NICOTINE THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

Dedicated to Reformed Faith and Practice
Vol. 3 No. 1
January 1999

Mere Confessionalism

"In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity." This is the motto of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. (The expression itself is of some antiquity, and it may date back as early as St. Augustine.) At its founding in 1981 the EPC adopted a modern language version of the Westminster Confession of Faith as its doctrinal standard. At the same time it also adopted an eight-point "Essentials of our Faith" summary statement. The latter contains boiler-plate evangelical affirmations on the Bible, God, Christ, sin, salvation, and eschatology, in language that is mildly and non-militantly Calvinistic.

Are these two documents competing doctrinal standards? An interesting debate is playing out in the EPC now regarding what confessional status, if any, its "Essentials" possess and how they relate to the Westminster Confession. The "Essentials" themselves end this way: "These Essentials are set forth in greater detail in the Westminster Confession of Faith." But rather than solve the question, that ambiguous language only heightens the confusion. Does it mean that the WCF itself – taken as a whole – is the "Essentials" in fuller form, or merely that these eight affirmations can each be found there as well? Are the "Essentials," in other words, what the church *really* believes? Should the emphasis fall on the first or second word in the denomination's name, "Evangelical Presbyterian Church"?

MOST CONSERVATIVE Presbyterians would likely contend that the EPC has misidentified the essentials of the faith. After all, it is open to women in church office and the ongoing exercise of the charismatic gifts. At the same time, the EPC debate is instructive, because its conservative Presbyterian critics also tend to employ some form of what can be called the hermeneutic of essentials, of identifying what the church may or may not tolerate. Presbyterian theologian, John Frame, for example, in urging the creation of leg room within the confessions, laments that "the whole question of what is and what is not tolerable within the church has not been systematically analyzed."

Frame's quest is not new. Efforts to isolate the "essentials" within the confession are almost as old as Presbyterianism itself. Frequently, it has been the progressives who have been eager to speak of a "system of doctrine," in order to permit their deviation from the Confession and catechisms of the church. By "system" they mean the Confession "in-as-much" as what the Confession teaches is biblical. In this fashion, Presbyterian officers hold line-item vetoes to the church's Constitution, and the church had erected a Confession-within-the-Confession.

But it is not only progressives who speak this language. In efforts earlier in this century by conservative Presbyterians to preserve the essence of historic Christian orthodoxy, some upheld the minimal necessity of the "five fundamentals" of the faith. The unintended effect was to reduce the "essential and necessary" articles of the church's constitution to just five.

Especially of late the rhetoric of essentials is invoked in order to separate the Bible from the Confession in the name of the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura*. (Indeed, often it is phrased in the language of *liberating* the Bible from the confession.) Increasingly Presbyterian officers seem to be declaring, "never mind the Confession, show me where that is taught in Scripture." But for Presbyterians, an officer is committed to *sola scriptura* precisely to the extent that he is a Confessionalist. Confessionalism does not eclipse the doctrine of *sola scriptura*. Rather, a confession is the necessary means for the church to uphold Biblical authority. The Presbyterian way to point to the doctrine of Scripture is to refer to the Confession.

FRAME DESCRIBES THIS VIEW AS chauvinistic. "Although I am a Presbyterian," he writes, "I confess that I do not share [the] desire for us always to 'look like Presbyterians' before the watching world." In context, Frame's concern is specifically about worship, but by implication his views bear upon

INSIDE

The *Nicotine Theological Journal* will likely be published four times a year. It is sponsored by the Old Life Theological Society, an association dedicated to recovering the riches of confessional Presbyterianism.

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

Subscriptions: $7 per year ($9 Canadian); $10 for institutions ($12 Canadian). Back issues are $3. Orders should be sent to 622 Orchid Lane, Altamonte Springs, FL, 32714.

Correspondence and manuscripts should be sent to 32 Benezet Street, Philadelphia, PA, 19118, or to the address above. Submissions should not exceed 2,000 words.

the relationship between Scripture and Confession.

