NICOTINE THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

Dedicated to Reformed Faith and Practice
Vol. 4 No. 1
January 2000

Liberalism 101

On June 24, 1936, the *Christian Century* reported that with the founding of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, J. Gresham Machen had finally come "very close to the place where he will find peace in no church except one of his own making." Among the reasons for the *Century*'s condescension was the fact that the OPC had been formed because of modernism in the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.'s Board of Foreign Missions. According to the *Century*, anyone who could possibly detect apostasy in the "operations of a missions board administered by such men as Robert E. Speer [and] John Mackay" should finally have done with the PCUSA. The point being that the likes of Speer and Mackay were so honorable and men of such character that they could never countenance the apostate views that Machen deemed modernist.

Surprisingly, the verdict of modern day conservative Presbyterians is similar to that of the *Century* two generations ago. Of course, today's conservatives, if they know who Speer and Mackay were, would not judge them to be as good and decent as the editors of the Chicago religious weekly. But they do evaluate liberals in remarkably similar terms: if someone is a moral and decent Christian he can't be a liberal or apostate. This line of reasoning is especially evident when contemporary Reformed believers conclude that a liberal must have a character on the degenerate order of William Jefferson Clinton because any decent person (who doesn't beat his wife, gives to the poor, picks up trash) must be a conservative. In other words – to put it succinctly in the parlance of rabid Presbyterianism – liberals are scoundrels. (Which is the flip side of the modernist argument against conservatives – fundamentalists are un-American. Talk about *ad hominem*.)

THEN HOW DO WE EXPLAIN THE pro-family, love-thy-neighbor tone of the liberals who suspended Machen from ministering in the PCUSA? The very same report in the *Century* that summarized the proceedings of the General Assembly were Machen was suspended (June 17, 1936) also carried word that with the conclusion of the fundamentalist controversy the Presbyterian Church could turn to more pressing issues of social welfare. Among the items on the PCUSA's agenda were the "evils" of Hollywood and alcohol. The church's standing committee on social welfare was particularly alarmed that the movie industry "seems to have joined hands with the liquor traffic in portraying drinking scenes which tend to give young people the impression that these practices have general social approval." The church also reaffirmed its commitment to "abstinence from the use of alcoholic beverages as the Christian ideal" and to "the progressive control and eventual elimination of the liquor traffic."

BUT WHILE THE POWER OF liquor interests was "brazen" and "unparalleled," at least the *Century* could find a few good words about Hollywood, which it supplied regularly in its weekly column, "The New Films," which rated the latest movies and made recommendations for family viewing. For instance, here's the capsule summary of "Border Flight," a 1936 thriller, starring John Howard and Frances Farmer: "Crudely portrays coast guard's heroic airplane fights against smugglers. Much thrill, mediocre acting, absurd character values. Villain, completely obnoxious throughout, becomes heroic suicide and wins what sympathy is left." For "intelligent adults," the *Century*'s reviewer deemed it "crude. For ages 15 to 20, "Poor." And for children under 15, "Poor." Later in the column the author recommended for family viewing "Mr. Deeds Goes to Town," "Show Boat," and "Dancing Pirate." Villains must not be so bad if their nimble on their feet.

To change the old adage, with liberals like this, who needs friends? So ingrained is the habit of thinking defective theology and loose morals go together that many contemporary conservative Presbyterians would be shocked to see how family-friendly institutions the *Century* and PCUSA were and still are. That's because some conservatives have never thought carefully about the relationship between theology and practice. Instead, they have assumed that right practices automatically follow from orthodoxy and hence that anyone with questionable doctrine is invariably wicked. Which is only another way of saying that conservative Presbyterians fundamentally misunderstand liberalism. Hence the need for some

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 1167 Kerwood Circle, Oviedo, FL, 32765.

Correspondence and manuscripts should be sent to 32 Benezet Street, Philadelphia, PA, 19118.

Submissions should not exceed 2,000 words.

remedial instruction.

