

The Confession of 1967

Its Theological Background and Ecumenical Significance

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Publisher's Note

In order to analyze the background of the Confession of 1967 and to document his estimation of its significance, Dr. Van Til has quoted from the following books. We suggest that those who are interested in this theological discussion secure these books from their publishers.

Lefferts A. Loetscher. *The Broadening Church* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania), 1954.

George S. Hendry. *The Westminster Confession for Today* (Richmond: John Knox), 1960.

John A. MacKay. *A Preface to Christian Theology* (New York: Macmillan), 1941

John A. MacKay. "The Gospel and Our Generation," *The Christian Message for the World Today*, ed. By Stanley Jones (New York: Round Table Press), 1934.

John A. MacKay. *God's Order* (New York: Macmillan), 1953.

John A. MacKay. "The Great Commission and the Church Today," *Missions Under the Cross*, ed. by Norman Goodall (New York: Friendship Press), 1953.

John A. MacKay. *Heritage and Destiny* (New York: Macmillan), 1943.

John A. MacKay. *The Presbyterian Way of Life* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall), 1960.

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Richard Kroner. *Kant's Weltanschauung*, trans. by John E. Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago), 1956.

John Oman. *Grace and Personality* (New York: Association Press), 1960.

Arnold B. Come. *Human Spirit and Holy Spirit* (Philadelphia: Westminster), 1959

Arnold A. Come. *An Introduction to Barth's "Dogmatics" for Preachers* (Philadelphia: Westminster), 1963.

Karl Barth. *Kirchliche Dogmatik* (Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag), 1932 ff.

English translation, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark), 1936 ff.

George W. Forrell. *Understanding the Nicene Creed* (Philadelphia: Fortress), 1965.

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- Martin Marty. "A Dialogue of Histories," *American Catholics*, ed. by Phillip Scharper (New York: Sheed & Ward), 1959.
- Martin Marty. *New Directions in Biblical Thought* (New York: Association Press), 1960.
- Martin Marty. *The New Shape of American Religion* (New York: Harper), 1959.
- Vittorio Subilia. *The Problem of Catholicism*, tr. by Reginald Kissack (London: SCM Press, CTD), 1964.
- Hans Urs von Balthasar. *Karl Barth—Darstellung und Deutung Seiner Theologie* (Köln: Jakob Hegner), 1951.
- Hans Küng. *Rechtfertigung; Die Lehre Karl Barths und Eine Katholische Besinnung* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag), 1957.
- Martin Buber. *Two Types of Faith* (New York: Harper), 1958.
- Martin Buber. *Between Man and Man* (New York: Macmillan) 1958.
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Act and Being* (New York: Harper), 1961.
- Nicholas Berdyaev. *Beginning and the End* (New York: Harper), 1957.
- Gempo Hoshino. *Antwort, Karl Barth zum siebzigsten Geburtstag am 10. Mai 1956* (Zollikon-Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag Ag).
- Arnold J. Toynbee. *Christianity Among the Religions of the World* (New York: Scribner), 1957.

Introduction

The 1958 General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America appointed a committee to draw up "A Brief Contemporary Statement of Faith" (*Report of the Special Committee on A Brief Contemporary Statement of Faith*, p. 7). The proposed confession of 1967 constitutes a part of the report of this committee.

Should the Confession of 1967 be adopted by that church, an entirely new phase in its life will be ushered in. This is true because this proposed Confession gives expression to and is based upon a new theology. Our concern in this booklet, therefore, is with the nature of this new theology which will be given credal status if this proposed Confession is adopted by the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.

The casual reader of the new Confession may not readily see that it is founded upon a new and relativistic view of truth. Is he not told that the Confession of 1967 is based upon Christ and his reconciling work? Does not the new Confession appeal to the authority of Scripture? Does it not use the phraseology of the Bible and of the Westminster Confession?

Though we concede that the new creed and its new theology speak highly of both Christ and the Bible, we nevertheless contend that new meanings have been attached to old, familiar words. The whole question, accordingly, is one of reinterpretation. One may take a milk bottle and fill it with a poisonous white liquid and call it milk, but this does not guarantee that the poisonous liquid is milk. It may well be some thing that is highly dangerous to man.

Such is the case, we believe, with the new theology: It is an essentially humanistic theology which disguises itself as an up-to-date Christian theology. Of course, we are told that the new Confession is contemporary in its view of truth. We are also told that the Westminster Standards are outdated, being written in an age of absolutism. By contrast, today's theological thinkers know that truth is relative to man and the human situation. Has not Immanuel Kant taught us that man can know nothing of God and of Christ in so far as Christ is said to be God as well as man? From Kant recent philosophers and theologians have learned that man's conceptual knowledge is limited to the impersonal world of science and does not apply to the religious dimension.

Though the twentieth-century church has been informed by the new theology that it can have no objective or conceptual knowledge of God and of Christ, this same theology still continues to speak about God and Christ in eloquent terms. But, as we have already noted, these terms have new definitions. The God and the Christ of this contemporary theology have very little in common with the God and the Christ of historic Christianity. There is good reason to believe that the new theology has virtually manufactured a new Christ, a person who is essentially different from the Savior of the Scriptures.

First, the new theology speaks in the warmest terms of the great fact of the "Incarnation." Are we not encouraged when we hear this? For a moment we are—only to be sharply disappointed when we discover the "God-man" of the new theology is not the self-existent and self-attesting Son of God of the New Testament, of Chalcedon, and of Westminster. Instead of a Trinitarian formulation of the doctrine of the Incarnation, the church is to learn that God is identical with "Christ" and that "Christ" is directly identical with the "work" of reconciling all men to himself, but only indirectly identical with Jesus of Nazareth. Men can be truly men only as they realize that their very manhood exists in their participation in this work which is of "Christ." Men enter the kingdom of heaven as they follow "him" and they follow him if they treat all men as persons.

Second, this contemporary theology would have the church believe that Christ's salvation is ultimately universal. The "Christ-Event," the act of God's saving all men in "Jesus Christ," ideally reconciles all men to God and all men to one another.

Third, the new theology discounts the idea that the language of Scripture can truly represent the meaning of the "Christ-Event." When the Scripture speaks of God's reconciling act in terms of "vicarious satisfaction of a legal penalty, and victory over the powers of evil," then the new theologians of the drafting committee hasten to explain that "these are expressions of a truth which remains beyond the reach of all theory in the depths of God's love for man."¹ All that the Bible writers did or could do was point to a higher or deeper dimension of being opened up to them by this symbolic language of Scripture.

Thus when the new church, with its new creed, speaks to modern man about Creation, the Fall into sin, and Redemption through Christ, it is not speaking of the world of historical fact in the orthodox Christian sense. These theological terms are supposedly mythic and symbolic of another dimension of reality. It

¹ "The Confession of 1967," *The Proposed Book of Confessions*, line 71.

matters, but it matters only secondarily, whether these eyelets did or did not happen in the actual world of every day history. Such a question as this is largely irrelevant. Christ's reconciling work is not primarily historical in that sense. It is said to be primarily in a world above history.

In what follows we hope to show that this new "dimensional" theology which controls the new Confession is, at bottom, a new heresy—that its use of traditional language is misleading and that, for all its praise of "Christ the Word," its message is foreign to the teachings of the historic Christian faith. The new Confession presents an essentially man-centered instead of a God-centered theology.

Chapter 1:

The Broadening Church

The preface to the proposed Confession, we are told, "prepares the reader to expect something different from classical creeds and confessions."¹ We are to have something new and up-to-date. In about 4,200 words it will, with fresh emphasis, "expose the contemporary relevance of the old truth."²

Well, what is new about that? What about the *Brief Statement of the Reformed Faith* of 1902? Why not adopt that in 1967?

The answer is simply that the 1902 Statement would not be genuinely contemporary today. To be genuinely contemporary, the "great verities of the Word of God" must be applied to "today's burning issues" in the "thrilling revival of theology" that has taken place in our century.³

Therefore we simply must understand something of the "thrilling revival of theology" as this underlies the Confession of 1967. This is not an easy matter, since the new Confession does not express the theology of any individual theologian. Moreover, we lack access to the deliberations of the drafting committee. Hence, those of us who are on the "outside" are at a disadvantage in the matter. If only we had some "insider" to tell us the story of the making of this new Confession.

Fortunately one of the members of the drafting committee, Dr. Leonard Trinterud, gives us some insights into the method which the committee pursued in the fulfillment of its task. Our forefathers, he says, knew that the "faith was catholic and ecumenical," but that "its interpretation and confession had to be made in the actual life situation."⁴ Following the example of our Reformed forebears, we too want to confess the historic faith with the whole family of Reformed Churches, but we want to do so in formulations that are appropriate to the needs of our day.

¹ *Report of the Special Committee on A Brief Contemporary Statement of Faith*, p. 27.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

To be sure, there have been men who took the Reformed Confessions (in particular the Westminster Confession) as having the "character of timeless truth rather than the truth for the times."⁵ We want now to return, argues Dr. Trinterud, to the original Reformed and Presbyterian conviction that the church is "obligated to confess its faith in concrete specific terms in the immediate situation" in which it finds itself.⁶

We are, he adds, not the first to attempt to do this sort of thing. "During the nineteenth century ... attempts were made to draft a new contemporary confession for the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches of the world.... These efforts all failed, largely through Presbyterian insistence that the Westminster documents represented an achievement which could not be surpassed. The pleas for a new confession which would be addressed to the immediate situation were answered generally by asserting that the older documents needed only better interpretation and deeper loyalty. In the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, the Declaratory Statement of 1903, and a few minor changes in the Westminster Confession were all the revisions which could be achieved."⁷

But since World War 2 a new era has dawned. Presbyterian and Reformed churches have begun to sense anew that they have a "responsibility" to confess "the faith now."⁸ "Because of this world-wide feeling among the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches, the plans for the Union of the United Presbyterian Church of North America and the Presbyterian Church in the United States called for the preparation of a brief contemporary statement of the faith which would serve to guide the church in the crises and opportunities of the twentieth century."⁹

Along with the desire to speak in "the actual life situation" and to be "radically relevant," the writers of the new creed seek to be genuinely ecumenical.

Similarly, Dr. Edward A. Dowey, Jr., chairman of the drafting committee, asserts that the Westminster Confession represents theological absolutism. "The early Reformation produced militant, prophetic confessions for reform and renewal of the church. These centered chiefly on the doctrines of faith, justification, Scripture, church, and the sacraments."¹⁰ But a "new situation had

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 17–18.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

developed in the seventeenth century. Reform had evolved into orthodoxy.”¹¹ Thus the Westminster statement of faith “derives from an age of scholastic theology, of preoccupation with authority, and law, of churchly and political absolutism.”¹²

Unfortunately, according to Dowey, this world of the Westminster Confession has come to an end. “A statement that is appropriate and powerful in its own day,” he continues, “may fail to guide the church after some decades or centuries have gone by. It comes to resemble a monument marking the past more than a tool for present work.”¹³ You can see to what lengths an unbending orthodoxy born in an age of absolutism may go if you recall that “for more than a century seminary professors took an oath ‘not to inculcate, teach or insinuate anything which shall appear to me to contradict or contravene, either directly or impliedly, anything taught’ in the Westminster standards.”¹⁴ We have had enough of them! A good example has been set up by those who have written the “teaching material for Sunday schools as well as of curricula for theological seminaries.”¹⁵ For they have “depended less and less on the old documents and more upon principles drawn from living theology.”¹⁶

Now then, at last, we are able to write a truly ecumenical creed. “The Confession of 1967,” Dowey judges, “is not designed to define the faith of Presbyterians. The central elements of the faith of Presbyterians are all shared as well by other Christians.”¹⁷ To be sure, he observes, we still live in the day of “separated communions. Interchurch documents may lack binding force within the particular churches. Hence it is right for a single church to speak from within its own setting.”¹⁸ However, if the Confession of 1967 “does not at the same time reflect the catholic consciousness of that tradition, it is a failure.”¹⁹ “The present mission of the Presbyterian Church,” says Dowey, as “ethical, ecumenical, intellectual, and evangelistic, cannot be adequately directed by a seventeenth-century document, even a great and venerable one.”²⁰

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 20–21.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 21–22.

Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

1. A Major Watershed

What we have today, argues Dowey, is “a broader, more inclusive church than can be derived from the Westminster standards.”²¹ This is the case because, since the writing of these standards, we have crossed a major watershed. Modern science and modern philosophy have made tremendous advances both in the understanding of man and of his world. We now know that all reality is ultimately mysterious and that no man can express its meaning in any absolute fashion.

Surely a living theology must not hold back but cooperate in the expression of its creeds with the deepened insights into reality obtained since the seventeenth century. “After the mid seventeenth century, when orthodoxy matured ... [the church] was fearful of evolutionists like Lyell and Darwin, of higher criticism of the Bible, of development in theology, and, in short, of modern culture. It was also shirking the needs of the western frontier and of slaves in the South, as well as other pressing problems.”²² Today all this has changed. The church now realizes that its confession must harmonize with the great insights of modern scientists and philosophers. The church must no longer ask its pastors to subscribe to a confession which springs from the culture of a less enlightened age.

2. A Broader Church

Of course, the idea of a broader church, a church alert to the culture of our age, has been developing for some time. Professor Lefferts A. Loetscher, of Princeton Theological Seminary, traces this development for us in his book *The Broadening Church*. A brief summary of the story of this development, as he tells it, will help us in understanding the zeal that comes to expression in the work of the committee that wrote the Confession of 1967.

There have, says Loetscher, always been two parties in the Presbyterian church of this country. First, the Scotch-Irish wing; second, the “New England, English and Welsh elements have constituted the ... other great tradition in American Presbyterian history.” The Scotch-Irish wing has, from the beginning, “stressed the more ‘objective’ aspects of religion such as precise theological formulation, the professional and distinct character of the ministry, and orderly and authoritarian church government.”²³ The “New England element has contributed

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 21.

²³ *op. cit.*, p. 1.

values of a more 'sectarian' type," laying "more emphasis on spontaneity, vital impulse, and adaptability."²⁴

"During most of the history of the Church," says Loetscher, "these elements have been in rather fine balance—or compromise—which has given to the Church a characteristic moderation and has kept it in a kind of median position within American Protestantism."²⁵

Yet, basically, there was tension between these two elements. "Twice the tension became so acute as to dismember the ecclesiastical body.... But the ecclesiastical and dialectical incompleteness of either part alone has on each occasion prepared the way for speedy reunion."²⁶

According to Loetscher, as he relates the story of the broadening church, the two "wings," "parties," or "elements" developed into two mutually intolerable positions. There were uneasy truces and compromises, but in the end there was not room for both parties in the church. It was the second party, the party that was adaptable to cultural change, that won out. But the end was not yet in 1869, and the church restored unity "not by resolving its differences, but by ignoring and absorbing them.... The result was, of course, that the theological base of the Church ... was broadened and the meaning of its subscription formula further relaxed. The gentlemen's agreement of 1869 to tolerate divergent types of Calvinism meant that clear-cut definitions of Calvinism would not be enforceable in the reunited Church, and that it would be increasingly difficult to protect historic Calvinism against variations that might undermine its essential character."²⁷

Moreover, a "new cultural and theological atmosphere was forming" in the days after the Civil War.²⁸ Here science "was creating both a new method of intellectual activity and a new world view."²⁹ "Evolution was a concept that organized around itself some of the most characteristic ideas and moods of the late nineteenth century."³⁰ It soon "substituted change for fixity as the law of all things. Where the theory was consistently universalized, all absolutes—including

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 1–2.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

religious and ethical absolutes—were smashed at a stroke.”³¹ “Theories of development ... were conditioning the climate and in part defining the problems of theological discussion.”³²

Besides evolution, Loetscher adds, “the comparative study of religion was challenging the uniqueness of Christianity.”³³ In addition, by the end of the century psychology was laying even the “inner sanctum” of man’s spiritual experience “under scientific chains.”³⁴

Theologians hastened “to interpret, or reinterpret, theology in relation to these cultural forces.”³⁵ They turned for help to European, especially German, theologians. “By students returning from Germany idealistic philosophy, Biblical criticism, and later the Ritschlian theology were greatly stimulated in America.

“What is loosely called the ‘liberal theology’ is best defined as an attempt to mediate between historic orthodoxy and the radically altered scientific and cultural outlook. The key theological idea suggested by the cultural outlook was perhaps the doctrine of God’s immanence, which found humanity in God and deity in man and was congenial to optimistic developmental views.”³⁶

As Loetscher views the conflict, the adherents of liberal theology “were deeply convinced that the expression of Christian truth must adjust itself to the times or die.”³⁷ The “conservatives” “charged that liberals in defending and adapting Christianity were betraying it.”³⁸ Troublous times were ahead of the newly reunited church of 1869. “Could her newly regained unity survive such a strain?”³⁹

Soon the conservatives were charging the liberals with heresy.⁴⁰ But the liberals were bound to win out. Time was on their side. “Man’s dignity and confidence were rising to new heights in the late nineteenth-century world in which the Westminster Confession of Faith found itself. The Renaissance, and

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 10.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 10–11.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 12ff.

after it the Enlightenment, had turned attention away from the next life to the present life, away from God's sovereignty to man's worth and capacity."⁴¹

"In such an age and particularly in such a land, the Presbyterian Church could not avoid another look at its Calvinistic heritage, and especially at the formulation of that heritage in the Church's principal doctrinal standard, the Westminster Confession of Faith."⁴² What about the 'horrible decree' of double predestination? "The Confession's Chapter 3, 'Of God's Eternal Decree,' and part of its Chapter 10, 'Of Effectual Calling' especially the phrase 'elect infants,' with its intimation that some infants might be nonelect—were the chief objects of criticism in the late nineteenth century."⁴³

"A more serious challenge ... had been posed by New School Presbyterianism," which looked "in the direction of greater emphasis on man's responsibility in the face of God's sovereignty."⁴⁴ Hardly had the reunion of 1869 taken place but a desire for creedal revision expressed itself again and again.⁴⁵

But we would note that the liberal wing in the church never succeeded in its desire to have the church write a new confession. As Loetscher has pointed out, its strength was sufficient to cause the church to minimize the importance of the Westminster Confession. But the older liberalism was never strong enough to write a creed of its own to supplant the Westminster Confession.

3. The Twentieth Century

As Loetscher tells the story, the present century saw an increase of tension between the two wings of the church. "With the coming of the twentieth century, critical reason, as developed by the Renaissance and further emphasized by the Enlightenment, came to full fruition."⁴⁶ The spirit of relativism began to prevail. "Ethics, too, felt the shock of relativism."⁴⁷ A leftist movement in theology followed the pathway of relativism to its end. On the other hand "a right-wing movement, dubbed 'fundamentalism,' sought to defend the 'fundamentals' of

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 39–40.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 40–41.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

Christianity against liberalism and ultimately against the outright naturalism which it suspected lurked behind liberalism's compromises." ⁴⁸

However, "just before theological controversy in Presbyterian judicatories came to an end in 1936, an important new movement, 'neo-orthodoxy,' was beginning to appear in American theology. It was born amid suffering and disillusionment in Continental Europe following World War 1, and appeared on the American scene during the economic dislocation of the 1930's. It radically challenged the pantheizing tendencies of an optimistic liberalism that had glorified man and forgotten that God is 'totally other' than man. While accepting, sometimes even in radical form the results of Biblical criticism, neo-orthodoxy emphasized revelation and redemption as acts of God's initiative and grace. It accepted the prevailing skeptical attitude toward metaphysical speculation and did not undertake to deliver culture as a whole from relativism and historicism which had engulfed it. But it insisted with all the energy of its powerful dialectic that, by God's grace coming through Christ, man could, at the one point of an actual 'divine-human encounter,' escape the quagmire of relativism and have true, if paradoxical, contact with the absolute God. This theology was too sophisticated and too antithetical to long-prevailing American optimism to secure wide acceptance in the United States, but some of its insights and many of its catch words enjoyed increasing vogue. It was a challenge to naturalism and to naturalistic tendencies, in the name of historic Christianity and somewhat after the pattern of John Calvin, which arrested attention throughout the Protestant world and beyond." ⁴⁹

Neo-orthodoxy, argues Loetscher, brought with it a new appreciation of the heritage of the church. Church splits and divisions were becoming less and less palatable to twentieth-century Americans. ⁵⁰ In 1903, the conservatives felt that the revisions made in the creed at that time "did not alter its basic Calvinism." ⁵¹ But a later controversy began in 1922 and lasted until 1936. This conflict, says Loetscher, "issued in quite different results from those attending the earlier struggle. During the second period it was very definitely decided after prolonged discussion that the Church should adopt a more inclusive policy. Heresy prosecutions during this later contest were not even attempted by the most

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

conservative. The Church finally felt its way toward open recognition of the full right of moderate liberals to be ministers and officials.”⁵²

As seen by Loetscher, the theology and life of the American Presbyterian church have continued to broaden until “moderate liberals” have gained “the right” to be ministers and officials in the church. Indeed, there is much truth in this picture as Loetscher has drawn it—even though we may not share his enthusiasm for the “broadening church.” We believe, however, that Loetscher is quite mistaken with respect to his estimate of neo-orthodoxy. He says that this theology was “too sophisticated and too antithetical to long-prevailing American optimism to secure wide acceptance in the United States....” At the present time neo-orthodoxy is the prevailing theology in America as well as in Europe. Nor is neo-orthodox theology basically any more sophisticated or less optimistic than was the liberalism of Friedrich Schleiermacher and of Albrecht Ritschl. Neo-orthodox theology accords with the existentialist philosophy of the present day much as liberalism accorded with the idealist philosophy of the last century. Moreover, the existentialist philosophy of our day and the idealist philosophy of yesterday are both based on the idea of human autonomy which was brought to the fore and received definitive statement in the thought of Immanuel Kant. It is the same with the neo-orthodox theology of our day as it was with the liberalism of the last century. They are both, ultimately, rooted in Kantian soil.

It is, however, central to our purpose to note that neo-orthodox theology threatens to become triumphant in a way that the liberal theology never was. It has been only a little more than a generation since neo-orthodoxy entered the American theological world. Even so, its advocates propose to enshrine this relatively new theology in the Confession of 1967. This will be, if successful, the final step of a great theological and creedal revolution.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 94–95.

Chapter 2: The New Dimensionalism

The first chapter has gradually led us to the conviction that the "thrilling development of theology" of which the *Report of the Special Committee* speaks refers to neo-orthodoxy. It is apparently neo-orthodox theology that is supposed to be able to give us clear answers to the simple questions that people are asking in our day. It is apparently neo-orthodox theology that call, as "living theology," meet the need of the hour in a way that the Westminster standards cannot.

We propose, in the present chapter, to deal with the dimension-philosophy which underlies this neo-orthodox theology, to deal with it so far as it finds expression in the works of Drs. George S. Hendry and John A. Mackay, both members of the *Special Committee on A Brief Contemporary Statement of Faith*.

The dimension-philosophy of these men assumes that a God such as the One of which the Westminster Confession speaks does not and cannot exist. The dimension-philosophy of these men does not agree with the Westminster standards when they speak of man as a creature, of God, or as a sinner before the face of God. The dimension-philosophy of these men does not agree with the Westminster standards when they speak of the sovereign grace of God in Christ as the source of salvation for sinful men. Yet the thinking of both of these men has been very influential in the formulation of the theology of the new creed.

Modern dimension-philosophy in general holds that man can save himself by lifting himself higher in the scale of being. According to this philosophy, man is naturally immersed in the impersonal world of space and time. But no matter, for man can, by sheer determination of his free will, with a lift from such gods as there may be, raise himself gradually into a higher dimension or realm of existence. In this higher realm or dimension, all people treat each other as persons and not as things. When all human beings treat each other as persons then the golden age has come.

In the early church, the monk Pelagius held to a scheme of self-salvation such as the one to which modern dimensionalism now holds. St. Augustine, the great proponent of salvation by grace alone, sought to convince the church that the teachings of Pelagius had no proper place in its midst. Pelagius, on the other hand, argued that salvation by grace, as taught by Augustine, had no proper

place in the church. The constant argument of Pelagius against Augustine was that his idea of sovereign grace did violence to the natural goodness and free will of man. Pelagius claimed that he, rather than Augustine, taught true Christianity.

Today, the situation in the Presbyterian church is similar to that which obtained during the time of Augustine and Pelagius.

For many years Dr. Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield taught systematic theology at Princeton Theological Seminary. We may compare him to Augustine. Together with his colleagues Warfield, a man of great genius, taught a theology very similar to that of Augustine. It was a theology of the sovereign grace of God. Warfield thought of the Westminster standards as giving superb expression to this theology of the sovereign grace of God in Christ.

Why, asks Warfield, have the Westminster standards been "so perennial a source of strength to generation after generation of Christian men"? What "causes us still to cling to them with a devotion no less intelligent than passionate today"? "I think I should but voice your conviction," says Warfield, "were I to say that it is because these precious documents appeal to us as but the embodiment in fitly chosen language of the pure gospel of the grace of God."¹

Augustine had defended this gospel of grace, this "evangelical religion," in his day, against the "humanitarian" conceptions of Pelagius. The synod of Dordt defended this gospel of grace against the humanitarianism of the Remonstrants. "But the end was not even yet." Transferred to English soil, argues Warfield, "humanitarianism put on the garments of light, allied itself with religious fervor, and ran up by insensible stages into a mysticism which confounded human claims with the very voice of God." "This is the meaning," adds Warfield, "of what we call the Puritan Conflict which, from the theological side, was nothing else than the last deadly struggle of evangelical religion—the gospel of God's grace—to preserve itself pure and sweet and clean in the midst of the most insidious attacks which could be brought against it—attacks, the strength of which resided just in the fact that now its old-time foes approached it with the sword in hand, indeed, but under its own banner and clothed in its own uniform."²

It is difficult to find words more admirably suited to fit the situation in the Presbyterian churches of our day.

¹ *The Significance of the Westminster Standards*, New York, 1898, p. 2.

² *Ibid.*, p. 11.

Pelagius is today, so to speak, seeking to push Augustine out of his own home.

The concept of grace embodied in the Confession of 1967 is based upon neo-orthodox theology. It, in turn, is based on dimension-philosophy which assumes that man can save himself. It is this dimension-philosophy which Dr. Mackay, Dr. Hendry, and their followers are seeking to foist upon the church.

We deal first with Hendry because his theology led him to a direct reinterpretation of the Westminster Standards in terms of virtual Pelagianism.

1. Dr. Hendry and I-thou Dimensionalism

Dr. Hendry's book, *The Westminster Confession for Today*, seeks to give a "contemporary interpretation" of the Westminster Confession. His "contemporary interpretation" however is, in effect, a reinterpretation in terms of dimensional philosophy. In other words, Hendry's "contemporary interpretation" amounts to a substitution of a man-centered theology for a God and Christ-centered one.

To give "interpretations" of this sort is now the vogue. The Germans speak of it as *Umdeutung*. Liberals were not very good at this sort of thing. When they didn't like the doctrine of Christ's virgin birth or of his substitutionary atonement, they would reject these teachings. This rejection excited the fundamentalists and they reacted noisily.

Neo-orthodoxy knows better than, in this manner, to offend the fundamentalists openly. Don't just throw the milk out of bottle and put polluted water in it. Give your polluted water the color of milk. Hang up the portrait of Warfield on your wall and tell the church that, together with him, you revere the standards of the church. Having done this, the fundamentalists will not likely notice the fact that, in your contemporary interpretation, you have, in effect, substituted a modern man-centered theology for the historic Christian faith.

We are far from asserting that Hendry, or any of the other orthodox theologians, who together formulated the Confession of 1967, are self-consciously dishonest in their efforts. They may honestly believe that the Confession of 1967 and the Westminster Standards may both be called "Christian Confessions." *The Proposed Book of Confessions*, which the drafting committee offers the church for acceptance, seems to suggest that the Augustinian and the Pelagian views of grace are not really opposites. If, however, these men really can

think that this is the case, we can only stand amazed at their capacity for self-deception.

We now follow Hendry as, step by step, he gives us his “contemporary interpretation” of the several articles of the Westminster Confession.

By way of general introduction, Hendry tells us that a confession is like a map and that a map, to be useful, must up-to-date.

The Westminster map is, of course, out of date. But worse, when it was made the map-makers had an absolutist method of map making.

