

NICOTINE THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

Dedicated to Reformed Faith and Practice

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Calvinism, Ethnicity and Smoke

Old School Presbyterians who grew up within or on the edges of American evangelicalism -- we write autobiographically -- generally came to regard the Christian Reformed Church with awe for her robust expressions of Reformed piety. To be sure, Dutch-American Calvinists were never completely spared the piety of fundamentalism. But it was always a fundamentalism with a difference. While they may have frowned on such worldly amusements as card-playing or the theater or the dance hall, they continued to drink and smoke. "Sin came from the heart, not the environment," they generally insisted, and they were usually right. So when you walked into the Calvin College coffee shop twenty years ago, it was not coffee that you smelled, but the pervasive scent of burning tobacco.

Then there was the habit of the elders of the Wheaton CRC who smoked on the church lawn after Sunday morning worship, conveniently applying a jolt of nicotine to bus loads of stunned evangelical college students who were returning from church and knew next to nothing about Dutch ways, let alone Calvinism.

This brazen dismissal of artificial morality seemed so, well, *healthy*. For between puffs these elders could readily produce sound and sophisticated theological arguments on Christian liberty, the true nature of Christian virtue, and serving God in all walks of life. Yes, healthy, and more than a bit intimidating. Mark Noll well described the shock of seeing professing Christians smoke for the first time in his life, when he traveled to Calvin College as a Wheaton basketball player for his team's annual "ritualistic slaughter."

SUCH NICOTINE-STAINED PIETY, however, rapidly seems to be becoming a thing of the past. Visiting teams no longer suffer the effects of second-hand smoke on their travels to Grand Rapids. Recently the oldest college of the CRC held a "Great Calvin Smoke-Out." Anti-smoking support groups have been launched, and smoking is now prohibited in all buildings on campus. (Though our spies report that some faculty are quietly practicing civil disobedience in the privacy of their offices.)

The new CRC morality was on graphic display in the January 6, 1997 issue of the *Banner*. In its "Worldwide" news column, the *Banner* reported on the combined efforts of the American Cancer Society and the National Jewish Outreach Program to encourage Jews in converting

Saturdays into "Smoke-Free Sabbaths." We are not persuaded that the pleasures of smoking are forbidden on the Lord's Day. Still we would pause to commend the *Banner* at least for recognizing the increasingly quaint principle that some things are inappropriate on the Sabbath.

A few pages later Ron De Boer scores the misleading advertising of the Molson Brewing Company in his article, "What Beer Can Do for You." According to De Boer, what the Molson commercials "really do is seduce young viewers into lifelong discipleship to the Molson religion of self-sufficiency and nonconformity. The sad truth, of course, is that Molson is really corralling conformists and convincing them to show their independence and rebellion by buying beer and branding themselves with the Molson logo." Though we have not seen the Molson TV commercials that De Boer describes, we have no reason to dispute his analysis. We would suggest, however, that he offers compelling reasons not for abstaining from Molson -- we can provide other reasons for doing that -- but rather for abstaining from television, and the consumerist appetites that it inflames. Perhaps De Boer figures that some habits are too hard to kick.

THESE HABITS AND APPETITES seem firmly fixed in the logic of a third article in this issue, on "The Benefits of Smoking." Of course, the *Banner* was being sarcastic again, and author Brian Bosscher really catalogs the benefits of non-smoking for teenagers, which extend far beyond one's health. Non-smokers are sexier (it is a drag to kiss someone who just had a drag). Non-smokers can party heartier (you don't have to miss the action by stepping outside for a hit).

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And best of all, non-smokers have

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more discretionary income (instead of investing in a pack-a-day habit, "wouldn't you rather buy 40 CDS, or new jeans, shirts, and baseball caps?"). Now, who is the addict in this picture? Does it not appear that Rev. Bosscher is suggesting the substitution of one obsession for another?