THE BEST BOOK ON LIBERALISM in the United States is still William R. Hutchison's *Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (1976). And Hutchison gives a handy definition that should be particularly useful for conservative Presbyterian types. Simply put, liberalism is any modification of received orthodoxy. Typically, the doctrinal changes advocated by liberals run along the lines of divine sovereignty, human depravity, and Christian exclusiveness. But in America, liberalism made its biggest splash when Unitarians denied the deity of Christ. This is why Hutchison begins his study of modernism with a chapter on Unitarianism.

But for Hutchison liberalism does not equal modernism, and here is where this introductory course becomes tricky. Modernists advocated the self-conscious adaptation of Christianity to modern society by appealing to the doctrine of God's immanence and by locating God's presence in the unfolding of western civilization, which for them was the kingdom of God. Though modernism and liberalism clearly overlap, one need not believe in adapting Christianity to culture to be a liberal. Some liberals, Hutchison points out, were deeply suspicious about developments in modern society. Modernism, then, is a subset of liberalism. And as Hutchison also shows, the sorts of liberals that J. Gresham Machen was battling in the 1920s were actually modernists. They were not doctrinaire liberals. Instead, they were intent on being all things to all people (well, at least all WASPs) for the sake of maintaining a Christian culture.

JUST AS SUBTLE AS THE distinction between modernism and liberalism is the apologetical nature of liberalism. Typically conservatives think that a liberal is someone who has denied the faith and that such denials are easy to spot. Having grown up in a fundamentalist home, I can well remember visiting preachers haranguing liberals for denying the deity of Christ, the virgin birth – the list goes on – the way that Hell's Angels did. Liberals came across as scary people, sort of like witches or Democrats, folks who not only could not be trusted but were vicious, mean and calculating. But the classic work on liberalism, Machen's *Christianity and Liberalism*, assumes the best, not the worst, about the Protestant left. Modern science, technology, and culture had all made historic Christian teaching implausible. And so liberals, seeking to save Christianity, rescued "certain general principles of religion," the so-called "essence of Christianity." This was the same verdict of H. L. Mencken who wrote, modernists, "no doubt with the best of intentions," have "tried to get rid of all the logical difficulties of religion and yet, preserve a pious cast of mind." The Baltimore sage thought it a "vain enterprise." But it was still an attempt to defend Christianity against its culture despisers.

AND IT IS THIS APOLOGETICAL side of liberalism that confounds so many conservatives. If liberalism is pernicious – which it is ultimately – how can it be credited with doing anything honorable? The answer to that question is fairly obvious when you keep in mind that there is another option available – it is to reject Christianity outright and become an atheist or pagan. But typically conservatives treat all non-conservatives as if they are atheists or pagans, forgetting that there is a middle ground, no matter how flawed, inconsistent or dishonest it is. Which is just to say that there is a huge difference whether you have a member of a Satanic cult, a member of the Dallas Cowboys, or a member of the Episcopal church living next door. Eternally all three persons may be heading for the same place, but here and now the Episcopalian would be more likely to take in the mail when you're out of town, let the gas meter reader in without stealing the high fi, or feed the cat without strangling her. So the question, "how can people deny orthodoxy with good intentions?" invites the obvious answer, "well, duh." Everyday when we cross intersections, balance check books, or buy bread, we assume that other drivers, bank clerks, and bakers, who may not hold orthodox views of the atonement or the inscripturation of God's word, will not try to destroy us, our property or our reputations. Why would liberals be any different?

The decent and honorable intentions of liberals also helps to explain why liberalism is hard to spot. In his book on the Presbyterian controversy of the early twentieth century, *Presbyterian*

Pluralism (1997), the sociologist William Weston claims that the PCUSA contained no full-blown modernists. Instead, the church only had the milder sort, evangelical liberals. And this was the same conclusion that the Special Commission of 1925, appointed to study the cause of the fundamentalist controversy. No one in the church was denying Christianity outright. But whoever said that liberals did that? It's as if Madeline Murray O'Hair defines liberalism and since Harry Emerson Fosdick was not an atheist he must have been evangelical, though a little light in the divinity-of-Christ loafers. Liberalism, like life, is a lot subtler than that. Liberals try to have it both ways – being Christian without being orthodox. But they don't want to abandon Christianity.