Once a certain airport had a certain name. Some thought it could never be changed. The announcer now calls off Kennedy airport and a passenger that has stubbornly refused to get a new schedule doesn't get off the plane. He will not get off till he hears the word Idlewild. But this he will, in the new day, never hear. He is lost because he clings to an old map.

Just think of the temper and mentality of the Westminster map-makers for a moment and you will see at once why their product looks like a surveyor's map that George Washington might have made.

The Westminster men were, first, “excessively legalistic.”³ How can you really express a loving person-to-person relation in terms of an abstract law?

The Westminster men were, second, sure “that to every question there is one right answer, and that all the others are wrong. “Only once do they hint at mystery.”⁴ It is as though they were omniscient.

What would you think if the map-makers of colonial times had tried to tell you where each of the cities of the future would be located and what their names would have to be? Modern man knows that he is surrounded by ultimate mystery and that no man can do more than drive in a never-ending fog. We have learned to be much more humble than our forefathers were.

It does not occur to Hendry to point out here that the Westminster men had a God who is light and in whom there is no darkness at all. This God could tell men about the future. But Hendry and his colleagues cannot think even of Christ, the Godman, as able to give to man a final revelation of himself. The apostles of

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 14.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

Jesus, inspired by the Holy Spirit, are, for Hendry and his colleagues, nothing more than men who walk in a cave with a flashlight but have no power to recharge their batteries.

The Westminster men were, third, segregationists. They had a God who “in his eternal decree separates the elect from the reprobate.”⁵ But who can believe in such an arbitrary God today? Surely no modern man today dares think in such “terms of black and white.”⁶

The Westminster men were, fourth, men with little vision of the social implications of the gospel. The biblical word “neighbor” is absent from the Confession.”⁷ Surely now that we have learned to place all men in person-to-person relation to one another, the Confession needs restatement on this score.

Thinking of these four points, we might ask Hendry how he expects to be able to use the Westminster Confession at all in our day. Well, when he wrote his book in 1960, Hendry did say that he was ready “to trade in the Confession for a new one.”⁸ Yet, as long as no one was forthcoming, he said, he thought the old map could be repaired and kept “in a roadworthy condition.”⁹

2. The Patched-Up Map

Hendry now undertakes to adjust and repair the old roadmap. A valiant and desperate effort it is. How can you tell a passenger that Kennedy airport is the same as Idlewild which the map indicates? Let’s see.

We have time and space to look at only a few of Hendry’s efforts. As he drives along the road of human experience, he sees that it does not at all go where the Westminster map says that it should go. Will he be able to adjust the map so as to make it fit the meanderings of the road? The Confession of 1967, as proposed in 1965 and amended in 1966, virtually trades in the old map for a new one and Hendry had a hand in doing this. But in 1960 he still thought he had a repair-job to do on the old map. The entire job must be done, he says, with “care and

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

discrimination.”¹⁰ First Hendry deals with the Westminster Confession’s view of Scripture.

3. The Holy Scripture

Dr. Hendry at once speaks in terms of a new mentality when he deals with the Confession’s view of Scripture. The Confession says that the Bible tells us about that “knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation.” This knowledge of God, argues Hendry, “is a practical rather than a theoretical kind of knowledge.”¹¹ Before going further it is well that we ask at once what is meant today when theologians speak of the knowledge of God as being practical. How does “practical” knowledge differ from “theoretical” knowledge? The distinction between practical and theoretical knowledge derives from the great modern philosopher, Immanuel Kant. According to Kant, man has scientific, conceptual, or theoretical knowledge only of the world as sense-experienced. This world Kant calls the world of phenomena. Man can know nothing of God, since man has no sense-experience of him and God lives in the noumenal realm. Yet, in his conscience, man senses that somehow he has contact with God. In his conscience man feels that he himself is free, even though, as far as he knows himself in the phenomenal world, he is determined. On the basis of his sense of freedom, man postulates the experience of God. This God is said by Kant to reward the good rather than the evil principle in man. This God will, at last, bring about a universal kingdom of righteousness.

In recent times, this Kantian distinction between the world of phenomena and the world of noumena has frequently been expressed in terms of dimensionalism. The world of phenomena is said to represent the I-it dimension and the world of noumena is said to represent the I-thou dimension. The I-it dimension, we are told, is the world of science, of things, of impersonal objects, the determined cause-effect world. The I-thou dimension, we are told, is the world of personal relations, of freedom. It is the world of person-to-person confrontation. Surely God, in Christ, meets us primarily in terms of person-to-person confrontation. This is, we are told, the world of practical rather than of theoretical knowledge.

Now it is this knowledge, this practical knowledge, that is, says Hendry, “the theme of the Bible.”¹² “The knowledge of God which is given in revelation is of a practical, not a theoretical nature, and it is given within a relationship, which, in

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹² *Ibid.*

fact, it constitutes.”¹³ “Knowledge of God is not like knowledge of geography or mathematics, which are open to everybody; it is given only to those whom he sets in a personal relation to himself.”¹⁴

It follows from this, for Dr. Hendry, that “faith in the inspiration of the Bible is not a matter of theory; it is a matter of faith. And faith cannot be made to rest on theory; it is always faith in God—and here, specifically, faith in God in the person of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁵

Summing up the matter of Scripture, we have the following: (1) The distinction between theoretical and practical knowledge forbids the modern believer to hold to the traditional view of Scripture as the direct revelation of God to man. All theoretical knowledge is impersonal. The heart of the Gospel is that God stands in a person-to-person relation with man through Christ. This message of God’s person-to-person relation with man cannot be directly identified with anything that is said in Scripture, even about Jesus Christ by Jesus Christ himself.

(2) It follows that Hendry has not effectively repaired the first articles of the Westminster Confession. The heart of this doctrine lies first in the idea that God has clearly revealed himself in the world as created, and that, because of sin, man cannot of himself interpret this revelation for what it is. Then, second, the Confession says that in his grace, God has revealed himself redemptively to and in sinners so that they might truly interpret themselves and all the world around them for what they are created and redeemed by God through Christ.

For this objective view of both general and special revelation, Hendry substitutes a purely subjective one based on Kant’s distinction between theoretical and practical knowledge. As noted earlier, this view assumes that the world is an ultimate chaos on which man, with the help of a projected Christ, is supposed to impress some order through innate categories such as “unity, “possibility,” “causality and dependence,” etc.

4. Of God and the Holy Trinity

After dealing with Scripture and revelation, Dr. Hendry takes up the doctrine of God. Carrying on his distinction between theoretical and practical reason Hendry asks: “What is God?” However, he at once adds: “When we ask the

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

question, What is God? we imply that it is possible for us to observe God and describe him much as we might describe someone we had seen in the street. Any such description would take the form of a mental image or picture of God.”¹⁶

Yet we can say who God is: “God is he who has revealed himself in Christ through the Holy Spirit. This is the basic affirmation of Christian faith; and it is the necessary implications of this basic affirmation which were formulated in the doctrine of the Trinity.”¹⁷

Now the doctrine of the trinity, says Dr. Hendry, enshrines a paradox. It is the paradox “that God, who is infinite, almighty, sovereign, and sufficient to himself condescends to enter into relation with us, his creatures, and in his dealings with us shows himself most loving, gracious, and merciful.”¹⁸

But the mentality of the Westminster divines was unable “to grasp the central truth, which the doctrine of the Trinity was framed to protect, that the God of Christian faith is ‘the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.’ ”¹⁹ “The Confession undoubtedly intends and professes to describe the God who is revealed in Christ, but failing to discern the actual pattern of his being, it ends in describing another God, who is unrevealed, and who lacks the attributes of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus it actually imperils the faith it asserts, that ‘there is but one only living and true God,’ because it fails to concentrate on the authentic image of himself which God has given us in Jesus Christ.”²⁰

We must admire the frankness of Hendry here. His commitment to a Kantian theory of knowledge leads him to an open rejection of the God of the Westminster Confession. If one holds to the God of the Confession, then he holds, according to Hendry, merely to an idea of God, to a concept of God. And, says Hendry, to try to know God by a mere concept is, in fact, to worship this concept instead of God. It is to have a theoretical instead of practical knowledge of God.

Hendry’s modern doctrine of God is implied by his view of the revelation of God. The two stand or fall together. Hendry’s doctrine of God is not, according to his own words, that of the Westminster Confession. The two doctrines are

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

diametrically opposed to one another. Hendry does not even try to patch them together. To be sure, in 1960, Hendry was still patching up the old confession. Apparently he then still thought of this as possible, even if the part of the map dealing with the doctrine of God had to be torn out altogether. Apparently Hendry thinks it is possible to repair the wheel of a wagon even though the hub of the wheel has rotted through.

The writers of the Confession of 1967 were not frank enough to tell us that they too propose to have us worship a new God. Yet this is, in effect, what they are doing. They are, in effect, asserting that the god of Pelagius is the same God as the God of Augustine. This is, in effect, to say that there is no god except such a god as men cast up as ideals for themselves in order to hypostatize them and worship them.

5. God's Eternal Decrees

In the third chapter of his work on the Westminster Confession, Dr. Hendry, in speaking of God's eternal decrees, says that "a false model" was used by the composers of the creed. They evidenced a major deficiency when they dealt with the relation of eternity to time. "The consequence is that the doctrine [with respect to the decrees] assumes the cast of a deterministic philosophy, in which there is no real place for human freedom, despite verbal protestations to the contrary."²¹ Even so "the decisive objection to this form of the doctrine is not that it is destructive of human freedom; it is that it denies the freedom of God—that is, his freedom to be God in all the dimensions of his eternity and to pursue his eternal purpose in time and through time. If all things that come to pass have been determined by God's decree from all eternity, then, once the decree has been fixed, God becomes, in effect, his own executor. But such a God is not eternal in the full sense of the word; he is only pre-temporal."²²

If only the framers of the Westminster Confession had had the benefit of the modern distinction between theoretical and practical knowledge, they would have seen that God's sovereign grace is a postulate of the practical reason and, as such, outreaches all the "contradictions" between the absoluteness of God and the freedom of man. Then they would have held to a God who, though changeless, can and of necessity does turn into the opposite of himself.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 54–55.

As the Westminster men did not have a true idea of God, they naturally did not, says Hendry, have a true, biblical idea of the will of God. They followed Augustine all too closely. "The fault of Augustine, later aggravated by Calvin, was that he traced the sovereignty of grace to the sovereignty of an inscrutable will, which was then absolutized and made the basis of a double predestination. But this absolute and inscrutable will is not the will of God as it is revealed in his act of grace in Christ."²³ No wonder then that this Augustinian-Calvinist doctrine simply "is no longer held by Presbyterian churches in the form in which it is set forth in this chapter."²⁴ The third chapter of the Confession, with its particularism, breathes "an air of dread and doom," whereas the New Testament passages, on which its chief teaching is built, with their universalism, "breathe all air of exultant joy."²⁵ There is no need, then, for Hendry to patch up the third chapter. It has already been rejected by the churches—for the best reason: nobody believes the particularism it teaches any more. Modern churchmen hold to the true universalism of the gospel; a new god must be projected.

Taking now Hendry's discussion of the Confession's teaching on God, on revelation, and on his decrees, we have the following picture:

The Westminster men thought that it was possible for them to have theoretical knowledge of God and of his revelation. They thought that there was an actually existing God whose substance corresponded to the ideas or concepts which they had about him. They thought that this God of their own construction actually controlled everything that came to pass in the course of the history of the world. This, their God, had an eternal decree according to which he worked out all that takes place in history, even those that take place in and through the deeds of men. In their mind, this God had segregated the elect from the reprobate from all eternity: Human history was nothing more than God's working out his decree through human beings. Armed with their determinist and rationalist philosophy, the Westminster men, though they were "neither judge nor jury, but judged," presumed to settle the issue of the final judgement for all men.

Hendry will have none of this. Why then did he not simply tear up the whole map based on such a determinist view of history? Why did he not tell us openly that it needs to be replaced with a modern map based on the assumptions of modern philosophy? Why try to put new wine in old bottles?

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

6. Dr. John A. Mackay and Dimensionalism ²⁶

We go back a step now as we discuss the dimension philosophy of Dr. John A. Mackay.

Dr. Mackay has throughout his career sought to avoid what he calls "extremes" in theology. "The hour has arrived for the Center to move towards the Frontier."²⁷ When Dr. Nels Ferré sought to sum up the significance of Dr. Mackay's leadership in the theological and ecclesiastical reconstruction of our day, he hit upon the expression "Dynamic Centralism." "This method of Dynamic Centralism," observes Ferré, "avoids both literalistic fanaticism, factually erroneous and divisive, and liberal vagueness, lacking in power and broadly false. John Mackay has correctly interpreted the best of the Reformed tradition as having steered down this middle channel of methodological power."²⁸ As to its message, says Ferré, "Dynamic Centralism is neither supernaturalism nor naturalism. It is the gospel of the incarnate Son of God."²⁹ Dynamic Centralism, consequently, teaches neither predestination nor human freedom as central, but God's sovereign election of mankind in Jesus Christ."³⁰

Dr. Mackay speaks of his theology as representing a true hierarchy of being. We might also call his view dimensionalism. We shall briefly set forth his view on the basis of his many writings.

Mackay thinks of the dimension of science as lower on the scale of being and of the dimension of person-to-person relationship as higher on the scale of being. A true hierarchy of being is, therefore, a view of being in which the impersonal dimension of science and history is made subordinate to the personal dimension of religious and moral relationships.

Of course, Dr. Mackay, together with all neo-orthodox theologians, wants to be "Christ-centered" in his teaching. Says Dr. Mackay: "Jesus Christ said, not in so many words, but by implication, that reality is hierarchical. That means that you have in the universe a graded scale of being. You have God, you have man, you have animals, you have matter; you have also spirits, angelic and satanic. There is

²⁶ The material in this section is taken largely from my article "Dimensionalism or the Word," in *The Presbyterian Guardian*, June 15, 1954, pp. 105–106, 118–119.

²⁷ "Editorial," *Theology Today*, 1954, Vol. 1, p. 152.

²⁸ "Dynamic Centralism in Theology," *Theology Today*, 1959, Vol. 16, p. 330.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 332.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 333.

an hierarchical nature of things in which true order is achieved when the lower gives obedience to the higher.”³¹ It is this that Jesus Christ tells us as the “Lord of thought.”

But “Jesus Christ is” also “the Lord of life.”³² As such, he tells us that as for him, so for his followers, crucifixion is inevitable.³³ “Deity in all its fullness was in the Crucified Jesus making manifest the self-giving and forgiving love of God. Jesus in his death wrestled with and overcame all the cosmic forces that stood in the way of man’s salvation. Rising again from the dead, the Crucified conquered death and made the great Enemy a spiritual mother.”³⁴ Hence, “when man sets out to serve God in truth the end is crucifixion.” But Jesus Christ saved death for spiritual ends. In the dread womb of reality new life was engendered and a new law of spiritual advance revealed.³⁵

Seminary graduates are not to preach that the eternal Son of God took to himself a human nature and in it bore the wrath of God for sinners. They are not to preach the “grand particularities” of the gospel. They are rather to preach about the nature of Reality. In Reality, they must tell men, there are gradations. God occupies the highest place. But by love he comes down with the whole of his being to share the state and fate of man, in suffering. This is the way downward. There follows a way upward. “For the Lord of life is the crucified conqueror of death.”³⁶ “Redemption, the participation of man in the life of God, is thus found by the seeker to be the meaning and the goal of Biblical truth”³⁷

It is this way downward and this way upward that, according to Mackay, constitute the divine drama of history. The central point of this drama is the cross. “In the Cross of Jesus Christ the inmost nature of evil and the inmost nature of divine redemptive love were both revealed. It was there that the supreme crisis in both the life of God and man took place.”³⁸ Man’s “ ‘Everlasting Nay’ hurled at God” was defeated when “God in Christ responded with an ‘Everlasting Yea.’ ”³⁹ Thus an end was made “of sin and its power over man.”⁴⁰ Thus all that stood

³¹ John Mackay, *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, Winter, 1950, p. 8.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 11.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ John A. Mackay, *A Preface to Christian Theology*, New York, 1941, p. 66.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

between man and his true destiny was removed. It is now the destiny of man to participate in the new order—the order of the Resurrection.

7. The Bible as Perspective

Where then must men learn about this divine drama, this “Eternal Yea” of God? Of course, in the Bible. But not in the Bible as an “objective criterion” of truth. “There is no such criterion where the human realm is dealt with, or any realm which is directly related to our ultimate sense of values.”⁴¹ It is only if we first reject the idea of an objective criterion and commit ourselves to participation in the drama of God that we can write “a lyrical interlude on Biblical authority.” “When men are willing to adopt a Biblical point of view, to put themselves in the perspective from which the Bible looks at all things and to identify themselves with the spiritual order of life which the Bible unveils, they understand the Bible, they see those spiritual realities about which the Bible speaks.”⁴²

8. The Great Commission

When men thus “learn Christ,” when they thus leave the balcony and walk the dusty road, they will understand “The Great Commission.” For on that road they will meet Jesus Christ as “a luminous category for thinking and a compelling personality for living.” This “compelling personality ... ordains us to a mission.”⁴³ And then we “move from Golgotha and the empty tomb to a mountain and a trail. There we confront an imperious Person with a pointing finger, and not merely a luminous personality.”⁴⁴ We then note that “this same Jesus Christ commands His Church to summon men everywhere to become His disciples.”⁴⁵ “He of the yoke and of the towel says: ... With my yoke upon you, and girded each of you with a towel ... get ready for the Road.”⁴⁶

9. Preaching to the Horizontally Minded

⁴¹ “The Gospel and Our Generation” in *The Christian Message for the World Today*, New York, 1934, p. 96.

⁴² John Mackay, *God’s Order*, New York, 1953, pp. 4–5.

⁴³ “The Great Commission and the Church Today,” in *Missions Under the Cross*, ed. Norman Goodall, New York, 1953, p. 129–30.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

Ibid., p. 132f.

As you thus walk along with your inseparable Road-Companion, you will meet those who are "the horizontally minded." "Horizontal-mindedness is interested only in a world of two dimensions, a world which is all surface with infinite breadth and infinite length.... Their characteristic gaze is parallel with the surface of the ground.... Their representative philosophy is a philosophy of history from which certainties and ultimates are excluded.... For such a type of mind the dimension of the eternal and the absolute means nothing."⁴⁷

What shall we say to these horizontal minded ones? "To a horizontally minded generation which has lost its way, our message is: Look up, sheer along the line of the vertical. Let the eternal in. We shall discover thereby the significance of life in the light of God. So shall our efforts at the organization of life on the terrestrial plane, be inspired by the eternal Wisdom and undertaken through the eternal Strength."⁴⁸

These that have learned to participate in the divine drama minister to a generation which has become aware of subterranean forces that "have torn great fissures in the placid surface of life," a generation which has "rediscovered hell, deep down in the human heart and in the social order." Having fearlessly explored with Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky "the nether world of human nature, human society and human institutions," they cry out: "Life is our need, life, life, life! Life that shall show Nietzsche and all neo-Nietzschians that Christianity is overwhelming abundance of life. Life that shall introduce a new meaning and thrill into our deadness, and make possible a totally new 'reverence for life' such as Schweitzer pleads for, with a consequent reconstruction of life—life that shall produce Christians who literally throb and pulsate with life as did Temple Gairdner of Cairo, as does Kagawa of Japan."⁴⁹

10. Pioneers at the Frontier

By thus asking the horizontally minded to look upward, and by proclaiming the "Eternal Yea" of God as victor over the "Eternal Nay" of the nether world, these horizontally minded ones will be brought to join the "brotherhood of enthusiasm" and to stand as pioneers at the frontiers of life. They will in turn find the "dimension of depth" in life. They will help men to change from individuals into persons by being "in Christ ... who proved to be the Man, history's center

⁴⁷ "The Gospel and Our Generation," p. 122.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 123–124.

because history's Lord."⁵⁰ Having seen the "vision splendid," having heard the "music of eternity," they will help those who are still in rebellion against the hierarchical structure of the Universe, who are out of step with reality, to find their true destiny in Christ. These those who live in a vacuum of Anonymity and Banality may find their true spiritual dimension of life.⁵¹

These in turn will speak with reverence of "God's adventurous concern for the human kind."⁵² They will tell those that live without the vertical perspective that "the ultimate spiritual pattern is that of a paternal Kingdom. Therefore might is not right. Souls are not for sale. Fatherhood among men, and all that it signifies, is grounded upon the reality of a Divine universal Fatherhood."⁵³ For "God's will to unity is ... the most central thing in cosmic human history. This Divine drive none dare ignore, for whatever man attempts that runs counter to it will ultimately be frustrated and shattered by it."⁵⁴

11. Hierarchical Simplicities

These "hierarchical simplicities" derive from "the famous *Theologica Germanica*, which played such a decisive part in the spiritual history of Martin Luther."⁵⁵ They derive more specifically from Kierkegaard, from Karl Barth, from Emil Brunner, from Paul Tillich, from Bergson, and from the Spanish mystic Miguel de Unamuno.

Here then is "truth with a lilt." The "great rift" in the universe has been closed. Such truth has the answer to the nihilistic mood of our time. As "the spectre of Nothingness" haunts the world, the universal church may call upon men to have the upward look. The church may tell all men everywhere that this is a "sacramental universe."⁵⁶

At the meeting of the Committee of the International Missionary Council at Willingen, Germany, in 1952, Dr. Mackay said, "We are happily agreed as to who Jesus Christ is; we start from an acceptance of His Deity and Saviourhood."⁵⁷

⁵⁰ John Mackay, *Heritage and Destiny*, New York, 1943, p. 26.

⁵¹ *God's Order*, p. 17.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁵⁵ *A Preface to Christian Theology*, p. 113.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁵⁷ "The Great Commission and the Church Today," p. 130.

No one needs then to be excluded from partaking in the preaching mission of the church. One need not, to be a preacher in the Christian church, believe the Bible as the objective revelation of God. One need not believe that God revealed himself to mankind at the beginning of history, making known his will to mankind. One need not believe in the virgin birth and the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ. One need not believe in the hope of eternal life in heaven or in eternal punishment for unbelief and disobedience to the revelation of God.

Did I say that one need not believe these points? Yes, one need not believe all or any of these doctrines. Many of those with whom Dr. Mackay is seeking to establish the universal church do not believe these doctrines. The modern dimension philosophy which Dr. Mackay is, with all possible force, impressing upon the church, does not require belief in such doctrines.

But this is putting it too mildly. For the truth of the matter is that Mackay's "hierarchical" scheme, his dimensionalism, does not allow for belief in such doctrines.

In concluding this chapter, we review what information we have as to the nature of the theology that Hendry and Mackay would substitute for that of the Westminster Confession.

12. The Theology of Dr. Hendry

As to Dr. Hendry, he wants, more than anything else, a free and sovereign God, such as is not found in the Westminster Confession. The God of the Confession becomes "in effect, his own executor."⁵⁸

A truly Sovereign God is a God of sovereign grace. The idea of sovereign grace, as the Bible teaches it, says Hendry, is not found in the Confession.

That the Confession has no proper doctrine of sovereign grace finds tragic expression in its chapter on justification. Calvin, says Hendry, speaks of Christ as fully discharging the debt that man owes to God and as making " 'a proper, real, and full satisfaction to his Father's justice.' "⁵⁹ The Confession adopted this idea. But "if God's grace is contingent on 'a proper, real, and full satisfaction' of his

⁵⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 55.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

justice, grace is not sovereign, and justification cannot be said to be 'only of free grace.' " ⁶⁰

Further, a truly free and sovereign grace is, argues Hendry, inherently universal. With its particularism, the Confession reduces "the freedom of grace to sheer caprice." ⁶¹ "The salvation provided in the covenant of grace is in God's eternal purpose intended for all men." ⁶² "The absence of a Christian profession" should not be held against those who have not heard the gospel. The final statement of the 12th chapter denies the possibility of salvation to those who 'frame their lives according to the light of nature, and the law of that religion they do profess.' But to assert that "good pagans" cannot "be saved surely overlooks Romans 2." ⁶³

In any case, men are not sinners in the sense in which the Reformers thought of them as sinners. When they spoke of man's "total depravity," they sometimes depicted man as though he "had become a monster." ⁶⁴ What we should mean by total depravity is that man has become a "battlefield of good and evil." ⁶⁵ As for original sin "it is manifestly unreasonable that one individual should be saddled with the guilt of another for an act committed far away and long ago.... " "The basic truth is our solidarity in sin." ⁶⁶

Finally, back of Hendry's idea of a God of sovereign, universal grace, is the idea of man's independence from the counsel of God as the Confession speaks of it. According to Hendry, the Confession is quite wrong, not only in denying the sinner's ethical freedom, but also in denying his metaphysical autonomy. The Confession, not only thinks of the sinner as ethically "passive" ⁶⁷, but also of his power of choice as a "farce." ⁶⁸ But it is only if man is metaphysically autonomous and ethically able to choose and to do the good, that he will reject the rigid system of determinism and, with it, the gloomy picture of man which he finds in the Westminster Confession.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 122.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

The truly free man—free metaphysically and ethically—will therefore reinterpret the Confession so that it accords with what he knows to be true about himself from experience. Such a truly free man will then go on to make “intelligent discrimination” among the contents of the Bible. Before he can put his “trust” in what it says, he is bound to distinguish “between the kernel and the husk.”⁶⁹ When read in accordance with what the truly free person knows to be true, it no longer “draws a sheer and absolute contrast between the saved and the lost, between saints and sinners....”⁷⁰ The truly free man knows that, “Reconciliation is not purchased from God by the work of Christ; it is the work of God in Christ: ‘All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself.... God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself’ (2 Cor. 5:18–19, RSV).”⁷¹

If the reader will now turn to *The Report of the Special Committee* he will see that, so far as its theology is concerned, Hendry might have written every word of it. The new Confession does not, to be sure, as Hendry in the book discussed, openly criticize the Westminster doctrines of the triune God and his revelation to man. The new Confession simply assumes that God is directly identical with Christ and that Christ is directly identical with his work of saving all men, but that Christ is not directly identical with Jesus of Nazareth.

Warfield spoke of the “vindication of the purity of the gospel by the Reformed world as over against ... Remonstrant adulterations.”⁷² In complete contrast with Warfield, Hendry not merely adulterates the gospel, but virtually rejects it.

To all intents and purposes, Hendry, like Adolf von Harnack, teaches the universal Fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of man as an ideal which a projected Christ will help all good men realize. The Confession of 1967 can be seen as only exactly the same thing.

13. The Theology of Mackay

When Mackay was installed as president of Princeton Seminary he called for a new theology with which the minister may meet the needs of men “in the present cultural situation.”⁷³ But what kind of theology do we need? It must not be a theology of ideas about God. It must be a theology, as Emil Brunner has taught

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁷² *Op. cit.*, p. 13.

⁷³ *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, April, 1937, p. 9.

us, of person to-person confrontation with God.⁷⁴ Have you not heard that orthodox believers insist that you must believe in their ideas about God? It is so easy to make ideas about divine things do duty for divine things themselves.

Unfortunately there has been in more recent times, argues Mackay in his *The Presbyterian Way of Life*, a great revival in a "minute and diminishing community of faith" that "continues to maintain a disdainful aloofness from all other church bodies, Presbyterian and non-Presbyterian alike." Mackay continues: "Deep, however, in the spirit of its members is an eschatological hope. This hope was expressed to me in my early teens by one of the denomination's saintly laymen. "The other churches may despise us today," said this Scottish Highlander, "but when the Millennium comes, they will all rally to the banner of truth which God has given to our Church." ⁷⁵

Mackay continues to tell us of his Odyssey till he enters the Millennium, not of the "Scottish Highlander" but of neo-orthodoxy. Through Neo-orthodoxy, Mackay makes the great discovery of how to be a loyal Presbyterian and at the same time an enthusiast for the idea of the universal church, embracing all Christians. "On the one hand," Mackay says, "I am today a more convinced and loyal Presbyterian than I have ever been before. On the other hand, I am less a Presbyterian absolutist and sectarian than at any time in my life." ⁷⁶

Was that Scottish Highlander the last of the species of absolutist and sectarian Presbyterianism? Oh, no! Mackay has been troubled by them all down life's path. Do you remember the twenties of this century? Do you remember how, at that time, "a General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. presumed that it had the right to define the central tenets of the Christian faith, that is, the 'system of doctrine' as contained in the historic Confessions"? ⁷⁷ Well, if you remember this, then you will also remember how over a thousand true Presbyterians stood up for their rights. The document they sent out to the church was called the *Auburn Affirmation*. American Presbyterianism, this document affirmed, truly requires that only when "the requisite number of Presbyterians vote favorably on a constitutional question is the General Assembly authorized to impose its collective will on fellow Presbyterians." ⁷⁸

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁷⁵ *Op. cit.*, pp. 11–12.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 51–52.