IN DESCRIBING HIS STUDENT days at Westminster Seminary (in the early 1960s), Frame recalls two features of that course of instruction: it lacked an overt "confessional or traditional focus" and there was a spirit of creativity and openness in theological reflection. He goes on to make a startling admission: "After graduation I became ordained in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and I confess I was rather surprised at the seriousness with which my fellow ministers took the confessional standards and the Presbyterian tradition. Eventually I became more like my fellow Orthodox Presbyterian . . . elders, but not without some nostalgia for the openness of theological discussion during my seminary years."

Our point is not to critique WTS or any other seminary. And whether Frame has described with accuracy the curriculum of WTS in the 1960s is not our concern either. But what is revealing is the dichotomy that Frame creates between "perpetuat[ing] and recommend[ing] the confessional traditions" on the one hand (which is where he finds WTS's education flawed), and a "flourishing of original and impressive theological thought" on the other (where he thinks WTS excelled). This difference he goes on to attribute to Westminster's understanding of *sola Scriptura,* which liberated the school from traditionalism and confessionalism.

BUT FRAME'S DICHOTOMY WAS unknown to previous generations of Reformed theologians. Calvin Seminary's Richard Muller writes the following on the harmony of Scripture and confession: "We need creeds and confessions so that we, as individuals, can approach Scripture in the context of the community of belief." Confessions function as mediating structures, standing between Scripture and the "potentially idiosyncratic individual" as "churchly statements concerning the meaning of Scripture." They are "normative declarations spoken from within by the church itself . . . as the expression of our corporate faith and corporate identity."

Muller's work on Reformed scholasticism reminds us that there was a time when confessional integrity did not compete with *sola scriptura,* nor did it impede theological creativity. For the scholastic mindset, Muller notes, "Once a churchly confession is accepted as a doctrinal norm, it provides boundaries for theological and religious expression, but it also offers considerable latitude for the development of *varied* theological and religious expressions within those boundaries." According to the Reformers, there is no churchman and there is no theologian where there is no confession. Why is that so unimaginable today? Why has the Reformation confidence in the creeds of the church vanished?

AS WE PREVIOUSLY ARGUED ("Sectarians All," *NTJ* 2.2), such anti-traditionalism only serves to locate one within a specific tradition, namely the Enlightenment, and its false claim that an individual Christian, armed with autonomous rationality can approach Scripture from a traditionless perspective. The Reformers, Muller claims, refused to approach Scripture with the false dilemma forced upon the church by its adoption of categories of Enlightenment thought.

Muller goes on to describe other pressures that our age brings to confessional integrity. He refers to the "noncredal, nonconfessional, and sometimes even anticonfessional and antitraditional biblicism of conservative American religion." Enlightenment rationality and democratic populism combine to create what Robert Godfrey has diagnosed as the evangelical impulse toward theological minimalism. This minimalism seeks to get as many people to express everything they agree on, and preferrably on one side of one sheet of paper. These affirmations become the truly "essential truths," and the hills for evangelicals to die on. Godfrey is echoing the thoughts of J. Gresham Machen, who in his essay, "The Creeds and Doctrinal Advance," described this impulse in the following way:

There are entirely too many denominations in this country, says the modern ecclesiastical efficiency expert. Obviously, many of them have to be merged. But the trouble is, they have different creeds. Here

is one church, for example, that has a clearly Calvinistic creed; here is another whose creed is just as clearly Arminian, let us say, and anti-Calvinistic. How in the world are we going to get them together? Why, obviously, says the ecclesiastical efficiency expert, the thing to do is to tone down that Calvinistic creed; just smooth off its sharp angles, until Arminians will be able to accept it. Or else we can do something better still. We can write an entirely new creed that will contain only what Arminianism and Calvinism have in common, so that it can serve as the basis for some proposed new "United Church" . . . . Such are the methods of modern church unionism.

