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Miscellanea

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How Should a Congregation Solve the Problem of Delinquent Members?

(A Conference Essay)

Delinquent members are found in smaller or larger number in nearly every congregation. For the purpose of this paper we do not mean financially delinquent members, but members who are delinquent in church attendance and in partaking of the Lord's Supper. Such members are often spoken of as "dead timber" or "driftwood." However, since they are souls who are precious in the eyes of God, who are redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, and whom the Savior wants in the mansions of His Father's house, I prefer to speak of them as delinquent members. It is my conviction that the existence of delinquents is, in the majority of cases, a reflection upon the congregation, which has failed in its duty to admonish an erring member as soon as irregularity began in the use of the means of grace. If every Christian in the congregation would sympathetically and charitably admonish a member as soon as he becomes delinquent, we would have a far healthier state of affairs in our congregations. But that does not obliterate the fact that nearly every congregation has delinquent members. How should a congregation solve this problem?

For a proper approach to this whole problem we must keep in mind that the local congregation is a divine institution. For this point we shall follow Dr. J. T. Mueller in his *Christian Dogmatics*. The Apostles and their followers consistently gathered the believers of a certain community into local congregations, or churches, and commonly instructed, admonished, and comforted them as such in their Epistles. Thus we read of "the church of God which is at Corinth" (1 Cor. 1:2), "the churches of Galatia" (Gal. 1:2), "the saints which are at Ephesus" (Eph. 1:1), "the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons" (Phil. 1:1), the seven churches mentioned in Rev. 2 and 3. The Book of Acts as well as the Epistles clearly set forth the truth that it is God's will and appointment that all believers living at one place should establish in their midst the public ministry and make diligent use of it by hearing and learning God's Word as it is proclaimed by the divinely called ministers. See Eph. 4:3-6; Acts 2:42-47; 20:18; Titus 1:5; Acts 14:23; 1 Pet. 5:2, 3; also Luke 10:16; John 8:47; Heb. 10:25. Furthermore, the Scriptures clearly teach that the Christians of one community should together celebrate Holy Communion, 1 Cor. 10:17; 11:26, and exercise the duties of Christian fellowship and love, 1 Cor. 1:10; 11:23; Acts 6:1-6; Col. 3:15, 16. And finally, the Scriptures make it clear that the Christians who have united to form a local church should not only privately reprove an erring brother, Matt. 18:15, 16, but also as a church, or congregation, rebuke and discipline impenitent sinners, Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:13. From these Scripture passages it must become clear that local congregations, which preach and teach

the Gospel and administer the Sacraments, are divine institutions (Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics*, p. 555 f.).

It is important that we keep this in mind when dealing with the rather frequent problem of delinquent members. Since the local congregation is a divine institution, it self-evidently follows that membership in the local congregation means membership in a divine institution. Membership in the local congregation therefore cannot be regarded as on the same plane with membership in the men's club, the ladies' aid, or the Walther League. When a Christian joins a local congregation, he becomes affiliated with an organization or institution which exists by divine right. Every member of a local Christian congregation should be made conscious of this fact; and who will deny that the emphasis on this phase of church membership has been sadly neglected in the past? Do our members, generally speaking, fully realize and duly appreciate the fact that their membership in the local church is a membership in a God-appointed institution?

We are now ready to proceed to the question: How, then, may membership in a local congregation be terminated?

Self-evidently death terminates such membership, for in death the soul of a Christian church member is taken from the Church Militant to the Church Triumphant.

Such membership may furthermore be terminated by removal. When a Christian church member moves away from the parish limitations of his congregation, he can no longer maintain an active membership and will therefore ordinarily request a peaceful release.

Membership in a Christian congregation may also be terminated by withdrawal. One whose name has appeared on the membership list may notify the congregation in writing, or he may declare before two or three witnesses, that he no longer regards himself a member of the congregation and that consequently his name should be stricken from the membership list. Such a delinquent should naturally be admonished in brotherly love; but if the admonition is fruitless, the congregation must regard him as "without" and conform to his wish. In such cases the final step in church discipline, according to Matt. 18, cannot be taken, because the respective delinquent has himself already severed his connection with the Christian congregation and must therefore be regarded as belonging to those of whom it is written 1 John 2:19: "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us." A public declaration of such fact should, of course, be made to the congregation, and the offender treated as one who is "without."

Finally, membership in the local Christian congregation may be terminated by excommunication, Matt. 18:15–17.

Now the question: May the board of elders, with the pastor's approval, strike the names of delinquent members from the list? Self-evidently not. The board of elders is not the congregation, and here the principle must apply: "Quicquid omnes tangit, maxime in re salutari, ab omnibus debet curari" (What concerns all, especially in matters of one's salvation, must be taken care of by all). Therefore also no con-

gregation should authorize its board of elders to take final action in the case of delinquent members, but the congregation itself should take that action, perhaps upon recommendation of its board of elders.

May the voters' assembly strike the names of delinquent members who have been previously notified by the board of elders that their names would be stricken in a given meeting unless they returned to active membership? I would say, No. We can easily understand that delinquent members put the Christian patience of a congregation to sore trial. But the fact that such delinquents at the time when they were admonished in a brotherly and evangelical manner did not express the wish that their names be stricken from the membership list surely indicates that they wish that membership to be continued. At the time of such admonition they may be asked directly whether they still regard themselves members of the congregation and N. N. as their pastor. But if they answer in the affirmative, the congregation must bear with them and continue its brotherly admonition. Dr. Theo. Laetsch writes: "If a former brother is a manifest and impenitent despiser of the Sacrament after continued proper and loving admonition and therefore cannot be regarded as a Christian, he must be excommunicated. But until that time he is a member, though an erring member, of the Christian congregation and is to be retained as such."

