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The Three R's of Theological Education

[*The following address, given at the joint meeting of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Theological Library Association and the New York Area Theological Library Association on May 14, 1998, reflects the editors' concerns about the future of theological learning and scholarship. As librarians we have grown increasingly despondent about the effects of technology on theological education. With this piece, the* NTJ *goes on record with a resounding rejection of educational technology and its trappings. Since very few voices have been raised against the so-called revolution in the library you may be reading it here first (which is a nicer way of saying "we told you so").*]

Once upon a time seminary students approaching graduation would ask librarians for recommendations about books they, as pastors, should have in their study. These students were contemplating life without an academic theological library -- scary thought. Librarians, in turn, could turn to a number of titles that listed books useful for a studious pastor's many homiletical responsibilities and ongoing learning. The librarians at Richmond's Union Theological Seminary put their recommendations in writing and published a couple of versions, an older one called *Essential Books for a Pastor's Library* (1968), and more recently, *Building a Pastor's Library* (1991).

BUT SINCE THE AUTOMATION revolution has turned academic libraries into computer centers, theological librarians are hard pressed to know what to recommend. What is more essential, a fast modem or Barth's *Dogmatics*? Will the soon-to-be graduate be served better by purchasing Calvin's commentaries or the King James Version for Windows 98? Or what about Hendrickson's series of the ante-Nicene church fathers? Would that be a better investment or perhaps the Logos CD-Rom Library Set, complete with the works of Edwards, Calvin and Spurgeon? And let's not forget about journals. Would a pastor receive more benefit from a subscription to America On-Line or the comparably priced religious periodical package of *Christian Century*, *First Things*, *Books & Culture*, *Theology Today*, *Commonweal*, *Crisis*, and the *Westminster Theological Journal*? (Yes, you really can subscribe to all of those periodicals for what it costs to subscribe to an Internet access provider.)

Librarians who face the dilemma of not knowing how to advise seminary graduates are reaping the first fruits of their decision to make peace with the automation revolution. They no longer know what to recommend to students for good reading material or for continuing education after seminary because automation has so dramatically affected seminary education itself. The dramatic transformation of our libraries thanks to the introduction of network software, OPACs and T-1 lines, has made it next to impossible for librarians to tell students what they need to learn while they are enrolled at their schools. The constant temptation is to think that everything is available through the Internet, not just in making various texts available, or in posting new bibliographical databases, but also by offering connections to Web-sites on various topics complete with everything from maps, archival material, to expert lectures. And the continual turnover of hardware that makes a computer purchase obsolete once unpackaged and configured yields the tempting thought that the riches of theological learning will be available in better and faster mechanisms of delivery.

WHAT FOLLOWS ARE A FEW comments on the ways that automation is affecting theological students. These reflections are organized about the different aspects of theological learning that, for the sake of memory, we might call the three R's of seminary education. These are reading, writing and religious communities. Unfortunately, educational technology has and will continue to do damage to genuine, not virtual, theological learning.

READERS

If you spend much time in conservative Protestant circles these days you will undoubtedly know that

INSIDE

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Co-Editors: John R. Muether and D. G. Hart.

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evolution is once again a controversial issue, and that the positions now considered orthodox by some biblical literalists make William Jennings Bryan sound like Harry Emerson Fosdick. One of the reasons for this state of affairs among evangelicals is the popularization of creationist views through the Creation Science Research Institute and its various outlets. As Ronald L. Numbers shows in his book, *The Creationists*, one of the distinguishing features of creation science is not only its Seventh Day Adventist eschatology, but also its engineering hermeneutic. Creationists tend to read the first chapters of the Bible like a technical manual, complete with the specs and charts for how to build the human anatomy.

Why conservative Presbyterians would fall for this hermeneutic is somewhat puzzling since they regard as illicit chalk drawings and flannel graphs that chart the end of human history according to the apocalyptic literature of Scripture. Still, the human desire for graphics being what it is, the sectarian followers of John Calvin have now turned the ancient Near Eastern cosmology of the Israelites into architectural drawings showing where Adam and Eve planted tulips in the Garden of Eden, where Noah's Ark landed, and how the fossil record looks because of the Flood.