The elders of the Wheaton CRC may have smoked to excess. Yet the vices of that bygone era seem mild compared to the addictions that have replaced them. The new prohibitions that force Calvin faculty to smoke stealthily in their offices remind us of Peter Berger's analysis of the increasingly common sight of pathetic smokers huddled outside of smoke-free office buildings braving the elements ("Furtive Smokers -- and What They Tell Us About America" *Commentary* [June 1994] pp. 21-26). As Berger sees it, today's anti-smoking crusade accelerated rapidly with the rise of a new class of "moral entrepreneurs." This new class consists of the cultural elites mainly from the educational establishment, the media, and government. Together they form a juggernaut that is re-engineering

American lifestyles along progressively defined values, seeking a society free of such evils as gender discrimination, race discrimination, and, of course, smoke. Thus, the phenomenon of "furtive smokers." The new class has for many years been a powerful counter-culture movement, but now, especially with the election of Bill Clinton, it is firmly positioned as the cultural establishment. (His cigar smoking only underscores the hypocrisy of these elites.)

THE AFOREMENTIONED ISSUE

of the *Banner* suggests that there are parallels between progressives in Washington and their counterparts in Grand Rapids. To be sure, CRC progressives have been around for a long time.

Earlier in this century, they championed the cause of Prohibition because, according to James Bratt, it was *the emblem of mainstream American Protestantism whose recognition and respect they eagerly sought.*

Now we have a new prohibition and a new symbol of assimilation. It is difficult, for example, to pick up an issue of the *Christian Century* without reference to the new class crusade against the satanic tobacco industry. At the same time, Christian Reformed obsession with mainline status seems stronger than ever. It is fair to say that progressives now represent the Grand Rapids establishment, and it is worth noting that the White House became smoke-free roughly the same time as Calvin College. Thus the Grand Rapids smoke-out is but one more sign of the CRC's march toward assimilation and explains why the evangelical students from Wheaton now attend the local CRC services where the elders no longer offend with post-worship smoke. Berger quotes an EPA official on the dubious evidence of second-hand smoke: "Yes, it's rotten science, but it's a worthy cause."

The *Banner* seems to be making a similar concession: "yes, it's rotten theology, but it's a worthy cause."

THE ANTI-SMOKING CRUSADE challenges the assumption that individualism is the primary language of American culture. However true that might have been in the past -- and even those claims Berger suspects are exaggerated -- it is no longer: "This is not a nation of rugged individualists, but of timid joiners, petulant victims, and self-denigrating conformists. Under a continuing rhetoric of individual autonomy and rights, an insidious collectivism is becoming the new norm."

Forty years ago came similar observations on the perils of conformity: "The melting pot as a term applied to the United States or Canada is no mere empty figure of speech. It is a powerful influence in the direction of conformity. This is true in many areas of life. It is true in social relations, in standards of living, in politics, education, manner of dress and manner of speech." The pressures of conformity are especially acute, this observer continued, on contemporary immigrant subcultures: "[C]onformity is a general characteristic of our age. The mass man, whose age this is said to be, lets others set his standards for him all along the line. But the increase of these pressures is accelerated on those emerging out of an isolationist shell." The writer was John Kromminga, former President of Calvin Theological Seminary, and he drew this conclusion, "The Christian Reformed Church is lost if it conforms."

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A Good Mother is Hard to Find

[Editors' note: This submission came from someone who clearly

misunderstands the nature of the Lord's Day and Reformed worship. The editors do not believe a service in a Presbyterian church should be devoted to Mother's Day celebrations, unless, of course, the Scripture lesson happens to come from a passage involving motherhood. (No tampering with the cycle of continuous preaching through a given book of the Bible.) But the following piece shows a sufficient understanding of original sin and contempt for sentimentalism that we have decided to print it, despite our Sabbatarian convictions.]

