4-1-1966

The Opinion - Vol. 05, No. 07

Fuller Theological Seminary

Richard A. Bower

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.fuller.edu/fts-opinion

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.fuller.edu/fts-opinion/38

This Periodical is brought to you for free and open access by the Fuller Seminary Publications at Digital Commons @ Fuller. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Opinion by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Fuller. For more information, please contact archives@fuller.edu.
GOD IS DEAD; THANK GOD!
by Ron W. Ohlson

I have just read once again Dr. Wright's article on the "Death of God," along with Professor Bromiley's response. I feel that it is unfortunate that Dr. Bromiley did not expound his points of disagreement, in order that we might choose for ourselves just whose ideas are "inadequate," "utterly confused," or "false and destructive conclusions."

Perhaps I do not understand the "God is Dead" movement from the point of view of astute theologians. I make no claim for that kind of understanding. However, I feel that one of the greatest problems facing theological education today is the fact that Professors are divorced from the world, confined to the ivory-tower existence of a theological institution. I have proposed before that theological education would be benefited by requiring professors to spend a couple of years every now and then in an innercity parish church, where God is so dead that people don't even swear in His Name any more. Then they would be forced to wrestle with the realities of the world with which we wrestle—the reality of people's lives in their world where God is dead.

As I understand it, the concept of the death of God is not so much a theological proposition as it is a practical reality. It seems to me absurd to argue over the life or death of God per se, as if it were an option. As Christians and theologians, we operate upon the assumption or premise that God exists and is thus very much alive. The only other alternative is that God does not exist, which in itself is a metaphysical assumption, based upon faith. This latter position could not realistically speak of the death of God, because it denies the life of God.

Thus it appears to me that the concept of the death of God describes a condition of our culture, rather than an ultimate reality. Both Schliermacher and Nietzsche saw in the religious veneer of 19th

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

****

RON W. OHLSON is a student in the PhD program in Psychology. He is a graduate of Colorado University with a BA in Psychology (1958). He received his BD from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1962.
Dr. Gayraud Wilmore’s series of addresses during last week’s Social Concerns Conference started with the presupposition that integration holds the greatest promise for inter-racial peace. With this specific orientation, he analyzed our current racial crisis as rooted in an alienation which inevitably leads to hate. Ironically, all but twenty-five members of our community chose to omit the lecture spelling out the spiritual needs of both races. In “The New Situation in Civil Rights,” Dr. Wilmore demonstrated how the barriers of segregation which the white middle-class has thrown around itself have created a peculiar species of hatred in our generation. As the metropolitan cores of population have become increasingly black, the white suburbanite has consciously segregated his culture further and further from those most in need of his living standards. The result is not only deprivation, but also hatred. The ghettos of minority groups see just enough of the American Dream to know that they have been singled out as a group of Americans who cannot realize that Dream. Not the failure to fulfill their aspirations, but the coldly mechanical denial of recognition by their “white brethren” has engendered a new hate in the hearts of Negro youth.

Despite our guest’s winning ability to propound his own solution of “direct action,” he closed his remarks with a pessimistic appraisal of the church’s ability to achieve effective integration. Without this vehicle for revolution, her task becomes simply to “pick up the pieces” of the secular revolutions. On the one hand, Dr. Wilmore tied today’s racial tension to modern Christianity’s tension in the areas of protestant ecumenicity and protestant-Roman cooperation. An afternoon panelist, on the other hand, linked the success of American inter-racial peace with the future success of both the predominance of Christianity in America and the predominance of democracy in world politics. The professional competence of both men in their respective fields only fortifies the extremity of the statements.

D.K.G.

“Some claim that I have ensnared the people by the melodies of my hymns... I do not deny it.”

