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FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
135 N. Oakland Avenue
Pasadena 1, California

March 7, 1954
THEOLOGY NEWS AND NOTES
Vol. 1, No. 2.

Dear Alumnus:

Your reactions to the new project were very gratifying. Austin Warriner (National City, Cal.) welcomes "any rust preventive." Dave Wallace (Edinburgh) borrows from British idiom and speaks of the alumni letter as "top-hole, smashing, and frightfully decent." Many other communications have been received. And thanks to all of you. But now to the business of the NEWS AND NOTES.

Chuck Farah (Chateaugay, N.Y.) asks: "Why is it that Fuller Seminary makes no option to Fundamentalism a possible solution for thinking Christians?...Why not permit the men to believe that even if they cannot hew to the strait and narrow, they are not forced into the Charybdis of Neo-Orthodoxy or the Scylla of Modernism?" This is a good point, Chuck. I remember Niebuhr's warning: "We cannot have all the truth, though it is difficult to avoid pretending that we do." This threat, I fear, is with us always. Fuller Seminary must teach some system of theology; otherwise it will be eclectic, vacillating, and irresolute. The threat is that our enthusiasm will lash us on to make assertions that are more sweeping than the complexity of the facts warrants. We may forget that systems of theology are man-made. If we at Fuller have pressed any of you into the disjunction--"Either you accept the system at face value or you are left with skepticism"--I can only ask that we be forgiven. I am convinced that Reformed theology is more consistent, more Biblical, and thus more energetically to be defended than any other--Pelagian, Arminian, Thomistic, Liberal, Neo-Orthodox, etc. But far be it from me to say that Reformed theology is unattended by defects which these other systems of thinking may at times correct. I think Niebuhr is wrong; but elements in his system are a masterful improvement over Reformed theology's explanation of the same facts. I think Thomism is wrong; but Thomas's correlation of the theological and the moral virtues surpasses anything I have read in the standard Reformed literature. A system of theology, it seems to me, draws its prime virtue from two counts: (a) Its soteriology and (b) its basis of authority. Neo-Orthodoxy, despite its precious insights at many crucial points, is deficient in these two areas. Hence, I think it is a false theology, and will continue so to teach at Fuller. But may I be protected from false disjunctions, for they are generally more a mark of ignorance than of learning. But, Chuck, remember that we all have this same problem. You will find that your people will contribute to Presbyterian work only as you (unconsciously) overstate the purity, virtue, and finality of Presbyterian purposes. If you hint that the differences between denominations are "inconsequential," the people will not find it easy to rise to sacrifice and devotion as Presbyterians. All advertising is freighted with this unconscious lie: Duz does everything! Nothing washes like soap; no soap like White King! We will never be able to sympathize with one another in this problem until we sense the place of the unconscious lie in our own propaganda. Teaching theology is partly propagandistic, remember. We are trying to sell a system of thought. But, finally, remember that the degree to which you accept and delineate this system has nothing to do with our love and fellowship in Christ. If any of the alumni looks on others as heretics because elements in the system are not accepted, he should seek God's forgiveness. Let us not begin with Christ as our trust and then unconsciously shift from Christ to a system of truth. Christ is the tie which joins all of our hearts as alumni and faculty, not Reformed theology. We may not have all the truth, but we do know that we are to love one another.

Bob Johnson (North Hollywood) wonders what course of prudence to follow regarding the marrying of divorced people. He feels that Fuller has not altogether equipped him for such practical problems. Without reviewing the complex case which was set down, Bob,

it seems to me that you have proceeded well,--with one exception. As I now see the matter (though I may be wrong), marriage does not begin the moment there is coition, as if a young couple could argue subsequent to their vows that they were never married since they never came together physically. Intercourse is a fruit, not the cause, of marriage. Marriage is based on a public promise, the vow. There are two grounds for divorce: (a) sexual infidelity, in which case the innocent may remarry without sin, (b) refusal of a non-Christian to live with a Christian, ibid. Beyond this you will have to use a generous quantity of sanctified common sense, mercy, and Christian charity. Ease the person out of the complexity with the least sin possible. If you are free to review this source, check John Murray's articles on "Divorce," in THE WESTMINSTER THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL, November, 1946-May, 1951. They are somewhat deficient in the relating of mercy and law, but they nonetheless represent a great work in this field. Professor Murray, by the way, will be the Payton Lecturer next year. He comes to us from Westminster Seminary and will be speaking on "Biblical Christian Ethics." Alumni in this area will want to take in Murray's lectures.