How, then, must a congregation deal with its delinquent members? It must first of all be conscious of the seriousness of spiritual delinquency. Rightly does Dr. J. H. C. Fritz state in his *Pastoral Theology:* "Despising the means of grace is a greater sin than most people imagine, because it is a sin against the remedy itself" (p. 239). Realizing the seriousness of spiritual delinquency, the pastor, individual members, and especially also the elders of the Christian congregation will admonish the erring member in a brotherly, evangelical manner. They will remind him of all that Christ Jesus out of love has done for him, perfectly fulfilling every letter of the Law in his stead, suffering, bleeding, and dying to atone for his sin and guilt, triumphantly rising again from the dead to show that God and the sinner are reconciled, majestically ascending into heaven, there to prepare a place also for him. They will remind him of the passages of God's Word, preferably letting him read them in his own Bible, which speak of hearing God's Word, using the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, meeting and worshiping with fellow Christians. From the Scriptures and in all patience they will point out to him that the local congregation is a divine institution and that consequently withdrawal amounts to a withdrawal from God's institution. They will show him from Scripture that the local congregation is in possession of the Office of the Keys and that by his delinquency in church attendance and partaking of the Lord's Supper he is robbing himself of the ministrations of this sacred office. Never should a Christian congregation wait with such admonition until the erring member has become settled and hardened in his sinful neglect. How long such admonition should be continued becomes a question of casuistry, for it will depend upon the spiritual maturity of the respective person, his reasons for being delinquent, his attitude toward the Word of God that is presented to him in brotherly admonition, etc. The

principle should be maintained that such brotherly admonition should continue until one of three things happens: 1. the delinquent returns to active church membership; 2. the delinquent declares himself no longer a member of the congregation; 3. the delinquent must be excommunicated for persistently living in the sin of neglecting the means of grace.

May God in His grace grant to us as pastors and to our congregations a rich measure of wisdom from on high and the guidance of His Holy Spirit to deal with this problem according to His Word and will. May He bless the efforts of every congregation for the salvation of precious, blood-bought souls. May He grant both us and our congregations always to keep in mind the truth of His holy Word: "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth" (Luke 15:10).

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The Inerrancy of the Scriptures

On the inerrancy of the Scriptures the Rev. Vernon Grounds of Paterson, N. J., in a sermon preached over Station WPAT Jan. 16, 1944 (reprinted in the *Christian Beacon* of April 20), submits a number of valuable quotations constituting utterances of men of science who accepted or accept the Scriptures as being altogether without error. In dealing with people who accuse the Scriptures of being inaccurate in matters pertaining to the field of science, these quotations can render important service.

James Dwight Dana of Yale University, "probably the most eminent geologist America has yet produced," is here reported to have said to a graduating class: "Young men! As you go out into the world to face scientific problems, remember that I, an old man who has known only science all his life long, say to you that there is nothing truer in all the universe than the scientific statements contained in the Word of God."

Dr. Howard A. Kelly, "the versatile genius who was one of the four founders of Johns Hopkins University at Baltimore," said in the course of an article which appeared a few years ago in the *American Magazine:* "A definite Christian faith is the one really important thing in life. I mean that literally. It is vastly more important than any profession; than any scientific research; than any other or all activities of a man's life. . . . My intimate experience has shown me that the Bible is a Living Word, just as definitely God's Word to me — and to every man who reads it — as a letter received in the morning's mail from my mother is her word to me. As such the Bible is its own defense and needs no apologist."

Sir Ambrose Fleming, professor of Electrical Engineering in the University of London, in his book *The Origin of Mankind* writes: "Although there are a considerable number of educated persons in the leading nations of mankind who regard the remarkable Hebrew and Jewish literature called the Bible merely as the production of the unassisted human intellect embodying myths, legends, and the imaginations of men in unscientific ages rather than as in any way a supernatural

revelation of truth, yet the fact remains that this literary masterpiece still retains, in spite of all attacks on it, a dominating position amongst human literature and is an encyclopedic work which in extent of production, sale, world-wide circulation, and perusal is unapproached by any other book or books ever written by mankind. It has a power of appeal to, and influence on, the learned and unlearned, powerful or simple, rich and poor, strong and feeble, civilized or uncivilized, possessed by no other set of books produced in the history of the world.

"It has had to fight battles for existence against the most violent attempts to exterminate it, the like of which has been endured by no other book. Yet today it has been translated into every language spoken on earth and printed and sold in numbers reckoned only in millions of copies. Whilst it is reverenced, loved, and treated by millions of those who have studied it as a supernatural book and in some way difficult to define, as a communication from the Creator of the Universe to Mankind, yet here again the greatest learning, cleverness, and ingenuity has been brought to bear upon it to undermine any belief of the above kind and represent it as the outcome of the human mind alone, having in it mistakes, inconsistencies, and fabrications, characteristic of imperfect human knowledge of events and facts.