OF COURSE, THE HARD PART IS determining whether they have left the faith. This is hard because a liberal affirmation of the faith usually employs evasive language. But ethical considerations will not yield any greater clarity because liberals are generally such upright people, the kind who see villainy everywhere, from tobacco to racism.

J. Gresham Machen had no trouble recognizing the high ethical standards of liberal Protestantism. In fact, that is how he explained their inability to account for the apostle Paul's invective against the Judaizers. "What a splendid cleaning up of the Gentile cities it would have been," Machen could hear a run of the mill liberal saying, "if the Judaizers had succeeded in extending to those cities the observance of the Mosaic law, even including the unfortunate ceremonial observances." But this excessive interest in making people moral is also what prompted Machen's devastating critique. Instead of taking comfort in the Golden Rule or the Sermon on the Mount as liberals were wont to do, as if successful Christian living hinged on determining what Jesus would do, Machen thought Christ's ethical teaching only produced despair. "In reality, if the requirements for entrance into the Kingdom of God are what Jesus declares them to be," Machen wrote, "we are all undone; we have not even attained to the external righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees." The problem with liberals, then, wasn't their disregard for Christian morality. It was that their high regard of human nature.

BUT IF MACHEN WAS HARD ON liberals for denying historic Christian teaching about sin and grace, he did not stoop to calling them villains. He believed it a Christian duty to sympathize with anyone who had lost their "confidence in the strange message of the cross." What is more, despite their deep and abiding differences, he thought conservatives still shared "many ties – ties of blood, ties of citizenship, of ethical aims of humanitarian endeavor" with those who had abandoned the gospel. Believers even had a good deal to learn from non-believers and should treat those who differed from them with respect. Socrates and Goethe were not Christians but still towered "immeasurably above the common run of men." And the reason for this respect was the gospel. "If he that is least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than [non-believers], he is certainly greater not by any inherent superiority, but by the virtue of an undeserved privilege which ought to make him humble rather than contemptuous."

So instead of piling on liberals and attributing all manner of wickedness to their theological equivocation, a basic lesson is in order: to paraphrase Neuhaus' Law, Where Orthodoxy Is Optional, Righteousness Will Sooner Or Later Be Proscribed.

Allen Rich

_____ *SC88*

When Bad Things Happen to Good Confessions

The following essay, by Gardiner H. Shattuck, Jr., is an excerpt that appeared under the title, "Knowing the Tasks," in Robert Boak Slocum, ed., A New Conversation: Essays on the Future of the Episcopal Church *(New York: Church Publishing Inc., 1999). We are reprinting it not because we agree with the author's conclusion about the ambiguous nature of theology. Instead, this excerpt is valuable because it highlights a brand of confessionalism rarely considered in Reformed circles; it confirms the* NTJ*'s editorial outlook, namely, that theology affects practice but not always in ways church members like; and it provides a warning about making experience the norm for theology and practice.*

. . . This personal story begins in the early 1970s when I was a senior at General Seminary. Although prior to 1970 each diocese conducted its own examinations to test the competency of candidates for the ordained ministry, the 1970 General Convention created the General Board of Examining Chaplains in order to standardize that process on a national basis. The board eventually composed the General Ordination Examination (GOE), which is designed to test students in seven areas of expertise: scripture, history, theology, ethics, contemporary society, liturgics, and ministry. Since the GOE was developed during a time when the term "relevance" was in vogue, its creators were concerned that students should apply the formal knowledge they had acquired in seminary to real-life pastoral situations, thus making theological learning (in their words) "*responsive* to the needs and demands of people in the world." The first GOE was administered in 1972, but like the original model of any new product, it contained numerous minor flaws and defects. As historian John Booty notes,

critics faulted early versions of the exam "for ignoring content knowledge, for less than adequate evaluation, and for situation questions that were contrived and to a degree false."