HOW DO WE CORRECT SUCH A mechanistic hermeneutic? How do we encourage students to acquire the language skills of humanists rather than physicists? One way *not* to do this is by putting the Bible on CD-Rom in searchable form. To be sure, the convenience of an on-line Bible is hard to deny. What could be easier than doing a word search in a Windows format that allows the reader to find and quickly compare all the uses of a specific Hebrew or Greek word? (Just out of curiosity, don't we already have concordances that do this without requiring a $1,500 piece of equipment to read them?) But is this a good way to cultivate good, patient and thoughtful reading?

For instance, what would we think of literary critics doing word searches on all of Shakespeare's comedies to see what the bard thought about fate? Would such a search produce real learning, or simply a lot of citations? Wouldn't we be more inclined to trust the labors and instincts of someone who had read and reread Shakespeare's plays and could not simply go to those places where he mentioned "fate," or "chance," but could also point out plot structures and characters whose twists and turns subtly portrayed the vicissitudes of the human condition? So then, why do we want pastors who have to rely on the latest digitized version of the Bible to generate insight? Wouldn't it be better to have a worn-out Nestle's Greek New Testament that reflected years of study and the familiarity and wisdom that comes with it? The point of these questions, of course, is that the automation revolution at least indirectly promotes the hermeneutics of engineers rather than that of humanists, and this development is harmful for the kind of readers we should try to nurture at good theological schools.

WRITERS

If the digitization of texts is not conducive to reading, what about writing? Do our students write better in an automated environment? Chances are that if they aren't good readers they won't be very good at writing either.

BUT THE REAL QUESTION IS NOT what kind of grammar checking software is available but a more fundamental one: do our students still write? This is a question prompted by a recent education school dissertation completed at the University of Pennsylvania on Bethel Seminary, one of the few ATS schools to offer an accredited M.Div. on the Internet (though actually two-thirds of the courses are done in one week stints of residency at the Minneapolis campus -- oh joy, January in Minnesota). What is clear from this study is that professors grade students on the basis of their conversations on the Internet and exams, but writing research papers constitutes a very small part of Distance Learning. How could it since most of the students only had a week's access to a decent theological library?

Generally speaking, term papers take longer than a week. Which means that until the whole world of theological learning is digitized and on-line, writing a good paper will not be a part of extension degrees.

SOME MAY BELIEVE THIS IS NO great loss. After all, who wants to grade all of those papers? And how many seminary graduates go back to essays written in school for current vocations (how many seminarians still know Calculus either)? But the point of a term paper is not to guide its author throughout the rest of her life. Instead, writing a research paper is one of the highest forms of learning that we know. Many former students can remember a paper written, the contents of which are long forgotten, but whose research turned on lights in their minds that continue to inform the way they think. More learning, I would argue, is done during the preparation of a long paper than in sitting through a semester of lectures. That is an arguable point. But it is confirmed by what western educators consider to be the pinnacle of a good education, namely, the writing of a dissertation, the longest of research papers.

So if technology makes it possible for students to stay home rather than come to campus, and if it tempts theological educators to offer an education that does not include library research and the writing of a term paper, then the automation revolution may not only be furthering poor reading skills but also rearing a generation of students who don't know how to write.

RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

In addition to reading and writing, most schools expect graduates to become at least familiar with, if not master, the religious tradition in which the institution stands. In my own case, graduates of Westminster Seminary should know something about the debates that have shaped the history and development of Reformed orthodoxy. This includes not only knowledge of those Presbyterians who have adhered to the Westminster Standards but also some awareness of the Continental Reformed tradition of the *Heidelberg Catechism*, the *Belgic Confession* and the *Canons of Dort*.

Learning the outcomes of these older debates may seem very different from what takes place in university graduate school where students learn about the scholarly debates of the present. But in both cases, whether training in divinity or a modern academic discipline, students need to practice similar skills. They begin first to listen to the conversation of a body of scholars, determine what the discussion is about, identify the important voices, and, if so bold, figure out a way to contribute to that conversation in a way that won't cause embarrassment.

DOES INFORMATION technology give students the skills they need either to become a part of a religious community's conversation? The answer is, in my estimation, no. Most of the conversation in Westminster Seminary's part of the theological world is not on-line nor will it be in the near future because of the incredible expense of electronic publishing. So then, what do students do when they go on-line in search of learning in the Reformed theological tradition? Either they find a small snapshot of it -- the last fifty years -- or they run here and there to other religious traditions, or they look for good rates on airline tickets, or they check out the home page for "Godzilla," the next Hollywood blockbuster. In other words, on-line theological discussion is inferior to the off-line one that already exists in the library's stacks. If librarians are going to give students advice about where to go to learn about the Reformed tradition, they should be saying, "roam the stacks, madame" not "surf the Net, dude."

