book, *Yes I Am*, entitled one of the chapters, “No Independent Self.” There are still several *ad hoc* groups of Christians who trace their distinctive thought back to the teachings and writings of Norman Grubb, and it is among these groups that I have heard the phrase, “no independent self,” commonly used.

Over the process of time such phrases often acquire multiple meanings in the minds of those employing such. This seems to be the case among those referring to “no independent self.” The meaning of the phrase has become mired in the muddy waters of multiple and mixed applications, creating an ambiguous mumbo-jumbo of terminology. Careful examination of the issue seems to reveal that there was an ambiguity of meaning even in the writings of Norman Grubb.

It is my intent in this article to attempt to clarify how this phrase might be employed in a legitimate biblical and theological context. In order to do so, we must recognize that there is a legitimate assertion of “independent self” in reference to God, and there is a legitimate denial of “independent self” when we understand the function of the human creature. The diabolic deceiver, however, seeks to provoke falsification in both the

assertion and denial of how “independent self” applies to mankind in general and to Christians in particular.

Before we commence to consider these, however, it should first be noted that the way in which “self” is being used in this phrase has a relatively modern origin in the English language. Only in recent English usage, influenced by the discipline of psychology, has “self” stood alone as a separate word and as a synonym for “being” or “person.” Reference to “independent self” utilizes this modern psychologized meaning of the word, but this does not forestall its use in the valid explanation of biblical and theological Christian concepts.

God is the only “Independent Self”

It is inaccurate to categorically affirm that there is “no independent self.” The One who was “in the beginning” (Gen. 1:1) and is the Creator of all things is an “independent self.” God is THE only Independent Self. He is the only One who is completely independent and autonomous – influenced by, and contingent upon, no other. He is Self-existent, Self-determinative, and Self-generating.

What God is, only God is! He is singularly and solely the God of the universe. Jehovah-God is totally Self-sufficient – not contingent or reliant on any other. He is complete in Himself, and lacks nothing.

By affirming that God is the Independent Self, there is no implication that He is solitarily individuated. “Independent,” in this case, does not mean detached or unrelational. The divine Independent Self functions in Trinitarian relationalism as the three Persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit interact in Love. God is a personal, relational God, Who always seeks union-relationship with others. He is not a standoffish dictatorial authority. He is not a “black-hole” that pulls everything in and absorbs all things in Himself.

God, the Independent Self, has an absolute character that is intrinsic, inherent, and self-existent within Himself. He never acts

“out of character,” contrary to Who He is. He always acts out of Who He is, consistent with His own character.

God *does* what He *does*, because He *is* Who He *is*! Everything He does is *ek Theos* or *ek eautos*, “out of Himself.” Every action of God has its origin in, and is derived from, Himself. God is Self-generating, Self-operative, Self-empowering, and Self-productive.

The character of this all-powerful, divine Independent Self is LOVE. The apostle John twice stated, “God is love” (I John 4:8,16). This is not to say that God *has* love to give or distribute, but God *is* essentially, intrinsically, inherently LOVE. He always seeks the highest good of the other. *Agape* love is always other-oriented.

As the Independent Self, God is a Self-for-others. These “others” are the other persons of the Triune Godhead, and all of the created order who exist to participate in His interrelational Love.

God is fixed in His character of Love. He is not, and cannot be, a self-for-self. He is complete in Himself, and has no needs. He cannot be a selfish God.

Given the aforementioned premises, that God, the only Independent Self, is a loving Self-for-others, we can conclude that there cannot be an “independent self” who manifests the character of “self-for-self.” Such is an impossible and incompatible combination.

God always acts from His character of Love. He has Self-determinative “free-will” (only the Independent Self has such) to act as Who He is in Himself. He has the Self-empowering omnipotence to enact whatever He determines in the context of His own character and in accord with His Self-limiting creation of choosing relational beings.

God is the only Independent Self in the universe.

Creatures cannot be an “independent self”

So, when we use the phrase “no independent self,” we are not referring to God, the Creator. It is only a valid phrase in reference to created beings, both angelic and human.

Lucifer (Isa. 14:12), the Light-bearer, who was the head of the hosts of the angelic creatures, was not an independent self. He was dependent on God, and derived from God to manifest God’s authority, light, and love. Where the self-for-self character came from that prompted his announcement, “I will be like the Most High God” (Isa. 14:14), is the inexplicable unknown of theodicy (the area of study that seeks to explain evil in reference to the righteous character of God). The origin of evil is an enigma to human thought. God is the essential cause of all things, but He is not the culpable or blameworthy cause of evil, which is contrary to His character.