St. Ambrose

The time has probably passed when we can say with any certainty that the fine arts are an instrument of the devil who seeks to ensnare the pleasure-loving souls of men. But we are far from coming to an agreement on what exactly is the relationship of the arts to our Christian faith. Are they a luxury or a necessity in our expression of faith? Do we need the poetic as well as the rational to adequately express our faith, even in theology? Lest you think the answers to these questions are self-evident, try to work out an

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3
EDITORIALS (continued)

adequate relationship between theology and the fine arts. Is there something that art can express, theologically, that cannot be expressed in any other way? If so, is art merely to be of an utilitarian interest? What, specifically, can and should be done to integrate the arts with theology (if, indeed, anything should be done)? In order to stimulate interest along these lines, we are devoting the May issue of the opinion to a discussion of the "Theology of the Fine Arts." Letters and articles representing all view-points will be welcomed in hopes that we may stimulate interest and thinking on this topic.

R.A.E.

GOD IS DEAD: THANK GOD! (continued)

20th century culture and the fact that God had really become a function of the culture instead of a dynamic reality which transcends culture. When the culture became secularized God died, and as Nietzsche says, the Churches became "tombs and sepulchres of God." I perceive that this is precisely what has happened in 20th century American culture.

Protestant Christianity has become a function of the American middle class, to the extent that going to church becomes synonymous with faith, and the corporate dynamic of God's presence in a community of people degenerates into an egocentric system of personal piety divorced from the life of the secular society.

It is for this reason that I feel that we should welcome the concept of the Death of God, as it comes with the secularization of our culture. Bonhoeffer caught the exciting possibilities of this idea when, in Letters and Papers, he spoke of a "world in which man has come of age, ... where God is teaching us to live as men who can get along very well without him." God thus forces us to become truly human, truly free, and to assume the responsibility for human life and society in all its vicissitudes.

In the secular world where God is dead, there is no confusion between God and culture, leaving both God and man free. War can no longer be justified as it was, curiously, for hundreds of years, as a holy conflict between the forces of God and the forces of evil. We can no longer justify dropping bombs and napalm on Asian villages with the concept that God is on our side. When God is dead the issue becomes American versus communist interest, which is what it should be, for a sovereign God is concerned with human life on both sides.

In the secular society, morality becomes a matter of concern for human life, instead of a desire to please or avoid displeasing God. When God is dead, political power can never again be used to enforce adherence to a certain doctrinal position, and the many varieties of Inquisitions will be a thing of the past.

In the society where God is dead, the power of the institutional church or religious system can never become a barrier to human progress; for example the Roman Catholic position of birth control is blocking international action on an issue that is so critical that the future of humanity depends upon it.

Finally, when God is dead, it is no longer a matter of social advantage or personal pacification to associate oneself with a Church.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4
GOD IS DEAD: THANK GOD! (continued)
It becomes a matter of choice, even a dangerous or painful choice. But when people make that kind of choice, God genuinely comes alive within the community which gathers under those conditions.

It is clear that in a society in which God is dead,' it may be very difficult to be a Christian or to maintain a vital faith in God. It appears to me that this is the way that Jesus said it should be. When God is dead, both God and man are set free from the shackles of institutionalized religion and systematized theology, and God and man are free to relate in new, creative and dynamic ways, guided by the spirit of the living God, reflected in the true Word of God, Jesus the Christ.

When we are thus free, when God forces us to live without using him as a working hypotheses, we are also able to become fully human. We must wrestle with the responsibility for our own lives, and our own world. When we face this responsibility, we may discover in a new and exciting way, the presence and alongsidedness of the living God as the dynamic which brings meaning to our genuinely human existence. It is in this spirit in which life is possibility instead of probability, that I feel we can thank God for the death of God.////

* * *

STIRRING UP THE SAINTS
by Douglas K. Stewart

How do you stir up Christians to redouble their efforts in pursuing a godly life and witness in the second half of life, or for that matter, in the 3rd quarter of a Seminary academic year? Our text today answers this perennial problem: "And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near." (Hebrews 10:24, 25, New ASV.)