TAKING THE GOE IN 1975, I remember well how one of those contrived "situation questions" caused me trouble and embarrassment. I was asked to imagine being a parish priest visiting a woman whose husband had just died suddenly from a heart attack. The widow is trying to make sense out of her husband's unexpected death, and after a few minutes of general conversation, she asks the priest to explain the church's teachings about death to her. Based on the remarks I received from the people who evaluated my answer, I should have responded to the widow's concerns in the following way. As a priest on a pastoral visit, I would allow the widow to express whatever pain or anger she was feeling; I would reassure her that her feelings about her husband's death were understandable and normal; I would explain to her that death is a natural event; I would tell her that, despite her husband's death, God continues to love and care for him; and I would emphasize that one day she and her husband will be reunited in heaven. In other words, I would do everything *but* give a direct answer to her question about the church's teaching on death.

THAT THEOLOGICALLY EVASIVE but emotionally sensitive response was the one I should have given on the exam. The need for a pastoral approach to the widow's grief seemed so obvious, however, that I assumed the questioners were seeking something more – namely, a theological response. As a result, since students were being asked specifically to discuss the church's *teaching* about death, I decided to begin with an exegesis of 1 Corinthians 15, the biblical reading that had such a central place in the burial service of the 1928 Prayer Book. I got out various books that had been assigned in my seminary New Testament classes and began to explain the Pauline text I assumed had been read at the husband's funeral. The themes I discussed during this hypothetical "pastoral" call included: the link between death and human sinfulness; the nature of the place where the dead now "sleep"; their awakening when Christ returns; the attributes of the spiritual body; and so on. Although I felt proud of the biblical and theological acuity my answer displayed, I had actually made a disastrous mistake. As one of my evaluators remarked, she would have "thrown me out of the house" if I came spouting such beliefs on a pastoral call, while another evaluator thought I sounded more like a fundamentalist or a Jehovah's Witness than an Episcopalian! Thanks to the knowledge I had gained studying the New Testament in seminary (as well as my own inexperience with the theological ethos of the Episcopal Church), I failed one of the GOE areas, namely, the theory and practice of ministry.

Luckily, the examining chaplains of my own diocese gave me a second chance, and once I explained to them the reasoning that led to the answer I gave, they understood the problem and passed me along for ordination on schedule. I like to think they made the right decision, because in the parish ministry I quickly learned to make compromises and to become "responsive" to both the beliefs and needs of church members. As the majority opinion in the Righter trial observes [a 1996 ruling that upheld the ordination of a practicing gay deacon], the doctrinal teachings of the church are related to "the lived experience of the people of God in particular times and places, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit." I see that better now than when I was in seminary. I also came to understand that, if the Episcopal Church has any official teaching about death, it is not likely to be found in reading the apostle Paul. I realized this most clearly when I participated in a funeral at which the recessional hymn was a solo rendition of Frank Sinatra's "My Way" ("The record shows I took the blows / And did it my way"), sung by the granddaughter of the deceased. Although the theology of Sinatra's song is diametrically opposed to the text of 1 Corinthians, the priest who officiated explained that he had allowed the piece as a pastoral gesture to the family.

IN 1986 I WAS CALLED TO BE rector of a parish in Rhode Island, where because of my graduate school training in church history, I was asked to instruct students in the diocesan School for Deacons. My teaching role was expanded a few years later, when leaders in the diocese decided to integrate all aspects of its educational programs. In 1990 a new "School for Ministries" was formed, which combined the three former educational ministries of the diocese (the School for Deacons, the Lay Ministry program, and the Diocesan Christian Education Committee) into one body. While the School for Ministries continued the task of training people who were studying for the diaconate, it also offered courses in biblical studies, theology, church history, and spiritual development, which were required by the diocese for anyone who wished to be licensed as a lay reader or lay eucharistic minister. The courses were designed for people of all educational levels, ordained as well as lay, who were seeking a congenial forum in which to learn about and discuss contemporary religious issues. I was a member of both the governing board and the faculty of the school, and there was tremendous excitement when our first catalog was published in the fall of 1991. The curriculum, we said, was intended to provide courses and workshops by which adults in Rhode Island would be enabled to grow spiritually and intellectually, to learn about the Christian faith, and to become better equipped to live out their baptismal vows. Those of us who helped develop the curriculum believed we were offering not only a decidedly Anglican vision of theological education (an emphasis on growing

spiritually and on exercising one's baptismal vows), but also a program that would be popular, accessible, and empowering for everyone in our diocese.

