

5-14-1954

## Theology, News and Notes - Vol. 01, No. 03

Fuller Theological Seminary

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### Recommended Citation

Fuller Theological Seminary and Carnell, Edward John, "Theology, News and Notes - Vol. 01, No. 03" (1954). *Theology News & Notes*. 178.

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FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
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May 14, 1954

Dear Alumnus:

We welcome the class of '54 to our mailing list. For their benefit, let me mention that this is a quarterly sheet of friendly interchange of theological problems and ideas. All of you are welcomed to send in items for discussion.... This time, rather than answering some of the many questions before me, I thought I would inject a bit of fun. Bob Laurin called this article to my attention, in RELIGION IN LIFE, Summer, 1953. It is one of the plumpest pieces of theological humor I have read. I know you will enjoy it--and learn a lot of wisdom from it (such as a warning, as in the last NEWS AND NOTES, that there is an "unconscious lie" in propaganda). I hope it brings some pleasure--to Al Strong in Ethiopia, Bob Gerry in Japan, Bob Campbell in France, etc. Wherever you are, alumnus, be serious about theology, but not stiff and brittle. Well, here it is, by Robert McAfee Brown:

#### THEOLOGICAL GAMESMANSHIP

How to win a theological discussion without knowing anything, or, The Art of using imaginary lances to demolish real windmills (Frequently known as inverse Quixote-ism).

Few theologians, save the Men At The Top, really know as much as they need to know, or, more important, as much as they need to give the impression of knowing. If they are fully informed on the history of Tischendorff's second visit in quest of the Codex Sinaiticus, or the extant correspondence between Zwingli and the Burgermaster of Dort, it is usually because this was the field of their doctoral dissertation twenty years ago.

And yet daily in the classroom, at annual meetings of learned societies, at conferences, in informal discussions, the theologian is expected to converse learnedly on the most recent developments in biblical history, patristics, doctrine, liturgics, oriental religion, and metaphysics, not to mention psychology and anthropology. How to help him? What to do when confronted by the unanswerable question? How to engage in a conversation about a topic on which one is totally ignorant, and still emerge as the most penetrating commentator? It is to deal with such serious questions as these that the present essay is offered.

"Okay" Words. Every theologian must have at his disposal certain words which can be introduced casually into discussion in such a way as (a) to indicate general knowledge, but not in such a way as (b) to elicit pinning down. The following are "okay" words for 1953: Bultmann, Lund, Tillich's first volume (one word), Scandinavian Journal of Theology (four words), nonbeing, Kierkegaardian (pronounced "Kierkegorian").

"Non-okay" Words. These are to be mentioned only in disparaging terms: neo-orthodoxy, natural theology, humanism, experience, Kierkegaardian (pronounced "Kierkegaardian"). (Both lists will be revised from time to time. It will not be long, for example, certainly no more than six months, before "Buber" is an okay word.)

What to Do About Barth. The problem is two-dimensional. (1) You must know a great deal about Barth these days. (2) You don't. What to do, therefore, about Barth?

The following procedure has been tried, and is almost foolproof. Its three distinct stages can serve, cumulatively, to flatten almost any opponent.

Stage One. When Opponent is learnedly discoursing about Barth, wait until there is a pause or lull in the exposition, and then say in an offhand manner, "Of course, you know he's moved way beyond that position in the latest volume of the Dogmatik."



(It is sometimes effective to say this as an aside, in a loud voice, to someone other than the speaker.) For the full strength of this gambit, it is essential that the last word be given a strong German flavor. If someone raises his eyebrows at your pronunciation, refer amusedly, in a mumbling sort of way, to "my incurable Bavarian accent."

The reference to the latest volume has the tactical value that it cannot be challenged by more than one out of 750 listeners, since the latest volume is always in German. It has the further advantage that it might also be true. (As a general, though by no means universal, rule, truthfulness in Theological Gamesmanship heightens the ultimate effectiveness of any statement.) The statement itself is often enough to deflate any self-styled "Barth expert."

Stage Two. If Opponent shows signs of rallying, rather than retreating, say quickly, after an almost imperceptible pause, and with the suggestion of a sigh, "How I wish they'd get the thing into English, once and for all." If Opponent is by now not completely silenced, say (Stage Three) to the most distinguished member of the group, "It would avoid so much misunderstanding of Barth's real position."

This series of statements will work against almost all theologians except those named T. F. Torrance.

The Appeal to Ignorance. The object here is to make Opponent feel that he has made either an utterly trivial theological distinction or that he is, in a rather gross way, trying to display intellectual superiority. Thus:

Opponent: But you must recall Anselm's distinction between . . .

Self (interrupting): I can honestly say that I have never read a single line in Anselm which had the remotest connection with the subject under discussion. (This is probably true.)