It was then that "a small group of conscientious and ardent spirits, who were totally insensitive, however, to the soul of Presbyterianism in matters of Faith and Order, withdrew from the Church." ⁷⁹

Don't you recognize the spirit of the Scottish Highlander in this? What a damage these "conscientious and ardent" spirits seemed, at first, to have done. All theological discussion came to a virtual standstill. "In a few years, however, the cathartic had done its work." ⁸⁰ The Church had received a new understanding of its heritage and mission. Theology was restored to its traditional place. "The 'Broadening Church' to use the designation of a distinguished Church historian, Dr. Lefferts A. Loetscher, who has dealt with this period of Presbyterian history, was on its way again, with a fresh vision of Truth and a deepened devotion to it." ⁸¹

The natural man of our culture today holds that there cannot be a god who reveals himself in nature or in the heart and history of man. Being absolutely committed to this "truth" that there can be no absolute truth that is available to men, over one thousand "Presbyterians" insisted that the substitutionary atonement, as an idea, could, at most, be a pointer toward something transcending all thought. The Presbyterian Church officially approved of this absolutist belief in the relativism of all truth and excised from the church "conscientious and ardent spirits" who did not agree with them. It is this development in the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. that Mackay hails with great delight. However, we must judge that it is the neo-orthodox theology of Barth and Brunner which deludes him into thinking that a church holding this theology has a Christ who speaks to the need of the age. How can a Christ who is a precipitate of modern culture do anything more than approve of that culture?

In *The Presbyterian Outlook* (December 13, 1965), Mackay writes an article dealing with the proposed Confession of 1967. The article is entitled "Commendation and Concern." Dr. Mackay, originally appointed a member of the committee to draft *A Brief Contemporary Statement of Faith*, was later led to resign his membership in the committee due to pressing duties. Nevertheless he was deeply concerned with the new Confession. He was especially concerned that the Gospel, as he understood it, find adequate expression in it.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

Dr. Mackay notices that the original Confession proposed in 1965 spoke of the Bible a "normative" witness to Christ. Is the Bible not much more than that, he asks. Is it not "the supreme source from which we draw truth that is authentically Christian"? Says Mackay, "It is my judgement that the Holy Scripture should be given a greater and more authoritative theological status than that which is accorded to it in this confessional statement. I would express my viewpoint thus: The Bible is the authoritative witness to Jesus Christ, in whom God and man became inseparably related, and is the supreme source from which is derived our knowledge of God's revelation of himself in the history and life of the Hebrew people, and of his redemptive purpose for mankind Jesus Christ, the God-man, who by his life, death and resurrection became man's Savior and Lord.... The Bible, it may be said, is self-authenticating."⁸² By thus speaking of the Bible, Mackay wants to give "more status to the Bible and greater attention to the fact and dimensions of Revelation."⁸³ What is true for the Bible is also true for the idea of Reconciliation, the central theme of the new Confession.

In the case of reconciliation as the content of biblical teaching, as well as with the Bible itself, Mackay is concerned about the "full dimension" of the term. But we note again that on the basis of the dimensionalist philosophy which Mackay holds, he can have neither the "normative witness" as truly normative, i.e., truly authoritative, nor reconciliation in the biblical, reformation sense of the term. His philosophy does not allow for a Jesus of Nazareth who is at once directly identical with God and man, who is truly God and truly man. He cannot have the Christ whom the Bible or the Chalcedon Creed presents.

What Mackay says in the *Outlook* article must not be thought of as anything more than an application of his "hierarchical simplicities" to the Christ of the Scriptures. In his pamphlet on *Protestantism* (Princeton, 1955), Mackay says that it is the hallmark of Protestantism to think of Scripture as constituting "the supreme authority in all questions relating to Christian faith and practice."⁸⁴

It soon appears, however, that it is neo-orthodox theology in which, according to Mackay, Protestantism has come to its own. The theology of Barth and Brunner has, he says, led to a "rebirth of Protestant orthodoxy."⁸⁵ Through these men "the Bible and the Bible alone became the supreme source of theology, as it had been in the Protestant tradition when it first broke upon the world. A new Biblicism was

⁸² *Op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁸⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 14.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

born which" was "still prepared to affirm with intellectual conviction and passionate faith that the Bible was the Word of God to man."⁸⁶

When, therefore, Mackay wants to give a higher status to the Bible than is given in *Blue Book* 1965, he does so frankly in terms of the activist categories of Barth, and in terms of his own hierarchical view of reality. We shall speak of Barth's views later. For the moment it may suffice to say that, to be fair to Mackay, one must not ascribe to him the historically orthodox view of Scripture as setting forth of a once-for-all revelation of God in Christ to man.

Finally, what holds for Mackay's proposed "improvement" on the new Confession as proposed in 1965 holds also for the "improvements" introduced in the 1966 Revision. Orthodox Christians may be duly impressed when the proposed Confession now speaks of the Bible "as the Word of God written," and when it is said that the "Scriptures are not a witness among others, but the witness without parallel."⁸⁷ But such words must not be wrested from the activist scheme on which the new Confession is built. It is the God who is identical with his act of incarnation in Christ, and it is the Christ whose person is identical with his working of saving all men, to which the Scriptures as the "word of God written" "give witness without parallel" in the Confession of 1967.

But this God and this Christ are, in the first place, projections made in accord with the specifications of Kant's three Critiques. The God and the Christ of such men as Hendry and Mackay, as has become clear enough in this chapter, are at most limiting ideals which the evolving ethical consciousness of sinful man sets before himself. Neither Hendry nor Mackay, nor any of the others who helped frame the new confession, according to their writing, believe even in the possibility of any such thing as an absolutely final manifestation of God to man in the dimension of ordinary history. At best and at most the Scriptures as written can be, on the modern post-Kantian view, pointers toward an unknown Christ. They merely give the "perspectives" of prophets and apostles who were in no better position to know anything about Christ than are we. Of the noumenal realm nothing can be known by man, but the moral and religious consciousness of man must act as if a revelation came too him from that realm. "Knowledge" of this realm is practical but never theoretical. It is the new God and the new Christ conceived in terms of Kantian philosophy, refined by Søren Kierkegaard and theologically expressed by Barth, that speaks to us in the new Bible of those whose theology underlies the new Confession. The God, the Christ and the Bible

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ 11. 187–188.

of the writers of the new Confession stand diametrically opposed to the God, the Christ and the Bible of the Westminster Confession.

Chapter 3: What Is Man?

In the previous chapter Dr. Hendry told us that the Westminster Confession does but scant justice to the freedom and responsibility of man. The question of human responsibility was also raised during the period of creedal revision which took place at the turn of the century. However, the discussion at that time, we are told, was carried on in terms of the difference between Calvinism and Arminianism. What was the relation between God's counsel and man's responsibility? What was the relation of the divine spirit to the human spirit in regeneration and conversion? We are informed that no answers could be given to such questions by either the Calvinists or the Arminians. Thinking to defend the sovereignty of God, the Calvinists could not even come in sight of it. Thinking to defend the freedom of man, the Arminians could not even come in sight of it. In fact, neither the Calvinists nor the Arminians had any proper notion of either the sovereign freedom of God or the freedom of man. The reason for this is that both the Calvinists and the Arminians tried to have a theory, or concept, of the freedom which they attempted to defend. When the Calvinists defended the sovereign will of God, they drew the conclusion that it must involve a limitation of the sovereignty of God. There was nothing wrong with their logic; it was in their premises that they were mistaken.

Now the Westminster Confession, says Hendry, is a Reformed confession. In its teaching with respect to the decrees of God, it is deterministic. Accordingly it thinks of the spirit of man as "altogether passive."¹ What is to be done? Are we to work in the direction of Arminianism? Of course not! We have just shown that Arminianism, no less than Calvinism, leads into a blind alley. It leads only to another theory of human freedom. Dr. Mackay, in effect, tells us that a "living" theology must be built on dimension-philosophy which is, in turn, based on the idea of human self-sufficiency. The philosophy of both Hendry and Mackay rests upon the contemporary view of man. We must, therefore, inquire as to what man thinks of himself in modern times. Without understanding this we can scarcely expect to understand the basic issue involved in the Confession of 1967.

Dr. Hendry shows us the way out of the old question between determinism and freedom. We are to get our help from modern philosophy. "The theology of

¹ Chap. 10:2.

the Reformation," he says, "implies the virtual elimination of the human spirit as a factor in man's encounter with the gospel." But this "theological conception of a condition in which man is 'altogether passive' and the human spirit plays no active part, was found, when it was examined philosophically and psychologically, to be quite untenable. Man cannot be deprived of active spirit without ceasing to be man. The development of the philosophy of spirit in post-Kantian idealism, originating in Germany, may be interpreted historically as a revolt against the suppression of the spirit in Protestant theology; for it was in its initial intention an affirmation, or reaffirmation, of the human spirit."²

Man as spirit, argues Hendry, has a "capacity for self-transcendence." In its "impulse to reach up to and aspire after the universal and the eternal, spirit is seen as the distinctive feature of man; it is that which distinguishes him from all other creatures; it is the secret of that creativity which he alone of all intelligent beings has evinced."³ Says Hendry: "The significance of this conception of spirit for the Christian understanding of man was first perceived by Kierkegaard, and it is doubtless to his influence that we may ascribe its current adoption in Christian anthropology."⁴

"If contemporary Christian anthropology shows an affinity with ... the conception of spirit that was recovered by idealistic philosophy, it may well be because of a feeling that this conception does fuller justice to the Biblical conception of spirit than the scheme of orthodox soteriology accorded to it."⁵ "It is spirit that keeps the relation between God and man essentially free and personal."⁶ In Scripture there is great stress on man's distinctness from God. "It is this paradoxical combination of emphases that provides the key to the essential meaning of spirit in Scripture, and explains the eventual recognition of the human spirit in Biblical thought. While the powerful sense of the dependence of all creaturely existence on God sometimes led to the use of language that equated vitality with direct participation in the divine Spirit and left no room for a human spirit, it came to be realized that man's unique ability to acknowledge his relation to the divine Spirit implies his ability to encounter spirit in its own

² George S. Hendry, *The Holy Spirit in Christian Theology*, p. 101.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

medium, so to speak, and this is intelligible only in terms of his endowment with created spirit.”⁷

1. The Need of the Idea of Paradox

According to the new theology, the Reformers in following Augustine, did not do full justice to the paradoxical nature of the relation of God to man. Even Karl Barth was apparently carried away by his notion of grace alone. He shows a tendency to override human freedom. By contrast, Hendry holds that the true notion of grace respects freedom in man and “engages it to the full extent.... Unless man’s freedom is engaged, the only relation that could be established between them [God and man] would be of the I-it order. According to the Augustinian conception of grace, in which God descends upon man like an irresistible force, man’s role is only that of an object; significantly enough, it invites comparison with that of a stock or a stone. But this is a travesty of the incarnation, which means precisely that God does not treat man in this impersonal way but accommodates himself to man by taking his form so as to engage him as a free subject and bring him into a personal relation with himself. For a personal relationship can be effected only when man is approached as ‘thou’; i.e., a subject whose freedom is respected. The incarnation means not only that God condescends to man, but that he respects him as man to such an extent that he accepts the definition of man and subsumes himself under it.... It is the paradox of grace that God, in descending to man, does not unman him, as we might expect, seeing that He is God; by choosing to become man, He affirms his manhood, He subjects Christology to anthropology.”⁸

Here then we have, according to Hendry, the positive solution for what, on his analysis of the Westminster Confession, was an insoluble problem. Here, too, we have the solution by which Mackay can, at the same time, be an ardent Presbyterian and an ardent adherent of the concept of human autonomy as found in modern philosophy. It is the paradoxical relation of God to man, through Christ incarnate, that solves at one stroke the whole Calvinist-Arminian, the whole Protestant-Roman Catholic dispute. Kierkegaard’s belief that truth is subjectivity, set men free from the hopeless effort of applying the truth which obtains in the “I-thou dimension” to the world of the “I-it dimension.” The sovereignty of God can now be seen for what it is in a way that it has never been seen before. The sovereignty of God is now seen to have nothing to do with cosmic and psychological determinism. God’s sovereignty is his freedom to

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

subject himself to the condition and fate of man. At the same time the freedom of the spirit of man, as Plato, Kant, and others have developed it, has nothing to do with an attempt to escape from determinism. Man's freedom is now the freedom to encounter God in Christ in the I-thou dimension.

2. Dr. McCord's Appeal to Men as Free

We are now in position to make a forward stride in our understanding of the "living theology that furnishes the thought-pattern for the Confession of 1967." We now know that it is the modern philosophical view of man, as developed by Immanuel Kant and his followers, especially by Kierkegaard, that has motivated the great advance in the "Dynamic Centralism" of the new theology.

3. Truth as Subjectivity

We also know that the new theology builds upon the intellectual revolutions wrought by Freud and Darwin. Says Dr. James I. McCord, the president of Princeton Seminary: "Actually, the Reformers could not ask 'What is man?' They did not have the tools and background to raise this question. They could only ask, 'What is man as sinner?' But the nineteenth century produced a revolution in biology with Darwin and his discoveries, to be followed by a revolution in the social sciences and psychology."⁹ Modern science and philosophy have furnished us with an anthropology that enables man to be free in his 'I-thou dimension' and determined in the 'I-it dimension' without contradiction.

Let modern science do all it will in giving naturalistic and deterministic interpretations to everything that pertains to nature and history. Let modern psychology include man himself as enmeshed in the merry-go-round of subject and object. Christ has told us, in effect, that Being is hierarchical. Above the realm of phenomena, the realm of science, there is the realm of noumena, the realm of spirit and freedom. Above the impersonal I-it dimension is the personal I-thou dimension. It is in this realm of person to-person "encounter" that we move with utter freedom.

4. Man Is Free From the Law of Contradiction

The law of contradiction no longer troubles us; this law applies only to the world of things, the world of the subject-object relations. In the world of persons,

⁹ *Theology Today*, 17, 3, pp. 297–298.

God is wholly free to become the opposite of himself in the incarnation and man is wholly free to become the opposite of himself by participation in the being of God. The Reformers still accepted the Chalcedon Creed with respect to the person of Christ. "But with the coming of the nineteenth century there were new factors unknown to the Chalcedonians. One was the new critical philosophy of Kant, with its emphasis on the subjective limitations of human knowledge. Another was the replacement of the old ontological categories with psychological categories, while a third was a new understanding and mastery of historical tools. Basically, therefore, the Christological question remains undealt with in our own time in the terms that are now available to us." ¹⁰

Granted, however, that we shall see new principles used by a new theology that will go much further even than we are now able to go, these principles will all spring from the vision of the freedom of man that we even now possess. Let us now rejoice in the fact that we have in this new view of man, and in the distinction between the I-thou and the I-it dimension that is based on it, the means with which we can avoid the pitfalls into which our fathers, all of them, fell. We now have (a) a totally new approach to the question of knowledge, (b) a totally new approach to the question of being, and (c) a totally new approach to ethics. We now know that man is spirit, that man is free.

A. Man is Free from the Idea of Final Revelation

According to the new theology, knowledge of man as free liberates us, once for all, from a view of God's revelation to man as directly identical with the canon of Scripture. Just think of the distressing limitations under which "the Westminster divines did their work on the theory of Scripture. It was a theory, a concept of Scripture they tried to develop: as though God in his sovereign grace could be confined and cabined in a conceptual scheme. Says the Confession: "Yet, notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our heart." ¹¹ About this, Hendry observes, "The testimony of the Spirit, it is clear, is here understood to deliver a formal theological judgment regarding the authority of Scripture, and thus, in effect, to provide a ready-made solution to the difficult problems that surround the establishment of the canon." ¹²

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 298.

¹¹ 1, 5.

¹² *Op. cit.*, pp. 76–77.

B. The “Christ-Event” Appears on the Horizon

Now compare the approach of the new Confession to that of the old. We now know that the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit are what they are in their work of reconciling men. We have now shed all ontological categories. For us all is Act. All is the Christ-Event, and the Holy Spirit brings men into self-conscious relation to this Christ-Event. For us the Holy Spirit always does what he “did” through those who wrote the words of Scripture. Dr. W. A. Visser’t Hooft, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, had the true vision when he said that the Council may “*Deo Volente*, suddenly take on the formidable authority of an organ of the Holy Spirit. Its whole life must be a constant counting with that possibility and a constant watching for that intervention from above.”¹³

In the field of being, we now start from the fact that the God-man, Jesus Christ, the Christ-Event, includes all the past and all the present. The calendar no longer troubles us. It belongs to the I-it dimensions. The death and resurrection are one event, an event primarily in the realm of *Geschichte* rather than in that of *Historie*. God in Christ is both wholly revealed and wholly hidden as man confronts him. This is paradox but not contradiction. With the help of the idea of paradox, Kierkegaard has helped us to see that, in the Incarnation, that which is logically “impossible” has become a fact.

C. Richard Kroner Explains Kant’s View of Man and the World

(1) Ethical Voluntarism

Then, in the field of ethics, we start, as Kant taught us to start, with the idea of freedom. Let Richard Kroner, one of the world’s authorities on the philosophy of Kant, explain the significance of this. In his *Kant’s Weltanschauung*, Kroner speaks first of Kant’s *Ethical Voluntarism*. “Kant’s philosophy,” he says, “is voluntaristic.”¹⁴ This does not mean, he adds, that Kant holds to a voluntaristic rather than to an intellectualistic metaphysics such as was the case of Schopenhauer. It is not from a metaphysics of the will but from the activity of the will in its moral capacity that we must begin to think about ourselves and the world. “All metaphysics is necessarily intellectualistic and consequently exalts the intellect over the will. He, on the other hand, who declares that the will is supreme has to conclude that the nature of things is incomprehensible.”¹⁵ “Once the possibility of making the will

¹³ *The Christian Century*, January 8, 1958, p. 42, quoted by Truman B. Douglas.

¹⁴ *Kant’s Weltanschauung*, tr. by John E. Smith, Chicago, 1956, p. 6.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

the center of a metaphysical theory is dismissed, then the will can be conceived as making itself the center—the ultimate center and unity. Such a will would then attain to the high rank of metaphysical or supersensible.... This end transcends the finite wishes and desires of the individual and unites him with all mankind ... ethics thus replaces metaphysics.”

“The will obtains its metaphysical dignity not through the instrumentality of metaphysics but through itself, in so far as it directs itself toward the good.”¹⁶

It is thus that Kant obtains his concept of human freedom and autonomy at one stroke. “There is no metaphysical law of nature, but it is the moral law within our will which is the metaphysical law. It is the law of the supernatural or supersensible world. He who obeys that law rises above the level of the world of sense. He rises above that necessity and order which govern nature; he enters the realm of Freedom and reason which transcends the phenomenal sphere.”¹⁷

“For Kant moral obligation is something ultimate and absolute; it signifies the limit and also the summit of all human consciousness. In fact, it signifies the peak of man’s whole existence. To explain it or to derive it from a higher source would only deprive this obligation of its unrelieved gravity and its inexorable rigor.”¹⁸ “Every metaphysical system conceives of the world as something finished and thereby leaves the will with nothing to do.”¹⁹

(2) Ethical Dualism

The ethical voluntarism of Kant therefore involves an ethical dualism. The world of nature stands sharply over against the intelligible world of freedom as the latter stands sharply over against it.²⁰ But the dualism is in the interest of a more ultimate monism. Kant seeks for a synthesis between his two worlds. However, he seeks for this synthesis not on metaphysical but “on primarily ethical grounds.”²¹ In seeking for an ethical synthesis between his two worlds, Kant faces the issue of the relation between morality and religion. Why should religion be brought into the picture at all? Is not morality sufficient to itself? Are not we ourselves, rather than God, the legislators of the moral law? “We submit to the

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 23–24.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 30–32.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

law not on God's behalf but for our own sake."²² The moral freedom of man must be "freedom from external supernatural powers" as well as "freedom from nature."²³ "No one before Kant had ever exalted man so much; no one had ever accorded him such a degree of metaphysical independence and self-dependence."²⁴

"Even God is dependent upon the moral law instead of the law being dependent upon him."²⁵

Kant did believe in God. He believed in the need of religion as well as in the need of morality. But he believed in a God who is ethically rather than metaphysically necessary. "If faith in God is a postulate of moral reason, his existence is as unshakably certain as is the validity of the moral law itself; this is Kant's authentic conviction."²⁶ And God must be thought of as "the absolutely sovereign and supreme being, beyond and above all relations, to be vindicated by nothing but himself."²⁷

"Does it not imply that man as a moral being ought to live as if God did not exist ... whereas man as a religious being should live as if God did exist."²⁸

"God as well as the moral law become ambivalent; they appear at the same time to be both independent and dependent upon each other, absolute and yet non-absolute."²⁹ Kroner suggests that here we have an "eternal antimony which even the ingenuity of Kant could neither evade or solve...."³⁰ This is the price that we must pay for an ethical voluntarism. For as soon as we seek to resolve the contradiction, we again make the intellect supreme and therefore fall back into the realm of the relative.

(3) Ethical Subjectivism

Kroner would therefore lead us on from ethical voluntarism and ethical dualism to ethical subjectivism. "If the moral will is the center of the human self—

²² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 36–37.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 39–40.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 44, italics added [italics removed—ed.]

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

if this self centers in morality—and if morality is the center of *Weltanschauung*, then this *Weltanschauung* must be subjective, for the human self is human just to the extent to which it is the self of a willing and thinking subject differing fundamentally from all objects that can be willed or thought.”³¹ For although faith must be faith in God, this faith “is nevertheless not a faith in any object or objective entity but in the supreme subject, in the absolute self.”³²

But how is this subjectivism then consistent with the “objective” character of science? And how, we add, is the monistic or hierarchical relation between the world of freedom and the world of necessity to be attained? Are both worlds perhaps to be subjected to one subject? Is this subject then the human or is it the divine subject?

We do know, says Kroner, that Kant saved science by the subjectivism of his epistemological theory. He called this theory “transcendental idealism.” The objectivity of science was not to be sought any longer where either the rationalists or the empiricists sought it, namely, in objective rationality or in the objective existence of things in themselves as though the two worlds may easily be fused. For the idea of morality, everything depends first of all upon its being independent of nature. “Nature has to be restricted so that the moral will has a field of its own; theoretical knowability itself has to be restricted so that freedom can grow.”³³ “The concept of a limited realm called nature springs therefore from the ethical spirit of Kant’s *Weltanschauung*; it springs from its voluntaristic, dualistic, and subjectivistic features.”³⁴ “It is this [ethical] subjectivism which restricts the sphere of both objectivity and of natural objects and at the same time refuses to allow nature to exhaust the whole of existence.”³⁵ The monism that we look for must, therefore, most emphatically, not be a metaphysical whether it be in an intellectualistic or a voluntaristic monism.

However, it is ethical subjectivism that enables us to understand “the doctrine of epistemological subjectivism. If it is true that practical reason regulates the life of the will and the realm of moral existence, is it not possible that theoretical reason (or intellect) regulates the realm of natural existence, in so far as this realm is regular at all?”³⁶

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 63–64.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

(4) Ethical Phenomenalism

Herewith we have reached the last state in the thinking of Kant, namely, that of ethical phenomenalism or monism. In his freedom man belongs to the purely intelligible or noumenal realm. "Nature is rationalized by the knowing subject and thus elevated to its true essence or to its essential truth."³⁷ The subjectivism of Kant's epistemology as well as that of his ethics heightens and exalts the significance of man. As the ethical realm is not degraded or debased by the subjectivity of the moral will, the realm of scientific knowledge is likewise not impaired by the subjectivity of nature. Instead, it is rational sovereignty and power which is manifest in both fields and which corresponds to the majesty of truth and morality."³⁸ Nature has to be essentially subjective if it is to be rational. "For what we call nature is determined by the rational character which makes scientific investigation and the foundation of scientific explanation possible."³⁹

The idea underlying this Kantian scheme, as outlined by Kroner, is that of human freedom or autonomy. How could man be responsible in a determinist scheme of things? Away then with the idea of a God who in any way and to any extent, directly or indirectly, determines man. Even the world of science or nature must not be thought of as directed by the providence of God or as expressive and revelational of the plan or counsel of God. There can be no revelation in nature on the basis of which man is without excuse if he serves not God. In itself, the stuff of man's environment is unmolded, uninterpreted. All the interpretation that man meets in it, he meets in it because he has brought it with him; he himself has put it there.

Man is therefore free. With his freedom he is inherently capable of making of himself and of the world what he will.

There is, to be sure, a necessity of sorts. Man cannot actually produce the raw stuff of nature. He can only give order to it by the categories of his thought. There is, therefore, a world of the sub-personal or impersonal. It is the world of science, the world of things, the world of the "I-it dimension" and therefore the world of necessity. Man, existing physically as well as spiritually, finds himself, to an extent, enmeshed in this world. He finds himself to be selfish. To treat other people as free persons with you, that is your ideal. But you find an evil tendency in you to treat other persons as things. You therefore do not fully realize your

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 69–70.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

own ideal of yourself. Men together do not realize the ideal they have set before them as to what they ought to be. Ideally, all men should treat each other as persons. Paradise then would come to earth. The "I-it dimension" of science would be made subject to the "I-thou dimension" of free personality and man would be all in all. Glory to man in *excelsis!*

It is this view of man as free or autonomous, in terms of which Hendry interprets or, rather, reinterprets the major teachings of the Westminster Confession. It is this view of man as autonomous, in terms of which the idea of God's clear and direct revelation to man in nature and in Scripture virtually is rejected by both Hendry and Mackay.

Nature therefore is to be thought of as a fragment of a whole much larger than itself. "Nature as such is not the whole; it is not fully known or knowable by scientific methods because by such methods it is not known in the perspective of the whole."⁴⁰ "The real opposite of subjectivism is therefore not objectivism but absolutism. Kant's epistemological subjectivism does not restrict scientific knowledge because it denies objectivity, but because it denies its absoluteness."⁴¹

In the idea of ethical phenomenalism or monism, therefore, the subordination of nature to freedom is expressed. At the same time, a true ethical rather than metaphysical monism is attained. The man of religion need not feel any absolute laws of nature that preclude or condemn his seeking contact with the infinite. "Nature ought to be nothing more than appearance; such a view is demanded by the ethical spirit of Kant's *Weltanschauung*."⁴²

Ethical Voluntarism, Ethical Dualism, Ethical Subjectivism and Ethical Phenomenalism or monism are the four points of view, all in the last analysis involved in one another, under which Kroner views the whole work of Kant.

It is this modern, this Kantian view of man, so well outlined for us by Kroner, that lies at the basis of the new Confession. The new Confession is to be man-centered rather than God-centered. The God of the Westminster standards is to be replaced by the projected ideal of man. It is this projected ideal, in reality man himself, that is, henceforth, to be called God. Great is Diana of the Ephesians! In Paul's day all the world knew that her image had fallen from heaven. Today all

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 95.

the world knows that the image or symbol of the ideal man, as contrived by man himself, has been projected into the unknowable realm of Kant's noumenal world.

Before turning to the neo-orthodox theology which bows so reverently before this new God, we notice an earlier instance of a Christian theologian bowing humbly at this shrine.

Chapter 4: Grace And Personality

Dr. Hendry refers us to the work of John Oman on *Grace and Personality*. Says Hendry: "In this book, which was first published in 1917, the distinction between the I-thou and the I-it relationship, which was to receive its classical exposition at the hands of Martin Buber six years later was already drawn and applied to theological thinking."¹ What makes Oman's book of special value for our effort to understand the new theology that finds expression in the Confession of 1967 is the fact that the new idea of God's grace, built on the new idea of man, finds striking expression in it.

Oman develops his idea of grace in sharp contrast to that which he finds expressed in the Westminster standards.