Perhaps you question why Christian believers would want to desert their church meetings. I suggest that they did so for the same reasons that some Christians avoid church or chapel today. They find the services dry and uninteresting, the same old routine. Their personal schedule is so tightly packed with more important things than meeting for corporate worship that they just can't be bothered. The pattern sounds familiar, doesn't it?

You might reasonably ask, "What transpired at these early Christian meetings that made them so boring?" Evidences from the Apostles in the New Testament and the writings of Justin Martyr indicate that

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5

* * *

DOUGLAS K. STEWART is a Junior at FTS. He received a BS degree from the US Naval Academy in 1958.
STIRRING UP THE SAINTS (continued)

they observed the same elements in their worship as we Christians do today: singing psalms and hymns, prayer and thanksgiving, reading of Scripture, exhortation by one another or a leader of the group, and observing the Lord's Supper. These early gatherings of the Lord's people had the indispensable function of encouraging the believers in their faith. The sense of fellowship, horizontal as well as vertical, was a source of great spiritual strength and nourishment to the first century Christians. And it was of these meetings that the writer of Hebrews solemnly warns us, "Let us not hold aloof from our church meetings, as some do." (Hebrews 10:25a, J. B. Phillips.) These believers who avoided services may have done so because they were not participating in them, as worshippers should. Perhaps they were only spectators. If this is so, then it is no wonder that they should feel they weren't getting anything out of them. They needed to pray with the leader who was praying, silently repeating his words after him if necessary. They needed to set themselves adrift in the hymns, instead of merely mouthing words. They needed to concentrate on the exhortation given by the speaker, perhaps even to the extreme of taking notes.

Returning to the text, we find that the negative aspect of stimulating Christians is countered by a positive one: "but by encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near." But how are we to encourage one another? The text doesn't really spell it out, although we can infer from the conjunction that our assembling together has much to do with helping our faith. How can this be?

The Apostle Paul tells us that, "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." (Romans 10:17, New ASV.) When Christians meet for worship, they hear the word of Christ preached. If they concentrate on the message, their faith and understanding are enhanced. The Scriptures are also read, which serves to edify our spirits. If responsive reading is the custom, then we ourselves join more actively in sharing the correction and instruction of the word. Prayer is offered; surely the believer can identify himself with the prayers of thanksgiving and adoration, of petition and confession. Ultimately, we must ask ourselves, "What is the primary purpose of corporate worship?" Without equivocation the answer must be that it is to glorify God by a sanctified joint effort as a body of believers. Even though the corporate effort may be enfeebled by sour notes from the choir or a stammering tongue, I doubt if our private times of worship are much superior.

Reflect for a moment on the spiritual values of worshipping with the saints. Surely the presence of our fellow believers in the congregation should inspire us to wonder and praise, as we consider that our God is able to save all who will turn to Him in repentance and faith. When we look around us and survey the spiritual and intellectual gifts of some, the five talent men, should we not marvel that even we, the one talent men, are able to find our unique place in the body of Christ? Ought we not, then, to be encouraged? This is the positive aspect of stirring up Christians to a life of love and works pleasing to our Father in Heaven.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6
STIRRING UP THE SAINTS (continued)

These two commands given by Scripture for stimulating the saints are complementary: by not deserting our Christian services, we open ourselves to an avenue of nurture in our life in Christ, and we bolster others in their faith; for we are members of one body.

This text also meets one of the principal spiritual problems of the Seminary student: that of drying up. How many of us are concerned about becoming callous and insensitive to the humbling, profound truths of Scripture—because we handle it every day, professionally? How many of us, after graduation, will look back on our seminary days, as many pastors will confess, as nothing more than a grueling, spiritual-mental contest, fought on a parched arena strewn with books, and papers, and eraser residue? May we not be so blind in reminiscing as to not see this fact; that one of the ways in which we could have been stimulated to love and good deeds was by corporate worship in the chapel. And if we recognize that fact, may we not regret that we failed to share in chapel worship—after all, we had 360 opportunities.