EARLY RESULTS WERE excellent. Several hundred lay people took courses in the school, and most of them expressed real enthusiasm about having the opportunity to learn more about their church. We thought we were on to a good thing. Yet in our pleasure and optimism about the initial feedback from participants in the program, the leadership of the School for Ministries failed to appreciate the extreme skepticism with which many clergy view both theology and theological education, especially for the laity. As a rector who was one of the early critics of the school observed, people often "confuse theological sophistication with the ability to minister," and he wondered "if St. Peter would have emerged as a leader in the primitive church had he been required to attend a theological academy" like the School for Ministries. Of course, those of us who led the school intended it to occupy a point midway between "a theological academy" and *no* education at all. But he had touched upon a valid concern, at least for Episcopalians, because in focusing on the question of openness and intellectual accessibility, we had forgotten how little theological knowledge itself is actually valued. Furthermore, given the current emphasis on baptism as the sacrament that empowers Christians for ministry, we had not considered an obvious question that people would ask: "If I am made a minister in the Episcopal Church by virtue of my baptism as an infant, why do I need to take *courses*? If I am already empowered by the sacrament of baptism, what more can education do? Isn't a simple desire to serve sufficient preparation for lay ministry?" We had no adequate answers for those questions. Not only were they inspired by the very same populist attitudes that had helped create the school in the first place, but they were also quintessentially Anglican and American: an approach to the faith that was sacramental and practical, rather than rational and intellectual.

UNFORTUNATELY, DIOCESAN officials themselves soon began to share this viewpoint about the purpose of the School for Ministries. If you wish to be a minister, they argued, show up in church on Sunday mornings and participate. ("Know the tasks," then, and do them.) As a consequence, the training program for deacons was discontinued in 1996, and the next year requirements for both the education and licensing of lay ministers were dropped. The other principal educational resource, our diocesan bookstore, was also closed at the same time. Although the school itself limped on for another academic year, offering a handful of courses, most of them were eventually canceled for lack of official support. Extremely demoralized, the governing board disbanded the school in the spring of 1998. We had gotten the point: worship and sacraments, not theological and historical knowledge, are the basis of church life.

RECENTLY, DOUG LEBLANC OF Episcopalians United observed that liberals hold "a powerful trump card" in their debates with conservatives over changing attitudes on controversial issues such as sexuality. While the right wing of the church today relies upon "propositional truth and often abstract theological principles," the left appeals to "emotions through powerful storytelling and firsthand experience." In other words, conservatives speak to the head and liberals address the heart. I think LeBlanc's analysis is absolutely correct and helps explain why members of Episcopalians United and others who are committed to "propositional truth" feel so embattled in the Episcopal Church in the late 1990s: they have not grasped the non-rational nature of historic Anglicanism and thus find themselves adrift in a denomination embodying that ethos. . .

So there is certainly nothing new about the divorce between theology and everyday religious life in the Episcopal Church because – for better or worse – it has been an inescapable feature of Anglican history. . . . In the end I believe that paradox and ambiguity are at the heart of human history and the Christian faith, for God comes to us at the point where human reason fails. The church came into existence, after all, trying to explain the inexplicable: that both God's condemnation of humankind and our election to salvation is revealed in a single event. God was made known to us when Jesus died in abandonment and rejection on the cross; God was most engaged in the world when, at Gethsemane and Calvary, we saw no sign of the divine presence. Since I have always been fond of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, let me conclude this essay with a portion of that epistle, which elucidates to me one of the core doctrines of Christianity: "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong" (1 Cor 1:27). Theology takes place, therefore, where theological discourse falters. By eschewing an overly intellectual approach to the faith, Episcopalians have indeed shown an appropriate understanding of what Christian theology is all about.