WHILE SITTING THROUGH THE traditional Mother's Day service at our PCA church, complete with the obligatory and cacophonous song from the children's choir and the usual parade of verses about virtuous women from Proverbs, I couldn't help but think of a Woody Allen line about mothers from the movie, *Manhattan*. After losing custody of his son to his ex-wife, a lesbian living with another woman, Allen's character wondered whether such an arrangement was healthy for the youngster. After all (and I'm paraphrasing) "one mother has screwed up so many children, what's going to happen to a kid with two?"

Before readers dismiss me as just another male chauvinist, let me explain. I have nothing against motherhood or women. I acknowledge that a traditional mother's responsibilities are unpleasant. Indeed, the pay is bad, the hours are too long, and the benefits are slim. And for the increasing number of working mothers whose husbands think that any menu involving more than two burners is a gourmet meal and who don't know the difference between the delicate, perma-press and normal cycles on the family Maytag, the tasks of rearing children, maintaining a house, and keeping a job are certainly formidable. Even though I hold down and enjoy the kitchen duties in our childless household, after spending several frenzied vacations and holidays with nieces and nephews, I have a

healthy admiration for all of those women who nurture, admonish, feed, and clean those cute but rarely content faces.

The question, however, is whether I and my fellow church members should be made to feel guilty annually about a mother's plight. For even though the Mother's Day Service is intended to be a celebration and recognition of the tremendous responsibilities our mothers undertake, it has become a means by which mothers continue to inflict guilt. By reminding us of all the things that mothers do and of how rotten kids can be, the ceremonies usually succeed in eliciting an uncomfortable and less than enthusiastic sense of thankfulness. The service turns into the kind of tongue lashing we, sons and daughters included, used to receive from our mothers when all other disciplinary measures failing, order was restored by making us feel sorry for those ladies who packed our lunches, washed our clothes, and nursed us back to health. The fear of disappointing mother was always greater than her spanking.

What bothers me most about the typical evangelical Mother's Day Service, then, is not that both men and women need to be reminded of the covenantal responsibilities which mothers in our culture bear in rearing children. Instead, it is that just the opposite happens. Still suffering under Victorian notions of domesticity and femininity, we treat our mothers with kid gloves and virtually sanction all that they do, inflicting guilt included, in the name of Christian Motherhood. As a result, children, at least, and probably many adults, leave churches on Mother's Day with the impression that mothers can do no wrong and that to think otherwise is to be ungrateful.

IT SEEMS TO ME THAT BY putting mothers on pedestals we patronize them and simultaneously fail to acknowledge the truth of our religion. If mothering is such a significant responsibility in the covenant community, we should spend

less time sentimentalizing our mothers' poor lot and more time challenging them to undertake their high calling with humility, obedience, and love. And since the Pauline notions of original sin and total depravity apply to both sexes, perhaps Mother's Day should include a time of repentance for mothers who no doubt fail in their duties along with a moment for everybody else whose chief fault is not that they take mothers for granted but rather that they labor under the wrongheaded notion that motherhood is merely an intensive form of babysitting.

In other words, American evangelicals need to recognize that Woody Allen's punch line may contain more truth than the sermons we typically hear on Mother's Day. For rather than reading Proverbs 31 every second Sunday in May as if it were a description of all mothers, verse 10 should be a constant challenge to women as well as husbands and children. "Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies."

Henry M. Lewis

_____SC88

Psalms or Hymns? A Debate Concluded

[This debate started in the Jan. 1997 issue of the NTJ.]

From: T. Glen Livet
To: Glenn Morangie
Date: 9/4/96 8:25am
Subject: Re: Psalmody -Reply -Reply

Glenn,

We agree that the Word is central to worship in the sense that God's revelation directs both parts of the dialogue. My point is that it directs neither part of the dialogue by providing the precise words to be employed; the preacher selects the actual words of the sermon, and, presumably, those who pray and praise select the actual words of those devotional acts.

The evidence of Revelation is actually two-fold: Part of it is explicitly Christo-centric (as we would expect, on the redemptive-historical grounds I mentioned earlier), and, manifestly, not any of it is derived from the canonical psalms.