As a dependent and derivative angelic creature, Lucifer was a choosing creature. Apparently God ordained that in Lucifer’s choice, he would become the opposite character of God, the fixed source of evil and sin by contorting, distorting, and aborting God’s goodness. By his choice Lucifer became Satan, the adversarial devil, the negative of God’s positive, the “god of this world” (II Cor. 4:4), the “prince of the power of the air” (Eph. 2:2), the tempter of mankind, and the source of all self-for-self character.

Humans were also created as choosing dependent creatures. Since “what God is, only God is,” the corollary is “what God is, man is not.” God is the only Independent Self – unconditioned, uncontingent, and unconstrained – with the absolute and intrinsic character of Love. Man, on the other hand, is not independent, autonomous and auto-generative. The creature, man, is dependent, contingent, derivative and receptive. It is imperative that we understand these essential functional differences between God and man. Legitimate Christian teaching always maintains the distinction of being and function between the Creator and the creature, between God and man, and never allows the human creature to become or be identified as the Creator, or to claim to function as God. The relationship between

God and man is always relational, and never that of equivalence. Man is not God, or a god, or a co-god, and never becomes such. The Creator God functions as the autonomous Independent Self, doing what He does out of Himself (ek eautos), autogeneratively. Man was created by God as a derivative creature, a dependent self, and a receptive person.

Man cannot autogenerate character as an "independent self." He can only derive and receive character from one spirit-source or the other, from God or Satan. The dependent human self can receive either the character of "Self-for-others" love from God, or he can receive the character of "self-for-self" selfishness from Satan. The result will be either godliness or sinfulness. These are the only character options for man.

Human beings are incapable of creating their own good or righteousness, because they are not God. They are also incapable of creating their own evil or unrighteousness, because they are not the devil. Man is not God or devil – he is always man. His created condition as a derivative being forever disallows his being or becoming an "independent self" with any sense of human autonomy or capability for self-generation or self-empowerment. This understanding of "derivative man" is the distinctive of Christian anthropology that has often been misunderstood even by Christian theologians and teachers.

Man was initially created with the presence of God within the man (Gen. 2:7). With the indwelling presence of the Spirit of God in the spirit of the man, man could choose to respond in faithful reliance upon God's provision in order to manifest the divine character of His Self-for-others Love. This was illustrated by the option to "eat freely" (Gen. 2:16) of the "tree of life" (Gen. 2:9), representing the choice to receive the divine outworking of the divinely inbreathed (Gen. 2:7) life of God.

When man responded to the tempter and chose against the faithful reception of God's character, fallen man did not become "independent," as much Christian teaching has suggested. Always a "dependent self," sinful man was dependent on the wrong

spirit, the diabolic spirit of the “father of lies” (John 8:44) who “blinds the minds of unbelieving men” (II Cor. 4:4) to deceive and delude them of their dependence on him. Unregenerate persons have “the spirit of the prince of the power of the air working in them, the sons of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2).

All of the analogies God uses in scripture to portray the function of man are images of dependency and derivation. Man is a vessel (II Cor. 4:7) that receives its contents. Man is a house (II Cor. 5:1) or a temple (I Cor. 6:19) that contains a spirit occupant. Man is a branch (John 15:5) that draws all of its life from the vine. Man is a slave (Rom. 6:16-18) who responds to a master. The human person is like a wife (Rom. 7:1-6) who depends on her husband. These images do not denigrate or depreciate man in any way, but simply exhibit how the human functions.

The function of the human dependent-self is always that of derivation. Man does not have an independent “human nature,” but always has a derived nature determined by the nature of the spiritual personage who indwells him (cf. Eph. 2:3; II Peter 1:4). The identity of man is not in his independent abilities, possessions, or association, but a derived spiritual identity constituting the individual either as a “son of God” or a “son of the devil” (I John 3:10). Spiritual life and death are derived from either the One who is Life (John 11:25; 14:6), or “the one having the power of death, that is the devil” (Heb. 2:14). Sinful self-for-self character is derived from the devil (I John 3:8), whereas the righteous Self-for-others character is derived only from the Righteous One (I John 2:1) as a “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22,23), thereby facilitating a derived spiritual image or visaging of one spirit or the other. Even immortality is not independently inherent in man, but is derived from the One “who alone possesses immortality” (I Tim. 6:16).