AGAINST IRRATIONALISM
by Thomas B. Talbott

There is a dangerous trend in contemporary theological circles which, if unchecked, threatens to destroy the rational significance of Christian faith. This is a trend toward irrationalism in theology especially Calvinist theology. Ever since William Ellery Channing penned his brilliant and decisive polemic against Calvinism, history has demonstrated, as well as history can demonstrate anything, that there are only two ways of remaining faithful to the doctrines of John Calvin: (a) by venerating an omnipotent demon and therby sacrificing one's moral integrity, a la Gordon Clark, or (b) by venerating logical nonsense and thereby sacrificing one's rational integrity, a la James I. Packer. Either option is equally perilous, but in this age of irrationalism (b) seems to pose the greatest threat.

In an unconvincing little book entitled Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God, Mr. Packer seeks to give intellectual credence to logical nonsense (i.e. antinomies), but his discussion is abrogated by a conception of logic which is wholly inadequate. The subject with which he is concerned (i.e. the relationship between divine sovereignty and human responsibility) is a difficult one, but his analysis is exceedingly childish. He rightly perceives that all Christians believe that God is sovereign: in particular, that He is sovereign in salvation. This is proved by the fact that Christians pray, that they give thanks for their salvation, and that they pray for the salvation of others (Ch. 1). But from this premise he somehow arrives at the non-Biblical conclusion that God casually controls everything, including all human acts of will, and then seeks to reconcile his radical view of God's sovereignty to a belief in human responsibility by an appeal to the category of antinomy. Now what is an antinomy?

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

THOMAS B. TALBOTT is a middler at PTS, He received a BS in philosophy at Portland State College in 1963.
AGAINST IRRATIONALISM (continued)
An antinomy, according to Mr. Packer, is not a real contradiction, but "an appearance of contradiction." It exists "when a pair of principles stand side by side, seemingly irreconcilable, but both undeniable. There are cogent reasons for believing each of them; each rests on clear and solid evidence; but it is a mystery to you how they can be squared with each other" (p. 18-19). Here Mr. Packer introduces the well known "antinomy" faced by modern physicists in their study of light. As this example shows, an antinomy is not a paradox, it is not a play on words which, upon analysis, is shown to be both dispensable and solvable. On the contrary, "an antinomy is neither dispensable nor comprehensible. It is not a figure of speech, but an observed relation between two statements of fact. It is not deliberately manufactured; it is forced upon us by the fact themselves. It is unavoidable, and it is insoluble" (p. 21).

Such an analysis is, to say the least, inadequate. (1) Are antinomies really forced upon us by the facts themselves? If so, how? (a) Are facts contradictory or non-contradictory?—rational or irrational? Of course not! Facts simply exist; they are neither rational nor irrational, apparently rational nor apparently irrational. Terms such as "true," "false," "antinomy," "logical," and "illogical" properly signify relations between and characteristics of propositions and ideas; they signify nothing about relations between facts. (b) Do facts sometimes require contradictory categories of thought? Perhaps Mr. Packer could supply us with an example here. Since facts cannot contradict each other, how can two contradictory statements accurately describe the facts? Could it be that Mr. Packer has observed some complex piece of phenomena such as a ball which was red at the same time and in the same respect that it was green? If so, what did it look like? Or if from one perspective he observed the ball as red and from another perspective he observed it as green, would he not then be dealing with two different facts? And where would the antinomy be in this? (2) Is an antinomy really "an observed relation between two statements of fact?" How could this be? Observed relations exist between facts, not between statements of fact. The relation between two statements is rationally apprehended, not observed. Mr. Packer has clearly mixed his categories. (3) Perhaps, then, an antinomy exists when two statements accurately representing the facts appear inconsistent with each other. But this is impossible. Statements which appear contradictory, have no referent in the mind of the person to whom they appear contradictory, and how can a statement devoid of factual referent accurately represent the facts? If I say, "John ate the apple," I have said something. If I say, "John did not eat the apple," I have said something. But if I say, John ate the apple and John did not eat the apple," I have said absolutely nothing about John. Therefore, since my statement signifies nothing, it cannot accurately represent the facts. Similarly, if I say, "God controls John's will," I have said something. If I say, "John is responsible in the sense that God does not control John's will," I have said something. But if I say, "God control John's will, and John is responsible in the sense that God does not control his will," I have said

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8
AGAINST IRRATIONALISM (continued)

nothing; and if it be objected that God controls John's will, but
John is responsible in some other sense (e.g. by divine declaration),
then there is no longer even an appearance of contradiction and no
need to posit antinomy.

