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A table of contents for *Theological Students Fellowship (TSF) Bulletin (US)* can be found here:

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FOUNDATIONS *(Doing theology on the basics of classical faith)*

The "Doing of Theology" in a Latin American Context
Peter F. Savage 2

ACADEME *(Reports from seminary classrooms, special events, and TSF chapters)*

Evangelical/Liberal Theology—A False Dichotomy?
Report on the Harvard/Gordon-Conwell Dialogue
Priscilla Felisky Whitehead and Tom McAlpine 8

INTERSECTION *(The integration of theological studies with ethics, academic disciplines, and ecclesiastical institutions)*

Urbana '81: Searching for a True Picture of Missions
Harvie M. Conn 12
Relationships Between the Testaments: Evangelical Theological Society Meeting
Barry D. Smith 14

SPIRITUAL FORMATION *(Probing questions, suggestions, and encouragement in areas of personal and spiritual growth)*

The Spiritual Pedagogy of Henri Nouwen John S. Mogabgab 14

BIBLIOGRAPHIC SUPPLEMENT *(Center Pages)*

Evangelicals in Biblical Studies: A Survey of Basic Books
Mark Lau Branson

EDITORIALS *(Opinions, Options, and Olive Branches)*

A Full-Orbed Gospel Gabriel Fackre 17

REVIEWS *(Notes and critiques on recent books and periodicals)*

Book Reviews (Itemized on back cover) 18

Reagan sneezes, we in the third world have pneumonia!

Furthermore, for the last two hundred years, the missionary enterprise has tended to follow the trade routes, the armies, and the centers of power which were established by the Western empires. Often the gospel has been presented in Western clothing, with a built-in dependency, cultural control, and a centralized power structure based in the "sending" country. Many third world churches are cut in the same cloth, with the same measurements, as the mother churches. Their hymn books, their liturgy, their Christian and theological education programs, their church buildings — all have stamped on them "Made in USA."

While the Catholic church was established in Latin America through the power of the sword, the evangelical church has been established by the power of the "dollar." Often the missionary enterprise resembles more a "multinational corporation" than the seventy disciples that the Lord sent out to evangelize.

All of these "realities" pose for us some very serious theological and biblical questions. First, if the Gentile church was free from the cultural control of the Jewish church in Acts 15, so that the Holy Spirit could lead the body of Christ in its world-wide mission, when does the third world church have its own Acts 15? Does not the church in each generation and in each context discover its accountability direct to the Lord for his mission in that context and the world as a whole?

Second, when can there be true mutuality and partnership in the body of Christ world wide, whereby there can be adequate listening to the Holy Spirit through each other? Syncretism only

If the Gentile church was free from the cultural control of the Jewish church in Acts 15, when does the third world church have its own Acts 15?

exists in the third world!? Are the members of the third world countries the only nationals who fight from a nationalistic perspective? When will the church in the first world hear what the third world church is saying?

Third, as there is increased global consciousness, the church also has become more aware of her global existence. The tension between the "local" and often "immediate" and the "global" and a new concept of the "immediate" takes on a new dimension. Can churches break out of their tribal groupings (denominations) to seize the new missionary opportunities? Can the church survive where there is an increase in the ever more powerful "para-ecclesiastical bodies"?

Fourth, the most critical question that needs to be asked is, "What is the church?" Is it an electronic phenomenon? Is it a communication phenomenon? Is it an entertainment phenomenon? Is it a social welfare phenomenon? What is its true identity in the Global Village?

Conclusion

Naturally each of the subjects listed deserves a series of books based on years of research and reflection by a church that is open to listen to what God would say to her in these areas. At times, due to summary form, this discussion may well smack of caricature rather than carefully developed thought containing objectivity and pastoral sensitivity. From the start, I want to express these limitations and my openness to be corrected and enriched through the dialogue which I hope this paper will stimulate.