Man is a dependent self who functions derivatively. He is not self-operative, but a receiver designed to be receptive to the activity of God by faith.

The foregoing premises are simply the objective realities of Who God is, and how God created all creatures to function. God is the only Independent Self, Self-generating His own character and action. Man is not an independent self, but a dependent self, deriving character from spirit-source.

Now, we must proceed to consider how Satan, the “father of lies” (John 8:44), attempts the falsification of the function of God and man. Willing to push any truth to its extreme falsity, the deceiver will use every fallacious argument to oppose God and His ways. *Diabolos* will try to deny that God is the only Independent Self, and deny that man is a dependent self, by alleging that man can function as an “independent self” (the lie of humanism). Conversely, the devil will tempt man to deny that man is a dependent self, and affirm that man is not an independent self, by alleging that man is absorbed and coalesced into an equivalence of oneness with God wherein man can operate as the Independent Self of Godness (the lie of pantheism).

Denial of the objective realities of the function of the Creator God and the human creature is introduced through subjective misinformation. We will herewith consider three (3) forms of false thinking propagated by the “father of lies” (John 8:44).

The False Thinking of Human Potential

In the Garden of Eden the serpent introduced the humanistic lie to the original man and woman, “You, too, can be like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:5). How does God know good and evil? From His absolute Independent Self, He knows His inherent and exclusive character of goodness, and knows that all that is not consistent with Himself and not from Himself (*ek theos*) is evil.

The subtlety of the satanic suggestion was the false implication that man could be an “independent self” who could self-determine and self-generate his own goodness, thereby considering all that was not consistent with his own thoughts, opinions, and attitudes to be “evil.” It was the fallacious

suggestion that man could be his own center of reference and determination, the lie of human self-deification.

All of mankind has partaken of the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Gen. 2:9,17) in Adam's act of responding to the tempter. Humanity, as a whole, was deceived (Rev. 12:9) by the diabolic deceiver, and has henceforth engaged in the self-centered "good and evil" game that allows every man, and every group of men, to set themselves up as self-determinative gods.

Although man cannot be "like God" in being or function, the lie of the tempter was that man could be an "independent self" manifesting a self-generated self-for-self character. We have already noted the impossibility and incompatibility of such a combination, but this is the fallacious thesis of humanism.

Satan, himself a dependent creature, knew full well that man could not be an "independent self," and was surely cognizant that the usurpation of control would cause man to be dependent on the evil satanic source to manifest self-for-self character. The power-play worked in conjunction with the freely chosen disobedience of man, and Satan, the "I" specialist, the ego-promoter, the death-dealer, began to "work in the sons of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2), manifesting his character of selfishness in fallen, unregenerate humanity, now constituted and identified as "sinners" (Rom. 5:19).

Every subsequent generation of unregenerate mankind has operated under this humanistic delusion of man's function as an "independent self." This is the mind-set of the world-system. The indwelling Satan-spirit (Eph. 2:2) feeds the mind of man the false information of his being an "independent self." Fallen men falsely believe and falsely think that they are functioning as separate, stand-alone persons. They are convinced that they are "independent selves" who function as the cause of their own effects and the source of their own sufficiency, able to chart their own course and solve their own problems by self-help techniques. Their mantra is, "Be all you can be." The premise of being an "independent self" with unlimited potential to achieve

all they desire is so entrenched in the mind-set of the world, that a comedian like Flip Wilson could caricature his misdeeds with the flippant explanation, "The devil made me do it," and it was only viewed as a joke, for no one believed it to have any validity.

In the midst of a people who falsely thought they were "independent selves" and were operating by the derivation of the self-for-self character, God introduced the Law through Moses. What was the purpose of this Law? God had no illusions that satanically dependent persons could self-generate righteous character and behavior. The purpose of the Mosaic Law was to reveal that the Israelite people were not "independent selves" who could produce what God desired. The Law served to expose the inability of men to manifest godliness apart from God, and righteousness apart from the Righteous One, Jesus Christ. "By the works of the Law no man shall be made righteous" (Gal. 5:16). God used the Law to demonstrate that no man can be "like God," self-generating godly character. The Law forced the people of Israel to recognize their inability to live up to God's expectations, and to admit their selfish sinfulness.