That is just one way that information technology hurts the discourse of religious communities. Another is when our graduates, who go into the ministry, discover that Power Point presentations catch more people's attention than a conventional three-point expository sermon. Pastors, priests and rabbis have an obligation to take the conversation of the past that they learned in theological school and then make it available to the people in the pew so that members of religious communities, too, can be a part of that conversation even if only listening. So we need to ask what will educational technology ultimately do to our churches and synagogues? I, for one, do not think it will be healthy, since one of the original pieces of classroom technology, the overhead projector, has already transformed Christian worship, making it, depending on your perspective, either user-friendly or incredibly vapid.

So, all things considered, educational technology is not much of a help. Two thumbs way, way down. Some may be wondering, why so negative, why so hostile? In my own case, this reaction stems from the conviction that books and faculty represent our schools' greatest treasures. And yet, thanks to machines, the message heralding a new scholarly order for the ages bombards librarians and faculty constantly. Maybe machines can serve the production, reading and learning of books. But then that really would be a new age of learning because the lion (automation) would have to lie down with the lamb (books).

NEVERTHELESS, THIS IS NOT the way automation is being presented. For now, the technophiles are making bibliophiles look like they are old fashioned and out of touch with both the "vast" resources available on the Internet and a generation that grew up with laptops and Game Boy. This is not good. The wave of future learning will be that form of genuine learning that has stood the test of time, namely, learning by and from the book. Bibliophiles of the world unite! Question the hype and cost of educational technology.

TO THAT END I CLOSE WITH A few sentences from the agrarian poet, Wendell Berry, whose reaction to electronic newspapers and "interactive novels" provides a model for opposition to electronic libraries and "interactive" technology. "It disgusts me," Berry writes, "because I know there is no need for such products, which will put a lot of money into the pockets of people who don't care how they earn it and will bring another downward turn in the effort of gullible people to become better and smarter by way of machinery. This is a perfect example of modern salesmanship and modern technology -- yet another way to make people pay dearly for what they already have." In other words, we already have a good way of learning theology and it is right in front of us, among our faculty and within the books in our libraries. As stewards of the tradition of book learning, librarians need to ignore the sales pitches of technophiles and argue instead for the crucial place of the reading and writing of books to the survival of religious communities and theological education.

D. G. Hart *SC 88*

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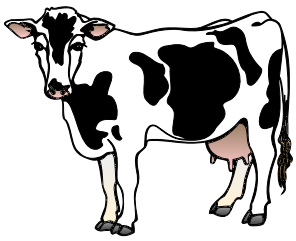
Theology for Preschoolers



[*Originally published in* Credenda Agenda *10/1 (1998) 27.*]

A FEW WEEKS AGO, MY FOUR-year-old son recited 2 Cor 5:21 from memory. Then I asked him a series of unscripted questions about justification, imputation of sin, and imputation of righteousness. He answered them perfectly, in his own words. Someone in the room interjected, and warmly asked, "Is Jesus inside your heart?" A puzzled look came over my little boy's face. "I don't know," he replied, and his confusion was evident. I silently rejoiced. My son was thinking in biblical categories, and that last question hailed from pop theology, not biblical theology.

There was a time in my life when I thought that teaching creeds and catechisms was patently unspiritual. I believed, fallaciously, that whatever was recited from rote memory was, inherently, neither genuine nor personal. Thankfully, these opinions changed by the time my first child was born. Since then, the greatest selling point for creeds and catechisms has been their obvious benefit to my own children.