ACADEME

(Reports from seminary classrooms, special events, and TSF chapters)

EVANGELICAL/LIBERAL THEOLOGY — A FALSE DICHOTOMY? REPORT ON THE HARVARD/GORDON-CONWELL DIALOGUE

By Priscilla Felisky Whitehead (M.Div. student at Harvard Divinity School) and Tom McAlpine (TSF Associate Staff).

The recent dialogue between Harvard and Gordon-Conwell faculty was a noteworthy example of inter-seminary exchange. This article is a joint effort of a Harvard student who helped organize the discussion and a TSF staff member who was able to attend during his visit to TSF chapters in the Northeast. Priscilla Whitehead contributed the first section, which sets the context. This is followed by Tom McAlpine's edited summary of what the participants actually said, and the article concludes with some of his personal reflections on several of the issues raised in the discussion.

Background

Religious pluralism is a contemporary phenomenon receiving careful attention from many quarters today. It is no longer possible to withdraw from engagement with other major religious traditions. However, what many within those traditions also are discovering, much to their discomfort, is that the pluralism within one particular religion or nation can be as challenging and difficult as that between different traditions. The current media emphasis on the resurgent fundamentalism in American Christianity is a graphic example. How many Christians would be willing to claim some religious identification with their brothers and sisters in the conservative wing of the church? How many evangelicals could find a common ground with the so-called liberal contingent in Christianity? Such questions have not received as much attention in our seminaries and churches as the broader ecumenical ones relating to religious traditions as a whole.

Several Harvard Divinity School faculty, staff and students discovered they shared a mutual interest in exploring the seeming misunderstandings and lack of interaction within the boundaries of the Christian faith itself. Most had experienced personally some degree of pain or frustration at being labeled — or mislabeled — according to someone else's preconceptions or assumptions about their theological positions. Not only did they find that this inhibited genuine dialogue about Christian theology in a pluralistic world, but it also complicated any potential cooperation regarding common concerns. A way was sought to bring together various theological perspectives for the purpose of informing and raising consciousness about labels which may be too hastily and incorrectly assigned.

What emerged as a first step was a two-hour dialogue between professors from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, an admittedly "evangelical institution," and Harvard Divinity School, a most diverse community perceived by some as a bastion of theological liberalism. After some discussion during the planning stages about the value of addressing specific theological topics, it was decided rather to confront two of the common labels themselves and how they are perceived by those within and without their supposed confines. Thus, on 23 November 1981, Professors Richard Lovelace and David Wells from Gordon-Conwell and Professors Gordon Kaufman and Richard Nie-

buhr from Harvard addressed the topic "Evangelical/Liberal Theology: A False Dichotomy?" before an overflow crowd in HDS's largest lecture hall. HDS Dean George Rupp served as moderator. Each participant gave an initial presentation, followed by opportunities to respond to specific issues or questions raised by the others. The question and answer session, opened to the audience at large as part of the scheduled proceedings, was continued informally by students and faculty from both institutions during the reception that followed.

The value of this particular effort at theological discourse is difficult to assess. Whether the actual result could be considered a true "dialogue" or not, it *did* raise many interesting theological issues; it may even have debunked a few myths students from one school had about their counterparts in the other. There was considerable enthusiasm expressed for further explorations of this nature, perhaps of a more topical or issue-oriented nature. The meeting does seem to have been a good beginning. Those who were most involved with organizing the event are more convinced than ever that such ventures are necessary if there is to be any hope of united efforts among Christians toward effective action in a world of crying need. Any student preparing for ministry in such a world needs to confront how he or she interacts with other Christians as well as fellow humans of other religious persuasions. Our hope that the world may move toward the goal we envision as the Kingdom of God may be dependent upon how well we model the Kingdom right here within our own sphere of Christian faith.

A Summary of the Discussion

Richard Lovelace (CGTS)

I entered college an atheist. I was converted to theism through the witness of neo-orthodox friends, and through reading Jungian psychology and especially Thomas Merton, who gave me a permanent hunger for experiential Christianity. I was pretty much making up my theology in the basement, taking the Christ story, for instance, as an archetypal myth.