"Side by side with these attempts to minimize its value and distort its meaning or deny the truth of its history, there has been of late years an enormous increase in the discovery of facts which confirm its historical accuracy by the work of much archaeological research and exploration."

W. Bell Dawson, "Gold Medalist in Geology and Natural Science at McGill University and Laureate of the Academy of Science at Paris," said: "To the present writer, the Bible is a revelation from God of those higher truths and of salvation through Christ. From a lifelong study of the Scriptures, he is also convinced that in every subject which they touch upon, their every word is reliable, deserves consideration; and this can only mean that they were written under divine supervision and guidance.

"If we will let the Bible speak for itself, we will be in a position to compare it with modern knowledge with some hope of enlightenment. We may thus find in the end that the portrayal of nature and of man as set before us in the Scriptures is not only corroborated by all that is most reliable in science but that by accepting what the Bible states, we will invariably be pointed to the right road and kept from the paths of error which would lead us astray in our advance in knowledge.

"Is it not, therefore, remarkable that the Bible instead of looking to science for its confirmation, in reality anticipates the highest and deepest that science can reach; and not only so, but brings these within the limits of our comprehension. Surely, these are marks of divine guidance and oversight; and they are reassuring to our belief that the Scriptures are a revelation from God."

Dr. Charles M. A. Stine, Director of Research for the Dupont Corporation, writing in the *Sunday School Times*, said:

"Christians are too often told that the Bible is unscientific, that it is outmoded, much of it clearly at variance with the teachings of

modern science. This is dinned into our ears by the vociferously articulate protagonists of so-called Modernism and accepted in grieved and doubtful silence by the wondering and groping heart of the devout. Let us examine briefly the alleged inerrancy and scope of modern science and a few of the concepts set forth in the Bible. We shall soon realize that science — man's wisdom — is a fluid and changing body of opinion as compared with the ineffable perfection of the wisdom of that Majesty who sits enthroned on high.

"There are many examples in the Bible that serve as incontrovertible evidence to the unprejudiced and thoughtful reader that the writers of the statements were divinely inspired. Many, many centuries before man's scientific discoveries had led to the apprehension of certain laws and truths, the Bible makes incidental reference to such truths."

When one reads these testimonies given by eminent representatives of science, one must marvel at the audacity of theologians who without special attainments in the sphere of so-called science nevertheless accuse the Scriptures of inaccurate statements in this sphere.

Digest of Luther's Brief Confession of the Holy Sacrament Against the Enthusiasts

(Dr. Martin Luthers kurzes Bekenntnis vom Heiligen Sakrament wider die Schwaermer. September, 1544. St. L. Ed., XX: 1765—1790)

I: 1—17: Introduction

1. Luther expresses regret that Schwenkfeld slanders his letter of Nov. 8, 1543, and is inclined to place Schwenkfeld on the same level with all enthusiasts, Jews, Turks, Pope, and even the devil. — 2. Having warned them often and earnestly, Luther decides to avoid the heretics according to the command of Tit. 3:10: "A man that is an heretic, after the first and second admonition, reject." — 3. Schwenkfeld proves himself an irreconcilable enemy by his writings against Luther and his offense and laxity in regard to the holy Sacrament.

4. Fifteen years ago an attempt was made to come to an agreement in doctrine with Zwingli and Oecolampadius. They remained irreconcilable on the point of the Lord's Supper. — 5. In the meantime these men were not brought closer to Luther, but were confirmed in their error. Zwingli was slain in battle, and Oecolampadius died soon afterwards; this caused Luther great grief. — 6. After Zwingli's death a book appeared, supposedly written by Zwingli, which astonished Luther greatly and caused him to doubt whether Zwingli's soul was saved; for it was proof to him that he was dishonest — *Christianae Fidei Expositio.* — 7—8. In this book Zwingli proves himself an enemy of the Holy Sacrament and actually becomes a heathen, for he includes in a list of so-called saints such heathen as Socrates, Aristides, Numa, etc., all professed heathen. — 9—10. As a result Luther has lost all hope for an agreement between the followers of Zwingli and those who hold the truth. Luther would rather be torn or burned a hundred times than be considered

of the same mind with Schwenkfeld, Zwingli, Carlstadt, Oecolampadius, and the miserable enthusiasts.

11. They slander the Sacrament by conceiving of Christ's presence in a local sense, and call the Lutherans *"Fleischfresser," "Blutsaeufer," "Anthropophagoi," "Capernaiten," "Thyesten,"* and other names. — 12. Christ's body is not received part by part, but His entire body is offered in the Sacrament in an incomprehensible manner. — 13. They surely should know that they are telling a lie when they call the partakers of the true Sacrament by these names, since in the Mass they themselves have frequently sung and confessed the right view: *"Sumit unus, sumunt mille, quantum iste, tantum ille, nec sumptus absumitur."*

14—15. Moved by love the Lutherans went to Marburg, but were accused of a lack of it. The Zwinglians considered themselves as full of love; the Lutherans were charged with inconsideration and unmercifulness. What good did the Lutherans' attempt to meet the Zwinglians accomplish? Their insistence upon their heresy makes union impossible. They are to be avoided. Tit. 3:10. — 16. If it were true that only bread and wine are to be found in the Sacrament (which it certainly is not), there would still be no justification for the slanderers to hurl disparaging remarks at Lutherans. They are really blaspheming God's Word. — 17. Had Luther wished to retaliate, he could have called them soul murderers because of the soul-destroying work they are doing.

