

Florida Christian Convention/National Missionary Convention 1985

DOCTRINAL TRENDS OF THE RESTORATION MOVEMENT

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First, doctrine is fundamental, not auxiliary. Christianity without doctrine does not exist. Word has somehow got out that orthodox doctrine is the enemy of spirituality. Doctrine is an embarrassed intruder in many congregations. Barely tolerated, it cowers on the back pew; the territory around the pulpit has long since been claimed by commanding personality, practical mysticism, professional music, and pop psychology.

A round of applause awaits the convention speaker who will announce that we are saved by Jesus, not doctrine. Brotherhood scholars impressed by German theology are throwing up a wall between Jesus and doctrine. This one-eyed theology is catchy; it breathes rhetorical authority. By design it eases the force of doctrine, mitigates the raw authority of Scripture, accredits human testimony, and expands the range of union. But it won't work. Jesus does not descend in euphoric mystery; He comes clothed in the Apostles' Doctrine and dwells in our hearts by faith. The Bible does not elevate the Person of Christ over the doctrine of Christ. Biblical faith is propositional. Existentialism settles its faith upon an immediate experience with the Person (in which case propositional revelation is superfluous). But even the disciples who walked with Jesus did not know Him apart from a complex of theological statements defining His Person and work. A concept of truth can never be personal in a way that does not depend on content.

Doctrine, therefore, is central, not orbital—not a parenthesis in the Christian message, but the thesis itself. We face no choice between strict orthodoxy and heartfelt Christianity. Strong doctrine is not legalistic Pharisaism; it is obedience. True doctrine firmly held does not create a dead church; it is the only source of genuine vitality. Enthusiasm in the local congregation can just as easily be vivified nonsense as true Body life; and where doctrine is discounted; sentiment reigns as the canon of faith.

Second, negative trends are inevitable. The human heart is precisely what the Bible says it is, and the indwelling spirit does not mitigate our capacity for self-deception and self-justification. And we can get used to anything. Our generation of the Church wants to enjoy Christianity without having to slug it out in some dirty brawl to defend the Faith-once-delivered. New Testament Christianity has always existed in the documents, not in the purity of a first-century golden age. From day one the Church has been forced to choose between conflict and compromise; before he could get out of town, Paul's enemies subverted his doctrine in the churches he founded. It's been that way ever since. We must not get the vapors over doctrinal confrontation, as if some strange thing were happening to us. Our congregations, on the average, are no better or worse than the churches in A.D. 65; and where did we get the idea that our generation of the church has within it some natural quality that makes apostasy abnormal? Modern Christians are irrationally critical of theological debate. They have the feeling that controversy in the Church is anomalous and tacky. I am regularly scolded by brethren of fine-tuned soul, warned that the Spirit of Christ equals quiet civility. Polemics are out of fashion. Trends go unchecked because believers care more about manner than content; syrupy error passes ahead of straight-spoken truth.

Confrontation, however, is the business of the Church, right along with love and evangelism. To deny this is to condemn Peter and John and Paul ...and Jesus. Since the Church can ultimately be counted on to stray, we have reason to anchor on what the Bible says, not on what the Church is believing and doing.

Third, Satan is a predictable liar, i.e., we can foresee not only that he will seduce the Church, but the form that seduction is likely to take. Our Enemy keeps raising his primordial question: "Hath God said?" The rebellion he incites among the children of God, moreover, can be expected to wear the mask of extravagant piety, by which he eases the Church away from divine authority. We must not be surprised when noisy god-talk drowns out the quiet voice of sound teaching.

Fourth, trends, by nature, follow culture. In every generation the Church has surrendered its distinctiveness by conforming its thoughts and life to that of the larger community. The modern Church sanctifies the ideas that dominate the world instead of judging them. A church loosened from Scripture will, of necessity, be a trendy church, convinced that all things work together for good to him who is "with it."

Fifth, trends, again by nature, are hazy and troublesome. Trends intimidate by the subtle tyranny of tendency. Trends are propelled along by their own weight, moved by the power of historical momentum. Trends are hard to get at; they do not speak in clear affirmation; the rhetoric of trends is all smudge and blur. Trend-fighters have not the luxury of clear targets. They fight a battle that is almost impossible to win, yet they must be won before most good hearted Christians can bring themselves to believe that the war is on. Trends do not exist in the abstract; trends are people—nice people—leaning this way or that. By the time trends evolve into fixed heresies, they are as conspicuous as unchangeable. In the transition, however, trends resist definition. Believers are impatient with the refined arguments that expose trends. The ideas opposed by trend-fighters are rudimentary, and therefore seemingly harmless; for this reason trend-fighters will be thought of as bigots. The Church can't seem to remember that the congeniality of genteel misbelievers goes to the grave with them, while error and skepticism live on to ravage the faith of their grandchildren.