I don't think my mind is made up; I just think I have a different biblical theology than that of some in the Reformed camp. The Vosian program of biblical theology influences me more than it did Murray; there are significant differences (in my opinion) between the Sinai covenant and the New covenant (though, for Murray, I'm not sure this is so), and, correspondingly, the devotional materials of each is different. Beyond Vos, I'm Kline-ian (is that a word?), amplifying that difference even more so. Almost all of the theonomists are exclusive psalmist, because they cannot distinguish what it is to be under the Sinai covenant and what it is to be under the New Covenant; for those of us who are sufficiently Vosian and Kline-ian to spot the error in theonomy, we see the same error here. The very fact that the Westminster Assembly was predominantly Erastian proves that their biblical theology was different from that of the American church; and, while the American church changed the chapter on the civil magistrate, it never did go back and make the other changes that would have been consistent with this change (e.g., the Larger Catechism's direction that we pray that the civil magistrate would "countenance and maintain" true religion).

Actually, in my own personal history, I was once a psalm-singer (there was even a group of us who met one afternoon a week at WTS with Norman Shepherd to sing psalms). My wife and I still have two copies of the RPCNA psalter from which we sang back when we were dating, and in the early years of our marriage, and we once worshiped at a church that used this as their hymnbook. So, it is not something I haven't considered. However, as the Vos/Clowney/Kline biblical theology has influenced me increasingly, and as my exegesis of the relevant biblical passages (1 Cor. 14, Eph. 5, Col. 3, and Revelation) has suggested that the apostolic church did NOT restrict its corporate praise to the canonical psalter, I have simply surrendered a position I once held.

I think it is the Scotophiliacs and bad-hymn-reactionaries who won't examine the matter fairly. The position of EXCLUSIVE psalmody is easy to refute, logically. If there is a single biblical example of something other than a canonical psalm being approved for the praise of NT saints, then the position must fall; and it does. The question is: Why would anyone hold to a position which so manifestly contradicts the evidence of 1 Cor. 14 and the book of Revelation? In Murray's case, it was because his biblical theology was still vacillating between whether he was a Jew or a Christian (a position common to many "Crown and Covenant" Scots). In most people's case, it is their understandable disappointment with the poor quality of so much hymnody. But, the quality of most preaching is poor also, and this remains no argument against preaching. Again, the quality of most public prayer is poor, but this is no argument against public prayer.

Personally, I don't think the Greek word (psalmos) MEANS "canonical psalms," and I therefore don't think the ET of the word necessarily means it either.

If one summarizes the biblical

evidence, one finds 4 lines of evidence, historically:

- 1) The Israelites celebrated God's acts in corporate song long before there was a psalter from which they could exclusively sing.
- 2) Once there was a psalter, they added to it, as new acts were done by God. Thus, they never sang exclusively those songs in the canonical psalter at any given moment, but added to its collection.
- 3) The NT evidence suggests that the apostolic church continued to produce new songs of praise, not exclusively the canonical psalter.
- 4) The evidence of the triumphant saints is that they do not sing exclusively the canonical psalter.

That is, exclusive psalmody is a Puritan invention; it is not a biblical invention. No one, in any era within biblical times, sang exclusively the canonical psalter.

As to the standards, there is some evidence that they are exclusive-psalmist in their orientation, but the evidence is not as good as one would like. Had they wished to exclude non-canonical psalms, they could have added such an expression, e.g., "the singing of canonical psalms with grace in the heart." It is possible that, by the seventeenth century, the word "psalms" was virtually synonymous with religious devotional music. I agree, however, that the standards should be changed, so as to remove precisely the ambiguity that is now present in them.