Were Mr. Packer to spend less time criticizing rational analysis
(cf. p. 16), and more time acquainting himself with the methods of
critical thought, he might avoid such confusions. Notice his alleged
antinomy arising from the study of light. It is not a genuine anti­
nomy at all. In the first place, there is not a single shred of
evidence to support the conclusion that a ray of light is composed of
waves in the same respect that it is composed of particles, or that
light acts like a wave at the same time that it acts like a particle.
Nor is there any evidence, nor by the nature of the case could there
be, that there exist "wavicles" in the external world as metaphysical
things-in-themselves. By appealing to physics, the best Mr. Packer
can do is supply us with a contradictory metaphor. In the second
place, and more important, the function of scientific theories is not
to explain reality, but to serve as conceptual models which generate
verifiable predictions. Their justification lies not in their truth­
fulness, but in their pragmatic ability to work. Unfortunately, the
same does not follow for theology.

By way of conclusion we might cite an irony in Mr. Packer's
method. He willingly uses logic against an opponent, but is unwilling
to allow his opponent the same liberty. He begins with a caricature.
He states that "all Christians believe in divine sovereignty, but some
are not aware that they do, and mistakenly imagine and insist that
they reject it" (p. 16). This is, of course quite false. Even
Catholics and Arminians are unwilling to deny God's sovereignty.
They merely seek to maintain divine sovereignty in spite of human
autonomy. Mr. Packer's objection to this position is that it tends to
drive the thought of sovereignty from our minds. But why? Catholics
and Arminians can always postulate an antinomy. They can always
claim that man is free in the sense that God does not causally control
his will, but that God mysteriously exercises causal control over his
will. Here is a real antinomy—one worthy of the most irrational
mind! Mr. Packer will have none of this however. Rightly perceiving
that the Arminian view of human freedom implies the rejection of the
Reformed view of God's sovereignty, he categorically rejects the
Arminian view. In other words, he rejects any view of freedom which
might imply a limitation of God's sovereignty, but he criticizes the
Arminian for rejecting any view of God's sovereignty which seems to
imply a limitation of human responsibility. Such a double standard
inevitably occurs whenever one is willing to sacrifice logic on the
altar of his own presuppositions.

* * *

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

DISTRESSED

I am distressed by Dr. Bromley's response to Dr. Wright's
CONTINUED ON PAGE 9
DISTRESSED (continued)

article on the death of God. While I am concerned about the validity of Dr. Bromley's criticisms I feel first priority must be given to the manner and spirit in which these criticisms seem to be presented.

When Dr. Bromiley says "A statement like... ...is so obviously inadequate that one would hardly expect it from a properly taught catechumen" I wince because he seems to go beyond the issues and declare himself contemptuous of the intellectual efforts of a fellow professor. When he says a given position "produced a fine crop of false and destructive conclusions" I am troubled at what appears to me to be a sarcasm which does not reflect a sensitive regard for people.

Yet I feel Dr. Bromley is capable of this. I have a friend who is deeply grateful to Dr. Bromiley not only for a very meaningful theology but also for his personal warmth and graciousness. I would be happy to find I have misinterpreted the spirit of Dr. Bromley's letter but my fear is that he has used his intellectual and theological acuity as a sword against a fellow human being.