Sixth, sound doctrine is worth the struggle. If we will not contend for the Faith, it can only mean that we are not convinced the New Testament Christianity is of any great worth. It may be that we have little appreciation for the infinite difference between truth and error. Those who care about the truth care about it intensely simply because they care about it at all. A man can be relaxed about trends away from truth only if he is, at heart, an unbeliever.

Seventh, those who, in the quest for unity, reduce the content of required faith to an uncontroversial minimum ("Jesus is Lord") are not, as they believe, elevating the living Christ over dead legalism. They are, in fact, accusing God of delivering a word revelation so obscure and ragged that no reasonable deity could expect men to agree on what the words mean. I affirm that doctrinal truth is affirmable. I reject the subtle persuasions of cultural Hegelianism, i.e., that truth is a never-ending process, that all conclusions are tentative, that truth resides in the hunt, never in the discovery. If we're not sure about true doctrine, let's study until we are convinced. If we have learned the truth, let's take a stand on it. In either case, let's have no more of this foot-

shuffling nonsense that says we can't be too sure about doctrine. There is a difference between intellectual humility and weak-mindedness.

A final word of introduction. The Restoration Movement is alive. Hundreds of intelligent, faithful leaders preserve and preach the New Testament Christianity. While nothing could be clearer than that our outfit needs revival (when has that not been true of the Church?), it is not a given that we cry out for redefinition. I don't trust these fellows who, of late, have been reading over the grave of the brotherhood. I fear they want the movement certified dead so they can apply for the commission to resurrect it to their own vision. We may have lost our nerve; we have not lost our reason for being. And the preacher who has little or no experience in strong doctrine has no right to declare that the Restoration Movement isn't working and call for a new plan.

Freedom. Freedom is the dominant cultural theme, and the Church is buying in. Have you noticed in brotherhood preaching and writing how our list of restrictions is shrinking while our catalog of freedoms grows daily? Sunday has become Independence Day every week. Have you noticed, for example that brotherhood scholars are discovering that divorce is not the enormity we always understood it to be in Scripture? Satan is subverting our freedom in Christ by progressively liberating the church from the Word of Christ. Our Enemy translates freedom from condemnation into freedom from covenant. We must re-teach ourselves that the love of Christ does not subtract from His authority, that Faith requires more than obedience than Law, not less (the son obeys more quickly than the slave), that obedience is still better than sacrifice, and that exhilaration does not outvote commandment. The outward evidence of the indwelling Spirit is neither tongues nor lawlessness. If Jesus is Lord, that makes us obedient children, not prodigals straining to liberate ourselves from His Word.

Inerrancy. The most deadly trend is the denial of the inerrancy of Scripture. Errancy functions to free the Church from the sheer authority of the Word. The issue is not over (1) terminology, (2) mode of inspiration, (3) hermeneutics, (4) translations or copies, (5) artificial precision in language, (6) institutional jealousy, (7) Calvinistic fundamentalism, (8) party-building, or (9) fellowship. It is not a disagreement over how to construe particular problem texts; it's about the nature of the Bible—what kind of book it is. The inerrancy controversy raises the question of the connection between Scripture and faith. While errancy is not a test of fellowship, neither is it on the level of a piano in the church house or speaking in tongues. Inerrancy has to do with the inspiration of Scripture, an issue that is before, behind, and under matters of interpretation and opinion. It's the difference between understanding the Bible and believing it.

Errancy is coming at us from neo-orthodox theology, which is, in turn, supported by the historical-critical methods. Scholarly errantists have adopted neo-orthodox categories of inspiration, revelation, faith, and in doing so, have abandoned the traditional, conservative concepts of these foundational doctrines. Neo-orthodoxy is, in brief, the attempt by made-in-Germany theology to retrieve something of a biblical faith from the devastation visited on European Christianity by classical liberalism, without committing to the traditional orthodox belief in the factual truth and absolute authority of Scripture. The soul of neo-orthodoxy is not the radical conclusions reached by open advocates of the system, but rather its epistemology, according to which the Bible is not, in its essence, the Word of God; it is a human witness to

revelatory "events". Since the Bible is not the touchstone of revelation the believer's faith does not depend on it. Scripture is sifted by the historical-critical method to discover what the believer might choose to regard as "authoritative". Johann Salomo Semler, the father of the historical-critical method, was in revolt against the supernatural. His dictum: "The root of all evil (in theology) is the interchangeable use of the terms 'Scripture' and the 'Word of God'".

Sound familiar? Scripture, we are being taught, is the Word of God only in a secondary sense. Brotherhood teachers seek to shift the focus of faith from the Bible to Jesus, from the propositional to the personal, from the objective to the existential, from biblical faith to mysticism. The Bible as revelation softens to the Bible as witness; authority mellows to authoritativeness; infallibility melts to trustworthiness; infallibility is given to mean the ability of scripture to get the job done, not that the Bible is completely true; The New Testament, we learn, is not a pattern for the Church, only a "norm". And so it goes. Inceptive neo-orthodoxy loosens faith from Scripture.