This impulse stands in sharp contrast to what Godfrey calls the theological maximalism of the Reformed, which sought at least in the past to extend the boundaries of the church's confession in pursuit of the "whole counsel of God." Moreover, Reformed maximalism and evangelical minimalism differ not only in the size of their creeds but in the very purpose of their creeds. To quote Machen again:

These modern statements are intended to show how little of truth we can get along with and still be Christians, whereas the great creeds of the church are intended to show much of the truth God has revealed to us in His Word. Let us sink our differences, say the authors of these modern statements, and get back to a few bare essentials; let us open our Bibles, say the authors of the great Christian creeds, and seek to unfold the full richness of truth that the Bible contains. Let us be careful, say the authors of these modern statements, not to discourage any of the various tendencies of thought that find a lodgment in the church; let us give all diligence, say the authors of the great Christian creeds, to exclude deadly error from the official teaching of the church, in order that thus the Church may be a faithful steward of the mysteries of God.

BUT IS ALL OF THIS FAIR TO evangelicalism? After all, no less an evangelical icon than C. S. Lewis contended for a "mere Christianity." Yet Lewis himself was not confused about his beliefs, which he said were found in the Anglican Book of Common Prayer. His search for a "mere" Christianity was not an alternative to the creeds of the church. Rather, he likened it to the difference between the halls and rooms of a mansion. "Mere" Christianity may bring one into the hall. "But it is in the rooms, not in the hall, that there are fires and chairs and meals." The "worst of the rooms," he went on to stress (perhaps thinking of a dimly lit and drearily decorated attic of Calvinistic horrors), is to be preferred over the hall.

Whatever Lewis intended, his words have been hijacked to serve unhealthy purposes. The ambiguities of the expression, "Mere Christianity," can be found in many of Lewis' disciples. And when it meets contemporary evangelicalism, there is a volatile mix that may prove lethal to the theological reflection and confessional identity of the church.

CONSIDER *TOUCHSTONE* magazine, which had recently changed its subtitle from "A Journal of Ecumenical Orthodoxy" to "A Journal of Mere Christianity." Its editorial purpose is to "subordinate disagreements to the common agreement" because the crisis of our day is so grave. Here we must recognize the debilitating effects of the so-called culture wars on the confessional identity of the church. Abortion, Gay rights, women's rights, funding for and legal protection of pornographic artists, evolution in the public schools -- all of these are battle fronts in the increasingly rancorous struggle over the meaning and purpose of America. And these are the causes to which Christians should devote their energy.

"We need to identify the 'real enemy'," urges *Touchstone,* and that enemy is without, not within. What is said moderately in *Touchstone* can be found in more virulent form in Peter Kreeft's *Ecumenical Jihad.* For Kreeft, mere Christianity may not even be recognizably Christian. The moral decay of America, with all of its leading indicators of spiritual decline, is creating new alliances, even among those of differing religious convictions. The old fashioned Protestant v. Catholic v. Jewish warfare is passe. So great is the threat of secular humanism and so united are we with former antagonists on the really crucial issues, that even evangelical Christians, Kreeft predicts, will eventually arrive at the conclusion that Muslims are on the right side. They may be murdering Christians in Sudan, but at least they are not massacring unborn children. Given the real crisis of our time – the decline of Western Civilization – this is "no time for family squabbles." This is not merely cultural warfare but *spiritual warfare* that will unite Protestants, Catholics, Orthodox, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and maybe even an occasional natural-law-advocating atheist.

(Don't be too alarmed by all this. The Holy Spirit is at work among pious Muslims, Kreeft assures Christian skeptics, and in heaven these Muslims will come to learn that the Allah they served was the God of the Scriptures. What is more, Kreeft goes on to comfort Catholics that Protestants will ultimately come to venerate the blessed Virgin Mary, if not in this life then in the next. So the very ecumenical Kreeft eventually emerges from the closet and is outed by the end of his own book as a good, confessional Catholic.)

TOUCHSTONE MAGAZINE ultimately appeals to experience over doctrine. "Mere Christianity," it states, is found ultimately not in doctrine but lies in "the character of a man." Similarly, Kreeft argues that beyond theological differences, we find mere

Christianity where there is love. This privileging of experience over doctrine prompts us to wonder whether efforts to arrive at evangelical essentials owe less to C.S. Lewis than to Friedrich Schleiermacher, the 19th-century father of modern theological liberalism.