There were two further stages in my conversion to evangelicalism. The first was a crisis regarding my personal relationship to God. My Catholic and Episcopal friends intimated that I was not playing with a full deck and suggested that I should read the Bible. I did, and saw the wide gulf between a holy God and my sinful life. You will recognize this as an analogue to Luther's and Bunyan's experience. The people who were able to help me at this point were evangelicals, who explained the classic doctrine of justification.

The second stage began with a sense of normlessness in my faith, and I was counseled to read the Scriptures. Prayerful reading resulted in the experience of immediate contact with God. And while I have read a great deal of theology since then, I have made it a rule to not incorporate into my theology anything which the Holy Spirit has not first shown me in Scripture.

These two stages of experience define what Gordon-Conwell means by evangelical theology: a theology which tries ultimately to be controlled by exegesis and which incorporates the elements of the early creeds together with Luther's doctrine of justification by faith.

I will now talk briefly about the historical origins of the modern evangelical movement. While it derives from the faith of the Reformation, it exists in dialectical tension with both the confessional theology of the post-Reformation period and the various forms of heterodoxy which developed out of enlightenment rationalism, romanticism, and the Kantian approach to authority and historical reality. Calvinist Puritanism and Lutheran pietism were the first stage of the evangelical renewal movement, distinguishing themselves from scholastic orthodoxy and the variants from Reformation faith. They insisted on a transforming, existential quality of faith and the illumination of the Holy Spirit, which led to a distinctive dynamism, visible especially in the

evangelism, mission, and social reform of the first and second great awakenings (Zinzendorf, Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys).

But this movement was deformed at the end of the nineteenth century through the revivalist mechanics of Charles Finney's pelagian theology and the separatist and socially passive thrust of Darbyite dispensationalism. And, on a broader canvas, the energy leading to Edinburgh and slogans such as "the Christian century" was dissipated in the fundamentalist-modernist controversy.

At the present some speak of a dissolving of the theological center; at the same time that there is a certain convergence of theologians toward a center point of biblical fidelity which I would identify as classical evangelicalism.

***We need a closer definition of "liberal."
I could no more speak against freedom
and self-criticism than I could against
motherhood.***

Gordon Kaufman (HDS)

I am just speaking for myself.

I do not like labels, but if they must be used, I am a liberal Christian theologian. I reject the assumption that liberal and evangelical theology are to be contrasted. "Liberal" indicates what I understand the Christian faith to be, what the gospel is about. That is, the heart of the gospel is concern with human liberation, human freedom, the breaking of bondage. A corollary to this concern is the central importance of criticism as a means to realizing that freedom.

Both Paul and Jesus understood the gospel in this way. For Paul, the gospel directs people away from religious tradition taken as a set of requirements and towards love of neighbor as the sole requirement (Gal. 5). This freedom is very radical. It should lead us into a continuous activity of criticism of traditional values and beliefs and institutions, rejecting those which no longer conduce toward loving relationships between human beings and reconstructing the others so that they help foster communities of reconciliation and justice, and peace. Likewise Jesus teaches that all religious institutions, practices, and beliefs are for the sake of human beings — human fulfillment (Mk. 2:27). God alone is to be served, and to devote oneself to anything else is idolatry. Thus devotion to the Bible and the creeds should be provisional and subjected to criticism and revision.

Liberal theology is often associated with the nineteenth century, and this is correct. Not until the Enlightenment did Christians see that Luther's and Paul's emphasis on freedom applied to Christian beliefs. Aided by Descartes and Kant ("have courage to use your own reason"), Christians began to subject all domains of life to criticism — freedom — the gospel. One great fruit of this self-critical movement in the nineteenth century was the historical re-examination of the Scriptures themselves. It is one of the glories of Protestant Christianity that the sense of freedom promised by the gospel was sufficiently powerful that it could produce the kind of radical, critical reinterpretation of the Christian Scriptures which the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have seen.