Man can only be man as God intended man to be when he admits the fallacy of "independent self," repents of his derivation of the self-for-self character of Satan, receives the very life of God in the Person of the living Lord Jesus, and derives the godly character of God's Self-for-others by the receptivity of faith.

The False Thinking of Christian Ability

When the spiritual exchange of regeneration transpires in a receptive individual, and a person has been "turned from the dominion of Satan to God" (Acts 26:18), the Christian is a "new creature, wherein old things have passed away, and all has become new" (II Cor. 5:17). Spiritually, that is! The psychological mind of a new Christian is still polluted with old residual attitudes of the false humanistic perspective of an "independent self," however. So, the new "child of God" (John 1:12; I John 3:1,2) inevitably slides into the subjective perspective of false thinking that they must try to live the Christian life. The humanistic

premise of human potential transitions into a form of “evangelical humanism” that falsely believes that the Christian should have the ability to “be like Christ.”

It is in this context that the “union life” brethren often speak of the necessity of a subjective realization that we are not separated “independent selves” who are required to do what only the living Christ can do. Even when Christians properly understand that they “were by nature children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3) in conjoined union with the Satan-spirit, and now, by the spiritual exchange of conversion they are “partakers of the divine nature” (II Peter 1:4), “joined to the Lord, one spirit with Him” (I Cor. 6:17), they can still retain the false premise in their minds of a responsibility to perform in accord with God’s expectations. Despite knowing that Christ lives in them (Col. 1:27; Gal. 2:20; II Cor. 13:5), and that “the grace of God is sufficient for every good deed” (II Cor. 9:8), Christians unknowingly lapse into the separated thinking that they have to live “like Christ.” Accepting such popular mottoes as “What Would Jesus Do?” they try to do what only Christ can do – be Himself and live His life, manifesting His divine character in our human behavior to the glory of God the Father.

Since most Christians do not understand their “union with Christ” (I Cor. 6:17) and their new identity “in Christ” as “new men” (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10), “made righteous” (Rom. 5:21; II Cor. 5:21) as “saints” (Eph. 1:18), they retain the old mind-set of a “separated concept” of a Christian here on earth attempting to relate to a transcendent God up in heaven, where Christ is seated at His right hand. Their perception is that their prayers and their praises must ascend through the vastness of space up to a far-away God. Many Christians believe that their past is forgiven, their future is assured, but the present occupation of the Christian life is to do everything one can to “present oneself acceptable to God,” when in reality they are “acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (I Pet. 2:5; Rom. 15:7).

The apostle John advises us that as Christians, “Greater is He who is in you, than he who is in the world” (I John 4:4). Though Satan has been expelled from his indwelling presence, he

continues to assault Christians as the “accuser of the brethren” (Rev. 12:10). Christians are not exempt from temptation, and should not expect to be. The tempter constantly introduces thoughts designed to cause us to doubt our identity “in Christ,” and to reinforce the false attitude that we are “independent selves” who must perform the Christian life. This is as it should be, as God deigned it to be, for the falsity of our thinking that we are “independent selves” must be exposed, and the inability of any alleged self-sufficiency in living the Christian life must be demonstrated.

Ironically, the deceptive suggestions that we are self-operating “independent Christian selves” are conveniently delivered by much of fundamentalist and evangelical religious teaching today. We are told that we must discover and accomplish God’s will for our lives, when the truth of the matter is that God’s will is only and always Jesus – His life and character lived out in every situation of our lives. We are told that we can be what God wants us to be “with God’s help.” “Do your best, and God will do the rest,” for “God helps those who help themselves,” are oft-repeated incentives. God’s grace is viewed as a “booster-shot,” or something akin to “Hamburger Helper,” but it’s the “Holy Spirit Helper” instead; or a form of “spiritual Viagra” that gives a Christian what he needs to “do it.” This is essentially the same as the Roman Catholic teaching of “infused grace” that allegedly provides the boost for Christian performance, which the Protestant reformers reacted to as “works” righteousness. Now, the Protestant churches are promoting the same “works” of the alleged “independent Christian self” in such schemes as WWJD (What Would Jesus Do?) and “the purpose-driven life.” We must rediscover that God’s grace is the divine dynamic whereby He does what He wants to do in manifesting His character via the Christ-life in and through the Christian.