Fundamental to Schleiermacher's method was his division between the kernel and husk of the Christian faith. The latter is the practice of Christianity, that which is culturally conditioned, and the former is the "essence of the Christian faith," stripped of these acculturated accretions. It was this non-negotiable kernel that Schleiermacher desperately sought to preserve. The husk is what is offensive to unbelievers, specifically, 19th-century elites of Protestant Europe. The task of the church, therefore, is to remove the objectionable and make Christianity attractive and relevant.

SCHLEIERMACHER IS NOT alone in this methodology. In our century, Tillich's "method of correlation" and Bultmann's program of demythologization likewise restated biblical message in language free from pre-modern superstitions and categories more friendly to modernity. A little closer to home, seeker-sensitive worship owes much to 19th-century liberalism, in order to make church accommodating to unchurched Harry and Sally. All of these are efforts to repackage the Christian faith.

In his book, *Rumor of Angels,* sociologist Peter Berger says that whenever one engages in this method, one is making a cognitive adjustment to the worldview of modernity. In the case of liberalism, the result can be "a profound erosion of the traditional religious content, in extreme cases to the point where nothing is left but hollow rhetoric." But however practiced, this adjustment or "bargaining" is always a process of "cultural contamination," because in the encounter between the church and modernity, modernity always wins.

Berger's point, of course, is that you cannot adjust the wrappings and leave the core unaffected. But is it a stretch to link contemporary evangelicals with a Schleiermacher? We may not see language like kernel or husk, much less something as ominous as demythologization. But substitute "message" and "method," and it begins to sound familiar. How many times have you heard it said that we must maintain our message but we must change our method, because the world is changing, and at a dizzying pace at that. Or think about the churches that describe their "philosophy of ministry" in brochures for first-time visitors without reference to their theological standards. And then there is "worship style." How is it that churches can offer two morning services that are "identical" except for the music? Let us not forget that Friedrich Schleiermacher was as desperate as Bill Hybels to present Christianity in relevant and meaningful ways to a skeptical culture.

IN DAVID WELLS' TERMS theological liberalism and contemporary evangelicalism both quarantine theology from ministry. By dividing message from method, both permit theological convictions to play a diminishing role in the life of the church. On more and more matters, evangelicals are suggesting that theological considerations are irrelevant, overshadowed by the more urgent need for cultural relevance or evangelistic effectiveness. According to Wells,

> It is not that the elements of the evangelical credo have vanished; they have not. The fact that they are professed, however, does not necessarily mean that the structure of the historic Protestant faith is still intact. The reason, quite simply, is that while these items of belief are professed, they are increasingly being removed from the center of evangelical life where they defined what that life was, and they are now being relegated to the periphery where their power to define what evangelical life should be is lost.

SCHLEIERMACHER'S METHOD should serve as ample warning that theological minimalism is a false messiah. It is sure to destroy what it claims to preserve, not only when it is in the hands of liberals, but also when it is practiced mildly by conservative evangelicals. A lowest common denominator is an ecumenical dead end. A Reformed church whose worship disguises its Reformed identity is simply not reformed.

Presbyterians would do better to affirm a "mere" Confessionalism, and regard, along with our ancestors, the standards of the church as liberating and not constrictive. Further, Presbyterians might want to acknowledge, however humbling it might be, that they stand to learn something here from the Lutherans. Our Lutheran counterparts seem far more vigilant in their confessional identity than Calvinists. At a recent gathering of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, Missouri Synod theologian, David P. Scaer, struck at the heart of the evangelical dilemma:

> Any survival and recovery of Reformation theology cannot be made to depend on a further compromise which identifies an essential core of agreement in order to save it. . . . This kind of agreement immediately puts Lutherans at a disadvantage, since they must concede what makes them Lutherans.

In observing the eager participation of the Reformed in such holy grail pursuits of essentials, Scaer wonders whether the Reformed have made such a suicidal concession. We can hardly improve on Scaer's conclusion: "Distinctions between essential and non-essential do not belong in the confessional vocabulary."