Bob also wonders about giving an invitation. Remember, situations differ. Follow decorum, common sense, and that "feeling" which tells you when to go and when to stop. In some situations you may want to prolong your invitation; in others you may not even feel it appropriate to give a public invitation at all. College and university students rarely "hit the sawdust trail." They have to be dealt with individually. Gary Demarest in Seattle finds it better to ask the university students "to commit their lives to Christ" rather than "accept Christ." Also, remember some have gifts at giving public invitations, others not. Follow your gifts. But give all men an invitation!

John Wilder (Princeton Seminary) wonders how we know that the original manuscripts of the Scriptures were infallibly inspired. Well, John, remember that knowledge of the autographs--both for evangelicals and for all others--is premised on the witness of the text before us which has been faithfully restored by lower criticism. In proceeding back thus, one can move through either (a) the doctrine of the Bible's own view of itself or (b) the mixed witness of problems in the over-all reading of the text. The first bases its view of the Bible on doctrine: the doctrine of the text's own view of itself. The second bases its view of the Bible on a correlation of the facts, pro and con, as found by higher criticism and general study. The first believes it can be exegetically established that the Bible claims to speak truth at all points. Hence, it concludes that the autographs all were true. This, I think, is a less emotional way of putting it than (as in our Fuller catalogue) "free from all error in the whole and in the part." To be true is to be free from all error--of course. Inerrancy is exegetically established as the view held by Christ and the apostles. The second view builds up its view of the text, not from doctrine, but from its conclusions regarding the reliability of the text when tested by the usual critical criteria. It concludes that the original manuscripts--if any--were not free from error. You see, the question is really tied in with the basic presuppositions of the theology which raises the questions in the first place. Since I believe the Bible communicates propositional revelation, and since part of that revelation is the doctrinal claim that the Old Testament (and a fortiori the New) is so invested with divine inspiration that it can be accepted and followed as true, it follows that I defend and believe in the complete truthfulness of the original manuscripts. Within the natural rights of language, the autographs asserted nothing about reality which was not, in fact, a true judgment regarding reality. John, if you want to follow through on this--or if others want to join you in the matter--feel free. I do not claim that I have fully satisfied your mind at this point.

Carroll Payne (McKenzie, Tenn.) inquires what, in my opinion, constitutes the differences which separate the National Association of Evangelicals from the American

Council of Christian Churches. If I were really forthright here, I would candidly admit that I do not, as a matter of fact, know what the exact differences are. Unconsciously I have thought they were the following: (a) degrees of separation. The NAE rejects the "come-out" movement as divisive, whereas the ACCC defends it as a badge of Christian vigilance. A great deal of heat has been generated about this matter. I believe a man ought to go back to his own denomination until he is forced to commit sin within that group; in which case he must leave. But it is unethical to withdraw from one's own short of this situation. The ACCC thinks of the larger denominations (Presbyterian U.S.A., American Baptist, etc.) as apostate, and that young men should witness against the sins of these groups, rather than joining with them. (b) Social programs. As I see it, the NAE feels that part of our gospel responsibility is to introduce concrete changes in life--justice in society, equity in racial relations, etc. Whereas ACCC tends (though not uniformly) to identify this with a "social gospel," and says that our task is to preach the Word, not dabble in matters of social relativity. These, as I now review the matter in my mind, are the differences. But I may be altogether wrong. I have never made a systematic study of the matter. So, I cannot recommend any sources for you to read. Correspond with the leaders of both movements, for they ought to be able to clarify this for you. Your effort at effecting a unity between these two groups is altogether praiseworthy. I personally feel that this division is a scandal in our midst. But do not misunderstand me. I do not feel either (a) that the issues of division which I have outlined above are trivial or (b) that the possibility of union is an easy event. As I mentioned in my answer to Chuck Farah, there is an unconscious lie that supports the final pretensions of both. I cast my lot with NAE because I am convinced that the "come-out" movement is ill-digested and because I feel that we must rise to an interpretation of the gospel in all areas of social life. Evangelicals should have done what Niebuhr has done in his analysis of the relation between justice and love in the whole front of life. But I am honest enough to admit that the reasons for my convictions are not perfect demonstrations; that there are good arguments on the other side which impress me greatly. The danger of NAE is that it will not see the heresy of the groups it is trying to influence; the danger of ACCC is that it will not see the orthodoxy of the groups it is railing against. In short, the issues which separate these two great groups are cast in shades of grey, not in black and white.