II: 18—42: The Opponents Pervert the Words of Institution

18. The enthusiasts are sinning to their eternal death. They have been warned and nevertheless continue to resist God's Word. — 19. They were warned first by the Holy Ghost, who showed them how they were divided by seven "spirits" in the interpretation of the Words of Institution.

20. Carlstadt said: "This is My body" should mean: "Here sits My body." — 21. A second "spirit," Zwingli, says it should be: "This represents My body." — 22. The third "spirit," Oecolampadius, says: "That is the sign of My body." — 23. The fourth, Schwenkfeld, declares that the meaning of the words: "This is My body" should be put aside and human reason should ascribe its own meaning to it, namely, thus: "Take and eat, My body which is given for you is this" (that is to say, a spiritual food). 24. The fifth "spirit" presents a somewhat similar argument: "Take, eat, that which is given for you is My body." — 25. The sixth one says: "Take, eat, this is the remembrance of My body." — 26. The seventh speaks thus: "The bread, which I give, is a body for itself, not My living natural body, but a dead and lifeless one, as wood or stone. But since the bread is My creature, it is My body." This view is perhaps the most offensive of all. — 27. Above all these "spirits" poses the devil as a "holy spirit" and says: This is no article of faith, believe what you will concerning it.

28. These false spirits, though they are in discord over the text, are agreed on what they consider a high, spiritual meaning, namely, that bread is bread and wine is wine. — 29. They make of the Lord's Supper an ordinary meal. According to that, any eating of bread or drinking of wine could be the Lord's Supper, for in a certain sense if we do all

things to the glory of God, that is a spiritual eating and drinking; that is, the equivalent of faith. — 30. They use two passages to support their contention: (1) John 6:63: "Flesh profiteth nothing," and (2) Eph. 4:10: "Ascended up far above all heavens."

31. Their argument based on the first passage, Luther has refuted so thoroughly that even Zwingli forgets about it in his last publication. — 32. The second argument — that the ascension to heaven hinders the true presence of Christ in the Sacrament — is due to a misconception of the ascension of Christ. If the ascension did not hinder the first Lord's Supper, it will not affect the succeeding celebration of the Sacrament.

33. At the *colloquium* at Marburg they tried to settle the issue by bringing about an agreement on the idea that the body of Christ is merely spiritually present. 1 Cor. 11:27, 29 refutes this false teaching, showing that even the unbeliever receives the true body of Christ. 34. They accuse the Lutherans of teaching a *local inclusion* of the body and blood of Christ in the bread and wine respectively. They well knew that neither Papists nor Lutherans have ever taught that. — 35. The Christian Church teaches that Christ's body is not *locally* in the Sacrament as straw in a sack, but *definitive*, that is, definitely; not as straw in a sack, yet actually, bodily.

36. When they left Marburg, Luther thought there was yet hope of gaining the others to the side of Scripture, but that seems hopeless now, due to the continued slander and opposition of the Zwinglian party. — 37. Their conscience must certainly tell them that they are wrong. Luther's conscience was clear because he had given them due warning.

38. In the third place they were warned by the judgment of God over Zwingli, who died in many sins and great blasphemy, as his last book shows. — 39. Zwingli did not die for a good cause, but in taking up the sword, he acted wickedly against those whom he attacked. — 40. His followers comfort themselves with the thought that they are spreading the Word of God, but what good can this accomplish when they pervert it. Many a heretic has been a diligent student of God's Word. — 41. They have had warnings of God, warnings from those who accept the words as they stand, and they are, in addition to this, self-warned, self-condemned. — 42. Here you have the reason why further discussions with them were cut off.

III: 43—61: The Seriousness of the Error of the Opponents

43. To summarize: They have in the first place taught that there is nothing but bread and wine in the Sacrament. We have shown them that the true body and blood of Christ are truly present. — 44. Luther succeeded in overthrowing the arguments they presented from the false exegesis of the two passages mentioned above. (John 6:63; Eph. 4:10.) — 45. Luther takes his stand with Abraham in believing that what God speaks He can also do. God's Word is more to be trusted than reason.

46. He who does not wish to subject his reason to the Word of God ought never to deal with the Word of God, for he will distort its meaning. — 47. Those who will not believe the article of the Lord's Supper, can they believe the article of the person of Christ? — 48. The heresy of

the enthusiasts has the earmarks of Eutychianism and Nestorianism. Let them consider how it is possible that the one and complete divine nature of the Son could so be separated that on the one hand it is united with the human nature, while the same one and only divine nature of the Father and the Holy Ghost is not united with the human nature, and then their enthusiasm and reasoning goes beyond all bounds. The devil cannot be idle when he has started only one heresy; he must invent more. When a ring breaks at one place, it is a ring no longer, and does not hold, but breaks again and again.

49. He who does not believe one doctrine will mutilate other doctrines as well. It is certain that one who does not rightly believe one article, or rejects it after he has been admonished and instructed, believes no article with earnestness and true faith. And whoever is so bold as to dare to deny God or accuse Him of falsehood in one statement, and does so deliberately and contemptuously in spite of one or two warnings or instructions, he will not only dare, but will in fact deny God and accuse Him of falsehood in all of His Word. — 50. Therefore we have to say: Believe wholly, entirely, completely, or believe nothing. The Holy Ghost does not let Himself be turned or divided, so as to have one part regarded as true and to permit another part to be taught or believed as a false part of Scripture.