Which leads to the unpleasant conclusion that a "confessing evangelical" is a contradiction in terms. Perhaps then Reformed need to cultivate among themselves the same dis-ease for the term "evangelical" as Machen had for "fundamentalist" in his day. Although he reluctantly accepted the term, he couldn't abide the artificial reduction of a full-orbed Calvinism into a list of fundamentals. So instead of asking what church officers can get away with and how churches can be innovative, Reformed should second Machen: "isn't the Reformed faith grand!"

"IN ESSENTIALS UNITY; IN NON-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity." This is a motto that the Presbyterians can embrace. We need not concede it either to charismatic Presbyterians or broad evangelicals, but only if we define essentials in a confessionally self-conscious way. In our standards, there is unity – mere confessionalism. The search for essentials ends when the church adopts her standards. Beyond our confession, there is liberty, and with it openness and even diversity, in theology, worship, and life. And what about charity? By worldly standards, confessionalism does not permit a hermeneutic of charity, for that is a charity of indifference and tolerance. But confessionalism does cultivate a biblical charity that rejoices in the truth, and believes all things.

JRM *SC88*

Shopping for Heaven

Those who peruse the new title shelf at their local bookstores undoubtedly have noticed the spate of titles on spirituality. A tricky word to pin down—more and more spirituality simply represents the experience of the divine, however that experience or the divine are defined. The most helpful books are those that attempt to describe American spirituality; two recent titles come from two veteran observers of American religion, Robert Wuthnow and Richard Cimino.

WUTHNOW'S *AFTER HEAVEN* (University of California, 1998) examines spirituality in America since the 1950s in terms of a neat schema. The 1950s were characterized by a "spirituality of dwelling," emphasizing institutional religion (generally, Christian religion) in a sacred space (generally, a church building). The 1960s and 1970s were characterized by a "spirituality of seeking," emphasizing eclectic appropriation of non-traditional religions and the negotiation of private "individual" faiths in non-sacred spaces. This seeking spirituality became more "disciplined" in the 1980s, according to Wuthnow, but did not abandon its fundamentally individualistic and eclectic direction. For Wuthnow, neither dwelling nor seeking are adequate models for experiencing God; he pleads for a "spirituality of practice" that emphasizes both communal responsibility and individual eclecticism. This does not necessarily mean that Wuthnow's spirituality will lead its practitioners back to churches and to Sunday morning worship; rather, a spirituality of practice is much more comfortable in small groups where there is little institutional authority. Thus, Wuthnow is careful to keep the church from becoming an obstacle to the individual's search for God.

SHOPPING FOR HEAVEN (JOSSEY-Bass, 1998), co-written by Richard Cimino and Don Lattin, is a frightening book for anyone who has not set foot in an evangelical church lately. The authors analyze current trends to predict where spirituality will be in the next century. Cimino and Lattin contend that future spirituality will continue to emphasize the practices learned at Home Depot — "consumerism, eclecticism, and conservatism" by which they mean privatization. Hence, megachurch programming, "blended" worship, and gendered ministries (such as Promise Keepers) will be keys for evangelicals in the next millennium. People seeking God after Y2K will be even more individualistic than they are now — a God that they fashion after their own image. Spirituality and the church will be even more at odds in the new millennium.

That modern American spirituality and the church would be in opposition is not really surprising. After all, evangelicals, a group that proclaims loudly their reverence for an inerrant Bible, have denigrated the church for over two hundred years. Ever since George Whitefield led his first congregation outside church walls to hear him preach in the open air, evangelicals have increasingly viewed the church as less and less essential to biblical Christianity. As Frank Lambert has well demonstrated, Whitefield taught eighteenth-century evangelicals to apply the same wisdom learned in the market place to their search for God. As individuals heard Whitefield's sermons in the market squares of Philadelphia, Boston, and Charleston, as individuals read Whitefield's journals excerpted in Ben Franklin's books, and as Whitefield's converts broke away from their parish churches to start independent sects, the church went from being the body of Christ to Home Depot. Owing to irreconcilable differences, "Experiencing God" and going to church were divorced.