I might recommend that you be a little more cautious about suggesting that those who disagree with you haven't taken "the other side seriously." I've taught worship for a number of years here, providing our students with the arguments and bibliographies for both positions. I've also taken some difficult and unpopular stands here in our church that have cost us members and money (no-choir, weekly communion), simply because I've studied the issues of

worship fairly carefully, and come to non-popular conclusions. And I think the OPC Majority Report took John Murray very seriously (how else could you take Murray?). I also encourage psalm-singing, corporately, familiarly, and privately; I just don't believe that such must exclude the singing of other devotional pieces.

Later,
Glen _____

From: Glenn Morangie
To: T. Glen Livet
Date: 9/4/96 10:46am
Subject: Re: Psalmody -Reply -Reply -Reply

Glen,
 Wow, such a sensitive guy to issue such a long and personal response. I must have struck a nerve or you must be convicted by the power of the word. (Or could it be that I am just brilliant?)

Please be advised, however, that I did not say that you were guilty of not taking the other side seriously. I actually complimented you as one of the few hymn-singers who could make an intelligent argument and also respect the motives of the other side, while also recognizing the position psalmody has had in the tradition. But chances are you didn't read my exemption of you because of the medium. Unless something is on the page we don't read it as carefully. The tv screen and the never-never land of the Net must explain your taking offense. I am sorry if I gave any. But don't be so sensitive.

Having gotten the niceties out of the way, let me take the gloves off and respond to a few of your remarks. (By the way, kudos on your using the exegesis weapon. You know historians all too well. Once Greek and Hebrew come up, our minds turn into jello.)

First, I will take a stab at the I. Cor. 14 passage. Not only did that church sing hymns, but they also spoke in tongues. Surely you wouldn't condone the latter. Then why the former?

Could it be that in that pre-canonical age they had hymns that were as specially revelatory as tongues, prophecy, et al. Just a shot. Granted this is not an argument for psalms, but it is for singing inspired revelation.

Second, one of my concerns with hymnody is the implicit notion that there is a generic Christian language of piety. So even if we are Reformed, when it comes to singing it is ok to use the words composed by a Wesleyan, Lutheran or even Roman Catholic (e.g., "Faith of Our Fathers"). This makes me very nervous. If we had explicitly Reformed hymns, like our sermons and prayers should be (which is why, again, we submit those who preach and pray in corporate worship to licensure and ordination exams), then I wouldn't have as much a problem, I don't think. But hymnody historically has been one of the most ecumenical forces in Protestant history at least, and therefore corrosive of the integrity of confessional traditions. And American Presbyterian practice of hymnody is precisely why we have no obviously good response to P&W. For so long we have been singing words by Wesleyans and Anglicans that we have no ready response when someone in the congregation wants to sing a song by the Pentecostal, Jack Hayford.

Again, this is not a convincing argument for psalms, and exclusive-psalmody may be an over reaction to contemporary developments. (As I used to say in our Illinois church, the psalms were a perfect compromise to the worship wars between praise songs and hymns -- then, at least, no one would be happy.) But some strenuous effort needs to be made on music in worship since it is the catalyst for much of the contemporary worship phenomenon.

Finally, I am surprised that you are squeamish in admitting that the Westminster divines were exclusive psalmodists. The standards may have only a few references, but that is because it was assumed you didn't need

to exclude hymns. After all, they produced a psalter, not a hymnal, and if Bob Godfrey can read aright, the directory for public worship is explicit about psalms.

My problem is that I am increasingly persuaded by your take on the law, and therefore follow much of your biblical theology (I guess it is really Vos' and Kline's). And I think you make a good case for why we should not limit our praise in worship to the canonical psalter. Where I would prefer to go, then, is in the direction of singing hymns and psalms from all of the canon, including NT hymns and those in Revelation. That way we would have the fulness of God's revelation without having to depend on the inspiration of 18th century Brits or 20th century charismatics.

One good thing did come out of my provocation -- it was a glimpse into the private life of the Livet family at worship. Are you going on to Ricky Lake anytime soon?