Thus liberal theology is hardly in tension with the gospel. The

gospel is the good news that we were created for freedom, and that freedom is available to us, including freedom from earlier stages of Christian tradition. Thus liberal theology is evangelical through and through.

David Wells (GCTS)

We need a closer definition of "liberal." I could no more speak against freedom and self-criticism than I could against motherhood. Let me work at that closer definition through a historical approach.

Historically, Protestant liberals and Catholic modernists in the nineteenth century saw Christian faith as a little Alpine village perched on the side of a mountain right in the path of an avalanche — modern consciousness. For instance, Kant's phenomenal-noumenal distinction produced diffidence regarding things metaphysical. They responded with two apologetic moves. First, they grounded Christian faith on the evidence of religious experience (phenomenal). This both dodged Kant's criticism, and made religious pluralism easier to understand. Thus liberal theology starts not from objective revelation, but from experience common to all.

Second, most identified the sense of "godness" with evolution. In personal terms, they saw a development from brute animals to divine sonship as people managed to sluff off the ape and the tiger within them. In societal terms, they looked for a time of greater justice. At the close of the nineteenth century, some hoped that war might be a thing of the past.

From this apologetic reshaping there emerged the distinctive marks of liberalism: (1) a concern with divine immanence, so that God is found by, with and under all human personality, and the traditional understanding of miracle is brought into conformity with the laws of nature and human personality; (2) a reworked Christology, so that Jesus is not a unique breaking-in, a new species, but the perfection of what is already present in human life; (3) revelation, not as the divinely given disclosure of God in human language, but the summation and interpretation of experience; (4) sin, not as something breaking fellowship and relationship with God, but as a tiresome ball and chain which impedes the progress of the human race; (5) salvation as a nurturing process by which we bring the sense of God within to greater clarity and focus. To quote Niebuhr, the gospel of liberal Protestantism was about a God without wrath bringing man without sin to a kingdom without judgment through a Christ without a cross.

To summarize, liberal theology saw human personality as a reservoir of the divine, saw critical reason as the means of pumping out the divine, assumed continuity between Christ and culture, and equated social progress with the coming of the Kingdom of God.

Richard Niebuhr (HDS)

Note that both Gordon-Conwell people gave historical presentations; Kaufman spoke of what liberalism means to him.

"Liberal," "evangelical," and "Christian" are adjectives, not nouns. Treating them as nouns reifies what cannot be reified and tempts us to forget that the "liberal-evangelical" distinction is very fluid and constantly changing. Wells characterized liberalism in terms of immanence, but it was Jonathan Edwards who said that "space is God." Also, I resonated with Lovelace on personal testimony and religious experience underlying the foundations of theology.

The Bible is not a static entity. It is a written document which we employ. It is only effective when employed, and it is always employed in a particular cultural context.

Human beings are unfinished (a definition), and in each generation we are completing our own human nature, and completing (interpreting) the Scriptures for ourselves.

The Bible contains a summary of the law in two commandments. The first commandment relativizes the Bible, directing us to God and to nothing else. The second commandment tells us to

love all that shares the cosmos with us: promote love of being, of fulfillment of all being. That is a commandment which is the essence of both "liberal" and "evangelical."

[At this point the moderator identified some common themes in the presentations, and asked the participants to interact with these themes in particular ways. They exercised freedom in responding to this request.]

Lovelace: A simple liberal/evangelical categorization is inadequate. A more important question concerns which direction a person is moving. I like to set up a rheostat with biblicity at one end and non-biblicity at the other. So reification is a danger.

Regarding experience, Tillich properly observed that it is the indispensable medium, not the source of theology. It is crucial to combine experience and norm.

Regarding Niebuhr on the Bible: the Bible abides as an objective source. Its relevance does unfold, and in that sense it does not stay the same.