I am writing this letter because I as a student have a need in all of this. I need for my professors to provide intellectual guidance but further I need for them to show me how theologically concerned men can earnestly debate critical issues and respect one another as persons. Only then can I center my attention on the issues under debate without the anxiety that intellectual mayhem might be going on beneath the surface: only then can I feel assured that personal feelings are not confusing the issues. This is of vital importance because if Dr. Wright is guilty of anthropologizing theology and is in danger of leading us down the road of Schliermacherian Liberalism I want to know - and I think Dr. Wright does too - because I don't think either of us want to take that road.

David Donaldson

*COURSE ON KUNG*

Roy Brewer's response to Ron Ohlson's letter in the opinion concerning the sterility of social concern on this campus greatly disturbs me. Though Mr. Ohlson can be accused of overstating his case, Mr. Brewer has completely missed the issue being raised.

As one of the two Fuller men reported in Selma (though it should be stated that Fuller ought not claim any credit here since I was not a member of the student body at the time but sent and financed by the church I served in Northern California) my recent four day visit on the campus has illustrated to me that the concerns of March 1965 are dead in March 1966. The inertia of a proclamation of the gospel in the ethos of human needs has been lost. Fuller today appears to be no further along the road towards proclaiming the total mission of the church (both proclamation and servanthood) than just before Dr. George W. Weber presented this community with his lectures on "Congregation in Mission."

A point of illustration would be the recent lectures on "The CONTINUED ON PAGE 10
COURSE ON KÜNG? (continued)

Church Confronts the Collegian! Here in the chapel I heard a chilias-
tic theology proclaimed which, except for a few 20th century words,
completely misses the crying needs of the 20th century university
student: An address such as this will not show to the unconcerned
college professor the revolutionary nature of the gospel in society.
College students want to see Christian principles in action that will
relieve the injustices of Bogaloua or the tragedy of Watts, or the
conflict of Delano or the neurotic pressures of suburbia. Jesus
himself always linked the proclamation of the Gospel with acts of
human kindness. Christians today need to do the same; the need to
minister to human needs by being active members of CORE, SNCC, NAACP,
Poverty Councils, Neighborhood Councils, etc. It is in these groups
that Christians can find the needs of suffering humanity.

Yes, Mr. Brewer, there are some students and professors who have
these concerns. But, the general ethos of the seminary is that of
confused and individualistic grappling rather than a concerted,
and well-planned approach towards training men to serve the church in
these areas.

The seminary needs to offer today courses which stimulate and
educate students in the fields of ethics and social concern. Such
courses need to include texts such as Harvey Cox's Secular City and
Ernest Troeltsch's Social Teachings of the Christian Churches as well
as texts on sociology, political science, and economics instead of
pure Bible exegesis. Courses need also to be programmed to meet the
contemporary theological debates of Atwitzer, Lehmann, Küng, Petz,
Hamilton, Van Buren, Robinson and Fletcher. This must be done so
that Fuller graduates can communicate knowledgeably with clergymen
from other schools and traditions. Lectureships need to be financed
that will bring in knowledgeable non-Christian men to speak in these
areas. Finally, through actual involvement in conjunction with major
denominations and/or the Council of Churches or with the various civil
rights organizations the faculty and administration should lead the way
by setting up experimental ministries in areas of the country that are
in need. Fuller without this is like Cal Tech without laboratories.
Only as the administration and faculty leads the way by making contacts
in the power-structure of the Southland will such experimental minis-
tries bear fruit for the students. But only as students set aside time
to work on these projects will training as well as reconciliation take
place. Fuller cannot afford to sit back on her laurels of past
achievements (which really aren't too much) for the world of action will
pass her by. Therefore let us join together in the mission of being
"Born to Care."

Ralph Wright

---

the opinion is published the first Wednesday of each month through-
out the school year by students at Fuller Theological Seminary, 135 N.
Oakland Ave., Pasadena, California. Opinions expressed are those of the
individual author.

the opinion staff

Richard A. Bower............Editor-in-Chief
David K. Garth.............Managing Editor
Richard W. Burr..............Literary Editor
Terry A. Simonson...........Consultant Editor