1. The Infallibilities

Says Oman: "A doctrine both of God and of man of the utmost simplicity and definiteness was possible on the old dogmatic basis. God was the absolute and direct might and all He did without error or failure; and man was the creature of His hand, directly fashioned and needing nothing for his making but the word of power. Then to deal with the Omniscient was to have infallible truth, to deal with the Supreme to have absolute legislation, to deal with the Omnipotent to have irresistible succour. Faith was acceptance of infallible truth, justification coming to terms with absolute legislation, regeneration the inpouring of efficacious grace; and the whole dogmatic edifice stood solid and four-square."²

It is useless for us today, argues Oman, to defend this dogmatic view of knowledge, of being and of ethics. Of course, there are always "persons encased in a jointless armour of obscurantism hard enough to turn the edge of any fact. But the value, for truth and beauty and goodness, of our own insight, choice and deliberate purpose, being once seen, can never again be wholly renounced."³

¹ *Holy Spirit in Christian Theology*, p. 12, note 42.

² *Grace and Personality*, pp. 4–5.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

2. The Underlying Problem

Such obscurantists cling to the old idea of God as omniscient and omnipotent in the way that Linus clings to his blanket. But "what all life does say to us is that God does not conduct His rivers, like arrows, to the sea."⁴ "The defence of the infallible is the defence of the canal against the river, of the channel blasted through the rock against the basin dug by an element which swerves at a pebble or a firmer clay. And the question is whether God ever does override the human spirit in that direct way, and whether we ought to conceive either of His spirit or of ours after a fashion that could make it possible. Would such irresistible might as would save us from all error and compel us into right action be in accord with either God's personality or with ours?"⁵

We who have the vision of man as free spirit therefore have learned to start from reality, from actual experience. It is this that gives a person-to-person idea of grace. "All infallibilities presuppose an idea of grace mechanically irresistible. But a direct force controlling persons as things is no personal relation between God and man; and the religion which rests on it does nothing to maintain the supreme interest of religion, which is the worth of persons over things, of moral values over material forces. God might so act upon men and still be a person, but there would be nothing personal in His acting; He might even care for each individual, but it would not be as a soul thinking its own thoughts and acting according to its own thinking; and the whole method has to be restricted to special spheres of grace, else it would not be an explanation of the world in any essential way different from heartless, rational, cosmic process."⁶

We are now prepared to see that a new view of grace is coming to expression simultaneously with the new view of man and his insight into the hierarchical nature of being. We of the twentieth century have learned to see "how absolute moral independence and absolute religious dependence are not opposite but necessarily one and indivisible."⁷ Oman, even before Mackay, exults in the fact that with the help of Kierkegaard's paradox the problem of contradiction no longer troubles him!

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

3. Irresistible Grace

Herewith we are ready to reject the old notion of irresistible grace. For the old dogmatic view "grace is the might of omnipotence directed by omniscience."⁸ The religious man ascribed all things to God.⁹ "Hodge's argument abides indisputable. Everything he says, on the Arminian side at once loses its value, if it be admitted that regeneration or effectual calling is the work of omnipotence. As with the scientist or the metaphysician, so here, God is absolute, unconditioned force, force infinite and direct, in respect of which the finite force of the human will is in nothing to be regarded."¹⁰ We can now be good Presbyterians.

Of course, argues Oman, the shallow views of Pelagianism are not the answer to Augustinianism, and Arminianism is not the answer to Calvinism.¹¹ We must not set human personality apart from and over against God.¹² The same is true of "the catholic compromise."¹³ Nor did the Reformation or post-Reformation offer escape. The "conception of grace remained unchanged, being more clearly than ever conceived as the operation of omnipotence directed by omniscience."¹⁴ "In all these systems there is a unity of aim which makes it plain that, for all alike, the perdurable ground of all high faith and of all deep morality alike is the grace of God. But, if they are all in conflict with fact, bankrupt in logic, and unable to reconcile religion and morality—the most inseparable interests of our nature, would it not seem that something is omitted in their conception of grace, some finer, subtler, more pervasive dependence of man on God, as though we should assume that the lake depends upon the ocean only by canal or tide, and forget the rain-bearing clouds, which not only rise from the bosom of the deep and forever maintain the lake in brimming fullness, but which refresh all its landscape, so that it is not as a dead eye in the pale and rigid visage of a desert, but is the ever changing glory in the face of the fair and fertile vale?"¹⁵

The only hope of escape is "to rid ourselves of the idea of omnipotence guided by omniscience as an irresistible violence on a pre-determined scheme, and conceive it as freedom to choose its own ends, directed by a manifold

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 33.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 34ff.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

wisdom selecting and using the means for attaining them, we begin to see how worthless is this schedule of the Divine and how vital is an understanding of our own experience.”¹⁶

Starting from our own experience as free spirits, and thinking of God as our Father the whole God-man relation is seen in ethical perspective.¹⁷ “The supreme question, therefore, regarding grace, would be, What, amid all it does with us, is the end it seeks to serve? And the certain answer would be that its end is the succour of moral persons.

“In that case the way to understand the nature of grace is not to theorize about the operation of omnipotence, but to ask ourselves, What is a moral personality, and how is it succoured? To consider instead the coruscation of omnipotence as resistless might and of omniscience as undeflected fixity of plan, is as if an engineer could only prove his power by making engines weighty enough to break all the bridges. Real power, on the contrary, is never violent, and real wisdom never rigid.

“If grace, therefore, be the operation of love, the essence of which is to have its eyes directed away from its own dignity or any form of self-display and towards the object of its care, an inquiry into its nature must be vain which does not start by considering the human nature it would succour. In that case, the question is not, what is the nature of God’s grace? but, What is the nature of the moral person?”¹⁸

Now “the vital and distinguishing characteristic of a moral person is what philosophers have called autonomy. When that is lost, man is no longer a person, but is a mere animate creature. This independence is the singular, the unique quality of a person, and in any relations between persons where, on either side, this is ignored, the relation becomes less than personal.”¹⁹ Man is self-conscious, self-directed and self-determined, these three, conjoined into one, or he is not a person. “No succour that would be personal may ignore this central characteristic of the moral person.”²⁰ It is only if we think of God as thus moral persons that we think of his grace in truly ethical, i.e., in truly personal terms.²¹ “An inquiry into the nature of grace must, therefore, begin by asking what is meant by a moral

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 40–41.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 41–42.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

²¹ *Ibid.*

person being self-determined, according to his own self-direction, in the world of his own self-consciousness; for only then can we know how he is to be succoured." ²²

On Oman's view as on Hendry's view, we have, in this manner, superseded all the controversies of the past. We now know that the "essential quality of a moral person is moral independence" but that "the essential quality of a religious person is to depend on God." ²³ Formerly men would have had difficulty in combining these notions. For us no such difficulty obtains. "We are persons, and not merely individuals, precisely because we unite in one of these seeming opposites, and attain our independence as we find ourselves in God's world and among His children." ²⁴

It is this person-to-person relation between God and man that alone keeps us from thinking of a grace "which acts as impersonally as bleaching powder whitening cotton," cleansing our souls. ²⁵ God is our Father. That is the "essence of the situation." ²⁶ This fact is manifest "in all our Lord's life and teaching." ²⁷

All legal relationship between God and man now disappears. ²⁸ We now see that God is inherently gracious. ²⁹

4. Reconciliation

What then is the need and place for reconciliation? What is the nature of reconciliation? The answer to the second question may be given first. The nature of reconciliation is determined by the need for transformation of the human person. Grace is therefore gracious as it both possesses us and sets us free. ³⁰ "No direct operation of grace as power could ever establish such an understanding. What is more, it could not establish a personal relationship at all. The more it is omnipotent in the sense of utterly overriding our personal will and molding us as

²² *Ibid.*, p. 44.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

mere clay in the hand of the potter, the less it gives us a right to refer its source to a person.”³¹

As to the first question, the answer is that man is a sinner. He is at “enmity against God.”³² Of course, this does not mean that we have or have had a “quarrel with a dim, vast figure in a remote Heaven.”³³ It means rather that we are in bitter hostility to reality, with the sense that it is all against us.”³⁴ Now the significance of reconciliation is that we accept the discipline God appoints and the duty He demands.³⁵

5. The New View of Faith in Christ

Still further, reconciliation is through Christ. So there must be a place for Christ in our person-to-person relation with God. God “can give a true faith only by taking the trouble to show Himself worthy of our trust in all He appoints for us, all He requires of us, and all He purposes with us....”³⁶ What then do we, now that we “no longer rely on our infallibilities,” mean by revelation? God “is a person who would be personally understood....”³⁷ This means that his word “is inspired as it inspires us to lay ourselves open to God’s appeal” and that it therefore “approves itself as it reconciles and not as it informs.”³⁸

“But, if God, being the Father, can have no more adequate manifestation than His children, what could we seek beyond One who accepts all life’s discipline and meets all its demands, deals with all God’s children in love, and unflinchingly makes peace by obedience to righteousness even to death? It is a manifestation, moreover, we can verify, as, even amid our own failure, it enables us to realize God’s gracious personal relation to us in all things.

“For this reason, faith in Christ is not primarily as He meets us either in Scripture or in doctrine, but as He meets us in life.”³⁹

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, p. 122.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

"Only if grace is a personal relation, does it need to work through human experience and God be manifest in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself."⁴⁰

6. The New View of Justification

Finally a word must be said about justification and its place in the new person-to-person relation between God and man. We may say that "grace sets right our legal relation to God, but only by making it cease to be legal."⁴¹ For "the essence of God's pardon is in showing Himself so gracious as to give us faith in His love, and it is in this sense that we are justified by faith."⁴² "We have forgiveness and all its fruits because by faith we enter the world of a gracious God, out of which the old hard legal requirements, with the old hard boundaries of our personality and the old self-regarding claim of rights, have disappeared, a world which is the household of our Father where order and power and ultimate reality are of love and not of law.

"In that world atonement is a veritable experience and not a legal fiction, in that world and not in any other. There the sacrifice and service of Jesus Christ are no longer the crude legal device of taking so absolutely personal a thing as guilt and transferring it to the shoulders of another, an innocent person, or the equally crude moral device of making His righteousness ours, but are the manifestation of our deepest and holiest relation both to God and man in a world, the meaning of which, in spite of everything that appears to the contrary, is love."⁴³

This is as far as we need go, for "the first object of religion is not to demonstrate the reality of a future life, but to reconcile us to God in this."⁴⁴

7. The New View of the Triumph of Grace

Grace then brings triumph in human life. "A moral subject must be an end in himself."⁴⁵ But morality cannot solve its own problem. It needs the succour that religion alone can give. "We cannot have a true moral subject, his morality at once springing from his own worth and blessedness, yet forgetful of both and mindful only of call and opportunity, unless, by reconciliation to God in a world

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 210–211.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 211.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 213–214.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 305.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 307.

which serves our eternal good, we have the power of an endless life wherein law and love are one. Not till we have won this victory, have we a subject who is at once utterly loyal to himself and utterly forgetful of himself.”⁴⁶ The end of it all is to see that “the ethical meaning of love is to treat every man as an end in himself, reverencing him, not for what he is, but for what he ought to become.”⁴⁷ This is accomplished by grace alone.

Reading this brief summary of Oman’s work will enable the reader to understand why Hendry recommended it. The virtually Pelagian view of grace which Oman advocates so ardently is the view of grace which Hendry so greatly admires. Hendry speaks of “the necessity for a revision of the conception of grace in Protestant theology” and notes that this revision was “first urged by John Oman.”⁴⁸ Hendry’s new view of grace is that which springs from and accords with modern dimensional philosophy. It is this virtually Pelagian view of grace which is advocated by theologians who wrote or influenced the writing of the Confession of 1967.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 309.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *loc. cit.*

Chapter 5: The Christ-Event

In the preceding chapters we have referred to neo-orthodox theology as the theology which underlies the Confession of 1967. Karl Barth is the father of that theology, and the idea of the Christ-Event is central to the theology of Barth. We therefore deal in this chapter with this central notion of the Christ-Event of neo-orthodox theology. Says Dr. Edward A. Dowey, the chairman of the committee that drafted the proposed Confession: "The only criterion of Christian theology, finally, is Barth's: Jesus the Christ, as event and un-'translated.'" ¹

1. Difficulties with Barth's Theology

To be sure, when Dowey, Mackay and Hendry speak with enthusiasm of the neo-orthodoxy of Barth, this does not mean that they have no reservations with respect to it. Hendry, for instance thinks that there is a measure of determinism in Barth's theology. According to Barth's theology, says Hendry, "man is held so firmly in the embrace of divine grace from the beginning of his existence—and indeed from all eternity—that he never seems to reach a position from which he can assume a really free relation to God."² For all that, Barth's determinism, in contradistinction to that of the Westminster Confession, is, according to Hendry, of the sort that can be remedied. This cannot be said of the determinism of the Westminster Standards. Moreover, Barth himself supplies the means with which his determinism may be remedied. The determinism of Barth's later work can be corrected by tipping the balance a bit toward the indeterminism of his earlier work. Says Hendry: "The question then is whether the dialectic of the *Romans*, although it belongs to a stage which Barth is supposed to have superseded does not still provide a corrective to the dialectic of the *Dogmatik*, and whether both of them must not somehow be combined in a higher synthesis, before we can have a theological dialectic that is fully adequate to its theme."³

¹ Dowey, "Tillich, Barth, and the Criteria of Theology," *Theology Today*, Vol. 15, April, 1958, p. 58.

² "The Dogmatic Form of Barth's Theology," *Theology Today*, Vol. 13, October, 1956, p. 314.

³ *Ibid.*

What holds for Dowey and for Hendry holds also for Dr. Arnold B. Come, another framer of the Confession of 1967. Come has, he thinks, rather serious reservations about Barth's leading principles. His point is similar to that of Hendry. There is danger, argues Come, that in Barth's theology man loses his true subjectivity. According to Barth, says Come, man is related to God in the way that the Son is related to the Father. Here is, says he, where the danger lies. For all intents and purposes, Barth denies a distinctly personal character to the Son in relation to the Father. Says Come: "But it is precisely this concept of the 'Persons' of the Trinity which Barth has gone to great pains to refute. He prefers to speak of the One God in three modes of being (or existence). It is the One God who is Person in the modern sense of the term"⁴ Applying this point to the question in hand, Come says: "If Father and Son are two modes of being of the same Person, and if God and man are related in a way analogous to the relation of Father and Son, then man is no subject or person in himself, over against the Person of God."⁵ Moreover, what follows from the analogy of man to God patterned after the relation of the Son to the Father, applies with even more devastating results when we think of the human spirit in relation to the divine spirit.

The basic contention of Come is that Barth has not really done full justice to the I-thou scheme as he applies that scheme to the God-man relation. He says: "... and with this point we come to the thesis at which this entire book has been driving thus far: if man is truly a thou in relation to the I of God, then man himself is person in whom there is a subjective I as well as an objective I, and who is capable of achieving a unified I, a self, a spirit."⁶ The "real problem for Barth's schema," Come argues in his book on Barth, "arises as to the relation between God and man. Is man just a self-projection of God as the Son is to the Father, or is man a real subject and thou to God's person as man is to another man? Barth remains equivocal on this issue.... In making sure that God alone gets the credit for salvation, he is in danger of reducing its object, man, to a nonentity."⁷

Moreover, if man is thus reduced to a nonentity by Barth's view of the trinity, then man's faith in Christ, as well as Christ's work of his reconciliation for man, has little, if any, significance. According to Barth, reconciliation "has been accomplished by and in Jesus Christ, and he will bring redemption to an end. So the mission of the church is not to save the world but to proclaim to the world

⁴ *Human Spirit and Holy Spirit*, Philadelphia, 1959, p. 85.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁷ Come, *An Introduction to Barth's "Dogmatics" for Preachers*, Philadelphia, 1963, p. 158.

that it has been saved in Jesus Christ, to tell the glad tidings. The church consists simply of those who know this to be true and who have been called into the service of Christ as he extends in fact his victory over all that has already been done in principle.”⁸ We see, says Come, that “the same tendency to Christomonism that threatens to relativize history, absorb humanity, and empty faith here tends to imply that everything has already been accomplished for the world in Jesus Christ. In some transcendent ontological sense, all humanity has been fundamentally transformed by a single stroke on the cross of Christ.”⁹

Even so, for Come as well as for Hendry, Barth’s determinism is seen as simply a matter of balance and a matter of balance can be corrected. Has not Barth himself supplied the necessary tools to balance out his position? Has he not told us that the “subjective reception by man is an inseparable part of reconciliation (4–3, 3–11)?”¹⁰ “Then Why Karl Barth?” asks Come. The answer is that he has set us free from a form of determinism that cannot be cured, from a metaphysical, a non-dialectical, theoretical determinism. After all, Barth’s determinism is only one aspect of a dialectic that requires for its correlative the idea of real human freedom. Barth is, after all, says Come, in effect, basically committed to the I-thou—I-it scheme as it is based on the assumption of human autonomy as Kant outlined it. We, as preachers, therefore, can rest assured that he will lead us into the mystery of the gospel and will give us many a valuable lead for our homiletical efforts.

The difficulties of all three of these men with Barth’s theology can be summed up in Dowey’s words: “Barth, however, alone in his ultra-sophisticated rejection of every ‘and’ (Christianity and science, and philosophy, etc.) needs healthy reminders from other Church thinkers that the Church lives yet among many ‘ands,’ ”¹¹

2. Dowey on Barth’s Criterion of Theology

Let us then stand on Barth’s foundation at all costs. If he gets carried away with the deterministic aspect of his Christ-Event, then we can remember that this deterministic aspect will, of itself, swing back to its indeterminist aspect. Dare we follow Tillich or Bultmann? They may furnish us with warnings that we need in relation to Barth. They are in a position to do this because, with Barth, they also

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 162–163.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

¹¹ “Tillich, Barth, and Criteria of Theology,” *Theology Today*, p. 58.

operate on the basis of the I-thou—I-it scheme. But Barth continues to be the leader whom we follow more closely than we do any other.

Dowey tells us why we may trust Barth more than we do Tillich. Barth does better justice than does Tillich to the idea of the priority of the I-thou over the I-it dimension. Dowey's argument runs something like this:

Of course both Tillich and Barth work with the distinction between science and religion introduced by Kant. Both work in the tradition of Schleiermacher, the father of modern theology. Barth as well as Tillich is modern in his approach to science. A modern theology is "carried out in full consciousness of and thus in methodological accommodation to the involvement of theological language in the contemporary 'situation.'" ¹²

But Barth, rather than Tillich, is greatly concerned to stress the freedom of God in the act of his revelation. ¹³ "Barth's theology expresses his determination to concentrate upon the uniqueness of revelation in Jesus Christ." ¹⁴ "The object of Barth's thought is so radically soteriological-eschatological that the world by contrast is a disordered chaos. Any formal criteria that classify the Word of God as a word beside other words are for Barth to be rejected." ¹⁵ Thus Barth "carries the evaluation of 'situation' even farther than Tillich.... The book called Bible is by no means of itself even a medium for the Word of God according to Barth." ¹⁶

As for Jesus Christ, he is, according to Barth's own words, "also the rabbi of Nazareth, historically so difficult to get information about, and when it is got, one whose activity is a little commonplace alongside more than one other founder of a religion and even alongside many later representatives of His own 'religion.'" ¹⁷

Why then should Barth spend more time with Isaiah than with Plato or Whitehead? This cannot be accounted for systematically in terms of any general or a special vocabulary, a canon, a theory of inspiration, or the Holy Spirit—but reflects the sheer event of the believer being confronted with the Word in the event of the Isaiah-Church-Revelation. Barth "is not even interested in the

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 47.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

rejection of Plato until Church thinkers introduce Plato in such a way as to contradict the event itself.”¹⁸

Dowey asks the question how, with such a purely indeterminist criterion, Barth can distinguish his Reformation theology from that of Romanism or of modernism. He quotes Barth when he says that “accident springs from accidents. Therefore it may simply have happened to us to raise and present this opposition.”¹⁹ “How then,” asks Dowey, “can Barth say anything theological to one who does not share his standpoint?” The answer is “He cannot and does not intend to, outside the Church’s Confession.”²⁰

When therefore Barth writes a two-volume doctrine of creation, he does not do so “in any sense that is important to the techniques of science for describing the cosmos, or to metaphysics except in certain unpredictable concrete situations.”²¹ “The scientific goal is complete and corroborated description.”²² Certainly this is the last thing Barth wants to speak of when he deals with the mystery of the Christ-Event.

We must now draw together what Dowey says about Barth’s theology as it stands, he feels, in utter opposition to the efforts of science and what Hendry and Come, especially the latter, say about Barth’s absorption of man into Christ and God. From Dowey we have the aspect of Barth’s theology that corresponds to Kant’s ethical dualism. Barth is, if possible, argues Dowey, more consistent in setting the world of person-to-person encounter, of the world of pure freedom, the world of pure indeterminacy, over against the world of phenomena, the world of necessity, than even was Kant. On the other hand, from Come and Hendry we have that aspect of Barth’s theology which corresponds to Kant’s ethical phenomenalism or monism. According to this aspect, it is virtually the Holy Spirit who believes in man. God can be known by God only; man can know God only to the extent that he is thought of as originally participant in Deity.

Dowey, Hendry and Come are therefore equally satisfied that some clarified form of Barth’s dialectical combination between pure determinism and pure indeterminism, between ethical dualism and ethical monism, is what the Christian church should confess to the world as its faith.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, quoting *C. D.*, 1:1, p. 303.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, p. 44.

All three men are also agreed that one must, in accepting the basic principles of Barth's theology, cut himself loose from every form of orthodox theology once for all. Hendry speaks of Barth's *Church Dogmatics* as follows: "It is completely misunderstood by those who see in it merely a relapse into traditional orthodoxy or scholasticism. It is a gigantic experiment in a new form of theological thinking, and as the author has gained increasing insurance in its application, the patterns of traditional orthodoxy have been progressively transformed."²³

3. Barth's Act Theology

Now Barth's reformulation of the older theology goes to the bottom of every major teaching of Scripture—God, man, and the God-man, Jesus Christ who is truly God and truly man. Barth accomplishes this reformulation of all the basic doctrines of Scripture in terms of his actualism. Barth's "theology has become to an ever increasing degree a theology of movement, of dynamic actualism. God's being is his act, and his act is his act of revelation." Says Barth: "God is who he is in his act of revelation."²⁴ This means, says Hendry, that "his word is act; it is always a present event, never a given fact.... Revelation is present to man only in the revealing act of God. And faith, which is correlative to revelation, has for Barth the same actualistic or 'existential' character; it is always an event, a decision of man which answers to a decision of God; it cannot be transformed into a theoretical system."²⁵

The basic import of Barth's actualistic principle appears most clearly in his view of election. We quote Hendry at length.

Barth's dialectical interpretation of the doctrine of predestination marks his most radical departure from the tradition and at the same time provides the best clue to the pattern of his thought. According to the traditional Calvinistic doctrine of double predestination, God from all eternity elected some to eternal life, and abandoned the rest to everlasting damnation ('to the praise of his glorious justice,' as the Westminster Confession puts it). Barth rejects this doctrine on the ground that it substitutes an abstract God for the God who has revealed himself in Christ, and an abstract and arbitrary decree for the concrete act of God's grace in Jesus Christ. He insists that God's eternal purpose is made known to us in Christ, and that the doctrine of election must therefore be interpreted Christologically, according to the statement in [Ephesians 1:4](#): 'he [God] has chosen us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world.' We have to think of the divine act of election primarily as the election of Jesus Christ—and that in two senses: Jesus Christ is

²³ "The Dogmatic Form of Barth's Theology," *Theology Today*, p. 303.

²⁴ *K. D.*, 2:1, p. 293.

²⁵ *op. cit.*, p. 307.

the electing God, the subject of election, in that he expresses the eternal will in which God has chosen to be gracious to man. He is also the elect man, the object of election, because the grace of God which he expresses is his will, not only to be Immanuel, God with us, but also become man. The incarnate Christ, in whom God binds himself to man and man to himself is the concrete embodiment of election.

“Now while the decree, in the traditional doctrine, is frozen into static immobility, in such a way that God is reduced to the status of his own executor, Barth stresses the dynamic and dialectical character of the divine election. It is a real choice on the part of God. His Yes contains a No, but overcomes it. In choosing to be God with us, he chooses not to be God without us. In electing election he rejects reprobation. What then about sin? Does the election of grace mean that God’s judgment and wrath against sin are done away? Not at all. God rejects the reprobation of man by electing to take it upon himself. In Christ God has assumed the burden and the guilt of human sin and has himself become the reprobate man; he has thereby taken the reprobation of man away from him. Christ represents the victory of grace over judgment, of mercy over wrath, of election over reprobation. Election and reprobation do not stand side by side like two equal alternatives; reprobation is the negative or obverse of election; it is that to which God said No when he said Yes to the election of grace.”²⁶

God’s election of man in Christ is not something “before which man can only stand in helpless resignation. It is always a free divine decision, which becomes effective in a free human decision. Human freedom, so far from being incompatible with divine election, is rather ‘presupposed’ by it; for only in freedom can man choose what God chooses for him.”²⁷

“But is man free to choose what God rejects” asks Hendry. Barth’s answer, he says, is in the affirmative. But then “God in his superior freedom continues to be the Creator and to stand by his word to the world. The chaos which sinful man in his freedom would realize in the present belongs fundamentally to the past; as Barth puts it, it is the myth which God does not allow to become reality. Sin is a possibility for man in his freedom, but in the freedom of God it is an ‘impossible possibility’; where sin abounds, there is grace more abounding.”²⁸

Now Hendry’s objection to “the dynamic actualism” of Barth is expressed in the mild question “whether it can be carried quite so far as he attempts.”²⁹ This is, as was noted earlier, merely a matter of balance.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 310–311.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 311.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 312.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 313.

The upshot of the matter is that Hendry, as well as Dowey, is in effect ready to “turn in” the whole of the theology of the historic Christian creeds, and in particular that of the Westminster Confession, for the dialectical Christ-Event of Barth. In the theology of Barth, Hendry finds a God, and a view of grace, such as he could not find in the Westminster Confession. When he wrote his work on the Westminster Confession he was still willing to try a patch-up job on it. But even in October, 1956, he was ready to participate in the writing of a new confession, one which would, to all intents and purposes, replace the old with a new view of God, a new view of man and a new view of God’s grace to man in Christ. He has now been instrumental in writing a Confession in which man’s chief end is to glorify man.

4. Barth’s “Dogmatics” for Preachers

As for Come, he is certainly no less committed to the new theological dialecticism of Barth than are Dowey and Hendry. Come knows very well that this new theology requires a total rejection of the old. We shall mention at this point only what he says on reconciliation.

How shall we as preachers make use of Barth’s *Dogmatics*? He tells us as follows:

“The content of all preaching for Barth must finally come to rest in Jesus Christ.”³⁰ This is an all-inclusive because Barth equates Jesus Christ with “ ‘the humanity of God,’ that is, with all God’s ways and works with men from eternity to eternity. He is God as God lives with man, for man, and in man.”³¹

Yet, though the Christ-Event is inclusive of everything that happens between God and man, “it is only from the central event of God’s reconciliation of the world to himself in Jesus Christ that we can also preach what we want to preach about the beginning and the end of God’s way with man.”³²

What then of our reconciliation to God? Says Come: “Reconciliation in Jesus Christ. How are you to preach this? One more comment introductory to Barth’s treatment of this theme must be made for the English reader of the *Dogmatics*. The German word for “reconciliation” is *Versöhnung*. The dominant if not exclusive connotation of this word in German is that of the reunion of two

³⁰ Come, *Introduction to Barth’s “Dogmatics for Preachers”*, p. 200.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

alienated parties. It does not have at all the ring of the English word 'atonement,' especially as this latter word had become almost synonymous with the concept of penal satisfaction. When German theology wants to speak of satisfaction, it uses such words as *Sühne* or *Genugtuung*. At least this is true of Barth. Therefore, the translator of Vol. 4 of the *Dogmatics* has done Barth a signal disservice and has hopelessly confused most English readers by regularly translating *Versöhnung* as 'atonement.' In the Preface (4-1, 8) he says he has alternated the two English words according to the demands of the context. This simply is not so. He has regularly used 'atonement' whenever possible, using 'reconciliation' only when 'atonement' makes no sense at all.