Elevatedly yours,
Glen _____

From: T. Glen Livet
To: Glenn Morangie
Date: 9/5/96 10:56am
Subject: Re: Psalmody -Reply -Reply -Reply

Glen,
 Thanks for your thoughts. I think your point about 1 Cor. 14 is well taken; it is POSSIBLE, exegetically, that the song is revelatory, and that the hymns we sing should be restricted to translations or paraphrases of inspired literature.

However, the "lesson" of 1 Cor. 14 is almost certainly NOT inspired, and it is more probable, then, that the list of activities there includes (as the other Pauline lists) both inspired and non-inspired speech.

I could not agree more with your concerns about a "generic Christian

language of piety." Many of the hymns our people wish their pastor would select he does not select, for precisely this reason; they aren't consistently Reformed. I continually evaluate and re-evaluate the hymnal, with concern for precisely this question. I hate to admit that you are right on target, but you are.

I probably should have been clearer regarding the Westminster Assembly. As far as I know, the divines were exclusive psalmists. The divines, however, were also Erastian; and the version of the Westminster Standards adopted by my church are explicitly non-Erastian. David Coffin has frequently raised the question of the propriety of our calling them the "Westminster Standards," since they have been modified in several places. I have been influenced by David on this point, and so I believe there is a distinction between asking "What was the opinion of the Westminster divines?" and asking "What is the teaching of the PCA version of the Westminster Standards?" The first question is resolved by analysis of the 17th century sources; the second question is resolved by analysis of late-20th century sources (including, for instance, that the Directory for Worship only has constitutional authority in the chapters on sacraments, and that it is different from the Westminster directory).

I don't hesitate to affirm, however, that our tradition, in its earlier generations, was exclusive psalmist in practice; and, in the majority of cases, in theory (the two are not the same; many of Calvin's statements about the Psalms promote them on prudential grounds, and I am still unsure whether Calvin was exclusive psalmist in theory, or whether, at that early date in the reformation, there simply was nothing better).

As to the direction we take from the canon; I still believe that many of the psalms are literary productions that arise from the narratives contained in

the historical books; and that, therefore, the canonical psalms can provide direction for similar literary productions based upon the historical books of the NT. Presumably, for instance, someone could take the temptation narrative of Matthew 4; correctly perceive its obvious Second-Adam Christology, and compose a hymn of praise to Christ for his faithful warfare with our enemy, celebrating his triumph that assures our deliverance from the enemy, and that there is true righteousness for him to impute to us. That is, the psalter distinguishes itself from much hymnody by its celebration of the OBJECTIVE and historical acts of God, not our/my individual SUBJECTIVE experience thereof. "Amazing Grace" is privatized and romanticized, compared to the biblical examples of praise and adoration. I would therefore like to see a return to the psalms as examples of appropriate praise and thanks for that era in the history of redemption, yet also appropriate as models for later eras, provided the data of later eras is added.

We will be on Rikki Lake next Tuesday night, but not for family worship. They're doing a special on "Cigar-Smoking, Beer-Drinking, Weapon-Carrying, Orthodox Clergymen," and I am their exclusive guest.

Yours,
Glen_____

From: Glenn Morangie
To: T. Glen Livet
Date: 9/23/96 5:03pm
Subject: Re: Psalmody -Reply -Reply -Reply

Glen,
I have been so long in responding because they actually want me to do work here. Go figure.

I also couldn't help but revel in your remark that I was "right on target." Letting that go on the superhighway for two or so weeks was about as much

delight as I have had in a long time. Yes, I do lead a sheltered life.

Finally, you didn't write anything with which I disagree. I believe we have come to about as good a resolution as possible -- which is, I think, 1) that the case for exclusive psalmody is not tight, 2) that the direction of redemptive history indicates that other songs reflecting later acts of God are worthwhile, if not necessary, 3) but that the theological insights which informed the case for psalms are pretty good, and 4) that our tradition was appropriately suspicious of hymns.