A chief objection I once brought against catechizing is that answers are merely recited, and kids don't understand a word of what they're saying. My experience confirms that kids often don't understand what they recite, but why would that make catechizing objectionable? At age two, my children learn questions like these: *Q: What does God reveal in nature? A: His character, law, and wrath. Q: What more does He reveal in His Word? A: His mercy toward His people. Q: Where is God's Word today? A: The Bible is God's Word.* Do they *really* understand all this at age two? Of course not. (Do we adults?) My kids recite the words without much thought; it's a game to them. We play the "game" in the car, on walks, at meals, and whenever else we feel like it. We laugh a lot, and stop whenever it grows tiresome. I remember going through these questions with my son in this fashion. Then one day at church, after the Scripture reading, I pointed to my Bible which was in his lap. "What's that?" I asked. "The Bible." Then I asked, "Where is God's Word today?" He began to recite, "The Bible is . . ." He stopped himself, then his eyes widened and a bright smile came over his face. "The Bible is God's Word!" he practically shouted, no doubt distracting many who sat near us. *He understood.*

SOME MONTHS AGO, MY THREE-year-old daughter was learning the questions on God's attributes. One night she awoke crying and scared. I held her in my lap and asked Question 13: "Where is God?" "God is everywhere," she dutifully recited through her tears. I then asked, "Then is God with you in the dark?" She paused and thought. "Yes!" she answered, and her cry began to let up. "Is God with you in your bed?" Her cry became a half-giggle as she answered again. That night may have been her fiftieth recitation of Question 13, and that night she began to understand it. A few days later, she fell out of fellowship with her sister. Her mother and I had been out of the room, and couldn't tell who had wronged whom. "Where is God?" I asked, and the pat answer followed. I continued, "So God was here when this happened, wasn't He?" "Yes," she said. "Then God knows who took the toy." Instantly, tears began to flow from a tender three-year-old conscience. *She understood.*

I have found memorized prayers to be equally beneficial. When my children began to speak, sometime in their second year, we taught them to pray this prayer:

Heavenly Father,
You are good,
and holy,

and righteous,
and just.
We are sinful
because of Adam
and because
of what we have done.
Thank you for Jesus,
who gave to us
His righteousness
and took from us
our sins.
Thank you for the saints,
for baptism,
for the bread and the cup,
and for all good things.
In Jesus' name,
Amen.

To teach them the prayer, I said a line and they would repeat it after me. By age two, they could recite the entire prayer from memory, needing little prompting. My two-year-old recites it like this: "Heavvy Fawdo, yowo good, an howwey, an wychus, an dus. . . ." She understands very little of it. But as circumstances bring opportunity for instruction, as they do *daily*, I find instruction to be far more natural and effective when the lesson ties into what she has memorized. Often we add petitions at the end of the prayer, and after discipline we add specific confession after "because of what we have done." After teaching this prayer to three of my children, I've become convinced that its familiarity is what makes it such a useful tool for instruction. One Sunday I was called upon to pray before our congregation, and I prayed this prayer. When my son heard these familiar words prayed aloud in church, he began to realize what corporate prayer was.

THE BIBLE WARNS US AGAINST vain repetition. But children are natural repeaters. Their repetitions are hardly vain.

Christ Schlect *SC88*

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39 Alexander Hall

Evangelicalism by the Numbers

In his recently released book, *Losing Our Virtue,* David Wells uses the 1996 *Christianity Today* article on contemporary thirty-something evangelical leaders as more evidence of the managerial revolution in American evangelicalism. He writes: "Pastors, biblical scholars, theologians, and other kinds of scholars amounted to less than a third of the constellation, but forty-two percent were leaders of organizations."

IN THE BEAN-COUNTING SPIRIT of those individual profiles, *CT* ran a similar cover-story last year that featured "100 Things the Church is Doing Right." These included "fighting slavery, painting murals, crime-proofing homes of senior citizens, adopting special-needs kids, translating the Bible into sign language, doing handsprings, [and] collecting underwear for the homeless." As one would expect, the parachurch abounds. Something called Motor Racing Outreach joins golden oldies like Gideons International and the Pacific Garden Mission. Less than a quarter of the "church" profiles featured anything remotely resembling the visible church. Of those, many offered new ways of doing church in order to reach the disaffected. Our favorite was the "pizza church" (number 82 for those keeping score at home), which meets for worship at a New Jersey pizzeria. We counted only two churches whose profiles highlighted the preached Word of God, far less than the several "sports ministries" described.

Still, evangelicals do not lack for creativity. There are breadmaking classes, car maintenance services for single women, and Internet awareness programs. "This is the gospel," the *CT* editors conclude. An earlier generation of editors might have labeled it the social gospel.