PRESBYTERIANS HAVE NOT been immune from consumerism and low church ways. After all, among 19th-century revivalism's greatest heroes were Charles Finney and William

(Billy) Ashley Sunday—each ordained by the Presbyterian Church. In the 20th-century, some Presbyterians continue to apply market practices to the church. Whether they recognize it or not, those who champion contemporary worship music and small group Bible studies are not practicing a form of spirituality that comports with Presbyterian confessionalism. Rather, these are habits learned from American evangelicals who in turn learned them from the market place. And the habits of contemporary worship music and small group Bible studies cater directly to the eclectic, privatized, consumer-driven spirituality most Americans seek.

The problem with such spirituality is not merely goofy and mindless praise chorus or vapid sermons that signal the loss of Presbyterian teaching. Rather what is lost is much more profound. By applying market mores to the church, we lose an understanding of what God's people are to be and to do in this world. Gone is an understanding of the high position that Jesus grants believers through union with him— we are his *body*. Lost is a sense of the transforming power of word and sacrament that men, women, and children who have very little in common otherwise might be transformed into the body of Christ. Abandoned too is the conviction that Christians are pilgrims in this world whose purpose is not to shop for heaven, but to seek the city of God, not alone, but with a colony making its way through this world — as part of Jesus' body.

Hence, the church is not a mere institution; she is, by God's grace, a living organism. The church is necessary for true experience of God — for only the church has the means of grace and holds the keys of the kingdom. A spirituality of practice, as championed by Wuthnow, must be lived out, not in small groups, but among the people of God, gathered on the Lord's Day to hear the word and receive the sacraments.

OF COURSE, NONE OF THIS IS new. In the nineteenth century, John Williamson Nevin protested the low-church views of evangelicals (who did not know better) and Presbyterians (who should have) alike. He argued against the privatization of religion that occurred in the over-emphasis upon conversion by revivalists. Such an emphasis shifted the individual's focus away from the church and the sacraments, to himself. In turn, evangelicals created new sacraments (the Anxious Bench) and new church-like structures (the so-called "Benevolent" Empire). With these new institutions and means, the church faded in significance.

Nevin's protest was not heard by 19th-century evangelicals or Presbyterians, nor are his words any more likely to be heeded in the new millennium. American Protestants have too much practice in shopping for heaven to change their ways. The question remains whether Presbyterians will continue to follow the pied piper of revivalism or recover those marks of the church described in the standards to which they subscribe.

Sean Michael Lucas *SC88*

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Putting the X Back in Xmas

How to make "Jesus the Reason for the Season" – that is the dilemma facing evangelical Protestants. Some, the socially militant ones, insist that Christmas is a holiday by divine right and fight for the public nativity scene in town square, hoping to hide its otherwise nakedness. The evangelistic evangelicals (perhaps a redundancy) hope to use the holiday to reach the lost, taking advantage of banners, plays, or even worship to proclaim the gospel to those nominal Christians who go to church during the holy month of December. But rarely have evangelicals owned up to the commercial nature of modern Christmas celebrations and their part in its commodification. In his recent book, *Selling God*, R. Laurence Moore shows how the evangelical Presbyterian, John Wanamaker, transformed his downtown Philadelphia department store into a church during Christmas, complete with the largest pipe organ *in the world* (!!), programs of Christmas carols, and other Christian symbols. According to Leigh Eric Schmidt, whose *Consumer Rites* parallels Moore's book on religious consumerism, the nativity scene in Wanamaker's Grand Court "remained the center-piece" of the store's Christmas Cathedral, "often spotlighted with a beam of light that looked as if it had come shining down from the heavens." According to Schmidt, the interplay between the divine gift of God's only begotten son and the gifts exchanged at Christmas energized Wanamaker's displays. "Christmas gifts provided a tangible vehicle for connecting with the sacred drama."