When the onus of Christian living is placed on the performance of behavioral “shoulds,” and “oughts” and “musts” – on legalistic “thou shalt” and “thou shalt not” – then the fallacious foundations of a performing “independent self” underlie such teaching. In sermon after sermon they advocate more

commitment, dedication, and consecration, more independent resolve to “be the Christian God wants you to be,” and the result is the effectiveness of most New Year’s resolutions – failure. Obedience is inculcated, perceived in the old covenant, law-based concept of rule-keeping, rather than in the new covenant awareness of “listening under” (Greek word *hupakouo*) God to ascertain the next opportunity for receptivity to His activity. Calls for “more faith” and loyal faithfulness are also used to rouse dilatory Christians to more diligent performance, even by such techniques as “positive thinking” or “possibility thinking,” with no understanding that faith is simply how we operate as “dependent selves” deriving from spirit-source. Faith is “our receptivity of His activity” – our availability to His ability to express His character in our behavior.

Overemphasis on identifying and overcoming sin in one’s life is another capitulation to the fallacious mind-set of “independent self.” The adversarial “accuser of the brethren” (Rev. 12:10) must take nefarious delight in the interior archaeological expeditions that Christian religion advocates to sniff-out sin and ferret-out fleshliness. Such navel-gazing sin-consciousness leads to the repetitive confessionalism of the “altar-athletes” who run forward each week, thinking that they must identify and overcome their sin. When our mental focus is on Christ (cf. Heb. 12:2), rather than on sin, God will reveal our false attitudes (Phil. 3:15), and the positive power of His grace will swallow up any negative misrepresentations of sinfulness (cf. Rom. 12:2; Gal. 5:16; Eph. 5:18). Preoccupation with sin, moral weaknesses, carnal patterns, and addictions, however, often causes the Christian to become self-deprecatory, thinking that something is wrong with him, that a “dirty old man” still lives in him, apparently cohabitating with Christ. Such a schizophrenic “two natures” mind-set self-justifies the fallacious idea of an “independent Christian self” who is responsible to repress the evil side of himself in self-denial, and suppress the sin expressions of his behavior in self-improvement and self-reformation. Those who encourage the “application of the cross” in order to “die to self” in self-crucifixion can also fall into the fallacy of urging an “independent self” to commit spiritual suicide.

So, where does this lead that Christian (every Christian) who has been deceived with the false thinking of being an “independent self?” Though we decry the misdirected emphasis of Christian religion on the Christian’s ability to live the Christian life, it is the required door through which we all pass to the understanding of the illegitimacy of self-righteousness. We have to know what does not work, to appreciate the only One who can work in our Christian lives.

The entire process of satanic misinformation about being an “independent self” serves God’s purpose (Rom. 8:28) to bring us to the confusing morass of the “Romans Seven Syndrome.” We experience the frustration of admitting that “the good that I would, I do not; and the evil that I would not, that I do” (Rom. 7:19), and the consequent peace of recognizing that as a dependent creature I am not capable of doing either good or evil. We fall before God with the cry of desperation, “Oh wretched man that I am, who will deliver me” (Rom. 7:24) from the incessant striving to be an “independent Christian self?” The desperate man is ready to function as a dependent self.

The performance principle of the “law” serves its final purpose to reveal that we are incapable of keeping the rules and regulations, including the Christian standards of behavior. We are brought to the end of our deceived understanding of an “independent Christian self,” in the recognition that we cannot live the Christian life. We are forced to admit that we cannot manifest godliness apart from God, or righteousness apart from the Righteous One, Jesus Christ. The Christian life is Christ’s life lived out in us, as us, and through us, while we as dependent creatures derive from Him in the receptivity of His activity of manifesting His character in our behavior.

Romans 7 brings us to a “renewal of the mind” (cf. Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23), from the false thinking of being an “independent self,” to the “attitude that was in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5) when He humbled Himself in functional dependency on God for human life as God intended. Romans 7 facilitates the genuine repentance of “a change of mind that leads to a change of action.” The change

of mind is the admission, "I can't; only He can." The change of action is the willingness to be the dependent human creature that is receptive to the activity of Jesus Christ by deriving all from Him. Thereby we have "no condemnation" (Rom. 8:1) for the inability to live the Christian life, for "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set us free from the law of sin and of death" (Rom. 8:2), as all the performance is His performance. The "straw-man," the "silly-Sally," of an "independent Christian self" evaporates, as every mirage eventually does.

The False Thinking of Human Annihilation

Ever the extremist, willing to take any truth and transform it into a lie, the deceiving tempter has another falsity up his sleeve. If he cannot enslave people with the humanistic thought of human potential or Christian ability, he will push in the other direction toward pantheistic thought.