THERE IS MORE TO *CHRISTIANITY Today*'s number-crunching. In church growth parlance, there is attention to numbers (71 million saw the Campus Crusade's "Jesus" film last year on television), nickels (World Vision raised $20 million for famine relief this year), and noise (dozens of hopeful signs of cultural influence, from saving the rain forest to sacred jazz concerts in Greenwich Village).

We prefer the view of numbers and influence expressed by J. Gresham Machen. In his sermon, "The Separateness of the Church," he said,

> Last week it was reported that the churches of America increased their membership by 690,000. Are you encouraged by these figures? I for my part am not encouraged a bit. I have indeed my own grounds for encouragement, especially those which are found in the great and precious promises of God. But these figures have no place among them. How many of these 690,000 names do you think are really written in the Lamb's book of life? A small proportion, I fear. . . . [T]he church in countless communities is little more than a Rotary club. . . . The truth is that in these days the ecclesiastical currency has been sadly debased. Church membership, church office, the ministry, no longer mean what they ought to mean. . . . But in God's name let us get rid of shams and have reality at last. Let us stop soothing ourselves with columns of statistics, and face the spiritual facts; let us recall this paper currency and get back to a standard of gold.

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Presbyterians Do It Disrobed

In this case "it" is congregational singing. (No, we are not generally amused by bumper stickers that feature similar wording for all various and sundry occupations, but this one had a certain bite to it.) By this we mean that historically Presbyterians and Reformed have sung without choirs. Since song is an element of worship, along with preaching and reading the Word, prayer, the Sacraments and the collection, it is something that should be done by the whole congregation. But once Presbyterians began to give certain members of the congregation robes so they could sing by themselves, choirs became a separate element of worship.

ONE OF THE PROBLEMS WITH choirs, from our Presbyterian sectarian perspective (see "Sectarians All," *NTJ*, April 1998), is that it divides the congregation into those who can sing and those who can't. It might be one thing if the whole congregation were incapable of singing and we then set aside a certain number of the congregation to sing praise to God on behalf of those who can't sing. But as it stands, with at least four hymns in many services plus a selection by the choir, we have a situation analogous to taking the collection twice, one time for everybody, the other time only for those members particularly blessed by God, financially speaking. But how would most worshipers feel if they had to sit and watch while the wealthiest in the congregation put four-figure checks and wads of cash in the offering plates? How is denying the whole congregation an opportunity to sing praise to God while only a select few do so any different? In other words, why do churches tolerate special music and not special offerings?

THESE REFLECTIONS CAME home to us recently as each of the editors taught a Sunday School series on worship, one at a church whose worship leans toward "contemporary," the other at a congregation more sedate in its order of worship. In both cases the course chugged smoothly along until the week on music. At that point the informalists shouted "we want our P&W choruses" and the other remarked about the audacity of questioning the sickly-green robed choir. At that point we had the epiphany that no theological principles are really at stake in the worship wars among conservatives Presbyterians. It all boils down to musical preference; some like soft rock and Barry Manilow, others prefer choral anthems circa 1936.

A perusal of old journals and periodicals to see how Presbyterians and Reformed worshiped in the past and what they did with choirs confirmed our epiphany. Our search turned up the impression received some time ago in seminary that Calvin and Zwingli did not use choirs (did we mention they only sang inspired song?). But we were amazed and sadistically encouraged to read the following admission from 1987 off the printer of Emily Brink, the editor of the Christian Reformed Church-sponsored *Reformed Worship*. In explaining how Reformed congregations made the switch from worship without choirs to liturgies where special music is commonplace, Brink wrote, "What brought about this change? The truth is that we let choirs into our services not because we came up with some theological position on the role of music in worship, but, rather, because we liked what we observed in other traditions. We started borrowing practice before thinking theory. That's how change usually happens." Brink goes on to try to supply a theory for choirs. But after-the-fact theory sounds a lot like rationalization.

THIS LITTLE EXCURSION INTO the worship wars, sectarian Presbyterian style, has led to the conclusion that the current controversy about worship not only is exclusively about musical preferences but also that the only way to end the battle is by excluding all singing except the Psalms. Though lots of people may object to tenors singing off key, the glitz of the electric guitars, the sentiments of the Watts hymn or the syncopation of the praise song, no one can legitimately take issue with singing the words God's people have been using for over four millennia to tunes capable of being sung by young and old alike. Even those Protestants who know which wine to serve with poached salmon have enough sense to spot a good outlet for congregational singing when they see it. Reginald Box's recent book, *Make Music to Our God* (SPCK, 1996) is a history of and argument for psalm-singing in the Anglican tradition. His survey of the various ways psalms may be sung leads to this conclusion: "The psalms have always had a place of pre-eminence in Christian worship." The best Presbyterians and Reformed can come up with these days are lame rationales for choirs and blanket-endorsements of CCM (Contemporary Christian Music) such as John Frame's *Christian Worship Music* (P&R, 1997).