51. Arius is an example. He denied the deity of Christ and rejected the Author of his salvation. — 52. Arius also rejected Baptism, forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake, and the holy Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. — 53. Macedonius, Bishop of Constantinople, rejected the article that the Holy Ghost is God, and he rejected many other things that Scripture teaches in regard to doctrine and Christian life. — 54. Nestorius rejected the doctrine that God's Son was born of Mary. From this heresy and the two above-mentioned ones many other heresies grew, for example, Mohammedanism. — 55. The Pope remains the most pernicious heretic, and his false doctrine of good works has led to terrible errors. — 56. Likewise the enthusiasts are casting overboard the pure doctrine by denying the true meaning of the Words of Institution.

57. Enthusiasts try to clothe the devil with the bright garment of an angel of light when they speak of love and of a spiritual eating and drinking. — 58. God would have His pure light shine forth in its full brilliance without any elements of darkness. Luke 11:35; Matt. 6:23; etc. — 59. The heretics affirm that God is not strict if one article is not believed as long as all others are kept. — 60. Such heretics make the mistake of conceiving of God's Word as man's word. The works they do are an abomination. — 61. God does not delight in the sacrifice of fools, but demands obedience to His Word.

IV: 62—73: Regarding the Elevation of the Host

62. The abolition of the elevation of the host in Lutheran circles was looked upon by the enthusiasts as a concession that Christ is not actually present in the Sacrament, but it was really a protest against Roman Catholics, who made of the Lord's Supper a sacrifice, a work of man, rather than a reception of the grace of God through faith. — 63. For

the sake of weak Christians Luther permitted the elevation to continue, explaining it not as a sacrifice, but as a means of encouraging the people to believe and to thank God for the grace He has given. — 64. Elevation when thus retained was to be merely an admonition to believe.

65. Dr. Carlstadt pounced upon this procedure of Luther's and accused him of papistical tendencies. He should have known that Luther had warned against papistical error. — 66. To maintain his Christian liberty, Luther thought it necessary to retain the elevation. — 67. Since it is neither commanded nor forbidden, the elevation could be retained. — 68. Enemies of the Sacrament can therefore not boast that the Lutherans complied with their will. — 69. Yet in order to have unity in all churches, Luther suggests to follow the example of the majority and to eliminate the elevation.

70. A difference in ceremonies always carries with it the possibility of starting a schism. — 71. The Roman Catholic Church has more differences than any other church on earth, yet the Pope permits this, as long as all agree to call him the Pope. — 72. If you come to a community where the elevation is still in use, do not let it trouble your conscience. Perhaps it was impossible there to do away with this custom. — 73. Let us strive for unity in such externals of worship, but at the same time let us not offend the weak. JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

The Confessional Status of Prof. Otto A. Piper

The question has been submitted to the undersigned whether Professor O. A. Piper of Princeton Theological Seminary might not be classified among modern Lutheran theologians; at any rate, whether his doctrinal position is not rather (if not altogether) orthodox.

It might interest the reader to know a little of the well-known professor's life, whose frequent lectures among Lutherans have won him many friends in these circles. As *Religious Leaders of America* reports, Professor Piper has served Princeton Theological Seminary as instructor of New Testament Literature and Exegesis since 1937. He was born in Lichte, Germany, in 1891; attended the *Gymnasium* at Erfurt, Jena University, Marburg University, Paris University (securing his Th. D. in 1929), Munich University, and the University of Goettingen, where in 1920 he was made Licentiate of Theology. In 1920 he became *Privatdozent* at the University of Goettingen, and in 1930 professor of theology at the University of Muenster. He served as guest professor (Philosophy of Religion) in England from 1934 to 1937, after which he was called to Princeton. He is an industrious contributor to theological periodicals (*Theology Today, Crisis Theology,* etc.) and a busy writer of books, mostly of a non-controversial, practical character (*Die Grundlagen der evangelischen Ethik,* 2 vols., 1929—1930; *Recent Developments in German Protestantism,* 1934; *God in History,* 1939; *The Christian Teaching on Sex,* 1941).

Dr. Piper has been described by those who know him more intimately as a personally pious and very serious theologian. Since he was ordained as a minister in the Presbyterian Church, one might expect his theological position to be fundamentally Calvinistic. But the conservative

(Machen) group of Presbyterians does not recognize him as genuinely Reformed, and on this point both the Westminster Theological Seminary faculty (Orthodox Presbyterians) and the Faith Theological Seminary faculty (Bible Presbyterians) agree.

In *The Presbyterian Guardian* (Vol. 12, No. 4; Feb. 25, 1943) Dr. N. B. Stonehouse, professor of New Testament in Westminster Theological Seminary, points out that Dr. Piper is not an adherent of strict Calvinism, although "his theological point of view is *relatively* [italics in the original] conservative in the sense that he is far from being a left-wing radical, so far as modern thought is concerned." "Apparently," Dr. Stonehouse thinks, "he stands somewhat to the right of Karl Barth." In addition, the writer says: "There are emphases in the utterances of Dr. Piper that might well bring enthusiasm to ardent Fundamentalists. He seems to take the Bible seriously and often speaks of it as the Word of God. There is a strong Christo-centric emphasis in his approach, and the Christ whom he proclaims is no ordinary man: He is the incarnate Son of God in a unique sense, Virgin-born, worker of miracles, performing the redemption of man by His sacrifice on the Cross, raised from the grave, and coming again. He even closes his book *God in History* with the prayer: 'Even so, come, Lord Jesus.' Moreover, there seems to be an insistence, in opposition to the humanistic debasement of religion, that true religion has to do with the authority of divine revelation, the Lordship of Jesus, and the decisive significance of the work of the Holy Spirit" (p. 50).