"The point is that by using 'atonement' he is changing the sense that Barth himself intended. Barth clearly defines *Versöhnung* as the restoration of fellowship (4-1, 22). Therefore, if you are to read these three volumes with their intended meaning, simply cross out 'atonement' every time you find it in the English translation, and substitute 'reconciliation.' 'Jesus Christ is the reconciliation,' not the 'atonement' (4-1, 34). Reconciliation in Jesus Christ involves suffering, but it is not correct to say that reconciliation is the suffering. It is not valid even to say that it is the suffering as such that accomplishes reconciliation. A further rejection of this fundamentalist theory of atonement as penal satisfaction into Barth's writings may be seen in the translation of the lead statement of Paragraph 59 (4-1, 157). Here *die vollbrachte Rechtstat* is translated 'a satisfaction.' If Barth had meant 'satisfaction,' he would have used *Sühnung*, or *Genugtuug*, or *Bezahlung*. He is speaking of the completed justification of man, not the satisfaction of God. Such twisting of Barth's meaning is inexcusable. Barth's whole doctrine of reconciliation is clearly opposed to that of penal satisfaction, and to use the English terminology, accepted in the description of the latter, is to misrepresent Barth in a drastic manner."³³

Come, of course, is quite right in saying that, for Barth, the idea of reconciliation retains nothing, precisely nothing, of the meaning which it has in the historic Confessions. The framework of Barth's theology is that of the post-Kantian person-to-person encounter. Come objects when in connection with Barth's exposition of 2 Corinthians 5:19, the German word *Platzwechsel* is translated by the English word "change of places." "Barth's whole doctrine of reconciliation is built on his concept of an 'exchange' [Tausch] or 'change of places.' Volume 4, Part 1, is the story of God's self-humiliation in assuming sinful flesh in Jesus Christ. Volume 4, Part 2, is the story of man's exaltation to

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 200-201.

righteousness in Jesus Christ. It is a two-way exchange, not a unilateral substitution.”³⁴

In explaining Barth’s exegesis of the phrases “not counting their trespasses,” Come says that it is “the negative way of saying ‘become the righteousness of God,’ which really means to become the covenant-partners of God (this rules out the ideas of penal satisfaction and forensic imputation).”³⁵

Whatever the merit of Come’s objection on the matter of translation, he has helped us to see afresh that he himself is committed to a new theology, a theology that must be contrasted at every major point with such teachings as are found in the Westminster Confession, and notably a theology that must reject the idea of atonement as satisfaction to the justice of God.

5. Barth on Chalcedon

There can, then, be little doubt, but that the Confession of 1967 is directly or indirectly patterned after the theology of Karl Barth. Dr. Mackay spoke of a “Lyrical Tribute to Karl Barth.”³⁶ The Confession of 1967 seems to be something similar to that.³⁷

The Confession wants the church to be the church. The church can be the church only if it tells the world that God was in Christ reconciling all men unto himself.

Who then, according to Barth, is Christ? What, more precisely, is the meaning of the Christ-Event? Let us look to Barth himself for the answers.

The early church, says Barth, tried to express the biblical idea of what it means when we say that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. Unfortunately, the early church did not have the tools with which to express the idea of the incarnation of the Son of God at all adequately. The early church had nothing but the static categories derived from Greek philosophy. They asked how

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Theology Today*, Oct., 1956, Vol. 13, pp. 287–294.

In *Christianity Today*, March 21, 1966, Dr. Geoffrey W. Bromiley contends that the theology of the Confession is much less biblical than is the theology of Barth. We do not think that Barth’s theology is biblical except in the sense that it uses biblical words; however, Bromiley’s contention does appear to be in line with the main contention of this booklet.

Christ's eternal, changeless being as God could be related to his changing being as man. They meant well enough, those early Fathers. The substance was in them. But it was not till modern times that we, following Kierkegaard and others, have learned to see and have learned to use the concept of Act instead of the concept of Being.

Only if we use the concept of Act rather than that of Being can we really see that it is God's very nature to turn into the opposite of himself by becoming man, and that it is man's very nature to participate through Christ in the very aseity of God. Only if we see this, do we have an intelligible basis for the idea that grace is both sovereign and personal as well as universal.

Look at the orthodoxy that prevailed at the time of the formulation of the Westminster Confession. The orthodoxy of this time had a static notion of the immutability of God. This notion acted like a "Soviet veto" against the idea that God can really be man in Christ.³⁸ Hereafter references to the German edition will appear with the abbreviation *K. D.* and references to the English translation with *C. D.*. The volume numbers are in both cases the same. English translations which appear only with the German reference are my own.

Orthodoxy also had a static view of man. This led to the idea that man cannot be truly exalted through participation in the nature of God.

If, therefore, we are to speak in "biblical rather than pagan terms," explains Barth, we shall have to reckon with an immutability that does not keep God from becoming man.³⁹ We shall have to redefine the essence of God in such a way that it really allows for both the true humiliation and the true exaltation of Jesus Christ. The incarnation is an event. As such it is at the same time the humiliation of God and the exaltation of man. The peril in which man stands is God's peril in Christ. "We should be explaining the incarnation docetically, and therefore explaining it away if we did not put it like this, if we tried to limit in any way the solidarity with the cosmos which God accepted in Jesus Christ."⁴⁰

On the other hand the incarnation spells mankind's exaltation. "We have already said that in this event God allows the world and humanity to take part in the history of the inner life as His Godhead, in the movement in which from and

³⁸ Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, Zurich, 1932 ff., 4:2, p. 93; *Church Dogmatics*, translated by G. W. Bromiley, et al, Edinburgh, 1936 ff, p. 85.

³⁹ *K. D.*, 4:2, p. 26; *C. D.*, p. 26.

⁴⁰ *K. D.*, 4:1, p. 236; *C. D.*, p. 215.

to all eternity he is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and therefore the one true God. But this participation of the world in the being of God implies necessarily His participating in the being of the world, and therefore that His being, His history, is played out as world-history and therefore under the affliction and peril of all world-history."⁴¹

But how is it possible that there should thus be genuine interaction between God and man? Do we not then lose the changeless, eternal being of God? Do we not then lose the idea of man who, as a creature, can never participate in the nature of God? "How can a being be interpreted as an act, or an act as a being? How can God, or man, or both in their unity in Jesus Christ, be understood as history? How can humiliation also and at the same time be exaltation? How can it be said of a history which took place once that it takes place to-day, and that, having taken place once and taking place to-day, it will take place again? How much easier it seems at a first glance to speak of the given fact of this person and His structure, and then of His work, or, to use the language of more modern theology, of his 'significance for all succeeding ages, or His influence and effects'! How can the birth and life and death of Jesus Christ be an event to-day and to-morrow? Are these thoughts and statements that can really be carried through? But again, if there is a genuine necessity, even suspicions as to the possibility cannot be regarded as finally decisive. Difficulty or no difficulty, we must attempt to think and state the matter along these lines."⁴²

The incarnation must, therefore, be interpreted in terms of the *prima veritas* that in the Christ-Event there is involved the whole essence of God and the whole essence of man. Let us note something of what this implies for Barth.

In the first place Barth wants to do away with the idea that the states of humiliation and of exaltation of Christ follow one another temporally. Revelation can never be a predicate of history. The suffering and death of Christ are not to be identified as in themselves steps in the humiliation of Christ. Nor is the resurrection, or any fact following upon it, as such, to be identified as a step in his exaltation. Christ's work "cannot be divided into different stages or periods of His existence, but which fills out and constitutes His existence in this twofold form. Our question is whether this does not better correspond to the witness of the New Testament concerning Jesus Christ. Where and when is He not both humiliated and exalted, already exalted in His humiliation, and humiliated in His exaltation? Where in Paul, for example, is He the Crucified who has not yet risen,

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *K. D.*, 4:2, p. 120; *C. D.*, p. 108.

or the Risen who has not been crucified? Would He be the One whom the New Testament attests as the Mediator between God and man if He were only the one and not the other? And if He is the Mediator, which of the two can he be alone and without the other? Both aspects force themselves upon us. We have to do with the being of the one and the entire Jesus Christ whose humiliation detracts nothing and whose exaltation adds nothing. And in this His being we have to do with His action, the work and event of atonement. That is the first reason for this alteration of the traditional dogmatic form.”⁴³

In addition to rejecting the idea of the two stages of Christ’s life and work as following one another, Barth also rejects the idea of two natures as separate from one another. This point is, if possible, even more radical than the former. The removal of the idea of two states following one another rests upon the removal of the idea of two natures as separate from one another, and vice versa. The two natures must be interpreted in terms of the one act that takes place within both. If we begin with the Christ-Event, we see that his humiliation is the humiliation of God and his exaltation is the exaltation of man. Barth says, “For who is the God who is present and active in Him? He is the One who, concretely in His being as man, activates and reveals Himself as divinely free, as the One who loves in His freedom, as the One who is capable of and willing for this inconceivable condescension, and the One who can be and wills to be true God not only in the height but also in the depth—in the depth of human creatureliness, sinfulness and morality.

“And who is the Man Jesus Christ? He is the One in whom God is man, who is completely bound by the human situation, but who is not crushed by it, who since it is His situation is free in relation to it, who overcomes it, who is its Lord and not its servant.”⁴⁴

6. Grace! Grace!

By thus removing the traditional ideas with respect to the states and the natures of Christ, Barth is opening up a path for the sovereign and free, as well as universal, grace of God to man. God could not be either wholly revealed or wholly hidden in Christ, if the traditional idea of either the states or the natures of Christ were maintained. “There is no divine, eternal, spiritual level at which the Christ-event is not also ‘worldly’ and therefore this human history. The concept of the true humanity of Jesus Christ is therefore primarily and finally basic—an

⁴³ *K. D.*, 4:1, p. 146; *C. D.*, p. 133.

⁴⁴ *K. D.*, 4:1, p. 147; *C. D.*, p. 134.

absolute necessary concept—in exactly the same and not a lesser sense than that of His true deity. The humanity of Jesus Christ is not a secondary moment in the Christ-event. It is not something which happens later, and later again will pass and disappear. It is not merely for the purpose of mediation. Like His deity, it is integral to the whole event.”⁴⁵

We now see that, for Barth, the incarnation spells the exaltation of human nature. Grace is inherently universal. If Christ “exists as the object of the eternal election of grace at the beginning of all God’s ways and works, this means that He, the true Man, is the One, whose existence necessarily touches that of all other men, as the decision is made concerning them, as that which determines them inwardly and from the standpoint of their being as men, in whom and for whom they too are elect. Being made man among them, He comes to His own possession (Jn 1:11).”⁴⁶

Barth thinks that by his actualization of the incarnation he has, once for all, aired the deadly calm or staticism that mars the Chalcedonian creed. The only way by which this deadly calm can be cured, argues Barth, is by the idea of the Christ-Event, i.e., by thinking of Christ as the electing God and the elected man. By thinking of Christ as the electing God, we see that the one all encompassing attribute of God is grace. To be sure God is also holy and just. Man cannot sin without incurring this wrath. This wrath is terrible. Even so God’s grace shines through this wrath. God visits his wrath upon his Son. He does this, according to his nature, for all men. Accordingly God’s reprobation, God’s rejection of men is never final. God’s final word to mankind is favorable. All men are, as men, elected in Christ toward elevation of their being in him. Human nature came into existence in Christ as the elected man. As we noted, “The humanity of Jesus is not a secondary moment in the Christ-event.” To start with Jesus Christ the elect man is to disperse the “last appearance of contingency, externality, incidentally and dispensability which can so easily seem to surround the historical aspect of the Christ-event in its narrower sense. It is essential and integral to this event that it is not only the act of God but that as such it includes a human history, the history of the true man, which means the existence of the man Jesus.”⁴⁷

When we ask who man is, says Barth, we must reply in terms of the “common actualization of divine and human essence. Of course, “in the inner life of God,” the essence of God “does not, of course, need any actualization.” “But His divine

⁴⁵ *K. D.*, 4:2, p. 37; *C. D.*, p. 35.

⁴⁶ *K. D.*, 4:2, p. 38; *C. D.*, p. 36.

⁴⁷ *K. D.*, 4:2, p. 36; *C. D.*, p. 35.

essence—and this is the new thing in Jesus Christ from the divine standpoint—needed a special actualization in the identity of the Son of God with the Son of Man, and therefore in its union with human essence. In this union it is not immediately actual. In this union it is addressed to what is of itself totally different human essence. It is directed to a specific goal (*apotelesis*), the reconciliation of the world with God. It is made parallel to divine essence, as it were, although with no inherent change. It is the divine essence of the Son in the act of condescension. It is the divine essence determined and characterized by His act, by His existence not only in itself but also in human essence. And as such it has to become actual.”⁴⁸

This common actualization of the divine and the human essence may be called the “*communicatio operationum*.”⁴⁹ The elevation of human nature took place together with the humiliation of God in the incarnation. In the incarnation God united divine and human essence in himself. “It is the history in which God Himself became and was and is and will be very man in His Son Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Man. And the force of this History is the raising, the exaltation of human essence by the fact that God Himself lent it His own existence in His Son thus uniting it with His own divine essence. We refer to the essence common to all men.”⁵⁰

It is with the idea of Jesus Christ as *Geschichte*, and therewith as the common actualization of the divine and the human nature, that Barth seeks to build upon and then go beyond the Creed of Chalcedon. The “interpretation” that Barth gives of Chalcedon is really in the nature of an *Umdeutung*. The new approach to Chalcedon is that of Jesus Christ as the common *Geschichte* between God and man. True enough, Barth does not want to place the divine and the human natures of Christ on a par with one another. He wants to maintain the distinctness of each nature. God must always have the priority over man. Barth thinks that only in terms of *Geschichte* is it really possible to safeguard both the distinctness of the two natures and their proper union. He thinks that by means of actualizing the incarnation through the idea of *Geschichte* he is setting forth the true doctrine of sovereign universal grace over against Romanism. He thinks that by his concept of God as identical with his act of incarnation he has overcome the whole idea of natural theology. He thinks he has thereby furnished the only possible and the only wholly objective foundation for Christ’s work of reconciliation. He thinks he has given faith its true object in the Christ of

⁴⁸ *K. D.*, 4:2, p. 126; *C. D.*, p. 113.

⁴⁹ *K. D.*, 4:2, p. 127; *C. D.*, pp. 113–115.

⁵⁰ *K. D.*, 4:2, p. 74; *C. D.*, p. 69.

Geschichte. He thinks he has found the true foundation of justification, sanctification and glorification in terms of *Geschichte*. These are guaranteed in advance for all men in the fact of their participation in Jesus Christ as *Geschichte*. In short, Barth presents us with the universal grace of God for all men, and this grace is the gift of God. Since it is God who gives us grace, and since God's will is sovereign even over His own being, therefore grace is new even to himself, in Christ as the chief and total receiver of grace. Thus sovereign grace is at the same time universal grace. The basic relation of all men to God is that they are in Christ the recipients of the grace of God. As inherently grace-receivers, all men are also inherently co-laborers with Christ in making known to all men that they are in Christ.

It is thus by a long and roundabout way that Barth takes us back to a position not basically different from that of Schleiermacher or of Ritschl. By his doctrine of Christ as the electing God, Barth makes sure that there is nothing in God that is not wholly revealed to man. He makes sure that God is nothing but love and grace to all men. By making Jesus Christ the elected man, the only real man, he makes sure that the issue of human life cannot be eternal death for any man. Adam is reduced to a shadow of Christ. Thus men's sins in Adam are overcome in advance by their being in Christ. *Historie* is made into an appendage to *Geschichte* lest there should be interference both with the objective nature and the universal reach of grace.

We have, then, in this actualization of the incarnation by Barth nothing less than a very ingenious effort to suppress the truth which the creed of Chalcedon was concerned to express. Chalcedon did not tell God what he cannot be, or must be. It did not define the nature of man in terms of final participation in the nature of God, whose nature has itself first been conceived as a projection of man's imagination.

Barth seeks to escape the idea of the essence of God in which death is God and God is dead. He seeks to escape the idea of a general anthropology since this is built upon the idea of direct revelation in history. He seeks, in short, to escape the deadly calm that he finds at the heart of Chalcedon. The creed there written, Barth thinks, is composed of the two ideas of a god in himself and a man in himself, both apart from Christ. But his Christ-Event, which is supposed to be the proper biblical substitute for such static theology, is composed of the two components of pure nominalism and pure realism.

Thus it is again in terms of a combination of nominalism and realism, of pure indeterminism with pure determinism, or pure irrationalism with pure rationalism that Barth seeks to go beyond Calvin.

Obviously, according to Barth's own words, his conception of grace as inherently sovereign and universal is the opposite of that of Calvin. Also obvious is the fact that Barth's view of God and man as inherently interacting in Christ resulting in man's participation of deity requires the rejection of all that the historic Christian Confessions say.

Yet it is this theology of the Christ-Event which Hendry, Mackay, Dowey, and Come want to substitute for the theology of the Westminster Confession. It is this theology which, with its rough edges filed down for the benefit of American Christians, now finds expression in the Confession of 1967. Many American Presbyterians have, for some time, chosen between the kernel and the husk when they read their Bibles; they have already made human experience rather than the Bible their final standard for faith and life. They are now to be given official sanction for their virtual rejection of Scripture as the sole rule for faith and practice. Many American Presbyterians have, for some time, ignored if not denied the Westminster teaching with respect to God and his sovereign grace. They are now to be given official sanction for substituting the sovereign grace of sovereign man for the sovereign grace of a sovereign God. Many American Presbyterians have, for some time, been substituting a theory of salvation by good works which, in turn, spring from the hearts of "good" men for the preaching and teaching of the gospel as defined by the Westminster standards.

Now they are to be given official sanction for substituting a person-to-person program of reconciling all men to one another for the gospel of grace, in which a holy God brings sinful man back to himself.⁵¹

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In the January, 1966, issue of *McCormick Quarterly* Dr. Arthur R. McKay, the President of McCormick Seminary, and several of his associates give an appraisal of the Confession of 1967 as written in 1965. The men who write in this issue are, without exception, committed to an act-theology similar to that which underlies the new Confession.

A remark may be made on the article by Dr. Calvin De Vries, who, as a note indicates, "is a member of the Special Committee on a Brief Contemporary Confession of Faith" (p. 171). Dr. De Vries defends the idea that the new Confession is a "truly Biblical confession of faith." Does it not confess Jesus Christ? It does. But then the Christ in whom De Vries believes, like the Christ of the new Confession, is the Christ that is a

Chapter 6:

A Book Of Confessions

The National Observer (May 31, 1965) remarked about the difference of attitude which men displayed about the Confession of 1967 after the action of the 1965 General Assembly as follows: "A St. Louis minister calls the Presbyterians' proposed new statement of faith a 'charter for church renewal.' A professor of church history in Pittsburgh considers it 'the greatest doctrinal disaster in the history of Presbyterianism.' "

1. A Book of Concord

Whether you tend to agree with the St. Louis minister or with the Pittsburgh professor will depend on the kind of Christ you have. If one thing is clear about the Confession of 1967 it is that it has a different Christ than the Christ of the Westminster Confession. The Christ of the new confession resembles the Christ of Karl Barth or, at least, the Christ of neo-orthodox theology in general. The Christ of the old Confession is the Christ of the historic Christian confessions and, in particular that of the creed of Chalcedon.

Karl Barth is quite right when he reasons to the effect that these two Christs exclude one another. Barth says that he has actualized the incarnation. In doing so, he has discovered a God whose nature it is to change into the very opposite of himself. Both a new God and a new man come with, as they are involved in, the new Christ of Barth. The Christ-Event includes all three. It is this new Christ-Event of Barth, of neo-orthodoxy, that constitutes the hub of all that is said in the new confession.

One will certainly misread the proposed confession if he thinks that there is anything left in it of the old teachings with respect to Christ, to God and to man. Words must not deceive us; it is the meaning of words that is all important. And the meaning of words derives from the framework in which they are placed. This framework is that of the modern I-thou—I-it dimension.

projection into some sort of noumenal realm of which nothing can be known by any man and who is therefore of no possible help to sinners.

The "minister of St. Louis" likely does not realize what has happened. Likely he has been trained in a university or seminary where Immanuel Kant's idea of freedom is maintained to be essentially the same as Martin Luther's idea of the freedom of the Christian man. Perhaps too, at the recommendation of Dr. Hendry, he has read John Oman's *Grace and Personality*. In the introduction to this book, Mr. Nolan Best says that "in essence Dr. Oman is as Calvinistic as Calvin himself." But Dr. William Childs Robinson observes in a review of this book that "Dr. Oman is a Kantian." Robinson cites Dr. Oman's book in illustration of the fact that a Presbyterian church that professes the most anti-Pelagian creed in the world may nevertheless teach Pelagianism.¹ Besides confusing philosophical Kantianism and theological pelagianism with Calvinism, our minister from St. Louis has likely been fascinated by Paul Tillich, Richard Niebuhr, Emil Brunner, Rudolph Bultmann and many others as these men have reworked the Christian message in accord with modern existentialism. Is it any wonder then that he feels relieved as his church, officially committed until this time to a theology out of accord with this, now officially adopts the position that he has all the while believed?

It is clear that the Confession committee did all it could to obtain the type of reaction that the minister of St. Louis has shown. There was really no serious doubt but their new confession would be favorably received by the General Assembly of the church. Loetscher has shown conclusively that the liberal party has come out victorious in the recent struggles with respect to the faith in the church. Loetscher notes with satisfaction that after the last major struggle, centering round the person of Dr. J. Gresham Machen, the church has been able to pursue its program in peace and has been able to state its policies according to the prevailing opinions in the church.

Even so the committee left no stone unturned so as to make sure of victory. The committee members made plain in their introductions that in this confession the church has something really different from what it has had before. They tell us that the new confession accomplishes what it was impossible to accomplish by means of alterations, subtractions, or additions to the old confession as this was attempted in days gone by. But then, what will the simple Shorter Catechism believers think? Will they not fear that the new confession really indicates a departure from the faith of the church? As for the "Minister of St. Louis," will not even he need some assurance that the essential religious values of the old confession have been retained in the new?

¹ *Christianity Today*, mid-October, 1932, p. 4.

It would seem that some such reasoning inspired the committee to provide a historical background calculated to quiet the fears of conservative elements in the church. It would seem too that some such reasoning underlies the idea of offering the church a book of confessions.

2. Leonard J. Trinterud on Continuity

As a church historian, Dr. Leonard J. Trinterud, also one of the composers of the new Confession, offers the simple orthodox believer, whether ministerial or non-ministerial, great comfort with respect to the new confession. He begins his survey of history as follows: "In the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God wrought out man's salvation. This is the gospel. The Holy Scriptures are the unique and normative witness to this work of Christ. This the church of Christ has always believed. Yet the scope of the Scriptures is large, and its books vary greatly. From its earliest beginnings the Christian church felt the need for some kind of focus, or a summary statement, of the Biblical witness concerning Christ. Brief snatches of early creedal statements are already present in the New Testament. The so-called Apostles' Creed, and others like it, arose in the church as proper confessions to be made when a new convert was to be baptized. The considerable group of books about Jesus which appeared very early in the Christian era forced the church to separate the genuinely apostolic witness from the spurious, and also from the foolishly well-intentioned books. A canon of Scripture was sought which could be set as the standard by which the church could be guided and judged in its life and work."

"Very early in the church's life it was found that baptismal creeds and some accepted books or canon of the Scriptures could not in fact guarantee the unity of the church. From Egypt to Palestine, to Italy, to North Africa, the church was in serious trouble over false teaching (or heresy) about the meaning of Christ, the significance of salvation, and the relationship of the Christian gospel to Judaism and to the Greco-Roman religions. Once again the church was driven to make decisions and distinctions, which it did in a long series of councils and synods, A.D. 325 to 397. The Nicene Creed, a revision of an earlier and more simple baptismal creed, sought to say more precisely what Christ meant to the church and wherein many current religious ideas about him were false. The Council of Carthage (397) brought most of the Western churches to an agreement as to which books belonged in the New Testament. In between these two events many other formulas had been tried. By the close of the fourth century both the Eastern and the Western churches were attempting to close off further debates about the nature of Christ, the Trinity, and the books of the Bible by demanding acceptance

of their authoritative decisions as to which opinions were orthodox and which were heretical.”²

The first sentence of this passage begs the question. When Trinterud speaks of the “life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ” does he have in mind the Christ-Event of the new theology or the Christ of the Chalcedon Confession? We may be quite sure that he means the former. The third sentence would have no point at all unless it is based upon the first as referring to some such actualization of the incarnation as made by Barth.

A. The Church Has Always Believed

Yet Trinterud makes the simple assertion: “This the church of Christ has always believed.” Trinterud should have modified this sentence to read: “This the modern church, the church that has followed in the footsteps of Friedrich Schleiermacher, has always believed.”

B. To Face the New Situation

“New situations,” says Trinterud, “require new confessional documents.” As John Calvin said, the problems of the sixteenth century church could not be met by using only the fourth century church’s answers to other and different problems. Sixteenth century answers were needed for sixteenth century problems.³ Surely then twentieth century answers are needed for twentieth century problems. We now have a new view of man given us by modern dimensional philosophy. We now know that man is free and that God is free. We now, for the first time, understand that God’s grace in Christ is free. We now know that God is Christ, that Christ is his work and that his work is the act or process of saving mankind. Thus the church, in confessing this bears “a present witness to God’s grace in Jesus Christ.”

C. The “Typical Reformed and Presbyterian View of Creeds”

Besides following the example of the Reformers, we are, in our idea of a book of confessions, says Trinterud, following the example of the Westminster divines. “They had no thought of repudiating the Scots’ *Confession of 1560* or the English *Thirty Nine Articles*. Their action was merely a further illustration of the typical Reformed and Presbyterian view of creeds. New situations required new

² *Report of the Special Committee on A Brief Contemporary Statement of Faith*, p. 14.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

confessional documents.”⁴ So we have no thought of rejecting the Westminster Confession. The Reformed and Presbyterian churches saw more clearly than did the Lutheran churches that every church communion is “obligated before God to declare and to interpret the faith in its concrete and immediate situation. The faith was catholic and ecumenical, but its interpretation and confession had to be made in the actual life situations.”⁵

“New confessions for old” has therefore always been a truly Reformed motto. In writing new confessions “to replace their own earlier documents” these churches “were merely following their own testimony that the church had always to be reformed now, in its very own life, by the Word of God made known through the Scriptures by the Holy Spirit.”⁶

The committee is not even advocating the substituting of the new for the old. It is merely adding a new confession to the old. Who can possibly object to this?

D. The 1581 Harmony of the Confessions

In 1581 a Harmony of the Confessions containing some thirty or more Reformed Confessions was drafted. It was intended to show that though the Confessions differed from one another, there was a basic harmony between them. “These many churches were one in the faith even while they were determined to be radically relevant to their immediate situation.”⁷

Why not then think of the proposed book of confessions as a Harmony of Confessions. Perhaps you still prefer to use the system of the Westminster Confession. Most people today prefer freedom; but here is what you want. We still keep the old in stock.

E. The “General Evangelical Consensus”

Moreover, when a Harmony of the Confessions was composed “the Lutheran Augsburg Confession was among those shown in this Harmony to belong to the general evangelical consensus.”⁸

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 15–16.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁸ *Ibid.*

Was not the Westminster Confession a “wholly new confessional document”? Yet the Westminster divines “issued a new English edition of this Harmony of 1581 to show the Spirit in which Reformed and Presbyterian churches wrote confessional books.”⁹ Today we are working in the same spirit. We want a wholly new confession. We greatly admire the Westminster Divines “whose documents had spoken in such striking fashion to the British people of the seventeenth century....”¹⁰ But to honor the Westminster divines we must claim the “early ecumenical use of the Westminster documents” which was lost in the nineteenth century by confessing the faith in “concrete specific terms.”¹¹

“Most Presbyterian churches in the American scene, therefore, faced the unprecedented religious and social crises and changes of the twentieth century with a set of confessional documents written to guide the English and Scottish churches engaged in a civil war three centuries earlier.”¹²

“The Declaratory statement of 1903, and a few minor changes in the Westminster Confession” are all the changes achieved so far.¹³ These changes are negligible. To meet our need for a contemporary confession, a wholly new confession is needed. But then, this wholly new confession must be seen to be in the spirit of the Reformation, and in the spirit of Westminster divines.