THE MORAL TO THE STORY OF Presbyterian worship is that once Calvin's descendants introduced hymns and choirs into worship it became impossible to exclude praise songs, overhead projectors, licensing fees and worship leaders using hand-held microphones. It may be possible to argue about taste, but at a time when a theological consensus for worship does not exist is it possible to say the organ is intrinsically superior to the acoustic guitar, or that Isaac Watts is always better than Ira Sankey? Our rapidly hardening impression is that it is better to worship without robes and hymns if that is what it takes to be rid of guitars, leotards, and evangelical camp songs.

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Still Crazy After All These Years

While the principle is subject to abuse, we would affirm the idea that

communities of faith, like individuals, are products of their age. For example, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, founded in 1936, came about immediately following what historian Robert Handy has described as the great religious depression in American history. And in his multivolume twentieth century American religious history, Martin Marty locates the birth of the OPC squarely in the thick of the cacophonous "noise of the conflict." Without a doubt the context of depression and conflict have markedly shaped the identity of that little denomination in its first sixty years.

This year the Presbyterian Church of America is celebrating its twenty-fifth anniversary, and the occasion has prompted reflections on the state of the culture at its birth in 1973. One minister in the church has described that year in this way: "The PCA came into being as a separate entity at a very crucial time in the history of the church and world. The year 1973 was marked by great cultural transition from modernism to post-modernism, from liberalism and a reaction to it, to a younger generation that was searching for truth, to a time when evangelicals were becoming aware once again that the Gospel of Jesus Christ did have social implications and applications."

WOW! THE EDITORS OF THE *NTJ*, like many of their contemporaries, may have been guilty of sleep-walking through most of the 1970s. Even so, we were taken aback by those claims. We do not believe that 1973 witnessed the decline of modernism, and we have argued elsewhere that modernism is alive and well and looking an awful lot like evangelicalism. (And please: the language of postmodernism surely did not come into vogue until fully a decade after the PCA's birth).

Still, 1973 is a watershed year of sorts, as evidenced by these cultural milestones:

1. McDonald's unveils the Egg McMuffin.
2. The NIV (New Testament) is published.
3. Construction begins on the Alaska pipeline.
4. Nixon fires special prosecutor Archibald Cox in his "Saturday Night Massacre."
5. Ron Blomberg of the New York Yankees becomes the American League's first designated hitter.
6. Henry Kissinger and Le Duc Tho receive the Nobel Peace Prize.
7. Supreme Court hands down its Roe v. Wade decision.
8. The IBM Selectric typewriter becomes "self-correcting."
9. Death claims Pearl Buck, Pablo Picasso, and Bruce Lee (hmm, perhaps modernism died after all).
10. The world's first video game, "Pong," debuts.

We leave for others the task of drawing any conclusions about PCA identity. But lest readers complain that we have unfairly listed the more unsavory aspects of a most forgettable year of a most miserable decade, we remind them that we deliberately excluded any reference to the uniforms of a certain Major League Baseball team from western Pennsylvania, a historic bastion of American Presbyterianism.

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User-Friendly Your Grandmother

Computers are supposed to be changing the way we live and, of course, they are. No more tune-ups, and bar codes at the supermarket check-out lines. Whether these innovations have made living less expensive or improved the quality of life is another matter.

YET, AS ORDINARY AS computers have become, the public's understanding of these gadgets has not kept pace. This is not unlike the way most of us experience electricity. We take the light switches in our homes for granted. But if we ever had to sit down and explain what happens when flicking the switch (or if we had to replace the switch) most of us would be sorely tested.

But hardware companies keep offering new and better products, most of which make sense to hackers and computer-geeks. But how does one go about explaining what someone sees on the screen when going from a text-based to a graphics-based format. For instance, what exactly is a "button" and how do you "click" it? Or what about a "pull-down menu"? How do your write a user manual that expresses to someone who has never used a mouse exactly how to pull this menu down?