Regarding Kaufman on heteronomy: many forms of evangelicalism have put humanity in a straitjacket. There are so many humanists around because evangelicals are so inhumane. So I appreciate the impulse toward freedom. But the thing about evangelicalism is that when it encounters core biblical truth, it may first encounter it as heteronomy, but there is a breakthrough, and heteronomy becomes theonomy.

Kaufman: The Gordon-Conwell people assume that there is "the biblical message" or "the biblical faith" (e.g., Lovelace's rheostat). I do not understand this. There are many biblical positions on almost any topic you wish to take up. The Bible is a pluralist library of books, of theological ideas, of values, of points of view.

Second, even if there were *the* or *a* biblical message, there are different understandings of what that would be. There is not any biblical statement of what the biblical message is; we have to decide this. I think it is about freedom. But obviously that is not the only view. So what the biblical position is is unclear.

Third, even if we could find the biblical position, how to interpret this as bearing on our situation is unclear. We differ on what our world is, and this affects our hermeneutic.

Wells: In response to Niebuhr, of course evangelicals affirm the immanence of God. But not at the point of soteriology. Evangelical theology consistently has wanted to affirm that when you are talking about the relationship of people to God, you have to say with Ephesians 4 that we are dead. Therefore it does not seem to me to be a particularly faithful rendering of *any* understanding of the New Testament to posit then that the life of God is bubbling up within people. With Kaufman I would affirm that religious experience is not self-interpreting. So to try to build a theology on what we have experienced is a very dubious undertaking.

Niebuhr: I would like to correct Wells and Kaufman on the nature of experience. It is not an abstract entity. Experience has never been taken by Bunyan, Schleiermacher, James *et al.* as both ineffable and self-interpreting. Interpretation is obviously part of experience.

Regarding the opposition between experience and divine disclosure, *Pilgrim's Progress* has been translated in over one hundred languages. Obviously there is something about Bunyan's imaginative and innovative portraiture of Christian experience that has appealed to countless generations speaking various languages who have had very little contact with evangelical or neo-orthodox or Reformation Christianity. So the importance of experience in the whole Christian enterprise and the appeal to that which we have in common is nowhere more eloquently testified to than by this highly evangelical character and Baptist minister, John Bunyan.

Questions From the Floor

Q: Wells, can there be a synthesis between the positions expressed here today?

Wells: Yes and no. No, biblical faith is particularistic. Yes, if you run with the authority of Scripture and Jesus as sin-bearer.

Lovelace: The Reformers saw Scripture as harmony. Others see Scripture as an aggregation of theologies. This is the watershed here between the two groups.

Q: Kaufman, what is the standard of self-criticism? Is this standard open to criticism?

Kaufman: There are a number of norms, love between human beings, communities of reconciliation. So there are some moral norms of biblical tradition. These norms must be subjected to criticism. Now what we understand by love of neighbor, peace, reconciliation must be always subject to criticism because most of our understandings will have been wrong.

Q: Kaufman, what is to be made of the calls in Galatians, 1 John, and 1 Timothy to remember what we have from the beginning? Would Paul or John commend your theology to us?

Kaufman: We cannot extrapolate from these to the latter part of the twentieth century. There is no way to say what they would say. We can only say how we interpret it. We can speak for ourselves, not for them.

Q: Do evangelical theologians have anything as good to say to third world peoples as liberation theologians?

Lovelace: Many forms of twentieth-century evangelical theology have stressed only liberation from the guilt and power of sin, not from the realities of human bondage as described by Marx. There are folk like Ron Sider doing evangelical theology of liberation, also Orlando Costas and Rene Padilla. Look at the evangelicals in nineteenth-century England, Wilberforce and Shaftsbury. So there is no essential distinction. Our problem with liberal theology is its eclipse of liberation from the power of guilt and sin.

Q: Wells, speak to Kaufman's comments on Scripture.

Wells: In evangelical theology, the Holy Spirit is not understood to eclipse the writer of Scripture (background, temperament, etc.). But the presence of the Holy Spirit means that the cultural context does not negate the objectivity of revelation. So there is the possibility of coming to a common understanding of different parts of Scripture.