F. The Growing Ecumenical Movement

A great blessing has come to the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches through “the growing ecumenical movement.” This movement “forced upon the Presbyterian the realization that their seventh century confessional documents were not adequate to guide them in the twentieth century. Brief statements of faith were attempted but these documents failed to be relevant to the life of the church and had no great influence. The struggle of the German Church against Nazism, in which the Reformed churches played a leading role, alerted all Presbyterian and Reformed churches throughout the world to the peril in having no creed which faced the urgent immediate issues. The Theological Declaration of Barmen spoke forcefully to Germany in 1934 but no similar new confession arose in the other Presbyterian or Reformed churches. Barmen, however, by bringing the older confessional tradition into concrete attack against a special

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹³ *Ibid.*

threat to the German church, gave a lasting example for making a confessional church into a church of actual confessors and martyrs. Especially Parts 1 and 2 of this Barmen Declaration are far beyond the decade in which it was written.”¹⁴

We are happy to record that since World War 2 there has been an ever increasing recognition on the part of most Presbyterian and Reformed churches of their glorious task of “confessing the faith now.”¹⁵

The upshot of the matter then is that, with the new confession, we confess the gospel which the church has always believed. We are simply giving you a modern tool in a modern situation. Who goes across the Rockies by stagecoach today? Who can meet the competition of those who plow with tractors by means of a spade? We admire the Westminster Confession as we admire the Spirit of St. Louis and we think with awe of Lindbergh while we walk through the Smithsonian Institute. The Lindbergh old-fashioned one motor plane did very well in its day. But not one of us, except a few obscurantists, would insist that we must cross the Atlantic in the Spirit of St. Louis rather than in a jet plane today.

This historical review of the idea of confessional revision produces only dust and confusion. Of course, those who wrote the Reformation confessions believed in the need of creedal revision. They so believed because they believed that the Holy Spirit of God would, according to his promises, lead his church ever more deeply into an understanding of his once-for-all given revelation in Scripture. But the committee believes in creedal revision because it no longer believes in the God, the man and the Christ of the Reformation confessions. Those American Presbyterians who still believe in the God of Luther and of Calvin ought to realize that they are now asked to confess to the God of Kant; or rather, that they are asked to confess to the world that the word God is like an empty pitcher which is ready to receive and give back anything that man puts into it.

3. Edward A. Dowey, Jr.

The chairman of the committee, Dr. Dowey, writes in the same spirit as does Trinterud. The burden of his contention is that writing this new confession the church is simply doing what, to be a true Presbyterian church, it simply must do. A true Reformed church seeks always to reform itself. “The Bible must always be transposed into a contemporary key to be understood by contemporary men.”¹⁶

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

"The preaching, teaching, and social responsibility that characterize the Reformed tradition are rightly understood as translations of the Bible into the language and ethic of the living church. Creeds and confessions are guides for the work of translating."¹⁷

What a pity it was when, in the seventeenth century, the Westminster Confession was written, "Reform had evolved into orthodoxy. Each of the major traditions—Roman, Lutheran, Anglican, and Reformed—was insisting elaborately upon its own ancient and catholic rectitude. Competing orthodoxies produced sermons and theologians, piety and propaganda, of typically baroque power and conflict. Significantly, despite differences, the churches all tried to hold back the dawn of modern natural science and philosophy."¹⁸ We must therefore recognize that, though we admire the Westminster Confession "it derives from an age of scholastic theology, of preoccupation with authority, and law, or churchly and political absolutism."¹⁹ We can sense "behind the order, the precision, and the grandeur, a premonition that the world of classical and Christian culture in which the writers are at home is coming to an end."²⁰

What we now need is a book of confessions. Only by means of such a book of confessions can we both respect the preoccupation with the idea of "a truth that hovers above history"²¹, involving the belief in absolutes, going all the way back to the early church and, at the same time, speak forth "the meaning of the gospel in contemporary life. A statement that is appropriate and powerful in its own day may fail to guide the church after some decades or centuries have gone by. It comes to resemble a monument marking the past more than a tool for present work."²²

Look now at the liberty which the contemporary minister of the gospel has. He is no longer constrained by the "unbending historic standards." Look at what liberty Seminary professors have. Think back again to the mid-seventeenth century "when orthodoxy matured." "A defensive posture showed itself in 'subscription' controversies concerned with holding ministers and teachers to unbending historic standards. Probably the zenith of this concern was reached in American Presbyterianism where for more than a century seminary professors

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 19–20.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 20–21.

took an oath 'not to inculcate, teach or insinuate anything which shall appear to me to contradict or contravene, either directly or impliedly, anything taught' in the Westminster standards. The church had long before come to terms with Galileo, but was fearful of evolutionists like Lyell and Darwin, of higher criticism of the Bible, of development in theology, and in short, of modern culture. It was also shirking the needs of the western frontier and of slaves in the South, as well as other pressing problems."²³

Having crossed over "a major watershed such as the eighteenth century," we must enter upon our duties and privileges as those who wrote the Declaratory Statement of Barmen did. There was the "new Confessional Statement" of 1925 adopted and given "priority over Westminster" by the United Presbyterian Church of North America.²⁴ Even so, "the most fateful and decisive new statement of faith" was made when "the small Reformed group led other churches from confessional immobility to a confessing deed which brought many to imprisonment and martyrdom."²⁵ Dowey refers, of course, to the Declaration of Barmen written by Barth.

Surely then we must follow Barth's example. It is really only the official church body that is slow in doing so. "In recent decades the preparation of teaching material for Sunday schools as well as of curricula for theological Seminaries has depended less and less on the old documents and more upon principles drawn from living theology."²⁶ Even "local presbyteries" have, in recent times, shown alertness to "theological and cultural change." "The subscription of pastors to the confession has, through the years, varied widely in strictness according to the attitude of the local presbytery. Generally, there has prevailed a sensible moderation reflecting theological and cultural change. The result has been a broader, more inclusive church than can be derived from the Westminster standards. The accompanying danger has been to risk leaving the church without an effective confession.Ó

"Clearly the church has long been aware that history, including doctrinal history, did not stop in the sixteen-forties. The present mission of the Presbyterian Church, ethical, ecumenical, intellectual, and evangelistic, cannot be

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 21–22.

adequately directed by a seventeenth-century document, even a great and venerable one.”²⁷

4. Still More Relics

To stress even further the committee’s desire to work in continuity with the Church’s past Confessional activity, the committee proposes to include The Nicene Creed, The Apostles’ Creed, The Scot’s Confession of 1560, The Heidelberg Catechism, The Second Helvetic Confession and the Declaration of Barmen as well as the Westminster Confession and Shorter Catechism into the new Book of Confessions.

5. Barth at Last

It is good to enter a stuffy museum but it is better to come out of it. We breathe fresh air again as we turn to look at Barth’s Barmen Declaration.

All of these older Confessions confess a Christ in which those who hold to the neo-orthodox theology of the Barmen Statement and the Confession of 1967 no longer believe. But then there are good people, like the Amish, who ride in buggies on the modern highway. Our museum must by all means include some of these buggies. It will enable our culture to see how far we have come.

If we think it is difficult to pierce so deeply beneath the surface as to see any connection between the earlier creeds and the Barmen Declaration, Barth and his followers assure us that there is such a connection. “Barmen,” says the report, “developed and extended the Reformation’s motifs of Christ Alone, Grace Alone, and Faith Alone by reaffirmation and by the denial of elements in German culture that had formerly been taken for Christian and were now expressed in the demonic power of a totalitarian state.”

“The Committee proposes that this Declaration, probably the most significant confessional document of the modern church, be included in the Book of Confessions for the guidance and admonition of its example.”²⁸

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 26–27.

6. The Place of 1967

We are now ready for a look at the Confession of 1967 as a member of this series of confessions. The Report introduces it as a member of a body of confessions.

A. The Confession is Brief

"Brevity was construed as the smallest number of words required to bring out fresh emphasis and to expose the contemporary relevance of old truth."²⁹

B. The Confession is Contemporary

"Contemporaneity of content is prescribed in the original instructions referred to 'these times, ... the great verities of the Word of God, ... today's burning issues,' and the 'thrilling revival of theology.' This does not mean forgetting the past but emerging out of the past into the present."³⁰

It would have been in greater accord with the facts of the case if the committee had spoken of "the great verities" of the modern philosophical view of man that are now to be proclaimed by a Presbyterian church.

"What, then," the committee continues, "out of the Christian past needs most to be said and most to be reformulated for the sake of the church's confession in our day? The church preaches, teaches, and celebrates above all else God's gift of salvation to men. This is the main theme of the Bible and the main theme of Christian theology and worship, faith and life. In the ancient church, salvation needed creedal definition in terms of the deity of the Redeemer. Later, the work of the Redeemer came to the fore, then the means of redemption. What do the 1960's especially call forth from the teaching of the Scriptures? One passage in 2 Corinthians imposed itself irresistibly upon the Committee as it has imposed itself powerfully in the theology of our time:

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us (2 Cor 5:18–20, RSV).

"This passage became, not the text, nor literally the pattern for the present statement (although it is almost the pattern for its structure). But the touchstone

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

for the meaning of salvation expressed especially for the conditions of our day: the reconciliation of the world by God himself in Christ together with the resulting mission of the church.”³¹

It would have been well if the committee had told us that its concept of reconciliation, which is the heart of the confession, has been taken from Paul as reinterpreted in terms of Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*. Christ is his work of saving all men: that is the gospel of the Confession of 1967.

C. Of Faith

“The Confession of 1967 is not designed to define the faith of Presbyterian. The central elements of the faith of Presbyterians are all shared as well by other Christians.... [The Confession] has the ecumenical goal of advancing one denomination in the mission which belongs to the whole church.”³² The Presbyterian church is to lead the whole church of Christ forward in its mission of telling to all men that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself.

D. Structure

“The two main parts of the Confession, ‘God’s Work of Reconciliation’ and ‘The Ministry of Reconciliation,’ are obviously two aspects of one theme. The structure of the first part is Trinitarian, following the sequence of Son, Father, Spirit as the apostolic benediction of 2 Corinthians 13:14. The structure of the second part, first mission and then equipment for mission, places the church with unusual emphasis in the context of its aim and goal, thus in a posture of action. The church militant here is militant in the service of reconciliation. The final section points in hope to the triumph of God’s purpose.”³³

(5) The Place Of The Bible. “The Confession is intended to be Biblical throughout. At the end of Part 1 as part of the way the Holy Spirit ‘leads men to know God,’ its teaching on the Bible itself is presented. This section is an intended revision of the Westminster doctrine, which rested primarily on a view of inspiration that equated the Biblical canon directly with the Word of God. By contrast, the pre-eminent and primary meaning of the word of God in the Confession of 1967 is the Word of God incarnate. The function of the Bible is to be the instrument of the revelation of the Word in the living church. It is not a

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 27–28.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 29.

³³ *Ibid.*

witness among others but the witness without parallel, the norm of all other witness. At the same time questions of antiquated cosmology, diverse cultural influences, and the like, may be dealt with by careful scholarship uninhibited by the doctrine of inerrancy which placed the older Reformed theology at odds with advances in historical and scientific studies.”³⁴

7. Martin Marty

That the new Confession proposes confusion may be learned from what Martin Marty, the Lutheran ecumenist says.

“To most non-Presbyterian” says Martin Marty, “this (i.e., the Book of Confessions) sounds like a title for an anthology drawn from True Story magazine. To Presbyterians it represents a collection of scripts which tell the world what the church is and what it believes.”³⁵ Aren’t Presbyterians slow? It seems “that Presbyterians can crank up their machinery to provide a new confession only three times per millennium.”³⁶ Dr. Dowey himself said that ours “is a crisis not of lightning but of rust.”³⁷ Meanwhile things look favorable for 1967. The 643–110 vote on May 25, 1965, in favor of the script-writers and their general activities, sent the document further on its way.³⁸ A modern view of God as free to turn into the opposite of himself, a modern view of man as inherently participant in divinity and a modern view of Christ as the Act of union between this new god and this new man: This is what the new Confession offers us. If only the committee openly denied belief in the Westminster view of God, of man, and of Christ, then men would know the real choice that confronts them.

But what ails these Presbyterians anyway? “They would speak theologically in an apparently post-theological age. Who in the world cares?” “When churches are urged to look outward and speak out, Presbyterians seem to be looking into the mirror. They represent perhaps ¼50th of the nominal Christians in the world, yet in an ecumenical age they engage in apparently private, sectarian confessional activity. They claim that 17th century Westminster is ‘dated,’ but they reach back to the sixteenth century Reformation for their new inspiration.”³⁹ Fortunately, argues Marty, “the confessional obsession was atypical” for “most of

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *The Christian Century*, June 9, 1965, p. 733.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 734.

what the Assembly did was typical of what all active, mainline Protestant churches in America do each summer when the clan gathers.”⁴⁰

Even so, says Marty, Presbyterians will play with their theological paradoxes. Even though the great majority will be with Dowey there will be opposition. And on what will the opposition fasten? On the Bible! “Westminster’s linchpin is the doctrine of double predestination and the double covenant, ideas which not even many anti-Doweyites find basic today. What they do favor is Westminster’s doctrine of Scripture.” “The opposition contends that without Westminster’s doctrine of infallibility, as they interpret it, the church cannot be mired and cannot speak further with authority.”⁴¹

8. A Book of Discord

The “Presbyterians” are to be complimented by Marty’s carefree analysis of their confessional efforts. It is scarcely thinkable that a “son of Luther” should seem to have forgotten how Luther was ready to give his life for that for which Marty will not lift a finger, but is out to destroy.

For ourselves we plan to take the “Presbyterians” seriously. If ours is really a post-theological age, and if Dowey and his committee want us to speak theologically in this age, then more honor to them.

But then here is the problem. Is the Dowey committee really speaking theologically? Is it really calling on the church to bring the gospel of God’s grace to men? We have already answered this question in the negative. But let us now look at the Book of Confessions in order to see what it is that it wants us to confess to the world.

9. The Book Contains Two Mutually Exclusive Gospels

The first fact to mention about this book is that it offers two gospels, rather than one.

First, there is the gospel set forth by all the creeds to be published in the book except the last two. According to these earlier confessions it is man’s chief end to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

Second, there is the gospel set forth by the last two creeds to be published in the book. According to these later confessions it is man's chief end to glorify man and enjoy him forever.

The effort of the committee, and especially of Drs. Trinterud and Dowey, to make us believe that there is genuine continuity between the new creeds and the old is but special pleading. It should deceive no one.

Martin Marty certainly is not right when he says that the "anti-Doweyites" will oppose him on no other point but that of Scripture. On the other hand Marty is right when, unwittingly, he points out that the two views of Scripture, the one represented by the Westminster standards and the other represented in the Confession of 1967, are diametrically opposed to one another. They indicate precisely and basically how the two gospels differ from one another.

In the standards of historic Protestantism and perhaps most clearly in the standards of Westminster, it is the self-sufficient Christ himself who speaks to man in the Scriptures. In direct opposition to this in the Declaration of Barmen and in the Confession of 1967, it is the self-sufficient man who points a finger at a Christ who cannot speak for himself.

The new Confession does indeed speak of the Scriptures as "the Word of God written" and as such the source for the creed-making efforts of the church. We are told that the new creed wants to be biblical. Following the theology of the "living church," the new Confession thinks of itself as more truly biblical than the old. This is the case because the new theology thinks itself more truly Christological than the old, i.e., more truly activist than the old.

According to neo-orthodox theology in its every variety, the historic Protestant confessions simply could not be genuinely Christological and therefore could not be genuinely biblical. Why? Because orthodoxy, and even the Reformers, made a direct identification both of Christ and of his Word in Scripture with something that appeared in the I-it dimension. Orthodoxy simply had no eye for the mystery of the gospel. It did not appreciate the fact that God is always hidden in his revelation. Orthodoxy did not realize that, though Jesus is the Son of God and that the Bible is the word of God in Christ, this is must not be directly identified with anything that appeared or happened in the past. In short, orthodoxy does not realize that the whole transaction between God and man is, as Brunner has put it so well, a matter of person-to-person encounter, or, as Barth has also put it well, a matter of *Geschichte* and only secondarily of *Historie*.

It is always a mean thing to take toys away from children. Linus must have his blanket. But when will Orthodoxy grow up? When will it learn to drive a modern car instead of clinging to its Model T? How exhilarating it is to move with the greatest of ease from *Historie* to *Geschichte* and from *Geschichte* to *Historie*! The whole thing becomes a matter of reflexes. We have to pinch ourselves to think back to the time when it seemed strange to say that when God is wholly revealed in Jesus of Nazareth and the words of the Bible, he is, for that very reason, at the same time also wholly hidden, and that there is no mystery in God but that is wholly revealed in Christ. Christ is both the electing God and the elected man; let us sing it as a "lyrical tribute" to Karl Barth.

For all that, those of us who are orthodox are, with Linus, going to hold on to our blankets. The Heidelberg Catechism says in Question 1: "What is your only comfort, in life and in death?" The answer is:

That I belong—body and soul, in life and in death—not to myself but to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ, who at the cost of his own blood has fully paid for all my sins and has completely freed me from the dominion of the devil; that he protects me so well that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, that everything must fit his purpose for my salvation. Therefore, by his Holy Spirit, he also assures me of eternal life, and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.

You see that those of us who hold to the Christ of the orthodox faith do not hold to some abstract notion either of God or of man.

We believe that, and only that, which Christ has told us about God and our relation to him. Could there be anything more than this first question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism? Here I stand in person-to-person relation with Christ my Savior and my Lord! Modern existentialism is not existentialist at all, and neo-orthodox theology has no person-to-person relation with God.

Not how absolutely comprehensive my person-to-person confrontation with Christ is in the Heidelberg Confession. It includes heaven and earth. No bifurcation here between an I-thou and an I-it dimension. I am personally confronted with Christ in the realm of "necessity," the realm of science and the realm of philosophy as well as in the realm of "religion." I am, in Adam, created as a covenant-keeper. I became, in Adam, covenant-breaker. I daily break my covenant with God. The wrath of the Lamb awaits me in its full expression at the judgment day.

But I do not know how great my sin and misery is. Neither Greek nor modern philosophy has told me. In particular, Kant has not. Depth psychology has not begun to fathom it. A few pages of Freud is "enough to shock any decent beast" but Freud knows nothing of how great my guilt and corruption is. How could anyone, save Christ, tell me how great my sin and misery are? He alone is holy. Against him alone have I offended. His law of love have I trampled under foot. He alone is omniscient. The Heart of man is desperately wicked. Who can know it? Christ and Christ alone, for Christ is God. Here then I lie prostrate in my guilt and wretchedness. With Adam, and with all my fellow-men, I listened to Satan and plotted against my Creator. I still listen to Satan. Soon I shall I join him in the abode of the damned. Soon the wrath of the Lamb will come down in full fury upon me. Since I have refused to love and obey him, he will cast me out into outer darkness where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched.

But no, the great Physician sits at the side of my bed. He assures me that he has taken my place. He was, he says, made a curse for me that I might be set free from his wrath. At the cost of his own blood, he tells me in his Word, he "has fully paid for all my sins and has completely freed me from the dominion of the devil." He alone could do this and he alone did this, for he is truly man as truly God.

Now I walk in comfort every day. My Savior is my Lord! He has saved me in the whole of my being. The Father is now propitious toward me. Not a hair shall fall from my head without his will. No power in heaven or on earth or under the earth can set upon me to do me harm. The "phenomenal" world itself has been redeemed to be my home.

If I am still of little faith as I see the waves of empirical reality rolling over me, he bids me look at him. If I shudder when the last enemy which is death is about to snatch me away, then his Holy Spirit "assures me of eternal life."

Oh yes, I was on the way to eternal death. But Christ died for me on the cross. Then and there I died to sin with him on the cross. After that, on the third day, he arose from the dead and I arose with him into righteousness. I am now justified in him. He tells me by his Spirit that I am adopted into the family of God. I am a fellow heir with him of eternal life. He tells me by his Spirit that for me too he is preparing a dwelling-place above.

Now, having told me how great my sins and miseries are and "how I am freed from all my sins and their wretched consequences," he also tells me "what gratitude I owe to God for such redemption." It was through his law that I learned myself to be offensive to him and loathsome in his sight. It is now also his law

that guides me in my expression of gratitude to him. I shall never outgrow my foolishness all my days. Nonetheless I say: Oh how love I thy law; it is my meditation all the day.

Now on my merry way I go. Oh yes, I am temperamentally a pessimistic sort of fellow. And, oh yes, instead of getting better I seem to myself to be getting worse as I grow older. There is only the faintest beginning of true love and true devotion to my Christ in my heart. I daily repent of my sin and daily seek renewal of my passionate love for my Redeemer and Lord. Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? "But thanks be unto God who always causeth us to triumph and maketh known the savor of his name by us in every place" (2 Cor 2:14).

It is in this sense of victory through Christ that I now go forth to tell of his coming to those who have never heard of that name through which alone they may be saved. It is in this sense of victory that I go to my fellow-men, of every nation and kindred and tribe, to tell them and to show them how no problem, physical, biological, psychological, logical, social, ethical can, in any basic sense, be solved unless it be solved in Christ and by the regenerating power of his Spirit. Of course, I will cooperate with those who have not my Christ in bettering the lot of our fellow-men. I rejoice in the fact that Christ's general, common, non-saving grace reaches out to all men everywhere. I rejoice in the "good works" of any man even though they be not done from faith, according to the Word of God and for the glory of God. Even so, as a member of the Church of Christ I must speak forth the comfort of the gospel in a way such as is shown me in the Heidelberg Catechism and in the Westminster standards.

This is my blanket. Without it I cannot sleep. Without it I cannot go anywhere. I do not want to be seen anywhere without it. And now the new theology and the new creed are trying to take my blanket from me.

Who cares?

I do, Mr. Marty. You may say that the confessional activity of the General Assembly of 1965 was not typical. I believe that it was typical. It was all too typical. The Presbyterian churches pride themselves on being confessional churches. They want to continue to be. Why otherwise the labored effort on the part of the committee to establish in the minds of its laymen and ministers alike that there is continuity between the new and the old confessions? Why otherwise the contention of Dr. Dowey that the committee was simply, like the good old Puritans, seeking for more truth to break forth from Scripture when he doesn't believe in the Scripture as setting forth the Word of Christ in any final fashion at

all? Talk about creed-revision or creed-renewal! When the late B. B. Warfield spoke of it he meant that by careful exegesis of Christ's self-testimony in Scripture, the Church, guided by the Spirit of Christ, might gradually work out more fully the implications of that Word for every area of human interest. Do we, as the redeemed by Christ, have any responsibility for the "burning issues" involved in the race problem? Of course we have. Let us exegete the Scriptures to see what light, what new light for us who have not till now adequately searched it out, it may have. Do we have any responsibility with respect to the "new morality"? Of course we have. Let us urge men to seek pardon for sin in the blood of Christ and power from his Spirit to resist both every old and every new form of temptation into which in the situation of modern life we may fall.

None of this for Dr. Dowey and his committee. Marty says that they are turning away from the Westminster standards so as to seek a new inspiration by going back to the Reformation. But the Heidelberg Confession is a Reformation creed. We have often been told that it is a mild and ecumenical creed. We are told that it does not "flaunt" the doctrine of election in the way that, according to Dr. Phillip Schaff, the Westminster Confession does. In view of the Westminster Creed, says Schaff, "all is light for the elect and all is dark for the non-elect." Was it the "horrible doctrine of the double decree," that "linchpin" of Westminster, that the committee was skipping over when it included the Heidelberg Confession in its book of confessions? If such was the case then, surely this was self-delusion. It is the gospel of the sovereign saving grace of God through Christ's atoning death and resurrection that is found in both confessions. It is this sovereign grace of the historic confession that is obnoxious to Dowey and his committee.

What the new theology and the new Confession, following the new theology, are attempting to do is to take away from the followers of the Reformation, faith in the Christ of the Scriptures and the Scriptures of the Christ. The new theology has another Christ, a Christ patterned after the thinking of the natural man. The natural man repudiates the idea of sin, of redemption and of gratitude for redemption. He himself has no such "blanket" and feels no need of such a blanket. He thinks he knows how great his "sin" and misery are. Ancient and especially modern philosophy have told him. Evil, he thinks, is his sad plight because he is surrounded by the pure impersonal force of nature. When he thinks deeply of it, especially when he studies depth psychology and reads the morning paper, then he becomes very pessimistic. Let's write detailed descriptions of every conceivable form of corruption. Maybe that will bring release. What else are novelists for?

But then there is always the *Reader's Digest*. Or how about the power of positive thinking? If with Barth in his *Romans* we say that there is condemnation for those in Christ as well as for those that are not in Christ we must also with Barth in his *Church Dogmatics* assert that to be man is to be participant in the manhood of Christ. The reprobate are, says Barth, reprobate in Christ and are therefore elect in Christ. Let us go forth into all the world, not so much to tell them of what happened on Calvary outside the city of Jerusalem, but to tell them that they are in Christ, that they have, from all eternity, been reconciled to Christ whether they have heard of Pontius Pilate or not.

But what reason do the new theologians give me for tearing away my Heidelberg blanket from me? They tell me that it is for my own good. As a group of medical consultants, they stand around my bed and tell me that in my Christ, the divine and the human natures are supposed to exist independently of one another first, and that, after thus existing apart from one another, they are then artificially bound together—a God in and by himself and a man in and by himself which I must, myself, tie together with a string. Everything, they say, is artificial and everything is dead. Instead of such a Christ bringing me comfort, he, or it, they say, is calculated to bring me dread. Think of a God whose being is not identical with his revelation of grace to me in Christ. Such a God may send me to hell or to heaven according to his whim and I therefore live in jeopardy every hour. It is no wonder that I am gasping for breath. Think of a man who is not what he is as fellow-elect with Christ. Such a man in and for himself starts and remains in the death of isolation from Christ. How can you, the medical experts ask me, find any comfort in a Christ that has to be made-up out of concepts that apply only to the I-it dimension? How can you think of having any person-to-person confrontation with a Christ who, as God, is wholly unknown and who, as man, is wholly unknown, and who as God-man is an artifact?

All this abstract conceptualism, all this impersonalism, all this deadness is cured at once and once for all by the new Christ. The new Christ lives! "He is a human person."⁴² "His being as man is His work."⁴³ His work is the saving of all men. The man Jesus, "is the kingdom of God..."⁴⁴ As such he is "identical with the divine Subject."⁴⁵ In this identification of himself as both God and man, he is the salvation of every man. "*Wie die Geschichte der göttlichen Rettung für alle und jeden Menschen ganz und gar und ausschliesslich Er ist, so is Er ganz und gar und*

⁴² *K. D.*, 3:2, p. 69.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

ausschliesslich die Geschichte der göttlichen Rettung für alle und jeden Menschen... Er ist selbst diese Geschichte."⁴⁶

Through reconciliation God wants to make man participate in the "internal *Geschichte* of his divinity."⁴⁷ But this participation of the world in the being of God requires that God first participate in the being of the world, namely, that "his own being, his own *Geschichte*, work itself out as world-history (*Weltgeschichte*) and therefore under the entire burden and in the entire danger of world-history."⁴⁸

If we are used to thinking in static categories, we might demur at this point. Would God still be God if he submitted himself to *Weltgeschichte*?

Thinking Christologically, we reply that it is the nature of the Son of God to express the freedom of God. God in his freedom can become wholly unlike himself and yet remain the same.⁴⁹

Thus God became visible to us in the man Jesus.⁵⁰ But in this very revelation he remains wholly hidden.⁵¹ God is present in history but revelation is never a predicate of history. "It must signify that revelation becomes history, but not that history becomes revelation."⁵² Thus God can and does reveal himself in Jesus Christ. Therewith God has reconciled the world to himself.⁵³

God is free to become a creature and free to take his divinity back into himself. God is free to lift the creature in the strictest and most perfect sense into unity with his own divine being.⁵⁴ God is *totus intra et totus extra*. He is this in Christ.⁵⁵ What happens in God must be continued in the world. Eventuation in God is inherently also eventuation with respect to and in us.⁵⁶

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *K. D.*, 4:1, p. 236.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ cf. *K. D.*, 1:1, p. 337; *C. D.*, p. 367.

⁵⁰ *K. D.*, 1:2, p. 40; *C. D.*, p. 36.

⁵¹ *K. D.*, 1:2, p. 42; *C. D.*, p. 38.

⁵² *K. D.*, 1:2, p. 64; *C. D.*, p. 58.

⁵³ *K. D.*, 1:2, p. 172; *C. D.*, p. 158.