J. Robertson McQuilkin (Ben Lippen School) wonders when the faculty is coming out with its evaluation of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible. Well, Bob, since the question of the RSV has proved to be somewhat touchy, the ms. has been a little slow in production. As far as I know, however, the work is in its final stages and will soon be off to a publisher. Drs. LaSor, Archer, Harrison, and Ladd have edited the work. This "strife of versions," by the way, is another illustration of what I have in mind when I speak of the unconscious lie in all propaganda. Doubtless you have noticed the tendency to be "all for" or "all against" the new version, so that with each new negation of the other position the case becomes more absolute for the purity of the version which one uses. The fact is that neither side is as right as it thinks. I use the RSV in my preaching, but I know that one of the reasons for my choice is that I personally despise archaic language. The "wisteth, wotteth" language of the King James Version personally irks me. But I notice that others, happy with this language, are irked when they read the Bible in modern speech. I try to use the purely moral argument that "more of the gospel shines through in modern language" (which is formally true, I think), yet part of my enthusiasm is the reaction of my own person to the language forms of the 17th century. If the text says "prevent," I cannot, I will not, say "let." And the users of King James try to make their case as pure as they can too, but the unconscious lie is there. They are bound to the form of the text because its expressions have become too much a part of their person to be discarded. The important thing is that we read the Bible, regardless of the version.

On my desk I have a small stack of other letters, each containing more provocative questions. May I be forgiven if I delay answering them until the next NEWS AND NOTES? Thank you for writing.

Before I close, let me relate this problem of the unconscious lie to our predicament here at Fuller Seminary. We are trying to train students in such a way that they (a) accept the general theology of the Reformation in its broadest issues and yet that they (b) recognize and embrace the distinctives that give uniqueness to the particular denominational group in which they are to work. If we neglect the distinctives in our teaching, we give the impression that denominations make no difference. That is not true. I, for example, am a Baptist because I believe its distinctives more nearly represent the true New Testament position than do, say, the Presbyterians. (Which reminds me of the story of the revival which swept a town. Feeling under conviction, the Baptist and the Presbyterian ministers gathered for mutual confession. Said the Baptist: "Let's change our ways; if you'll stop telling your congregation lies about the Baptists, I'll stop telling mine the truth about the Presbyterians.") And if we make a great case out of the distinctives, we encourage the students to believe that the distinctives are so clear that they can become a ground for divisions among Christians; which is not true. I am first of all a Christian, then a Baptist. The distinctives cannot be demonstrated with the clarity and certainty of the great cardinals of the faith; otherwise they would not be distinctives. This is why our relation to the denominations is interpreted by many as disloyalty. In many cases, the graduate who remotely suggests that the distinctives of his denomination are not absolute is charged with denominational disaffection. So, you can see the spot we are in as we teach theology from year to year. We would appreciate your continued prayers. Help the seminary by being a good witness in your own group. Do not be divisive in spirit or rash in action; but give yourself wholeheartedly to your cause and be a good Christian brother to those who differ from you in the distinctives. It is up to you to help sell the seminary on the field.

Now for seminary news. The weather has been hot lately, though with very little smog. There is a lot of action going on regarding the smog, but the fruits have hardly been felt yet. Dr. Ockenga and his family have been with us for two weeks. We are still hoping that Dr. Ockenga will be visited with a definite conviction to join us in the task of Christian theological education as our resident head. Keep praying. The students have finished final examinations. This week we have our first spring vacation. Remember how the boiler would explode at Lake Avenue about this time of year? We are trying to make it better for the student by giving him a week free from school. Well, greetings to all. Drop me a postal card if you should move to a new address.

Cheerily,

Edward John Carnell