If you can live with that I'll still be your friend. Though that friendship part may be hard to swallow. I hope Rikki goes easy on you. But if not, you can always pull out your gun.

Hugs and kisses,
Glen_____

From: T. Glen Livet
To: Glenn Morangie
Date: 9/24/96 8:12am
Subject: Re: Psalmody -Reply -Reply -Reply

Glen,
We could even add a fifth principle. Parts of our tradition were suspicious, not only of hymns, but of music per se. Obviously Zwingli was, and Calvin was also (to a lesser degree), fearing that the merely sensual delight in music would detract from the duty of praise. If he was right, then, even some psalms, if set to unusually fine melodies, would be problematic, as Calvin himself said. Boy, life sure is difficult in the fallen world.

Yours,
Glen_____

From: Glenn Morangie
To: T. Glen Livet
Date: 9/25/96 1:18pm
Subject: Re: Psalmody -Reply -Reply -Reply -Reply

Glen,

You shall have the last word. Now that is especially difficult in a fallen world.

Glenn_____ SC88

39 Alexander Hall

Imagine Our Surprise

We were stunned to read in a recent issue of *First Things* (Oct. 1996) that there are Orthodox Presbyterians in the PCUSA. Terry Schlossberg writes that the mainline denomination's proposal to approve the ordination of homosexuals (defeated by the 1996 General Assembly) would have led "orthodox Presbyterians to flee in unprecedented numbers." Our confusion stems from the fact that Orthodox Presbyterians did leave the PCUSA, maybe not in huge numbers, way back in 1936 well before the cause of orthodoxy among mainline Protestants became little more than holding the line on bourgeois etiquette. After all, when was the last time that the PCUSA took a tough theological stand, as opposed to a moral or socio-economic stand? Schlossberg thinks the church did just that in 1994 when the General Assembly, in response to the Re-Imagining Conference, declared "Theology Matters." Schlossberg believes that it is only doomsayers who up and leave a church. The work of renewal will take a while, she cautions.

IT SURE WILL, ESPECIALLY IF the denominational magazine, *Presbyterian Outlook* is any indication. In its "Forum" of Feb. 17, 1997, a pastor from Washington, DC cautions against "A Confessional Manifesto" that regards church officers being guilty of "high treason" who do not "accept the faith of the church," especially the "singular, universal and uniquely saving Lordship of Jesus Christ." Instead of such a narrow rendering of salvation, the minister commands Paul

Tillich's notion that Christianity is not the final revelation of God but rather "witnesses to the final revelation." This means that Christ is "the unique *standard* by which we can and will evaluate all religions and philosophies." So if a Jew or Muslim embraces "untouchables," thirsts for justice, feeds the hungry, and rejects legalistic understandings of salvation, "we can say, using Christ as the standard, that such a person has recognized who God is and what God expects us to do." (With such an understanding of Christianity is it any wonder that Bill Clinton considers his presidency a ministry, capital M?)

Now, of course Ms. Schlossberg did not have members of the OPC in mind. Neither does it seem, however, that orthodoxy counts for much in determining who and who is not an Orthodox Presbyterian, let alone a Christian, in some sectors of the PCUSA. As we have long suspected, middle-class culture, not Scripture, is the final arbiter of orthodoxy in most mainline Protestant communions. Which means that as long as liberals were white, Republican, and heterosexual men, they were considered orthodox. But any threat to suburban middle-class existence is altogether beyond the pale.

Do Family Values Destroy Brain Cells?

A recent perusal of the offerings on Christian radio reminded me of an old bit I used to hear on sports-talk radio, the next station over. One team of hosts regularly reported on the exploits of basketball stars who underachieved in return for their millions. The segment was called, "Who is Stealing Money in the NBA?" And a favorite target of these reports was the ever so tall, Sean Bradley, who played well below his 7'6' frame. His line in the boxscore would often read as follows: 32 minutes, 6 points, 7 rebounds, 4 blocked shots, and 6 fouls, all for the marvelous sum of \$44 million over 6 years, or something equally appalling.