⁵⁴ *K. D.*, 2:1, p. 354; *C. D.*, pp. 314–315.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *K. D.*, 2:1, p. 176.

In his incarnation therefore, Jesus Christ expresses the *Geschichte* of God and man in unity. "He who says man says creaturehood and sin, limitation and distress. One must also say both of these of the man Christ Jesus.⁵⁷ But all of this is included in the nature of God. God is inherently coexistent as well as existent.⁵⁸

Looking at things Christologically, that is, from the fact of the incarnation as *Geschichte*, we see that in Christ eternity becomes time without ceasing to be eternity. God's eternity is itself beginning, succession and end. In the incarnation God submits himself to the conditions of time.⁵⁹ If we think of the attributes of God statically and abstractly, then we are horrified at this truth. Thinking concretely, that is, Christologically, we see that the living God himself is eternity.⁶⁰ "God is who he is in the act of his revelation."⁶¹ In the incarnation time is that form of creation, by which it becomes fit to be the place where God displays his deeds.⁶² If creation were eternal, then God would be limited by its and by his own eternity.⁶³ It is only in time and in space that God can both be and express his own eternal being. In the incarnation, therefore, the glory of God flows into time.⁶⁴ Incarnation is a free, sovereign act of God. In Christ God elects himself so that we can only believe in the non-rejection of all men.⁶⁵ "Here is our true beginning as men."⁶⁶

To sum up the matter then, the Christ of neo-orthodox theology, as portrayed by Karl Barth, author of the Barmen Confession and patron-saint of the 1967 Confession, is the act of God coming down into space and time for the purpose of saving all men, and men are the act of participation in the being of God through Christ. And all of this together is the Christ-Event. And the Christ-Event is *Geschichte*. "The reconciliation of the world with God in its totality is *Geschichte*."⁶⁷ Is this the Christ of Paul? It is not! Is this the "reconciliation" of which Paul speaks? It is not!

⁵⁷ *K. D.*, 4:1, p. 143.

⁵⁸ *K. D.*, 2:1, p. 521; cf. p. 578.

⁵⁹ *K. D.*, 2:1, p. 694; *C. D.*, p. 616.

⁶⁰ *K. D.*, 2:1, p. 720.

⁶¹ *K. D.*, 2:1, p. 288.

⁶² *K. D.*, 2:1, p. 523.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *K. D.*, 2:2, p. 130.

⁶⁵ *K. D.*, 2:2, p. 184.

⁶⁶ *K. D.*, 2:2, p. 704; for a more extended statement see my *Christianity and Barthianism*, 1962, pp. 13–29.

⁶⁷ *K. D.*, 3:2, p. 240.

10. The Book Contains Two Mutually Exclusive Views of the Trinity and of Election

It is obvious that in the new theology and in the new Confession, the Christ-Event, as thus conceived, is central to everything. The entire message of reconciliation which is said to be the burden of what the church must bring to the world, is but the man-ward aspect of the Christ-Event.

The God-ward aspect of the Christ-Event, is found in the new doctrine of the Trinity. Has not the church always believed in the Trinity? Yes, we reply, it has always believed in the Trinity, but it has never believed in the kind of Trinity proposed by the new theology.

The new Trinity is based on the new Christ. "The doctrine of the trinity is nothing more than the development of the confession that Jesus Christ is the Christ or Lord." ⁶⁸

You see then how the new revelational Trinity, according to which the triune God is wholly expressed in Christ's work saving all men, is supposed to give me the comfort of the gospel in a way that the old idea of the Trinity never could. The new Trinity is the work of Christ in saving me.

Finally, we must note that the new Christ-Event is supposed to set me free at one stroke from all the nasty questions that always bothered me with respect to election and reprobation. Says the "minister of St. Louis" to me: You see now why I am so enthusiastic about the new creed. I can now be a Presbyterian without apology. I now realize with Philip Schaff that historic Calvinism is dead. What exasperating and futile arguments our forefathers had with the Arminians! Our fathers charged the poor Arminians with not teaching the full and sovereign grace of God in Christ. In my own day we were even told about supra and infralapsarianism. The supras claimed to be the most consistent, the most rigidly logical of Calvinists. These supras had a God who apart from and prior to Christ, would send some men to hell for no reason at all and others to heaven also for no reason at all.

But now all this is cleared away. Barth does not hesitate to call himself a supralapsarian, for he has "purified" the old teaching on this score in a twofold way. Barth believes in election. Of course he does. I do too. Else I would not be a

⁶⁸ *K. D.*, 1:1, p. 353.

Presbyterian. But Barth has shown election and reprobation not to refer to persons. Secondly he has shown that reprobation cannot be God's last word for any man. So I may now be a Presbyterian with all that this implies by way of heritage and at the same time lead the ecumenical church in preaching "biblical universalism" as my concept of destiny.

Now when I listen to what the "minister from St. Louis" tells me, I envy him. I, too, would like to be up-to-date. But I do not want to be up-to-date at the price of having no Christ to preach and therefore no message of reconciliation to bring to men. That, you see, is my difficulty with the new confession!

If I take the Christ-Event of the new theology and of the new confession and look at it soberly, then I realize that there is no room in it for my personal confrontation with the risen Christ at any point, with "Jesus the Nazarene" who appeared to Paul on the Damascus road (Acts 22:8).

The Heidelberg Catechism says that I belong body and soul to my Savior. On the new scheme my body belongs to the I-it dimension and this I-it dimension does not belong to Christ at all. The I-it dimension is the resultant of an interaction between a bottomless cauldron of unrelated brute factual stuff, and man, who has himself, by chance, appeared as a bit of flotsam and jetsam on the surface of this cauldron. How man's conceptualizing powers have ever come forth from this purely contingent and purely non-rational stuff no one knows. Neither God nor man knows. The Christ who is supposed to tell me what I am and what I need does not know. How could "he" know since he is nothing more than an abstract principle of comprehensive rationality correlative to an abstract principle of pure irrationality which man has postulated as an ideal for himself?

Moreover, not only my body but also my soul, so far as I can say anything about it, is also subject to the impersonal laws of the cosmos. The only part of me that is not subject to the impersonalism of the space-time world, the world of ordinary history (*Historie*) is my spirit. It is said to be free. But it is free by way of a purely negative relation which is supposed to sustain to the I-it dimension. If I cannot know anything about such freedom, I cannot know myself as free. This spirit is certainly not free because it was created in the image of God. It is rather free because it is autonomous, and as such nothing can be said about it. It is free only so far as it is free from all relation with God or its fellow man.

11. The Book Contains Two Mutually Exclusive Christs

Of course, the new theology says that my spirit is free in Christ. The new theology claims to have a Christ who is beforehand with man in every respect. Christ is said to be the electing God and the elected man. That covers all the relations between God and man. The very ground-form of humanity is said to be its election in Christ. But then this Christ: who is he? Does he really speak and act with respect to me from above? Not at all. The new theology as well as the theology of Schleiermacher or of Ritschl, starts *von unten*, from below. It starts from the free man which, as we have just seen is, because of his freedom, unable to find himself.

This free man, free by pure negation of the space-time world, must now seek to become positively free by the postulation of a Christ who lives in the I-thou dimension. The free man, free by negation, must use the I-it dimension for his launching-pad as he postulates the free Christ, the Christ of pure negation.

When then the Christ of pure negation has been launched from the impersonal launching-pad of the I-it dimension by the man of pure negation, who had first launched himself from that same launching-pad, then this man discovers that it was his Christ who had launched him in the first place.

Christ is before all and above all. He is the ground form of humanity. For all that, he is nothing but pure projection.

We have earlier seen that modern man must seek his freedom in terms of an ethical dualism such as Kant advocated. This ethical dualism makes an absolute separation between the I-it and the I-thou dimension. It relegates man's spirit to the noumenal realm, the realm of which, by definition, man can know nothing at all.

Then, when this fatal bifurcation between a realm of the impersonal and a realm of the personal has been made it is too late ever to bring these two realms together again. Not all the king's horses nor all the king's men can do it! When Kant tries to bring the two realms together by positing the primacy of the practical reason the whole effort is obviously artificial. If you have first denied that the world of space-time is created and redeemed by Christ, then you cannot afterwards bring this impersonal world in subjection to Christ.

Now the Christ of the new theology is, to begin with, not the Creator and Redeemer of the world. The new theology and the new creed want, at all costs, to

be modern. To be modern is to assume, if not to assert, that the world of science and the world of human personality are to be conceived of in some such way as Kant has conceived of them. It is therefore purely artificial and meaningless to talk, as the new theology and the new creed do, about God through Christ redeeming the world to himself. Its world is not created and cannot be redeemed by Christ.

On the basis of the new theology man is not created in the image of God at the beginning of history. Man has not sinned against God. How could he knowingly sin at all? So far as he has any concept of himself, he has this in terms of the I-it dimension. He cannot sin as free man because as free man he knows neither himself nor God. If he could sin, then there would be no Christ to save him; his Christ would as real man, have the same troubles as the man of whom we have just now spoken.

But why go through the dreary round again? Having cut man and his Christ loose from one another, the new theology cannot put them together again. The new theology and the new creed are taking my Christ away from me. They are offering me a new Christ, a prefabricated Christ, a Christ such as the natural man would like to see and adore. In adoring this new Christ I would be adoring myself.

Ludwig Feuerbach would say that the Christology of the new theology and of the new creed are but another instance of glorified anthropology again. It is the old story over again. Schleiermacher and Ritschl also rejected the Christ of the historic Christian creeds. They wanted a new Christ, one that is both sovereign and universal in his grace to mankind. These men made up their new Christ. They launched him from the impersonal realm of science, but he soon dropped to earth—still dead! Neo-orthodoxy has watched the failure of the older modernism. So it accumulated a much greater boosting power and drove its Christ much higher up into the sky than Schleiermacher or Ritschl did. But now this Christ is lost in space. He has never returned. He never will return! However, while not returning, he has returned as wholly hidden in the realism of the impersonal.

Yes, I know he is both wholly hidden and wholly revealed at the same time. But this does not alleviate the difficulty. To say this, reality must be assumed to be both wholly rational and wholly irrational at the same time.

This is the new blanket, the electrical blanket that the new creed offers me for my old Heidelberg and Westminster one. The new blanket has short-circuits

between every connection. It cannot be plugged into the main current.
Furthermore, there is no main current!

Chapter 7: On To 1997

We now give particular attention to the ecumenical aspirations that are expressed in the Confession of 1967. Martin Marty may be comforted by the fact that the Presbyterians who wrote the proposed Confession of 1967 said that it is "not designed to define the faith of Presbyterians."

It is equally obvious that the Confession is not designed to define the faith of non-Reformed evangelicals. The committee was not thinking of curing the Westminster view of election by a shot of Arminianism. It is the modern post-Kantian rather than the Arminian view of the freedom of man that constitutes the starting-point of the Confession.

To be sure, when the committee explains the contrast between its starting-point and the starting-point of the Westminster Confession it says that "the preeminent and primary meaning of the word of God in the Confession of 1967 is the Word of God incarnate"¹, rather than Scripture as the Word of God. But we have seen what it means when the incarnation is first actualized and then made the starting-point of a theology or a confession. The Confession of 1967 throughout assumes an actualized incarnation. This virtually reduces the relation of God to man and of man to God to a process.

Reality is seen as one Event with a downward and an upward movement. The Creator-creature, the sinner-Redeemer relations are aspects of this process. The Christ-Event includes all reality, of Eternity down to time and of time up to eternity.

When the new confession tells us that the church "bears a present witness to God's grace in Jesus Christ"², it tells us, in the name of Christ, that reality is hierarchical, that through the benevolent forces hidden in it, all will be well in the end. Human personality, radically evil as admittedly it is, has the redeeming forces that it needs for its rehabilitation within itself. Let us now transform society by telling people everywhere that they must treat the fellow-men not as things

¹ *Ibid.*

² 2:2, 3.

but as persons. Look straight upward and you will sense an attraction toward the realm of *Geschichte*.

Jesus Christ became incarnate, yes, but he is as such becoming incarnate. "Jesus Christ is God with man. He is the eternal Son of the Father who became man and lived among us to fulfill the work of reconciliation. He is present in the church by the power of the Holy Spirit to continue and complete his mission."³ All this is process. None of it refers to anything that was finished in the past. To speak of the incarnation as a fact of the past, to speak of the inspiration of the gospel writers by the Spirit as something that happened in the past is, on the view of the new Confessions, to fall back into the staticism of the obscurantists who lived before the day of modern science and philosophy. What we want is primacy of the Christ-Event. We want progress. We want act.

1. The Creed Making Process

The Amarillo Presbytery was therefore truly far-sighted when it called attention to the need of a new Confession. The Shorter Catechism defines God without reference to his love. It was assumed, at the time of its composition, that men were "superiors, inferiors, or equals." We now need a confession which, according to the thought of our day, thinks of God as loving all men equally as persons and which thinks of the ideal society as that in which all men treat each other as persons. There is therefore need for a genuinely new creed, a creed that is alive because it is the creed of "a living church."

In writing the new creed, therefore, the committee had the ultimate goal of a universal church in mind. Has not Presbyterianism always been ecumenically minded? Was not Calvin willing to cross seven seas in order to find unity with any of his Protestant brethren? We must now go beyond that and think of the universal church, the church in which all men shall be truly men, in which men treat men as persons rather than as things, in Jesus Christ. This is the church of the future.

2. The Church That Moves

President Emeritus John P. Van Dusen, of Union Seminary, New York, spoke of this new church at the graduation exercises of the Temple University School of Theology in the spring of 1964. He spoke of this new church as the Church of

³ 2:42–45.

Christ. This Church of Christ, he said, would be the church of the future. In the future we shall no longer see the names of separate denominations on the church signs of the various church buildings of the land. Yes, we shall still see these names, but only as fading out. They are the names that point to the past as the dead past. The Church of Christ is the name of the future church, of the Christ living in the present.

3. The Creed That Moves

The new church needs a new creed. It needs a new creed at every new period in the development of the vision that mankind has of its ever-increasing recognition of all men as persons. Surely if 1967 is a proper date for a new ecumenical creed, 1997 may be the time for a more obviously ecumenical creed. Of course, we are taking the year 1997 out of the air. And, of course, the situations that we shall speak of as preparatory to this imaginary Assembly of 1997 are also imaginary. But it is our serious belief that when the Confession of 1967 is adopted it may well lead to some such Creed of 1997 as we are suggesting. Let us look at some of the steps that may be taken in that direction.

The first step toward the creed of 1997 may well be a concord between the modern Lutheran and the modern Presbyterian and Reformed church bodies.

To discuss the possibilities of union between Reformed and Lutheran bodies there is no need for the modern Lutheran and the modern Reformed churches to hark back to the differences between them in the past. From the modern point of view these differences of the past spring from the common orthodox assumptions with respect to the relation between God and man. Both the Reformed and the Lutheran theologians of that Reformation period sought to be faithful to the Chalcedon view of the relation of the divine and the human natures in Christ.

But now that many of the Lutheran as well as many of the Reformed theologians have learned to speak of the Christ-Event as the Act of God whereby God turns wholly into the opposite of himself and whereby man's ground-form is seen to be participation in God through Christ, every obstacle to union has been, in principle, removed.

The modern Lutherans need no longer list the Reformed as heretics and the modern Reformed need no longer list the Lutherans as heretics on any major point of doctrine. The most serious heresies remaining to both are the orthodox

Lutherans and the Orthodox Reformed and these only in so far as they stubbornly cling to the idea that God reveals himself directly in the I-it dimension.

4. Martin Heineken, The Lutheran Theologian, On Søren Kierkegaard

Both modern Lutheran and modern Reformed theologians have been greatly assisted by the philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard. We shall ask Professor Martin Heineken to tell us of the blessing Kierkegaard has been to the church of Christ in our day.

Dr. Heineken's book is called *The Moment Before God: An Interpretation of Kierkegaard*.⁴ Heineken speaks as a modern Lutheran. Following Kierkegaard, Heineken will have nothing to do with "rationalistic fundamentalism which substitutes for objective uncertainty a supposedly infallible Bible."⁵ "There is no better example of a begging of the question (arguing in a circle) than the argument advanced for the inspiration of the Scriptures. It is said that the Bible is inspired because it itself says so. This in turn must be accepted as authoritative on the ground that those who wrote the Bible were inspired. This is arguing A on the strength of B, B on the strength of C, and C on the strength of A, thus completing the circle."⁶

Heineken accepts the same view of Scripture as is found in the Confession of 1967. The Bible is, he says, "the witness of believers behind which it is impossible to penetrate."⁷ Orthodoxy desires an objective basis for Scripture in the idea of direct revelation of God in history. "For Kierkegaard the entire orientation is wrong which seeks this kind of objective basis."⁸ "We are actually confronted with the phenomenon that a strict biblicist may not be a 'believer' at all but a confused rationalist, claiming apodictic certainty where it is quite impossible, or a pseudo scientist, citing the evidence of natural science where it doesn't belong.

⁴ p. 7.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 260.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

On the other hand, a very radical critic of the Bible may really be a 'believer' if he makes the proper distinctions and does not try to bolster with irrelevant argument that which must be 'believed' in a transformation of existence."⁹

No one seeks to "cure a cancer by spitting on it and reciting the magic words, 'Abracadabra.'" ¹⁰ Yet, even in our day, there remain some people who believe in the virgin birth Christ as a fact in the I-it dimension. ¹¹ Such people do not realize that "it is not the virgin birth of a man which is in question."¹² Surely the virgin birth of God must not be identified with a biological fact in the world of space and time. Of course parthenogenesis is theoretically possible, but that is not the sort of thing we speak of when we speak of the once-for-all event of the incarnation.

Again there are some folk left who believe that "a man once dead came back to life.... Such an occurrence is highly improbable but not impossible. A French surgeon is recently reported to have brought back to life, twenty minutes after he had been declared dead, a man who had been stabbed in the heart. With all the marvels scientists have been performing, no doubt this astounding feat will soon be obsolete. One must be very humble nowadays concerning what one declares to be impossible."¹³ But again it is not some such strange thing as a physical resuscitation that we have in mind when we speak of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This "is not by any means the witness of faith."¹⁴ Science will make resuscitation of human corpses a more frequent occurrence. What good would that do for us? What faith speaks of when it refers to the resurrection of Christ is something absolutely unique, i.e., "a final and complete victory over death."¹⁵ "He who means to establish an 'objective certainty' only confuses the issue. The biblicist is off the track with his 'proof.' It is better simply to trust the risen Lord and the testimony of his Holy Spirit. Then one will not confuse the mere historical fact with the redemptive fact. The historical fact is by no means denied, but it is the medium in which the redemptive fact is hidden. The two together constitute the revelation.... [But] ... there is no contemporaneity with the incarnation or resurrection except in faith."¹⁶

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 262–263.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 262.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 264.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, italic added.

5. Contemporaneity with Christ

It might appear then that Kierkegaard, and Heinecken following him, are leading us into the quagmire of pure irrational faith. It might appear that Kierkegaard, and Heinecken following him, are so strongly stressing the uniqueness or wholly otherness of Christ that we have no point of contact with him at all. But such is not all the case. The great discovery of Kierkegaard, says Heinecken, lies precisely in the fact that in the Christ-Event the absolute particular and the absolute universal are involved in one another. On the orthodox view of Christ and Scripture one has neither genuine particularity nor genuine universality.

We have already seen, argues Heinecken, that on the old view, the virgin birth and the resurrection of Christ, because identified with facts in the I-it dimension, would be repeatable. But the true Christian position believes in the absolute uniqueness of the Son of God. So also on the old view people who were not temporally present with Christ or the millions who did not hear about his death and resurrection on the cross outside Jerusalem, simply have no relation to him at all. But the true Christian position is that they who live in the midst of Christendom and therefore know all about him in the ordinary historical sense, have no advantage over the millions who are completely out of historical touch with him.

"Kierkegaard discovered that what makes the historical 'fact' so unique that neither the immediate contemporary, nor the later generation, nor the learned have the advantage is the fact that it is absolutely paradoxical. Jesus, the God-man, is the absolute paradox. Jesus, the carpenter's son, a creature of time and place, visible, tangible, finite, mutable, with a beginning and an end, subject to all the human limitations—eating, growing, learning, frustrated, forsaken, suffering, dying—is God."¹⁷

One can imagine that on reading this many a Lutheran pastor will feel the same sort of exhilaration that the "minister in St. Louis" felt when he first read the Confession of 1967. The minister of St. Louis was told that now, having the Confession of 1967, he need no longer speak with tongue in cheek when subscribing to a creed built on obscurantist historicism and proud particularism while actually believing in scientific evolutionism, higher criticism and philosophical existentialism. So now the Lutheran pastor is assured that he can

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 33–34.

continue to glory in Luther's theology of the cross and hold to Kierkegaard's idea of every individual's contemporaneity with Christ.

To have true faith in Christ is to be contemporaneous with Christ. How can this be? Well, it cannot be—if you want to measure reality by logic, by system, then it cannot be. But then, this is the point. When we have learned to follow Kant and therefore to distinguish between “the inviolable order of nature” and the order of absolute freedom, then we are ready also to follow Kierkegaard and to assert that paradox is the basic category of human existence. “The paradox of human existence is most boldly stated by saying that man is absolutely free and at the same time absolutely determined. This is his predicament in existence. To exist means first of all to stand out. The individual stands out from himself and the world, while he is yet involved with himself and the world. He is a part of nature and yet he is not a part of it.”¹⁸

Now you are also ready to see that Jesus Christ is the supreme paradox. “Jesus, the God-man, is the absolute paradox.”¹⁹

From now on the Lutheran pastor, together with the pastor from St. Louis, may enjoy a common exhilaration. Here at last we have the foundation for a “common Christian confession” in which the modern Lutheran and the modern Calvinist may believe.

Now the Lutheran and the Calvinist can actually realize that true ecumenism which both Luther and Calvin so earnestly desired. With the help of Kant and Kierkegaard, and with the help of Barth, Brunner and other theologians in our day, the Holy Spirit helps us to see our “inner unity in Christ.” Of course we continue to believe in the “ecumenical creeds” of the early church. Of course we continue to believe in the trinity. It is made the basis of the first part of the creed of 1967. And of course we accept the Chalcedonian creed. But we realize that all this would be “so much gibberish if the contradictions here asserted are not recognized as absolute paradoxes which point to the irresolvable ‘mystery of God.’ ”²⁰ We therefore reinterpret the old ecumenical creeds in accordance with Kant, Kierkegaard, Brunner and Barth. Doing this we are ready to face the twentieth century with the glorious message of sovereign, universal grace.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

The reader will note that the sovereignty of grace is, in this new theology, the sovereignty that is common to God and man. Heineken is certain that the orthodox view on the origin of the human race is fantastically foolish. "Adam, therefore, is not to be not fantastically outside the human race, as though he had occupied a position of freedom and innocence which others no longer occupy.... On such a basis it is no wonder that men have argued hopelessly about original sin." ²¹ But what can Heineken put in the place of orthodoxy on this point? Says he: "The state into which we must project ourselves is the psychological state preceding any choice whatever." ²² Following Kierkegaard, Heineken adds: "This psychological state is a state of dread, the object of which is unknown. It is thus a dread of nothing—it is the awareness of 'the alarming possibility of being able. What it is he is able to do, of that he has no conception; to suppose that he had some conception is to presuppose, as is commonly done, what came later, the distinction between good and evil.' This dread is both a sympathetic antipathy, and an antipathetic sympathy. That is to say, a man is both attracted and repelled. The attraction is not without its repulsion, nor is the repulsion without its attraction. There is 'nothing in the world more ambiguous.' Hence we speak of a 'sweet dread' or a 'sweet feeling of apprehension' or of a 'strange dread' or a 'shrinking dread.' We find such a dread in children who are still innocent and who stand before the unknown. They have no knowledge whatsoever of what it is that both attracts and repels them and draws them like moths to the flame. Hence also there is the same dread of innocence before the loss of virginity." ²³

We must, argues Heineken, "keep in mind that it is a self that is in dread. The self contemplates itself in freedom, and the result is an empty possibility of being able. It is this that arouses dread." ²⁴

Here then the idea of a noumenal self, a self that springs forth from the womb of chance, a self that is not, from the beginning, what it is because of its relation to God the creator-redeemer, that forms the starting-point of Heineken's theology of sovereign-universal grace. This starting-point is the same as that of the Confession of 1967. Unless seen in the light of this presupposition, the various statements of the confession have no coherence.

The historic Protestant idea, held by the Reformers, is rejected as though it were that much "abracadabra." The historic Protestant view is said or assumed to

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 177.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 177–178.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

require a sacrifice of the intellect, while this modern view is said to allow free scope for the exercise of the law of contradiction. Yet on this modern view, the human self is placed in an absolute vacuum. Man is said to be, not in dread of the God who addresses him with the law of love, but in dread of nothing. Then it is added that sin had its origin in this dread of nothing. "Thus out of the state of dread, which is the constant concomitant of freedom, sin is born."²⁵ Sin is not against the love of God but sin is, if it is against anything, against the self and this all floats in the abyss of the unrelated. But how can sin be sin even against the self if the self is a self without coherence?

Here is the absolute freedom of man which modern dimensionalism offers us. It goes without saying that, on this basis, the absolute freedom of God is identical with the absolute freedom of man. On this basis God is nothing more than a projection of the self—the self sprung full grown from the forehead of Chaos.

Here is the absolute freedom of man. It goes without saying that grace is sovereign. It is sovereign in the sense that it is purely arbitrary. Man has not sinned by breaking the commandment of his Creator's love. Man, and God with man, are surrounded by, just as they have sprung from, Chaos. Therefore grace is free; it is free because it is indeterminate.

Moreover, grace is inherently universal. On this view every man and every god is chaos born. All together are in "the same boat." There is no reason for thinking that one must enter into the Christian boat in order to come to shore safely at last.

In short, Heineken, as a modern Lutheran theologian, and Hendry, as a modern Reformed theologian, are together with many others preparing the modern Protestant church to profess a creed in which there is no grace at all because there is no Christ at all other than as the ideal human being. Why should not the modern Lutheran join the modern American Presbyterian in signing the Confession of 1967?

6. George W. Forell, Another Lutheran Theologian, On The Nicene Creed

A word may be added in passing in the way in which another modern Lutheran theologian seeks for continuity between the ancient ecumenical creeds

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

and the post-Kantian ecumenical church. Dr. George W. Forell writes a book on *Understanding the Nicene Creed*. Let us look into it for a moment.

Here we are: poor human beings, our legs chained in the I-it dimension. So, observes Forell, Paul Tillich has "brilliantly described" these fetters as "meaninglessness and emptiness, guilt and condemnation, fate and death."²⁶

After Forell has thus pictured man as controlled by worldly forces over which God has no control at all, he then calls upon Christ to save him. After "the psychoanalysts" have taught us to bring our "guilt feelings out into the open," then Christ is brought in to let us out of "the jail of our meaninglessness and our emptiness" into which we have locked ourselves.²⁷

When Forell hears Paul say that every man, knowing God, his Creator is aware of himself as a law-breaker, he prefers to substitute for this biblical teaching the teaching of the modern psychoanalyst. "The problem is that we don't really know what we are guilty of."²⁸ True, on Forell's view, man will never know what he is guilty of. In fact, why should man not explain away his guilt-feelings as an experience of racial adolescence? Forell, as well as Heinecken, starts man off in a vacuum. Says Forell: "When the Creed speaks of salvation it speaks of Christ's victory over guilt and condemnation."²⁹ But guilt and condemnation cannot be, on Forell's view; anything more than guilt feelings and damnation feelings of chance-produced men.

When Forell speaks of Christ, he too imposes the Christ of neo-orthodox reconstruction on the creed.