_____ *SC88*

Confessions of a Tobacco Eater

My smoking autobiography began when I was still in high school. I had inherited a brier pipe from my German grandfather, and a hand carved meerschaum from my Scottish great-grandfather. We were not teetotalers, for both family lines migrated to this country too late to be influenced by the temperance movement. I experimented with the pipes on the sly. I experienced the physical discomfort known by all

beginners. However, I did a fair job of hiding my sickness from my parents, neither of whom ever experimented with tobacco themselves.

I was not deterred from smoking tobacco by our ministerial examples. Even a visiting evangelist smoked cigars. I later found to my great delight that several of my favorite Calvinist theologians also smoked cigars: Charles H. Spurgeon, James H. Thornwell, Benjamin Morgan Palmer, John Murray, and other notables. It would no doubt have given Calvin much pleasure had he smoked, and made him as sociable as beer made Luther.

DURING ORIENTATION AT THE fundamentalist college where I was a freshman, the Dean of Students tried to get all those who had used tobacco to own up to it. But I knew better. It would be far safer to put the pipes away for a season and to say nothing. At any rate the Dean said that, regardless of past practice, there was no way one could smoke and remain at that institution. During my second year of college, at another school, I was repulsed by all the negative ethics. You can't do this, you can't do that. Of course, tobacco was one of the material substances which was in and of itself sinful. I found and read with pleasure *The Separated Life* by J. G. Vos, which was to me like a breath of fresh air. Vos held that there were some things which the Bible forbade and there were some things which the Bible commanded. The doctrine of Christian liberty meant that the Christian was free to use and to enjoy those things neither commanded nor forbidden. For my third year of college, I transferred to a denominational college, where more liberties were permitted. Once again I was using and enjoying the pipe.

THROUGHOUT MY SEMINARY training and in the pastorate I smoked. In fact, when I was ordained and installed, most of my officers (elders and deacons) smoked, too. While a pastor I gave several addresses at Rotary and Lions Clubs on "The Pleasures and Uses of Tobacco." I regret to say that, by the time I left the pastorate and became a member of the Seminary faculty, most of the officers had given up the habit; but not I, for I tend to stand by my liberties, as well as my convictions.

My research led me to a great deal of tobacco lore. In the Lutheran tradition, Johann Sebastian Bach wrote a poem, "Edifying Thoughts of a Tobacco Smoker," and wrote a Tobacco Cantata. Ralph Erskine, in our own tradition and minister of the Gospel at Dunfermline, in his Gospel Sonnets; or, Spiritual Songs, has some verses entitled "Smoking Spiritualized." And our Southern theologian Thornwell advised the wife of Professor Adger, "My dear, suffering sister, smoke, smoke, and again I say, smoke."

ONE CAN ASSESS ANYTHING BY its enemies. Pope Urban VIII excommunicated smokers. King James, who betrayed his Presbyterian upbringing, wrote a pamphlet entitled a "Counterblaste to Tobacco," described tobacco as "The Lively image and pattern of Hell." He called smoking "a custom Lothesome to the Eye, hateful to the Nose, harmfulle to the Braine, dangerous to the Lungs, and in the black stinking fumes thereof, resembling the horrible Stigian smoke of the pit that is bottomlesse." But there is nothing so pathetic as the old ballad with this stanza:

> I've seen the land of all I love
> Fade in the distance dim,
> I've watched above the blighted heart,
> Where once proud hope had been.
>
> But I've never known a sorrow
> That could with that compare,
> When off the blue Canary Isles,
> I smoked my last cigar.

During the early years at Reformed Theological Seminary, untroubled by fundamentalism or legalism, and eager to practice what we believed about Christian liberty, several of the professors smoked. The first professors of church history, practical theology, and NT used the delectable weed, even in public. Even the professor of systematic theology accepted and tried out a cigar proffered when my first son was born. Later tobacco users at the seminary were the second full-time professor of theology and one of the OT professors, although one of the members of the latter department would not even admit that Jesus turned the water at Cana into real [fermented] wine. For my self, I concluded that there was a typology of tobacco. You could tell a person's theology by the type of tobacco he used. Conservatives smoked cigars; liberals smoked cigarettes, neo-orthodox smoked pipes; and fundamentalists chewed. I prided myself that I was ecumenical.