WHAT REMINDED ME OF THIS segment was a "James Dobson Family Commentary" update, sponsored by Focus on the Family. These are one minute excerpts from his regular show that Focus producers repackage for use on radio stations at 20 or 40 minutes after the hour, to lead into commercials or back into regular broadcasting. They are good publicity for Dobson and his organization, supposed to be filled with wisdom, and no doubt, raise revenue.

This particular segment featured a child psychologist other than Dobson who counseled parents to take into account a child's intentions before spanking. If a child wilfully knocked the family Bible off the coffee table, then, of course, he needed to be disciplined. But if he were merely running across the room and the Bible happened to fall, then parents needed to show more compassion. (As if running through the living room stems from good intentions.) Anyway, the key to proper authority in the home was discerning a child's motives. Never punish a toddler without exploring why an accident happened. In the words of Marge Simpson, "Well, duh!"

Mysteries of Life

Has anyone noticed the inconsistency of evangelicals regarding prayer? Low church Protestants generally and evangelicals specifically distrust written and formal prayers because they are less authentic and sincere than words said to God that spring directly from the heart supposedly. Then, why is it that when it comes to prayers of conversion evangelical pastors and revivalists are as prescriptive, though not as eloquent, as the Church of England. Most of us have heard the refrain, "repeat after me these words," followed by a prayer which new converts are supposed to say to "receive Christ into their hearts." One would think that at the moment of decision the individual's own words would be imperative. After all, how

genuine is the conversion if somebody else gives you the prayer? So then, what's so bad about a few read prayers in public worship?

And You Wondered About Our Name?

Some of our friends laughed when we first broached the name of this rag. They appreciated the bad boy image the title might communicate, but questioned how wide a hearing it would receive. Well, it turns out that Nicotine may not deserve its unhealthy reputation. The *New York Times* reports that scientists have now found that the drug in tobacco has some value ("Researchers Investigate [Horrors!] Nicotine's Potential Benefits," January 14, 1997, "horrors" their's). Dr. John A Baron admits that he is having trouble finding funding. "The link between smoking and possible benefits is uncomfortable for many . . . in an emotional sense." But early results show that smoking reduces the risk of developing Parkinson's disease and Alzheimer's. According to Dr. Paul Newhouse, "Nicotine stimulated dopamine production in the brain and this could be a reason smoking appears to be beneficial" against Parkinson's. Nicotine also appears to interfere with the major chemical processes that lead to Alzheimers, something having to do with "beta amyloid plaque deposits." Also, some correlation exists between **non**smoking and the inflammation of the colon and rectum, the symptom of Crohn's disease. So, to turn Garrison Keiller's quip about nonsmokers around (they live longer but they live dumber), "smokers live smarter and may live longer."

STILL, WE HESITATE TO BE heartened by this report. The *Times* is **not** on our list of recommended reading. And we do not want, in this scientific age, to make science the ultimate authority. In fact, we stand by our initial editorial, that the benefits of tobacco are spiritual and social, not

mechanical and physical. It doesn't hurt though if scientists occasionally poke holes in the moralistic certainties of these self-righteous times.

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Second-Hand Smoke

From Douglas McGrath, "Before You Check In," *The New Republic*, March 24, 1997.

WELCOME TO THE WHITE HOUSE, A DNC LUXURY HOTEL: A BROCHURE OF PRINCIPLES AND PRICES.

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OUR ROOMS ARE EQUIPPED with TVs, mini-bars, fax machines and shredders. Our TVs receive all major cable channels except Court TV, which has been blocked until after the President leaves office. The mini-bars are stocked with snacks and have new locks to which the President does not yet have keys.

If this is your first time with us, welcome! If you're a frequent sleeper, welcome back. Once you arrive, just give your bags to the Vice President, and let us make your needs our cares. Don't think of it as the White House -- think of it as the White **Home**.

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