THE PROBLEM WITH ALL evangelical approaches to Christmas, from the crassly commercial to the devoutly evangelistic, is that of begging the question. Is Christ's birth really about "Christmas cheer," whether the secular variety of spiked eggnog, jingle bells, and jolly Saint Nick, or the seemingly more dignified joy that comes from gratitude to God for sending his Son to redeem the lost? In other words, should the incarnation make us glad or humble? Any answer to this question should, of course, keep in mind the less sentimental aspects of Christ's birth, the manger in the stable and Herod's slaughter of the innocents.

A better reason for Christmas gloom comes from the Bible's teaching about

the humiliation of the second person of the Trinity in the incarnation. Children reared on the Westminster Shorter Catechism are taught to conceive of Christ's earthly ministry under the rubric of his humiliation, as distinct from his exaltation. Question 27 reads, "Wherein did Christ's humiliation consist?" Answer: "Christ's humiliation consisted in his being born, and that in a low condition, made under the law, undergoing the miseries of this life, the wrath of God, and the cursed death of the cross; in being buried, and continuing under the power of death for a time." What is important to notice is that the birth and death of Christ, and everything in between, compose a single act of God in which he humbled himself by being subject to his own creation in the most humiliating fashion. So what is said about the incarnation applies similarly to the crucifixion, the former being initial, and the latter the culmination of Christ's suffering.

SINCE BIRTH AND BURIAL ARE part of Christ's humiliation, they should nurture a similar response from us as Paul says in Phillipians 2. Unfortunately the piety of Christmas is insensitive to this teaching as revealed by the spirit and traditions of the holiday. So instead of celebrating the birth of Christ at Christmas, the church should look to a more appropriate form of celebration – the regular receiving of the Lord's Supper, It is the proper alternative to Christmas cheer, consumerism and yuletide indulgence.

INSTEAD OF LINKING THE incarnation to fictional tales about Santa and his elves, the Lord's Supper unites Christ to real events in the history of Israel, filled with redemptive significance, like the Passover. And rather than forcing new and irrelevant significance on to the narrative to achieve a new market-centered gospel of trade and consumption, the Lord's Supper explains the true significance of Christ's coming, namely, to be the sacrifice for the propitiation of God's wrath. Moreover, the Lord's Supper produces a reverence and solemnity appropriate for something as awful as the incarnation. Instead of this being a time of gorging and giggling, the Supper's small portions nurture self-examination, repentance, and faith. One last thing – an important one for Presbyterians and Reformed – the Lord's Supper is biblically prescribed whereas Christmas is not. As J. Gresham Machen wrote,

> the Bible makes no definite provision for the commemoration of the birth of Jesus, but provides the most definite and solemn way for the commemoration of his death. . . . Indeed that commemoration of the death of Christ was definitely provided for by Jesus himself. "This cup is the New Testament in my blood," said Jesus: "this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me." In those words of institution of the Lord's Supper, Jesus carefully provided that His church should commemorate His death.

Evangelicals used to cry, "Back to Jesus." Maybe its time they did by taking up the cross and giving up the manger.

Brent Ferry *SC88*

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39 Alexander Hall

Joy To the World

So let's get this straight. It's bad form for American Christians and Jews to bomb Muslims during Ramadan but okay when they do it during Advent or Hanukkah. This is just one of the thoughts that came to us when we heard of Bill Clinton's decision to attack Bagdad on the eve of Congress' vote to impeach the president. Talk about coincidence. Like many Americans we were taken aback by the timing of his decision. But the apparent sensitivity to believing Iraqis was a nice touch from a president whose calling it seems is to feel the pain of others, even when he's causing it. It doesn't say much, though, for our president's sensitivity to the discomfort of Christian and Jewish men and women, serving in the American Armed Forces, who had to go off to the Persian Gulf at a time when they would normally either be longing for the coming of the Prince of Peace or celebrating God's faithfulness to the Jews. What, are Christmas and Hanukkah, chopped liver?

NOT THAT WE OLD LIFE Presbyterians have gone soft on the church calendar, mind you. Our liturgical year is still the rather monotonous one of fifty-two Easter Sundays a year. But we couldn't help but notice the hypocrisy of using the Muslim holy days to justify an aggression of dubious legitimacy all the while Americans were celebrating their own holy days.