Dr. Stonehouse then writes: "Sad to relate, however, these isolated propositions and emphases are set forth in a context and from a perspective which appear to share the fundamental presuppositions of Barthianism, which itself is not a return to Calvinism nor a return to any earlier conception of Christianity, not a return to the Bible, but an expression of Modernism. In speaking of Barthianism as Modernism I have in mind that, while it has repudiated various features of Liberalism and has sought to supply a corrective necessary to maintain the validity of religion, it actually shares the presuppositions of Liberalism to such an extent that it stands far closer to Liberalism than to orthodoxy."

The writer, in his article, examines Dr. Piper's viewpoints, in the main, on two points: Holy Scripture and Christ and Salvation. From *God in History* (p. 142) he quotes the following words explaining the Princeton professor's opinion on the Bible: "The truth of God is contained in the Bible; but Jesus showed that the Jews were mistaken when for this reason they identified the Bible with the Word of God. . . . God speaks to us whenever His Holy Spirit illumines the content of the Bible by the light of experience and holy history." This paragraph Dr. Stonehouse interprets (and we believe, correctly) as follows: "In other words, after all is said, not the Bible itself, as objective Scripture, is the Word of God, but God speaks only when the Holy Spirit takes of the things of the Bible and relates them to ourselves. This is nothing other than the Barthian doctrine that the Bible becomes the Word of God when God through it at any moment confronts us with Himself, but that it is not objectively, apart from our experience, the God-given

revelation. It is striking indeed that this view of Piper's, taught in 1943 at Princeton, is remarkably like that of Professor Briggs of Union Seminary, who was deposed from the ministry of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. fifty years ago because of his erroneous views of the Scriptures" (*Guardian*, p. 59). We ourselves have carefully read Dr. Piper's *God in History* and though he generally speaks in clearer and more orthodox terms than Barth does, the *principia cognoscendi* of both are fundamentally identical. In line with Barth's thought is also Piper's remark that "the only way of adequately coping with the problem raised by historical criticism (which both Barth and Piper acknowledge as justified) is the adoption of a dynamic, instead of the traditional static, conception of Holy Scripture" (*God in History*, p. 31; cf. also *Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, August, 1942, p. 10; *Presbyterian Guardian*, p. 59). Dr. Stonehouse remarks on this: "We are requested on this approach to give up the doctrine of our fathers that the Bible as a once-for-all God-given revelation, as it stands, must be accepted as authoritative and true on whatever topic it speaks, and to substitute the notion of a contemporaneous, momentary disclosure of the purpose of salvation in Christ." The writer next views Dr. Piper's fundamental meaning in the light of his remarks about the use of prooftexts. He says: "As a corollary of his Christo-centric principle, he maintains that individual texts may be appealed to as 'classical illustrations of a Biblical truth, but none of them,' he goes on to say, 'has argumentative force in itself. The prooftext method was the outcome of the above-criticized method that the Bible was primarily given for the purpose of teaching men wisdom'" (*Bulletin*, p. 11). After some further comment, Dr. Stonehouse proceeds: "His [Piper's] fundamental presupposition is that it is basically wrong to think of the Bible as authoritative on any subject other than the disclosure of God's saving purpose and hence that we may not properly assume that any particular passage, even if its meaning is grasped, is authoritative simply because it is found in the Bible" (*Guardian*, p. 59). What Dr. Stonehouse means by Piper's "Christo-centric principle" is that "that which the Bible is concerned with is the saving purpose of God in Christ, and nothing else" (*Bulletin*, p. 8), and that therefore where the Bible speaks on history, science, or philosophy, it is speaking outside its proper sphere and in so far is not authoritative (*Bulletin*, p. 8; *Guardian*, p. 59). The entire article by Professor Stonehouse is worth reading, since it brings many other quotations from Dr. Piper's writings showing that He is not orthodox according to the strict Calvinistic view of Scripture, but distinctively Barthian. We might say that Professor Piper rejects the *sola Scriptura* in the orthodox Lutheran sense, including the plenary inspiration, the infallibility, and the objective authority of the Bible.