Opponent either has to shift gears (a victory for you), or go into such a minute explanation of Anselm that he will be hopelessly enmeshed in his own dialectic within thirty seconds.

Should he, foolish man, attempt to explain the Anselmic distinction to you, be hopelessly grateful to him, and pathetically eager to understand. Every time he stops for breath, break in just as he finishes, "Yes, yes, go on . . .", particularly if he stops for breath only about once every ten minutes. ("Okay" substitute phrases for "Yes, yes, go on . . ." are (a) "Just a moment now, I'm not sure I get that," and, (b) "Would you remind repeating that again more slowly?") If this fails to confuse Opponent, produce a small notebook from your inside coat pocket, (Theological Gamesmanship experts on the West Coast say that the vest pocket may be even more effective. Thanks here to A. Miller.) and take notes as he talks, being careful to question him on his own phraseology, and also asking for specific references to Anselm's untranslated works. Opponent will finally retire flustered and confused, with the uncomfortable feeling that you are a man of infinite pains with a really first-class mind.

The Appeal to History. Almost anyone can be put in his place by the suggestion that he is saying nothing new, or is, at best, only reaffirming some ancient heresy.

Opponent: Don't you think we're giving too little attention to spiritual things in theology these days?

Self: How curious of you to say that! You are the last person I would have suspected of being a Gnostic. (In some circles it will be more effective to say "Manichean," or, in extreme instances, when there is plenty of time, "a type of early second-century Docetist.")

Other gambits are easily adapted from this basic one. In any discussion of the ministry it is usually safe to comment, in a slightly tired voice, "Surely that was all thrashed out in the Donatist controversy." Or, "I thought Cyprian had said the last word on that."

When discussing the sacraments, one of two approaches (never both) is recommended.



Either, "But man, that's sheer Zwinglianism!", or, "I take it, then, that you are defending magic, pure and simple." (Oversimplifying his position in this manner, is the best way to anger, and therefore fluster, Opponent. Say (genially, if possible), "Well, reduced to its bare essentials, what you are really saying is . . ."

The Superior Knowledge Gambit (not for beginners). Easier to illustrate than explain.

Opponent: I think my interpretation of the church has full historical precedent in Augustine.

Self (starting hesitantly, but gradually gaining assurance until the final words are spoken with complete authority, in an ex cathedra tone of voice): But surely, much as I admire your exposition, really now, which interpretation of Augustine's do you mean? There are at least five (eyes to ceiling for a brief moment of counting), yes five . . . (pause, then confidently) There are at least five interpretations of the church in Augustine's extant writings. (Give ever so slightly more emphasis to the word "extant.")

It is of utmost importance that the italicized words be spoken with authority, or Opponent may be brash enough to counter, "What are they?" Voice control is the key to success with any of these techniques. Statements must always be made in such a way that to question them could only lead onlookers to infer of your opponent, "What an utter dolt. Doesn't he know?" Never refer to "the Barmen declaration," for example, in such a way that a logical rejoinder could be "What's that?" The effect desired can be achieved either by speaking (a) passionately, or, sometimes, (b) off-handedly, so that the impression is conveyed that "we both know what I am talking about."

Suppose, however, Opponent does challenge the Superior Knowledge Gambit. Only one thing to do: bluff it out as good-humoredly as possible:

Self: Oh well (shrug of shoulders), I don't want to bore you with a thirty-minute lecture (chuckle) on Augustine. Show us those pictures of your children (playful dig in ribs). (This should be practiced several times before a mirror. It must convey the impression that you spent last summer visiting French abbeys collating the various Augustinian manuscripts and checking for errors in translation, but that you are really a family man at heart with a keen sense of what is ultimately important to your Opponent.)

The most foolproof use of the Superior Knowledge Gambit is actually to possess some superior knowledge, and guide the conversation to the point where you can bring it in. See following section.

The "But Luther Said . . ." Retort. An invincible part of the armory of anyone who wants to discuss the Reformation. It consists of memorizing a few brief statements from a relatively inaccessible source such as the Table Talk. (In dire emergencies it is considered de rigueur to quote from Roland Bainton's most recent book about Luther. Lists are now being compiled for aid in this instance, but it is admittedly hard to keep up to date.) Whenever a statement is made about the Reformation, or Luther, or the late medieval period, insert into the discussion the appropriate quotation from the Table Talk, prefixing it with the words, "But Luther said . . .", and emphasizing the word in this prefix which is most appropriate under the given conditions. If page number can be quoted, so much the better. It is not, however, yet considered in good taste to quote the passage in German before translating it condescendingly. (Note to Presbyterians: The "But Luther Said . . ." retort can be effectively adapted, with a minimum of trouble, to a discussion among Reformed theologians. The procedure is simple:

1. For "Luther" substitute "Calvin."
2. For Table Talk substitute Sermons on Job.
3. Proceed as above. )



The Offhand Use of Foreign Words. A few of these are essential.