There are some in the "union life movement" who affirmed the "no independent self" of human potential and the "no independent self" of Christian ability, but proceeded to claim there is "no independent self" because "union with Christ" constitutes such a oneness with the divine that the human "self" is annihilated by absorption into God. Relational union with Christ is falsely equated with essential oneness with Christ, and that to the point of monistic merging into equivalence with Christ.

When the idea of "no independent self" is pushed to the extreme of advocating "no independent personhood" because there is "only one Person in the universe," the distinction between God and man, Creator and creature, that is intrinsic to Christian thought (as noted previously) is denied. Claiming to be so "one with Christ" that they are "no longer human," some have accepted this false thinking of human annihilation as the ultimate expression of "union life." Humanity is depersonalized or dehumanized by the alleged obliteration of one's independent human self, as it is replaced by Himself as myself. "I am He, and He is me," in the consubstantial equivalence of essential oneness, is the claim of these deceived monists. They try to hide

their monistic pantheism behind the curtain of "panentheism," but their false colors are exposed.

Claiming to have the "single eye" that sees "God only," some have blasphemously declared, "When I see me, I see God. I see Christ. I am the third person of the Trinity." Should anyone "see" otherwise, they are regarded as not having the advanced spiritual sight to "see through" to God. To "see" them and what they do as anything other than a manifestation of God is identified as "seeing an illusion." Those who are not regarded as spiritual "knowers" and "see-ers" are seeing only the "illusion of humanness," "the illusion of carnality," or "the illusion of sin."

Enamored with their alleged essential oneness with God's Being, these spiritualists have little concern for the consistency of divine character in their behavior. Despising the word "sin," they often deny all possibility of expressing "self-for-self" character. "What I do is what He does. All I do is Christ in action as me, despite how it might appear." Even blatantly selfish and sinful behavior is regarded to be "God's expression as me" – another blasphemous indictment of God's character, that appears to be the apostasy of calling evil "good." Such a view of the mechanical inevitability of divine expression, claiming, "I am Christ, and Christ does not sin," is a form of perfectionism that presumes an integration into oneness with the Independent Self of the universe, to the extent that they function as God.

Whereas "law" served a purpose for revealing the fallacies of "human potential" and "Christian ability," it serves no purpose in this fallacy of equivalence with God. Convinced that they can do all things "as God," they are a "law unto themselves," flaunting their carnality and lawlessness with no regard for the character of God.

Though they use the phraseology of "no independent self," they have invested it with an entirely different meaning, believing they have progressed beyond being a dependent human self to operate as the Independent Self of the Godhead. This thesis entails a subtle denial of the distinctive objective realities of God

and man – that God is the only Independent Self, and man always functions as a dependent self. Denying their human creatureliness, they claim to be co-creators and co-gods with God, impinging on the singularity of God’s functioning only as Himself – What God is, only God is! At the same time they reject man’s function as a “dependent self,” having an intense disdain for the concept of “derivative man” wherein man always derives character from one spirit-source or the other, God or Satan. “God does not mean for man to have faith,” they assert, for they seek to deny the necessity of the human choice of dependence in “receptivity of His activity.” Satan’s original lie that man could be “like God” in human potential has now become the delusion that “you are God” in the essentialism of divinization.

Conclusion

The terminology we use in expressing biblical and spiritual realities must be clarified over and over again. As language tends to evolve, variant connotations develop as different people use phrases in differing contexts and applications. This paper has been an attempt to note variant meanings, and to clarify legitimate and illegitimate usages, of the phrase “no independent self.” As this phrase has been used as common vocabulary by a relatively small segment of the Christian community, those in the “union life movement” who have benefited from the teaching of Norman Grubb, the discussion of the phrase in this article may introduce concepts never before considered by those in the larger Christian community.

There are important biblical, theological and spiritual truths to be learned, however, in the awareness that God is the only Independent Self, autonomously and self-generatively expressing His loving character of Self-for-others. It is also important to recognize that man, unlike God, is a dependent and derivative creature who receives character from a spirit-source, either God or Satan. Clarity of theological and anthropological understanding will be a deterrence to the errors of false thinking that have been noted:

- (1) The humanistic false thinking of human potential.
- (2) The religious false thinking of Christian ability.
- (3) The pantheistic false thinking of human annihilation.

The lack of clarity on these issues has led to confusion, and some have been led astray to their own spiritual detriment.