Lack of space prevents us from presenting in full detail Dr. Stonehouse's remarks on the inadequacy of Professor Piper's views on Christ and salvation and sin. Dr. Piper indeed does not systematize his tenets, and his *God in History* is not a dogmatic; hence he does not express himself with sufficient clearness on these points so as to make his position fully lucid. But let the reader consider such a passage of

his as: "Their [the Jews'] rejection of Christ is based upon what they think is the revealed will of God. Hence their sin is not a breach of the Covenant which God made with them; and therefore it will not result in their annihilation" (*God in History*, p. 95; *Guardian*, p. 61). From this paragraph Dr. Stonehouse argues that "one can hardly escape the conclusion that he [Dr. Piper] does not regard faith in Christ as indispensable to salvation" (*Guardian*, p. 60) and suggests that on this approach [if this were true] thousands of non-Christians could be saved (*Guardian*, p. 61). He writes: "Dr. Piper's views lack the radical intolerance of the New Testament and share to a considerable extent the broad inclusivism of modern Christianity." (Cf. *God in History*, pp. 117, 158, 165.) "This failure to accord Christ the full place which He is given in the Christian Gospel goes hand in hand," so Dr. Stonehouse next writes, "with an inadequate view of sin. Sin, to be sure, is not dealt with [by Dr. Piper] after the superficial manner of modern evolutionism. It is described as guilt, and the fall of man is affirmed. Yet, as we have noticed [*Guardian*, p. 60], the Fall is not accepted as strictly historical; it is a fall 'from a spiritual world into this earthly world' (*God in History*, p. 59). Moreover, no place is given, and no place can consistently be given, to the doctrine that all men share in an original corruption and total depravity as the result of the sin of Adam, the first man. . . . Since for Piper the Fall is not historical in the true sense, it does not possess a once-for-all character" (*Guardian*, p. 61).

The Faith Seminary Presbyterian group (Bible Presbyterians) is in agreement with this verdict. In *The Sunday School Times* (September 18, 1943; cf. also the issues of September 25 and October 2), Professor R. L. Harris, instructor in Old Testament and Systematic Theology, Faith Theological Seminary, in a series of articles, entitled *More Barthian Books: A Brief Discussion of Some of the Teachings of Karl Barth as Found in Recent Books*, scores Barthianism, in the first place, for not believing that Scripture "is inerrant," but regarding it as a "human, fallible history through which men come in contact with God," quoting in proof of this Dr. Piper's statement: "The truth of God is contained in the Bible; but Jesus showed that the Jews were mistaken when for this reason they identified the Bible with the Word of God" (*God in History*, p. 142). He then goes on to say: "He [Dr. Piper] accepts the higher criticism when he declares that Deuteronomy was not written by Moses, but 'by prophetic writers after his death' (*ibid.*, p. 79) and again when, denying the unity of Isaiah, he refers to 'the exilic writer in the book of Isaiah' (*ibid.*, p. 87). Further, he [Dr. Piper] denies the historicity of the early chapters of Genesis: 'Old Testament scholars have recognized for a long time that the narratives and genealogies given in the first chapters of Genesis are not on the same level as historical records. . . . In the first chapters of the Bible, human prehistory is narrated in mythical language'" (*ibid.*, pp. 60, 61). (Cf. *The Sunday School Times*, September 18, 1943, p. 746 ff.) So also the Bible Presbyterians fail to regard Dr. Piper as a Calvinist in the traditional sense of the term.

Perhaps Dr. Piper's doctrinal position can best be explained from

his *prolegomena* in his *Vorwort* to his book *Die Grundlagen der evangelischen Ethik* (1. Band; Druck und Verlag von C. Bertelsmann in Guetersloh, 1928), in which he states the principle of his theological approach, not indeed as fully as one would desire, but nevertheless clearly enough to show his fundamental theological premise. Here he states, among other things, that "nothing would delight him more than the abrogation of the confessional antitheses within Protestantism (*Die Aufhebung des konfessionellen Gegensatzes innerhalb des Protestantismus*, p. XXIII). "Despite all his efforts to co-operate in this endeavor, he, nevertheless, could not deny the Lutheran orientation of his position (*blieb ihm gleichwohl die lutherische Grundhaltung seiner Stellung nicht verborgen; ibid.*). According to this statement, Dr. Piper, though being inclined toward Lutheranism, would gladly aid in the unionizing effort of abolishing within Protestantism the divisive trends of Lutheranism and Calvinism, not, however, in such a way that error would be corrected by heeding and obeying Scripture, but by a new confessionalism, based on the experience of truth (*Wirklichkeitsgefuehl*) (*ibid.*). But what, then, is truth? Dr. Piper regards his own doctrinal position as closely related to that of Lutheran confessionalism, represented in the middle of the past century by such men as G. Harless, Th. Harnack, R. Seeberg, and later, by men like Carl Stange and Karl Holl (p. XIII). This does not mean that he is willing to yield the achievements of critical theology (*die Errungenschaften der kritischen Theologie irgendwie preiszugeben;* p. XXII). Also on this point he deeply appreciates Barth and is eager to show his deep reverence for him as a great theologian (p. XXI). But his approach to the theological problem is not directly that of Barthian dialecticalism, but rather that of the new experience of truth (*Wirklichkeitsgefuehl*) or of the Neo-Realism which Barthian Theology originated (*ibid.*). He rejects as a misnomer the term Neo-Orthodoxy (*ibid.*), for he does not want any orthodoxy which once for all holds to the traditional truth as permanently established (*Wirklichkeitsbild*). Theology is fluid and so must have recourse to speculation (*die Theologie wird staerker als andere Wissenschaften ihre Zuflucht zur Spekulation nehmen muessen;* p. XIX); it must be "mythical" in the right sense of the term (*ibid.*). Dr. Piper deprecates the traditional method of "convicting opponents of heresy by means of quoting Scripture passages, passages from the Fathers or excerpts from Luther." This seems to him a method by means of which almost anything can be proved. His theology (he says) is indeed evangelical, that is to say, it is a theology intended for the evangelical Church. A theology, however, is heterodox only if either it fails to see essential parts of the ecclesiastical conviction (*kirchliche Glaubenswirklichkeit*) altogether, or if it sees them in a wrong light (p. XVII).