1. Schöpfungsordnung. Essential in the field of ethics. Can be referred to either (a) with approval, or (b) disparagingly.
2. Humani generis. Convenient when referring to a papal encyclical. Thus: "As the Pope put it in . . . was it Humani generis? . . ."
3. En arche en no logos. To be muttered under the breath, yet audibly, whenever someone refers to the Fourth Gospel.
4. It is sometimes effective to refer to "Jean Cauvin, or, as we have come to call him, Calvin . . ."
5. Agape. This is almost an "okay" word. It must always be used, as the English word "love" is inappropriate to theological discussion. Stress the second syllable. It is always stylish to refer to "the biblical notion of agape," and even more stylish to refer to "the distinctively biblical notion of agape."

(Note: This sentence, properly inflected (and it needs careful practice), is capable of starting the following chain of reasoning in the mind of Opponent: "This man is no fool. He knows his Greek. He has obviously read Nygren, he has mastered Kittel, and he is probably even acquainted with the criticisms of Father D'Arcy." It is even possible to pronounce agape in such a way that Opponent will instinctively be aware that you would pronounce its opposite "air-ose" instead of (vulgarly) "air-oss." To realize that such thoughts are going through the brain of Opponent is a not unpleasant experience and worth considerable pains.)

6. ". . . you mean you haven't studied Ugaritic?"

Palsy-walsy With the Great. Three lines of approach here.

1. On-the-"in"-with-the-World-Council.

Self: "t'Hooft said to me just last week, before he left for Geneva . . ."  
(No need to point out that he said it to 450 other listeners as well in a public auditorium in Columbus, Ohio.)

Or,

Self: "Well, I've decided to pass up Evanston. I rather fear I'll be knee-deep in galley proof by then . . ." (followed by a mumbled and deprecatory reference to ". . . publisher's very insistent . . .," said in such a way as to indicate that you are far too modest to wish to discuss your forthcoming book. This creates the impression that you have been invited to Evanston, probably by someone in Geneva who has written you addressing you by your first name.)

2. The I've-known-him-for-years-Impression: "Reinie" (no longer very impressive within 300 miles of Union Seminary); "Jim" (as in Democracy and the Churches); "Pit" (very effective on the continent); "John" (supply by inference Baillie, Bennett, or Mackay); "Liston;" "Nels;" "Cush" (substantial evidence of being On the Inside Track at Chicago). (Two cautions necessary here: (a) Only theologians who have small boys wearing holsters are likely to appreciate references to the noted Pascal scholar as "Yippee-aie-O" Cailliet. (b) Only Boston people seem to know just how to deal with the imposing array of names subsumed by "J.A.C.F. Auer." Boston, so far, has remained conspicuously silent.)
3. If by any chance you have seen a pre-publication copy of a new book in the field of theology, remark casually, "I was looking the thing over before Scribners put it on the market, and honestly, I hadn't a thing to suggest." (You are not obligated, in this gambit, to add that nobody, Scribners particularly, asked you to suggest anything.)



The Book Review Shortcut. There are three basic ways of making use of book reviews:

1. Read only the reviews, never the books: "When I saw how Pauck went after him, I knew he wouldn't be worth my time."
2. Read all the reviews: "Strange, isn't it, that two men so far apart as Wieman and Brunner should both like Feemer's new Symbolics. It makes you wonder . . ." (voice gradually trailing off).
3. Be stimulated by reviews: "I'm devoting the entire month of January to finding out whether this new thing on von Hülgel is really all that good." (Be sure that the month named is at least four months in the future, to convey the feeling that, desperate as you are to confirm your impression, every minute is absolutely blocked out until then.)

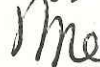
Impressing Oneself on the Group as a Person With a Definite Position. Discover the theological position of the group which you wish to crash, and then employ one of the two following opening conversational gambits, depending on whether you wish to evoke the response, "Ahh, this fellow is really one of us!" or, alternately, "What a courageous chap to say a thing like that here!"

1. "After all, though, it's not theology that's so important, I always say. It's living that really counts."
2. "There is not a single question worth asking which is not rooted in the necessity of affirming man's utter impotence."

Equipped with these weapons in his theological arsenal, the Theological Gamesman can "sally forth to the fray" (as has been said by others), confident of undermining his Opponent and thus making real and fine and true the great statement by (was it Melanchthon?) that "there is no substitute for Victory."

Well, farewell for now, and best wishes to all of you in all parts of the world.