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Just Grow Up

A recent visit to Yale, complete with watching a Yale-Princeton hockey game, reminded us of the suffocating ubiquity of post-1950s popular culture. Being some twenty years removed from college life it was curious to see Yale undergraduates participating in the rah-rah spirit that college students of our generation studiously avoided in the name of being independently cool. Even more surprising was to see the overwhelming support for the Yale band, an extracurricular activity that certain boomers associated with losers and nerds. But here we were, in 1998, watching kids supposedly indoctrinated in the dogma of political correctness and postmodernism not just playing in

but singing along with the band. Perhaps even more remarkable was that these nineteen- and twenty-year olds knew the words to the songs the band played. The Rolling Stones, the Beatles and Credence Clearwater Revival – it didn't matter. These students sang along. The scene was almost surreal. These college students were joining in the singing of music that in our generation was supposed to be a pronounced statement against joining anything. Of course, one of the great myths of popular culture is that of the solitary individual who does his own thing, even while two-thirds of the teenage population are doing exactly the same thing.

BUT ASIDE FROM REVEALING the conformist side of pop culture's individualism, this scene also spoke volumes about the triumph of rock 'n roll. Who could have imagined college students in the 1960s and 1970s singing with the college band to popular songs three decades old? Would any of us have known the words to the songs of Frank Sinatra or the Andrews Sisters? So why then won't John, Paul, Ringo and Mick just go away? Perhaps, an even more pressing question is why people are not embarrassed to continue to live like teenagers even when they are in their forties and fifties?

One way of considering this question is to contrast the Rolling Stones' relatively recent tour (lots of 1970s bands are doing retrospective treks, we understand) with what Frank Sinatra did for almost all of his life and with what Tony Bennett continues to do – that is, sing the songs that made them stars. It was not the least embarrassing for Sinatra to sing his kind of music because it was and is adult (don't ask for a definition; it's like pornography). It may not be Mozart or Vaughn Williams, but the way of singing, combined with the ethos such songs create, do not require listeners or adoring fans to act like teenagers. In other words, no one thought Frank silly singing his songs into his eighties. The same cannot be said for Mick Jagger. In fact, one cannot think of a more laughable sight than a man who is a grandfather acting like he is still the high-school deviant whose only care seems to be questioning all forms of authority.

WHICH RAISES A FURTHER question – why the triumph of rock 'n roll in most sectors of Christian worship? Why has perpetually adolescent music become appropriate for expressing praise and adoration to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? This is not to suggest that ballads like those made popular by Sinatra would be fitting. Our preference runs to the Psalms of the Old Testament set to tunes that are either singable by all generations or chanted. But the triumph of rock 'n roll, whether soft or not, seem to run contrary to the apostle Paul's instructions in Titus where he told older men to be temperate, serious, and sensible, and older women to be sensible, chaste, and domestic. If this is indeed conduct fitting sound doctrine, in fact, if gravity and self-control are virtues that sound doctrine is supposed to produce, then why has Christian worship become the arena where the musical forms of the Stones, Beatles and CCR, already domesticated, are now baptized?

Of course, our culture has many problems, but it does not say good things about our churches that by failing to see any difference between serious and frivolous music they are also in danger of losing the ability to distinguish adolescence from maturity. Of course, churches who follow the lead of pop culture may become as mainstream and as ubiquitous as the Stones, but they are likely to look just as silly when they turn fifty.

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Second Hand Smoke

[*In the interest of settling debates around the dinner table about what constitutes immoderate consumption of alcoholic beverages, we offer the following excerpt from* The Commentary of Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism. *His rendering of temperance on the basis of the seventh commandment (for Lutherans, that's the one on adultery) has been the next morning a great comfort to the soul, though aspirin seems to be better for the head.*]

The extremes of temperance are: 1. *Intemperance* in meat and drink, gormandizing, gluttony, drunkenness, inebriation; which signifies properly not the excess itself of drinking, but the nausea and reeling of the head, which are felt the day following. . . . 3. *Hurtful temperance*, or too great abstinence, and such as does not agree with our nature, as the temperance of hermits and superstitious fasts.

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