As was the case with Heinecken so with Forell. For him the virgin birth pertains primarily to the I-thou rather than to the I-it dimension.³⁰ For Forell, the "virgin birth" appears to be a creedal symbol. He says, "The doctrine of the virgin birth, here proclaimed, calls our attention to the fact that the Savior is truly God's gift and not man's achievement.... The fact that this saving deed has its origin entirely in God is proclaimed in the virgin birth and makes it a dramatic assertion of salvation by grace alone."³¹ Again, as was the case with Heinecken, so with Forell, the resurrection of Christ is merely "a sign of God's love," "of God's power"

²⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 25.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 45–46.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

and of "God's justice."³² "Confessing the resurrection of Christ, the Christian church proclaims the love, power, and justice of God."³³ So too, together with the ancient confession, we believe in the ascension of Christ but "to twentieth-century man the ascension says nothing about cosmic geography."³⁴

Forell apparently believes that Luther in his day already believed in this "primacy of the practical-reason-variety" of Christianity.³⁵

Of course what Forell is after is to give the working pastor a gospel to preach which twentieth century man will not throw out as "sick gibberish."³⁶ Remember this, you pastors, as you have your congregation sing the old hymn which reads:

There is a fountain filled with blood

Drawn from Immanuel's veins;

And sinners plunged beneath that flood,

Lose all their guilty stains.³⁷

Remember this when you have your people say that Christ, raised from the dead, is "at God's right hand."³⁸

Of course you must not "softpedal God's judgment."³⁹ But is there any divine judgment in the sense in which Paul speaks of it as the wrath to come? Forell allows no place to it in his theology as the Confession of 1967 allows no place to it. And how could he since, for him, sin has its origin in dread of the impersonal forces of the I-it dimension?

"The center of history," says Forell, "is the Christ-event described in the second article of the Creed. And for the Christian faith everything depends on the way in which one is related to this event."⁴⁰

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 53–54.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 62–63.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

But back of this, we reply, is the question: what is meant by the Christ-Event? There are two points to be stressed in this connection. First the Christ-Event of the historic Creeds and the Christ-Event portrayed by Forell are diametrically opposed to one another. Forell's Christ-Event is the projection of a vacuum-built man. The Christ-Event of the Creed is the birth, life, death, resurrection of the Son of God through whom man and the world exist and coexist. In the second place Forell's Christ-Event is constructed by man, as sprung from Chance, and having sprung from Chance he waves the logician's postulate and, in effect, asserts that the Christ of the historic Confessions cannot exist. Having thus, in effect, made a universal negative proposition about all reality, he goes on in effect, to assert that Christ is both wholly unknown and wholly known.

7. The Confession of 1977

When the Confession of 1967 has been adopted then such neo-orthodox Presbyterian theologians as Dr. Hendry and such neo-orthodox Lutheran theologians as Dr. Heineken may look forward expectantly to the adoption of the Confession of 1977, in which they may join together in the final demythologization of the faith of Luther and of Calvin and substitute for it the faith of Kierkegaard and Barth, the faith of Modern would-be self-sufficient man.

The zeal for the idea of the sovereign-universal grace of post-Kantian personalism of the Lutheran theologian Heineken and Forell finds-striking expression in the popular Lutheran journalist and ecumenist, Martin Marty.

Marty lives, moves and has his being in the atmosphere of ecumenism that springs forth weekly from *The Christian Century*. For Marty all hope for the future of the church is bound up with the modern ecumenical movement.

We live, says Marty, in a "dialogical world." This world can no longer be "diagrammed."⁴¹ The ecumenical movement appeared in transition, "from the sectioned space of Christian territorialism to the intersections of modern life."⁴² Those who understand the nature of the world today as dialogical realize also that the "church is shot through with inter personality."⁴³ They sense, therefore, that the church must never be identified with institutions. To be sure, "the charts of the church organization must deal with the 'I-it' " aspect of life. But, "as Buber

⁴¹ *Second Chance for American Protestants*, New York, 1963, p. 132.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

reminds us, the 'I-thou' cannot be organized."⁴⁴ The church is where the gospel is. "At the center of each believer's life should be the sense that if the Spirit of Christ is formed in others, he is one with them."⁴⁵ Marty tells us that his own views "represent an attempt to relate a catholic, coherent Christianity to a changing world."⁴⁶

8. A Second Chance for Protestantism

If now we live in a dialogical age and if only the church as ecumenical can meet the needs of such an age, then surely the Roman Catholic too must learn to see this fact. "If Protestants and Roman Catholics wish to make possible a creative coexistence, to enrich our pluralistic society, and to profit from each other's separate histories, they will have to participate in dialogue...."⁴⁷ Now "dialogue involves certain amount of risk—in this it is like a game."⁴⁸

Of course, as between Roman Catholics and Protestants the question of authority would be an important matter. "American 'Protestants' would hold that their view of authority is unconsolidated in history, in men or in movements; Catholics hold that theirs is consolidated in the 'Roman' Catholic tradition and papacy."⁴⁹

There is, to be sure, the ever-present heritage of fundamentalism represented today by the neo-evangelical. This movement "is strongest in countries of Calvinist heritage."⁵⁰ "Reformed conservatism begins with the doctrine of the verbal inspiration as an *a priori* ... The syllogism which is at the ground of this orthodoxy goes something like this: The Bible is the Word of God. God, being perfect, cannot err. Therefore the Bible is inerrant."⁵¹

But let us forget such a travesty of the true principle of the Reformation. The "only aspect that matters" as we enter upon the dialogue with Roman Catholicism

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

⁴⁷ Martin Marty, "A Dialogue of Histories," *American Catholics*, New York, 1959, p. 30.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁵⁰ *New Directions in Biblical Thought*, New York, 1960, p. 12.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

"is the rejection of any consolidated, once-for-all human authority except in the God-man Jesus Christ." ⁵²

In the Protestant-Roman Catholic dialogue, then, Marty puts the fundamentalist and even the neo-evangelical behind the lines. At the hour of danger they would side with the enemy in its claim that authority is "consolidated" in history. The "Protestant principle ... is to judge every man and every movement, every document and every impulse, to reveal the partiality of every vision of truth and every apprehension of divine reality." ⁵³ This point the orthodox Protestant—fundamentalist or neo-evangelical—simply does not understand. Thus they are unfit to carry on the battle of Protestantism in our day.

9. The Dialogue Today

Unity through dialogue: that is the last best hope for Protestantism. Protestantism is the last best hope for America and for the world. In some such way we may characterize the single-minded goal of all of Marty's many-sided effort.

"Inner unity with Christ" rather than an "earthly consolidation of his authority" is the principle of Marty's "reflective Protestant." ⁵⁴ "In the civilization of dialogue, which is our only option today," says the reflective Protestant "we can begin with commitment and proceed through love to new understanding." ⁵⁵ The commitment, narrowly speaking is naturally, to Christ, a Christ who comes to the reflective Protestant through "inner unity" alone.

When Marty reviewed the doings of the Presbyterian Assembly of 1965, he complained of the backwardness manifested there. According to Marty the task of the ecumenical movement is to make "post-Protestant America" Protestant. ⁵⁶ What is it that holds back progress on this point? It is fundamentalism in one or another of its runs. It is the view which, pretending to hold to absolutes, in reality absolutizes relativities. ⁵⁷ Marty takes one final, last glance at the benighted evangelicals and neo-evangelicals which he has already assigned a place in the rear and then calls upon all that really see the vision of sovereign-universal grace

⁵² "Dialogue of Histories," *American Catholics*, p. 49.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁵⁶ *The New Shape of American Religion*, New York, 1959, p. 106.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

^ la Kant, to move forward bravely into all the areas of life where persons are still treated as things. "Main-stream Protestantism" can now go forward toward union in order to present to men the challenge to believe in Christ, rather than to have faith in faith.⁵⁸

Marty wants a consolidated Protestantism which is to reject all consolidated authority except that which comes to us in "the God-man Jesus Christ." But who is to tell us about this Christ?

The God-man himself is not allowed to do so. The self and its world must first be intelligible to the self without this Christ.

Marty's Christ-Event, as well as the Christ-Event of Forell and of Heinecken is not, though it claims to be, continuous with the Christ of the historic Confession.

The committee that wrote the Confession of 1967 and assured us that it was not a confession of Presbyterians may, therefore, well be encouraged if they look about them at modern Lutheranism. A new Book of Concord may well be adopted at a convention all neo-orthodox-Presbyterians and of all neo-orthodox Lutherans. For want of a better name we have called it the "Confession of 1977." But whatever the name of such a creed, the main point is that the Christ of Kant's primacy of the practical reason, the Christ of Kierkegaard's absolute paradox, the Christ of Barth's pure act theology, will then be the Christ before whom all will bow.

Surely this is not, we are told, a "lowest common denominator" religion. Surely this is not the profession of "religion in general." It is the religion of the uniqueness and primacy of Christ. Meanwhile President Van Dusen's dream has at last come true. And meanwhile the mother church looks on.

Are you a Presbyterian? Yes. You believe that God passes by the reprobate and ordains them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice? This is the sort of question the minister from St. Louis used to have hurled at him. He was greatly embarrassed. But now all this has passed. It is no longer necessary to nibble at the Confession so as to have it make room for the universal nature of the gospel and for the free will of man. The Confession will be left unaltered, and as uninterpreted put in the Smithsonian Institute and called Confessions. After all, you do not tinker with the Spirit of St. Louis in order to orbit the earth with it. You put it away safely for antiquarians to see. For all

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

practical purposes the Confession of 1967 will be the confession by which Presbyterians will live.

Are you a Presbyterian? Yes. So you believe with "Dr. Luther" ... "that the will of man in conversion is purely passive...." ⁵⁹ Then are you any better than the Presbyterians? In your case, as well as in theirs, the free spirit of man is completely squashed! Why don't you too write a new confession, a confession built upon the assumption that man is a free spirit. Have you alone not read modern philosophy and psychology? Do you want to operate with your old Book of Concord in the twentieth century?

Why not join the Presbyterians, as together with you they project a new Christ for our new day? Let us call this new confession the "Confession of the Enlightened Protestants." Or if the adjective "enlightened" might seem needlessly to offend evangelical remnants in the Protestant churches, let us call it the Confession of 1977.

10. The Confession of 1987

Having reached this point we must look ahead to 1987. Is it too much to expect that in one decade the "principle of Protestantism" and the "principle of Roman Catholicism" will appear to be one principle after all?

Well in this case too, harsh words have been spoken. The mother-church calls itself the "living Church" because it does not tie men's souls down to a static, once-for-all given revelation in Scripture. Martin Marty, on the other hand, anxious though he is for all-comprehensive union, speaks of the Church of Rome as holding to the idea of "consolidating authority." And now we're not even citing any of the language used about and by the Reformers!

Well, you say, things have changed with Vatican 2. Think of Pope John 23. The mother-church no longer calls us heretics. We are now separated brethren. The church admits the need of reform. If only we on our part could keep Martin Marty and others like him from identifying Rome with the idea of consolidated authority. If only all of us Protestants would agree not to mention the subject of natural theology.

But there will, of course, always be spoil-sports. Here is this man Klaas Runia from Victoria, Australia. He writes in the conservative theo-evangelical magazine

⁵⁹ The Formula of Concord, Art. 2:9.

called *Christianity Today*⁶⁰ Runia quotes with agreement from Vittorio Subilia's book, *The Problem of Catholicism*. Says Subilia: "We must categorically exclude any reform of the sort to which Luther and Calvin called the universal church in their days."⁶¹ There are indeed, says Subilia, in the church, a number of younger theologians such as Hans Küng who speak as though things have really changed. But nothing is gained by wrapping "Trent's semi-Pelagian phrases" "in Augustinian ones." Nothing is gained when by "clever documentation" "Luther is made to look like a Catholic, and the Fathers of Trent like Lutherans, and the Catholic-Protestant antithesis is drained of its meanings, and reduced to an accidental if regrettable misunderstanding that no one in four centuries had even noticed but Dr. Küng."⁶²

11. Enter Neo-orthodoxy for Dialogue with Rome

All then appears to be darkness still. The mother-church for all its *aggiornamento* still shows no appreciation for the *sola scriptura*, the *sola gratia*, the *solus Christus* and the *sola fide* of the Reformation. In effect, the church still anathematizes the Reformation principle.

Fortunately, neo-orthodoxy solves our problem! The real darkness came from the stubborn unwillingness of the orthodox people in the Protestant, and especially in the Reformed churches, to reform themselves. With gritted teeth they challenged anyone to take from them the idea that if salvation is by grace then man must be wholly passive in the reception of it. But at last these Protestants have allowed the light to enter. Now the Reformed, and more particularly the American Presbyterians, have taken the lead. They have now taken their view of man from enlightened modern personalist philosophy. They have, with amazing rapidity, learned to apply the idea of free personality, taken from Kant's philosophy, to the whole God-man relation. So, for Emil Brunner, truth is wholly expressed in the idea of dialectic confrontation between God and man. So, for Karl Barth, the freedom of God, the freedom of man to become participant in the freedom of God, controls all of his thinking. What then is Protestantism? What is "The heritage of the Reformation"? It must not be identified with the theology of the Reformers. Protestantism is a movement in history. Protestantism, like every movement in history, can be understood only in terms of the whole of its development.

⁶⁰ cf. issue of June 18, 1965.

⁶¹ Vittorio Subilia, *The Problem of Catholicism*, trans. by Reginald Kissack, London, 1964, p. 97.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 41.

The principle of Protestantism is, therefore, not anti-Catholic. Protestantism is a positive, not a negative principle. There is, to be sure, and "outer," but there is also an "inner" history of Protestantism.

According to its inner history Protestantism appears to be the sharing of a perspective. This sharing of perspective is a sharing in a common memory of crucial events in the life of a community.

Do you see how the ecumenical idea thus blossoms forth from the principle of Protestantism? The Protestant principle implies the rejection of every human claim to absoluteness. The Protestant principle therefore recognizes that there is, as between Protestants and Catholics, a common loyalty to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

But what then, you ask, about Karl Barth? Has he not spoken of the Roman Catholic church as representing the spirit of anti-Christ? Is it not he who has actualized the incarnation? Did not Barth's negative judgement on Roman Catholicism spring from this very actualization of the incarnation?

Yes, indeed, but all this has changed. It was Hans Urs von Balthasar who, more than anyone else, has helped Barth to see that Roman Catholicism also begins its theology from the Christ-Event. Roman Catholicism, says von Balthasar, does not believe in direct revelation any more than does Barth. To be sure, Rome does speak of "faith and works," of "nature and grace," of "reason and revelation." But this "and" is not, as Barth thinks, fatal to the idea of the primacy of Christ and of faith in Christ.⁶³ The whole discussion between Barth and the Roman Catholic position may therefore start from the idea that revelation is revelation in hiddenness.⁶⁴ The difference between Barth and Roman Catholicism will therefore be not of principle but of degree.

Barth wants to be Christological in his approach to all questions of theology. It is well. So do we. Barth wants to actualize the Incarnation. It is well. So do we. But Christ has become one of us. Thus human nature must at least be presupposed as a possibility. Unless we have a general presupposition of the possibility of the Incarnation in the idea of the *humanum*, then either Christ is the only man or he is no real man.⁶⁵

⁶³ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Karl Barth—Darstellung und Deutung Seiner Theologie*, 1951.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

If Barth will only realize the significance of what von Balthasar has said, then it appears, that they have at bottom been friends all the while. Then it also appears that they have their common enemies in the Reformers. It is the Reformers, Luther as well as Calvin, who have failed to presuppose the *humanum* when they spoke of the *sola scriptura*, *solus Christus* and *sola fidei*. For the Reformers to magnify grace is to make a stock and a stone of man.

If the Reformers had really been concerned to maintain the sovereignty and universality of grace, says von Balthasar, they might better have remained within the church. Now that the separation has taken place there will be many obstacles to reunion. But on the fundamental questions of creation, Incarnation, and salvation, argues von Balthasar, the difference between Barth's theology and his own are not such as to warrant separate church existence.⁶⁶

Perhaps Martin Marty may now see where the real hope for the future lies. He need no longer fear the consolidated authority of Rome, as an obstacle against reunion.⁶⁷ If the new confession thinks of the New Testament writers as witness to the revelation of God wholly hidden in Christ, Rome has, with its view of tradition, in effect, always held this view. If the new confession wants no self-testifying Christ but a Christ to which men may point, Rome has, with its view of the Church as the continuation of the Incarnation, in effect, always held this view. If the confession wants to identify the testimony of the Holy Spirit, inspiring apostles to witness to the wholly hidden Christ with the testimony of the Holy Spirit inspiring leading theologians today to witness to the same wholly hidden Christ, Rome has with its view of the Holy Spirit, infallibly guiding the Pope, speaking *ex cathedra*, in effect, always done this.

To be sure, the Roman Catholic church moves more slowly than the new Protestantism does. But it moves! It is not static as were the Reformers and as are their orthodox followers today. To set 1987 as the date for the consummation of reunion may be much too optimistic. But Rome has always maintained the true *humanum*, the true freedom of man. It found this, encrusted under much static terminology, in the philosophy of the Greeks. Now that Protestantism has found this same principle in the philosophy of Kant, no longer encrusted in static terminology, but vividly expressed in Act philosophy it tends to think of itself as having a monopoly on it.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 393.

⁶⁷ Recently Marty appears to be seeing this point. Cf. *Varieties of Unbelief*, 1964.

However, leading theologians in both communions and led by the same Spirit, are now revealing the Christ-Event to all men everywhere. Now it is plain to see that grace is inherently both sovereign and universal. Martin Marty could give no reasons but he sensed by intuition that the ecumenical Protestants can look with more hope to Rome than they can to the orthodox neo-evangelicals. Of course even these are welcome in the new church of Christ if only they will promise to be silent!

Van Dusen's vision again proves itself prophetic. The Church of Christ will appear on every church-sign. The names Protestant or Catholic will gradually fade away. The Presbyterians deserve much credit for starting the ball rolling.

12. The Confession of 1997

The momentum of 1967 will not stop till all who want to treat men as persons rather than as things are brought into the Church of Christ. Surely this will include the Jews.

The Pharisees of Jesus' day said that he blasphemed in claiming to be the Son of God. They were committed to the idea of the living Torah, and Jesus challenged the validity of this idea by claiming that he, himself, was the final revelation of God. He must surely be put out of the way. There was not, there cannot be, any such thing as a finished revelation of God in history. This was and is the conviction of Jewish philosophers and theologians.

The modern Jew carries forth this Pharisaic idea of the living Torah. By doing so he aligns himself with the Roman Catholic church, against the Reformation teaching with respect to the self-attesting Christ.

The late Martin Buber's thinking may illustrate this point. Early we saw that Dr. Hendry signalized Buber as one of the pioneers in setting out the import of the I-thou—I-it philosophy. Brunner's idea of truth as person-to-person confrontation owes much to Buber's I-thou philosophy.

Buber's philosophy expresses the spirit of we-ness, i.e., the spirit of universal love. For Buber, human personality is what it is because of its relationship of love to other human personality and to God. Only he who addresses his fellow-man as thou and God as "Thou" can call himself "I."

Is it any marvel that with such a philosophy of love Buber calls Jesus his brother? Is it any wonder that when the *Christian Century* was listing some of the

leading thinkers who might be counted on to cooperate in the formulation of a new creed for the future church Martin Buber is among them? (March 5, 1958, p. 272)

13. The Convention of Jews and Christians

Let us imagine then a convention of Jews and Christians as meeting in 1980. The delegates to this convention are to engage in dialogue about the hope of union.

Hans Küng speaks first for the mother-church. The decrees of the infallible church, he says, are not frozen formulas. They are living pointers for deeper research into the infinite riches of the revelation of God in Christ.⁶⁸ Dogmatic definitions do indeed strike the truth infallibly, continues Küng, yet they cannot exhaustively express the truth. In explaining and developing truth, the church is not bound to any one form of philosophy. The church seeks constantly to set forth the truth in terms of more inclusive perspectives. It is thus that the church is the embodiment of the truth as the realization of the incarnation (*Auswirkung der Menschwerdung*) is accomplished in the church through the working of the Holy Spirit.⁶⁹

It was thus that Küng, following the example of von Balthasar, puts to silence all such worries as were formerly held by Martin Marty about the Church's holding to the idea of consolidated authority.

Küng also puts to rest all fears about the church's doctrine on justification. Trent did, he said, of course, oppose the Reformation teaching at this point. At every point the church had to stand guard over the rightful place of the *humanum* against the deterministic notions of the *Alleinwirksamkeit Gottes* of the Reformers. Our justification must, says Küng, be seen in the light of our election in Christ from all eternity.⁷⁰ Grace is both sovereign and universal. The sinner who rebels against Christ still exists in Christ.

Are you concerned about our natural theology? asks Küng. We hold with you that the whole creation bears the form of Christ.⁷¹

⁶⁸ *Rechtfertigung: Die Lehre Karl Barths und Eine Katholische Besinnung*, 1957, p. 106.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

14. The 'Wise Old Teacher' Addresses the Convention

Most encouraging as these remarks by Hans Küng were to the neo-orthodox theologians present, the greatest and most pleasant surprise came when the venerable figure of Martin Buber stepped forward toward the podium. There was thunderous applause. Everybody present seemed to know that Buber, though a "true Israelite" and a staunch defender of the "Jewish principle," had spoken of Jesus as his great brother. Everybody also seemed to know how strongly this wise, old teacher of the primacy of the I-thou over the I-it dimension was opposed to the Apostle Paul and his theology. Did not Buber reject with determination the "intra-divine dialectic" of Paul on which, he said, his whole teaching with respect to justification by faith is built?

Didn't Buber, as a philosopher, claim to have a view of reality which does not allow for the resurrection of Christ at all? Says Buber: "We can only realize anew that the resurrection of an individual person does not belong to the realm of ideas of the Jewish world."⁷² When Thomas, the apostle, was confronted by Jesus after his resurrection he said, "My Lord and my God." In saying this, says Buber, Thomas forsook the world of Jewish thought. For with this confession "the presence of the One Who cannot be represented, the paradox of Emunah, is replaced by the binitarian image of God, one aspect of which, turned toward the man, shows him a human face."⁷³ Recognizing Jesus as God, in the way that Thomas did, and as the Gospel of John does, destroys the very principle of immediacy towards the imperceptible being which is God, that marks Israel's Emunah.⁷⁴

Imagine then with what intensity of interest and joy the audience listened to Buber as he said that he was, even so, quite ready to enter into a new community of brotherhood with all those present. So far as Jesus is concerned, said Buber, I may with your indulgence, say that we who are Jews, have known him better than you, who are Christians for we have known him "from within."

We know him "in the impulses and stirrings of his Jewish being, in a way that remains inaccessible to the peoples submissive to him."⁷⁵ But now I am ready with you also to accept Jesus as a Messiah. I have previously sinned against you all here present, when I condemned your view of Christ. We ourselves have had

⁷² Martin Buber, *Two Types of Faith*, New York, 1958, p. 128.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

⁷⁵ *Between Man and Man*, New York, 1958, p. 5.

fundamental "orthodox Jews" who have thought of the law of Moses as though it were a "possession." So you have "orthodox Christians," fundamentalists, who still think of your Christ in the way that Thomas did and in the way that Paul sets him forth in his theology. I now realize that I should not have spoken of *Two Types of Faith* in the way that I did. There are indeed two types of faith. There is the faith of those who, with Paul, with Luther and with Calvin, hold to an "internal divine dialectic," to a Christ who has come in the past, who has come in the I-it dimension, and therefore does not live today. But your faith, which is also my faith, is the faith of men who live with the Christ who comes in the present, i.e., in the I-thou dimension. All of us have the truth and none of us have the truth. We all have insight into the Reality that is beyond time, beyond space, beyond logic, beyond all that any of us can say or think. We all realize that God is wholly revealed and wholly hidden in the world in which we live. Before all here present I give unto you "the kiss of brotherhood."

15. Bonhoeffer on Act and Being

As if it were by way of welcome and response to Buber, Dietrich Bonhoeffer then spoke of *Act and Being*. "God's being is solely act, is consequently in man only as act, and that in such a way that any reflection on the accomplished act has *ipso facto* lost contact with the act itself, with the result that the act can never be grasped in conceptual form and cannot therefore be enlisted into systematic thought."⁷⁶ Thus, "if the knowledge of God and self divinely implanted in man is considered purely as act, any being is of course wholly excluded. The act is always inaccessible to reflection; it fulfills itself always in 'direct consciousness.'"⁷⁷ Therefore, "if man knew, then it was not God that he knew.... So in revelation God is in the act of understanding himself. This is his location, and he cannot be found in my consciousness by any reflection on this act."⁷⁸ "God is only in the act of belief. In 'my' belief, the Holy Spirit is accrediting himself."⁷⁹

At this point Nicholas Berdyaev, of the Eastern Orthodox Church, spoke with enthusiasm of the freedom of man. He observed with great joy that theologians as well as philosophers have at least seen that "the true, deep-down existence of man, his noumenal self does not belong to the world of objects."⁸⁰ We now see that "it is only the resurrection of all that have lived which can impart meaning to

⁷⁶ *Act and Being*, New York, 1961, p. 82.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 89–90.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 92–93.

⁸⁰ *Beginning and the End*, p. 233.

the historical process of the world, a meaning, that is, which is commensurable with the destiny of personality.”⁸¹

16. The Articles of the Creed

Agreement had now been reached on the principle of creed-formation, between the Jewish, the Roman Catholic, the Eastern Orthodox and the Protestant theologians present at this constitutional convention. It was agreed by all that God is present to man in the act of revelation and of faith. There remained now the task of reviewing each of the articles of the Apostles' Creed with a view to seeing whether their wording could be improved. The consensus was that the various creeds of the church should all be published in a book of creeds. This alone would do justice to the Fathers. And the new creed adopted was the same as that of 1967 except for minor improvements in terminology. How true it proved that the creed of 1967 was not a creed for Presbyterians alone. It proved to be a creed for all who aspire to treat persons as persons rather than as things.

P.S. At the close of the convention Dr. Gempo Hoshino asked for and was given the floor. He expressed the desire that another convention be held soon, if possible in the year 2000. There are, he said, between the doctrines of the Shinsect and the theology of Karl Barth, many parallels. If one disregards the differences in origin, said the speaker; one can “without overstatement say that they are altogether identical with one another.”⁸² Both “stand on the theocentric standpoint and all the words that they speak spring only and alone from '*sola gratia, sola fide.*' ”⁸³

God is what he is for us—for us as Buddhists and for you as Christians in his movement of grace toward man. For you, who allow Barth to be your spokesman, as well as for us as Buddhists, reconciliation is the self-movement simultaneously proceeding from and returning to God. I too, as well as our esteemed friend Dr. Buber, will be glad to have the proposed confession of 1997 speak for me as for my Buddhist friends. We are all religious. We all want the primacy of the I-thou over the I-it dimension.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

⁸² *Antwort, Karl Barth zum siebzigsten Geburtstag am 10. Mai 1956, Zollikon-Zurich*, 1956, p. 423.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

Arnold J. Toynbee, the "Master Historian of World History"⁸⁴, then rose to add his brief 'Amen' to the thoughts of Dr. Hoshino saying that Christianity, like other higher religions, realizes that "man is not the spiritually highest presence known to man."⁸⁵ All higher religions, especially Buddhism along with Christianity, see that God "is the god of all men and is also another name for love."⁸⁶ God is "self-sacrificing love." Surely all the higher religions will agree with us in this and will find in it the common ground we seek for the world religion of the true "I-Thou."

The God-is-dead theologians sat in the gallery; they did not speak but smiled the smile of Feuerbach.

⁸⁴ cf. *Wisdom*, 27th issue.

Christianity Among the Religions of the World, p. 20.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

Appendix 1. Members Of The Special Committee On A Brief Contemporary Statement Of Faith

Appointed in 1958:

Rev. John Wick Bowman (unable to serve)
Rev. Arnold Come, Th.D.
Rev. Edward A. Dowey, Jr., Th.D. (chairman on the committee)
President Addison H. Leitch (resigned 1961)
President John A. Mackay (retired 1962)
Rev. D. H. C. Read (resigned 1960)
Professor Samuel M. Thompson, Ph.D.
Rev. L. J. Trinterud, Th.D.
Rev. G. Ernest Wright, Ph.D. (retired 1961)

Additions of 1959:

Rev. Markus Barth, Th.D.
Rev. Calvin DeVries
Ruling Elder Mrs. E. Harris Harbison
Rev. G. S. Hendry, Ph.D.
Rev. Cornelius Loew, Ph.D.
Rev. James D. Smart, Ph.D.
Rev. T. M. Taylor, Ph.D.
Rev. Gayraud Wilmore

Addition of 1960:

Rev. Kenneth E. Reeves

Additions of 1962:

Rev. John W. Meister
Rev. Charles West, Ph.D.¹

¹Van Til, C., & Sigward, E. H. (1997). *The works of Cornelius Van Til, 1895-1987* (electronic ed.). New York: Labels Army Co.