Cheerily,



Edward John Carnell

P.S. Since space remains, permit this postscript. Bob Duhs (Tacoma, Wash.) asks about Isaiah 45:7, "I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe...." Does this not make God the author of evil? Remember, Bob, we teach that God is not the author of moral evil. He is the author of evils in nature that result from His curse upon the world at the fall. "Then the Lord said to him (Moses), 'Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him dumb, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?'" (Exodus 4:11).

Sam Pittman (Hartford, Conn.) wonders why I made so much of the trichotomic-dichotomic controversy in Theology 421. He has failed to see the value of this stress. Well, Sam, you have me! I confess that in my first years in teaching theology I overstated the case. I still continue to emphasize the conflict, however, because it is a fine chance for a man to put his theological convictions on trial. Most of the men coming to us have been convinced of the trichotomic position. I defend dichotomy to brace the men for the vastly difficult task of yielding a conviction in theology. Theological pride is a terrible bondage. It issues in ideological self-righteousness in the mind and a smug sourness in the soul. We must learn the Christian sweetness of give and take.

John Riutzel (Pasadena, Cal.) inquires, "Can a person who has been regenerated in childhood days become a 'liberal' in later years, so that what is believed with the 'top of the mind' disagrees with what is really believed with the 'bottom of the



heart'?" Good question. Some would deny it, insisting that regeneration invariably issues in (a) a consciousness in the whole man of a new spiritual condition and (b) a consistent, holy fruit as a testimony to the world. I must dissent. Ordinarily, this is so. But what of backsliding? Remember, almost a year elapsed between the sin of David and the rebuke of Nathan. Man is so complex that, at times, it may well be that mind-certainty and heart-certainty war against each other. I have good friends that once sang the praises of Jesus, who today claim to be humanists. I pray God that they now speak only 'on the top of their head' as you well put it. But it is difficult to prove either side in the question. (Thank you, John, for your notes on science.)

Charles Boutwell (Springfield, Ore.) inquires whether one should add the attributive adjective "Conservative" to the names of the churches of that communion--"First Conservative Baptist Church," etc. Difficult matter, to which no easy yes or no can be given. I personally find such a title a bit over-pious. Even the adjective "First" leaves me cold. I would prefer Biblical names: "John Paul Baptist Church," "Peter and Paul Baptist Church." It is too bad that the liturgical communions have snapped up all of the euphonious names. And yet, what is in a name? If we preach the gospel, people will be saved regardless what we call ourselves. (I am sorry this counsel is so indecisive.)

William Bass (Los Angeles, Cal.) wonders if it is right to preach against modernism on Sunday, and then on Monday go to a secular university and, without any opposition, sit in class and take notes. Would Christ have done this? Should we not denounce error wherever we see it? Personally, I think Christians must regard the occasion. Jesus was not always in the act of denouncing. He was a friend of publicans and sinners. In "our ministry of reconciliation" we (courteously) denounce. Indeed. But when we purchase groceries or subscribe to a newspaper we do not denounce the pagan clerk or the Christian Science newsboy. So in class: we spoil the Egyptians, using the earrings of their wisdom to build the tabernacle to God. Although we do not always approve what they teach, we nevertheless remain gentlemen. Courtesy is not compromise.

Paul Toms (Hawaii) wonders if it is true that Boultmann is the rage in England and on the Continent. Indeed. He has rent the Lutherans asunder. Everybody is talking about "myth" today. (See my Niebuhr book for the significance of myth.) Again, Toms wonders if the Barthian objection to propositional revelation can be refuted in a few easily understood points. I suppose so, but this would be difficult. It is better to see the reasons why the underlying a priori of Barthian epistemology is non-Christian. By exposing the root in this fashion, the fruit will wither on the branches. (See Alan Fairweather, THE WORD AS TRUTH--Lutterworth Press--for a good account of this bad a priori. If you cannot obtain this, write me.) Finally, Toms wonders how he might keep up on the best in liberal literature. Subscribe to "The Westminster Theological Journal," Westminster Theological Seminary, Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia 18, Pa. It costs but \$1.00 a year (two issues) and contains fine, scholarly reviews of all the major literature, plus excellent feature articles.

Marv Mayers (Guatemala) has no question, but he does suggest that I give less space in NEWS AND NOTES to individual answers (handling these privately by separate mail) and more space to stimulating the whole alumni group by reviewing theological trends, giving hints regarding current problems, and suggesting crucial reading. Well, what do others of you say? Shall I continue this form, or shift it to sort of a "Theology Department Journal"?

I apologize to the many others of you whose letters are still in my files. I shall attempt to get at your questions next time. Thank you for your patience. And by the way, I would be happy over the years to learn whether your Fuller apologetical-theological training is proving adequate. If you can name any areas where you feel weak, I would be happy to know of the same. Farewell.

EJC