But much of the reading of Scripture in the twentieth century has little to do with literary criticism and much to do with twentieth-century epistemological assumptions (e.g., Bultmann's comment that people who used light bulbs could not believe in miracles). If we correct our presuppositions and are not naive about twentieth-century assumptions we can come to a common understanding regarding the core of New Testament faith.

Reflections on the Discussion

I would like to comment on two of the answers to questions coming from the floor.

Kaufman's second answer (our not being able to extrapolate from John and Paul to the latter half of the twentieth century) will be badly misunderstood unless it is juxtaposed with his opening contribution to the discussion. There Kaufman spent more time than any of the other participants relating his position to Scripture. And Kaufman's second contribution (concerning the problems in talking about "the biblical message") may suggest evangelicals avoid debating Kaufman on norms in favor of a more important question. This concerns the adequacy of Kaufman's theological proposals in light of the questions Kaufman himself raised: How do we arrive at our principles of interpretation? How do we get to our position here and now? The choice of the questions implies that it is important for there to be a connection between our reading of Scripture and our theology. Thus Kaufman

is both affirming this connection and warning us that it is not unproblematic.

But answering the first question (how do we understand the plurality in the Bible?) will involve judging the adequacy of Kaufman's (and our!) reading of Scripture. Kaufman lays great emphasis on freedom. But to plug "freedom" as defined by the Enlightenment into the New Testament as Kaufman was doing seems to me to generate at least as much confusion as clarity. This is not to say that the Enlightenment has not helped us recover important aspects of "freedom," but it is to say that our notion of "freedom" needs to be critically evaluated in the light of Scripture. I think this criticism takes place as the church reads Scripture under the direction of the Holy Spirit and aided by the gifts of the Spirit. And this, I think, is to talk about freedom within Scripture and tradition rather than freedom over against Scripture and tradition.

Wells' last answer (a reaction to Kaufman on Scripture) is noteworthy in a number of ways. First, it illuminates the way the Gordon-Conwell folk did not completely escape the temptation to triumphalism, for Kaufman's comments on Scripture — whatever else they do — describe clearly the difficulties Christians of whatever stripe have in hearing and responding to Scripture. One thinks of the discussions in the evangelical camp about the role of women in marriage, society and the church, about property and about war (whether in general or in particular: Vietnam, El Salvador). It will not work for evangelicals to identify these as peripheral rather than core issues, for they concern how we treat people, i.e., how we fulfill the second half of the Great Commandment. It will do us little good to say "the Bible, the Bible" if we do not the things that He says.

Second, in response to statements about the content of Scripture (the Bible being a pluralistic library of books), Wells appealed to tradition (how evangelicals understand things — in this case, the harmony of Scripture). Appeal to tradition here may be quite appropriate, but it was incongruous after the evangelicals had defined themselves in terms of the formal principle of *sola scriptura*. Concerning Scripture itself, I suspect that the false dichotomy which needs attention is that between Scripture as unified and Scripture as diverse. "Harmony" is not a bad word here, as long as one is willing to see the harmony, for instance, in both Bach cantatas and fusion jazz. But rather than using this model to launch into an extended third section, I will close by suggesting two modern works addressing this question: James Dunn's *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* ("the cohesive focal point" is "the unity between the historical Jesus and the exalted Christ") and Brevard Childs' *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (the canon itself may provide guidance in threading our way through the diversity).

IS ANYTHING HAPPENING ON YOUR CAMPUS?

If there are seminary or religion students on your campus meeting for fellowship, discussion or service, we would like to hear about it. TSF can make available to such groups its resources. Also, by mentioning what is happening on various campuses in the "Academe" section of *TSF Bulletin*, we may be able to suggest ideas and encouragement to students at other schools. Please write Theological Students Fellowship, 233 Langdon, Madison, WI 53703.

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