All these statements show how very close Dr. Piper is to Barth in his theological methodology. He declares indeed: "The aim of theology is pure doctrine, orthodoxy" (*das Ziel der Theologie ist die reine Lehre, Orthodoxie;* p. XVIII), but he at once defines theology as the attempt to obtain pure doctrine by way of science (*Theologie ist der Versuch, die reine Lehre auf dem Wege der Wissenschaft zu gewinnen; ibid.*). It is from this viewpoint that one can well understand his remark that

his approach is neither historical, nor Biblicistic, or confessional (*weder historisch noch biblizistisch oder konfessionalistisch;* p. XVI). His principle by which truth must be determined is that of Neo-Realism (*das neue Wirklichkeitsgefuehl;* p. XIII), by which evangelical truth, accepted *a priori* in its fundamental tenets, is speculatively developed and demonstrated. This Neo-Realism is the special merit of Karl Barth (*der unerhoerte Erfolg der Barthschen Theologie liegt darin begruendet, dass hier zum ersten Male einem neuen Wirklichkeitsgefuehl Ausdruck verliehen wurde;* p. III).

Dr. Piper's connection with Barth therefore cannot be denied. As Barth's theology is "scientific theology," so called, so also is Dr. Piper's. Neither Barth nor Piper accepts Holy Scripture as the only infallible source and norm of faith and life. Evangelical truth is *a priori* accepted as the "realistic conviction" of the Church and is then further expounded and demonstrated by speculative thought. But evangelical truth is thus removed from its divine, inerrant foundation; and since it is not anchored in the divinely inspired Scripture, which in its every statement comes to man with the divine declaration: "Thus saith the Lord," and since the "Word of God," according to Barthian interpretation, is whatever truth God might instill into the particular person who uses the Bible in an altogether subjective way, there is absolutely no guarantee that objective Christian truth, in its traditional sense, can be possessed or maintained within the Church. If Dr. Piper errs in the doctrines of Christ, salvation, sin, and so forth (as he is charged), it is because he rejects the *sola Scriptura,* the divine, inerrant foundation and source of the Christian doctrine. Speculation in theology only deceives and misleads. Scientific theology can only abolish divine truth, not establish divine truth. The theologian who rejects the Bible as God's Word in its objective sense will soon find himself utterly without the divine Word. Dr. Piper's theological methodology is indeed modern, and that in the sense not only of Barth, but also of Schleiermacher. There may be a difference in degree, but not in kind. All three draw their theology, not from Scripture, but from reason. We do not say too much if we declare that Dr. Piper's theological approach is Modernistic in essence and so bound to lead ultimately to a complete denial of all Scriptural truth. If it does not do so, it is only by a "fortunate inconsistency" that must be ascribed to the preserving grace of God. In reviewing, in the *Crisis Theology Quarterly* (Vol. 2, No. 1; Fall, 1944), Dr. A. M. Hunter's *The Unity of the New Testament* Professor Piper favorably notes Dr. Dodd's remark "that the greatest mistake in reading the Bible is the belief that the Bible offers doctrines to which we should give assent" (p. 50). Barth's speculative, Bible-rejecting "scientific theology" certainly could not have been stated more clearly by himself than it is put in these words. He who speaks after this fashion does not accept Scripture as the Word of God and should not complain if he is suspected of going the way of the Modernist. At any rate, such "scientific theology" is not the believing Scripture theology of Luther and the Lutheran Confessions; and no one can blame the champions of traditional orthodoxy if warningly they declare: "Here is Liberalism in a new disguise."

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

How is Truth Determined?

Using as caption "Science and the Supernatural," Mr. George Johnson, in the *Presbyterian* of November 9, 1944, submits some helpful observations on the attacks made on our Christian beliefs by people who claim to be devotees of science. In the course of his remarks, Mr. Johnson, examining the position taken by Prof. A. J. Carlson, who in 1944 was President of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, writes as follows: "Omitting the details, let us accept for the moment Professor Carlson's main thesis, which, you may recall, is that nothing is to be taken for true unless it can be verified by controlled observation or experiment. About the time of the lecture [of Professor Carlson], over a decade ago [first published in 1931 in *Science*] this was a fundamental tenet of that school of thinking that is variously called Neo-positivism, logical empiricism, or the Unity of Science. But it was soon pointed out that if direct observation were required for truth, all the past would have to be excluded, for it is impossible to directly observe the past. Universal propositions must also go, since it is obviously impossible to directly observe a numberless series of facts. Single statements must also be given up, since each involves an indefinite repetition of observation. For this reason the assumption on which Professor Carlson builds has been rejected as inadequate by the very school to which he consciously or unconsciously adheres. But the same school also disagrees with Professor Carlson in his abandonment of religious statements. It could not well be otherwise in view of the universality of religion and the impressive part it has played as a factor in human evolution. Any philosophy that had made a synoptic view of all the data of experience could not politely bow out of the domain of its system such an important factor in man's history and progress, and therefore a place has been found for religious beliefs within the Unity of Science." It strikes us that these are observations which a person may well bear in mind when unbelievers launch their attacks against our Christian faith. A.