BEFORE LONG I BECAME A confidant of the first president of the seminary. He told me that as a young pastor he had smoked cigarettes. One of the elders in his first pastorate convinced him that he should not smoke, and he took a vow – to which he always adhered (but later regretted) – that he would never again smoke tobacco. The theology professor at the time and I had offices in the downstairs of the library building. Both were pipe smokers. From our rooms wafted the delicious aroma of cavendish and burley, and sometimes perique and latakia.

The president of the seminary in those days was sorely tried – but remained faithful to his vow not to smoke tobacco – even when he was tempted by the fragrant bouquet of our pipes. To satisfy his craving, the president experimented with other substances. He tried tea leaves coated in honey. He tried dried lettuce. I even bought him some tobacco-less pipe mixture from the Tinder Box, but none of these would do. Then he had something of a revelation. He recalled the passage of Scripture which said, "Every herb of the field shall be to you for food." He decided that, although he could not violate his vow by burning tobacco, he could put it in his mouth

and thus consume it. So he began a career with Copenhagen. In fact, when he filled in for a term for a missionary to Africa on furlough, the president took enough tins of Copenhagen to last him until his return to the U.S. He did not use it in front of the innocents, however; he would go for walks in the evening, and thus enjoy tobacco. He continued to take consolation from this innocent pleasure after his retirement; yea, even unto his demise.

Faculty meetings in the early years were as agreeable as sociable gatherings in a pub, for smoke would ascend to heaven like incense. The time came, however, when two smokers (one from OT and one from NT) decided to make a motion and second it, that smoking be prohibited in the Faculty Room, during our meetings. One of them made the motion, but before the other could second it a Reformed-fundamentalist-pietistic legalist beat him to it. The motion passed, and this was the beginning of the end. The Dean later declared that there would be no smoking in the buildings of the Seminary. One of the secretaries and I had to go out back, even in the rain, to enjoy a smoke.

In addition to my duties as a professor, early in the course of my teaching I was elected stated clerk of my synod and, later, also of my presbytery. I also went to denominational archives on historical research. These responsibilities involved hours at a desk, without being permitted to smoke. I went to a grocery store one day and discovered that dry and powdery scotch snuff. I tried using it while reading and writing, but the logistical problems were terrific. It is next to impossible to convey a bit of snuff from the tin to the mouth, without spilling some of the nasty powder on one's shirt.

I THOUGHT I HAD DEVISED AN answer to the logistical problem. It occurred to me in the middle of the night that druggists used capsules; and if I could secure and fill some empty capsules, I could easily slip a capsule filled with the dry snuff into my mouth without spilling it or being observed, whether I was at the teacher's lectern or the clerk's desk. This was all well and good, but I soon discovered that those capsules were intended to dissolve in the juices of the stomach rather than the juices of the mouth. I was always left with a gummy mess in my mouth. This was not satisfactory at all. About this time that my younger son called my attention to the kind of tobacco that the athletes used on the field – the moist Danish style snuff. It could be put into the mouth surreptitiously, without becoming too obvious to the carpers. For years I used this form of tobacco in the pulpit, in the classroom, and in the presbytery meeting.

One day my dentist sent me to the oral surgeon, who frightened me, saying that I had a typical pipe smoker's mouth. He explained that there were white spots on the roof of my mouth, caused not really by the tobacco, but by the heat which came into the mouth from the bit of the pipe. I was devastated; but still reasonably young, I determined that I would give up the pipe.

I FINALLY GAVE UP THE USE OF Skoal, too, not for any theological reasons, but for something I heard from my grandson. His second grade teacher was discussing tobacco, alcohol, and other substances as drugs, and he was told that the use of drugs was life threatening. It seems that he told his teacher that his grandfather used drugs, and he was distressed to think that his grandfather was going to die from it. That was too much for even such a hardened sinner as I. With the help of the nicotine patches, I was able to free myself from the addiction.

But I have often admitted that if I am told that I have a terminal ailment, I shall bring out the antique pipes again, and smoke to the glory of God.