Library automation poses all sorts of problems. And in recent conversations we have heard about some humorous reports of computer users whose knowledge of technology has not caught up with their buying power.

FOR INSTANCE, ONE COMPUTER owner called a service representative to complain that he could not turn on his computer. As the representative walked the man through the various possibilities -- was the power source working, a broken switch -- he discovered that this user mistook his mouse for a foot pedal that would turn his machine off and on. Another service representative had to answer a call from an owner who was inquiring about a replacement for his computer's cup holder. It turns out this latent Luddite was using his compact disc drive as a place to hold his coffee mug. And finally, we have learned that Compaq will no longer include the on-screen command "press any key" for booting up its machines because some Compaq users have searched in vain for the "any" key on their key board.

Compaq's decision reminds us of one

of the funniest of all automation errors, this one fictional since it appeared on "The Simpsons." Envious of a colleague who worked at home because of a disability, Homer discovered that gaining sixty-five pounds would qualify him for an obesity disability. So after a successful regimen of overeating, Homer began to perform his duties of monitoring the nuclear power plant's radiation levels on a computer at home. But he was greatly disappointed to learn that his computer would not dispense a diet cola when he pressed the "Tab" key.

As Homer said on another occasion, "it's funny because it's true."

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The New Life/Old Life Controversy

"In his *Contemporary Worship Music*, Prof. Frame says that this music comes primarily out of the soft rock tradition of the early 1970s. (Frame has said that my going after rock music may indicate I have bitten off more than I can chew, though I wonder if with this music he has swallowed something the church will one day spit up.) Now when it comes to rock I prefer the British Isle stuff; U2 is a band I still enjoy even if it makes me look like I can't act my age and even though they have become increasingly commercial. I was also in high school in the early 1970s and know a thing or two about popular music from that decade (you would have had to grow up on Mars not to). One further personal remark is that I find it possible, at least in my own little brain, to separate music I enjoy during the week from music that is appropriate to sing corporately to God in prayer to God (maybe Frame finds this harder to do since he wants the RPW to extend beyond the Sabbath to every day of the week). Which means that as much as I might enjoy Arvo Pärt on Monday or Bono on Tuesday, Louis Bourgeois will do just fine on the Lord's Day."

THIS COMES FROM A RECENT debate about Presbyterian worship between one of the *NTJ*'s editors and John Frame, the most vocal Reformed (?) proponent of P&W. The debate played out on the Warfield discussion list on the Internet and has recently been printed and bound by the Westminster Seminary Campus Bookstore. For Presbyterians interested in worship it is a sobering reminder of how far apart are faith and practice in many Presbyterian congregations. For those who aren't Presbyterians the debate may function as the sort of entertainment that people experience when watching cocks fight. Whatever your disposition or sporting preference, you may purchase a copy of the sixty-eight page debate for $7.95 (plus shipping) by calling the Bookstore at (800) 373-0119. *SC88*

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Second Hand Smoke

[*Though we are in no way sympathetic with his theology or church politics, Henry Van Dyke's biography contains the following excerpt (Tertius Van Dyke,* Henry Van Dyke: A Biography *[1935]) which will no doubt be interesting to those who admire Charles Hodge and the Princeton Theology. It may also explain Hodge's own appearance.*]

At the end of April, 1877, Henry was graduated from the Princeton Theological Seminary but was still undecided as to his career. He had received several calls to small churches but experienced no specific calling to accept any of them. His father, returning from a peace mission (!!??!!) to the Southern Presbyterian Churches with Dr. John C. Backus and William Earle Dodge, looked at his son with an understanding and sympathetic eye and offered to pay half his expenses for a year of graduate study in Germany. The idea appealed greatly to Henry, already an ardent admirer of the vigor of German scholarship; but he was doubtful whether duty demanded his acceptance of one of the Church calls he had received. In this dilemma he went to consult the venerable Dr. Charles Hodge who heard him patiently and then pushed back on his ample forehead and said in his benevolent manner: "Well, Henry, I should advise Germany -- and drink plenty of beer and come back about twice as big around the middle."

So the decision was made. Dorner, Bernhard Weiss, and Grimm were the names that drew him to Berlin. *(Editorial shock added.)* *SC88*