Albert H. Freundt, Jr.
Professor Emeritus, RTS

_____ *SC88*

39 Alexander Hall

Billboards' Thoughts Are Slightly Less Than Divine
[reprinted from the Orlando *Sentinel*, May 17, 1999]

Sociologist Peter Berger once observed that in their encounter with the modern world, Christians are often their own gravediggers. By this he meant that both in the manner in which they defend their truth claims and the ways in which they practice their religion, people of faith unwittingly play into the hands of their secular opponent

IF HE LACKED EVIDENCE FOR that assertion, he now has plenty with the massive billboard crusade that is sweeping Central Florida. In an effort to get the unchurched to think about God, these billboards have God speaking to motorists in language that is disarmingly conversant with contemporary American idioms. "We need to talk," God gently nudges us. Or a little more sternly, "Don't make me come down there." And who in Orlando doesn't warm up to this: "Do you think it's hot here?"

The most offensive of this vulgar blight has God threatening to deliver the supreme sanction to Central Florida commuters: "Keep using my name in vain, I'll make rush hour longer." This merger of the Ten Commandments with Madison Avenue is particularly objectionable because it commits precisely the sin that it seeks to deter in its readers. It is deeply established within both Jewish and Christian traditions that taking God's name in vain entails, among other sins, the perversion of God's Word in profane

jesting.

But that was then, this is now. We need to update the packaging, say the God-marketers. This will render ancient religion more plausible to today's unbelievers. If we domesticate God and if we trivialize his character and his actions, he just might prove palatable to the modern sensibilities of our neighbors.

LEAVING ASIDE THE QUESTION of blasphemy, it strains credulity to imagine that these billboards will produce the life-changing results that they intend. Remember Jerry Seinfeld's clever routine about highway signs that posted fines for levels of speeding infractions? Those warnings consistently had the opposite effect of slowing him down. "$250 for going 80 miles per hour? Hey, I can cover that!" he exclaimed, foot on the accelerator. I wonder whether Orlando motorists might not make a similar calculation. When the wages of sin is, well, a traffic jam, haven't we lowered the stakes just a tad below hellfire and brimstone?

Now, of course, the rejoinder to my complaint is predictable. Chill out, the billboard supporters will counter. God's not that uptight. He's even got a sense of humor. Whatever you want to make of that sentiment, you can be sure that it is shared by the angry young motorist I overheard hurling a string of profanities this morning. After all, why should he take God seriously when believers refuse to?

JRM

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Second Hand Smoke

Groucho Marx was right about a lot of things, but he was wrong about Pittsburgh. After he and a lovely young object of his pursuit were blowing smoke in each others' faces in "A Night at the Opera," he finally exclaimed, "This is like living in Pittsburgh, if you call that living." We have longed admired that city from afar, and enjoy each opportunity we have to visit it. Some of the reasons for the appeal of that city were captured by Stefan Lorant in his book, Pittsburgh: The Story of an American City.

Pittsburgh grew because of its sturdy, hard-working citizens. Though early descriptions damn it as wicked, the town was nonetheless a religious place. "A compound of worship on Sunday and whiskey on Monday, thus compounding the spirits," went the saying. Presbyterianism ran strong in the veins of the men and women who settled on the Western Pennsylvania frontier; it formed a mold for their thinking; the Presbyterian Church, the Scotch-Irishman's bulwark in legislative, social, and moral matters, was a prominent force in Pittsburgh. There was a story about John Knox, who had prayed, "O! Lord give me Scotland," and God had not only granted the request but had thrown in Pittsburgh for good measure. And one repeated the saying of the little Pittsburgh girl who, when asked about her religious affiliation, replied: "Mama says it is sinful to boast, but I am a Presbyterian." The strength of Presbyterianism was the result of the early labors of their missionaries and the determination of their followers to hold on to their Scotch-Irish traditions. Their pastors, courageous, freedom-loving men, came from a hearty breed. During the week they worked in the fields; they were one with their flock; they had their respect and confidence. Thus, despite the numerous Methodist and Baptist communities, despite the strong Catholic and Quaker influences, it was Presbyterianism that took hold of the town and gave Pittsburgh its moral fiber.

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