The university at Tübingen has always been a fountainhead of neo-orthodoxy. Tübingen has been a curse on Biblical studies since the days of F. C. Bauer and before. Tübingen-style skepticism, introduced by the Campbell Institute, has done unspeakable damage to the Stone-Campbell movement. The voice of Tübingen, never completely silent among the Conservative Disciples, is increasingly becoming the voice of brotherhood leadership. The current Tübingen hero is the Roman Catholic neo-orthodox theologian Hans Kung. His name has become ubiquitous of late. I have heard Kung represented to the churches as a modern Alexander Campbell, which is absurd. Kung denies the Resurrection; his concept of inspiration makes him a radical disbeliever.

The Tübingenized faith is, at its base, mystical; it does not need a true Bible. The Tübingenized faith cannot see why inerrancy should be an issue. Since the Spirit speaks immediately and existentially as the believer reads, God can make His will known through untrue words as easily as in true ones. To the disciples of Barth, Brunner, and Kung, it is silly to speak of a faith that stands on factual infallibility. So what if Genesis 1-11 is theological story rather than history? What does it matter if the historical Daniel wrote the Book? Who cares if Isaiah is one person or two, or three? We are saved by Jesus, not by a view of inspiration. Is inerrancy worth the fight? The Tübingenized mind says no. I say yes. What is going on? Is it simply a matter of disagreement, however deep? Unfortunately, it isn't. It is a matter of two kinds of mind—two epistemologies. The Tübingenized mind tries to figure out why men such as myself are creating divisive issues from nothing. I think the errantist is odd for not recognizing that which stands obvious before us all: (1) that the Bible cannot be the true Word of God unless it is the true words of God, (2) that the Bible claims inerrancy for itself, (3) that the denial of inerrancy removes the keystone of biblical authority, (4) that Tübingenization represents an attempt to make peace with the philosophical mood of the twentieth century, and (5) that biblical faith is propositional, not existential. When faith is loosened from the propositional truth, there is nothing to check its drift to doubt and denial. Tübingenized faith has always moved away from Scripture because it has nowhere else to go, not to be halted by good intentions and loving spirits. "But I believe in Jesus," protests the Tübingenized faith, "and that's what counts. I don't have to believe everything in the Bible." I reply: We know what you believe today, but who can tell what you will believe tomorrow?

The denial of inerrancy is not, of itself, liberalism, as that term is commonly understood. All errantists do not subscribe to the aggregation of negative conclusions that are loosely typical of Tübingen neo-orthodoxy. The Tübingen-influenced brothers of whom I speak do, however, retain the methodology that was endemic to Disciple infidelity, i.e., the historical-critical method.

Advocates of the historical-critical method insist that it is neutral. Not true. The method assumes the negative conclusions at which it always arrives sooner or later. Advocates of the historical-critical approach don't try to deny that the method has an unbroken history of skepticism and infidelity; it never seems to work out as promised. Defenders of the method put me in mind of some of my professors at the university who held for socialism—never tried, they say but what betrayed. Proponents of the historical-critical method, like the socialists, want their system judged not by its bloody past, but on its radiant future. The negative method lives off the capital of biblical faith accumulated by its non-Tübingenized predecessors; the reserve of biblical faith is running out and the trouble is beginning in earnest.

Errantists revise Restoration history to make it out that inerrancy, not errancy, is the innovation. Those of us who faithfully repeat what nearly everyone used to agree on are accused of splitting the brotherhood. Why should we be calumniated for the mere act of reminding the brethren of what few ever doubted before? Answer: Errantists have to believe that inerrancy is a sudden, doctrinal intrusion, because if our position isn't, theirs is.

Scripture and the Church. The Restoration fathers broke with Protestantism and Romanism by affirming the priority of Scripture to the Church. Today the notion is spreading among us that Scripture answers to Church, although it is never said in just that way. The Tübingen doctrine goes like this: Believers are Spirit-baptized into the Church; in this way the Spirit, not Scripture, creates the Church. Jesus, not Scripture is the final authority for the Church. According to this paradigm, the New Testament is a norm for the Church in that it helps structure the Body so that the Spirit can more freely perform His primary work.

The above Scripture-Church doctrine is solidly built on two fabulously false dichotomies: (1) It separates Jesus from His words (the authority of Jesus is exercised through His words, not by the mere fact of the Incarnation), and (2) it makes an inconceivable distinction between the Apostolic Word (which is the words of Jesus) spoken and the Apostolic Word written. The Apostolic Word, spoken and written, created the Apostolic Church; the written Word will do it today. The Spirit forms the Church through His words. This was the faith of the Stone-Campbell movement from the beginning.

This Scripture-Church dogma, without wanting to admit it, gives the Church power over the New Testament. The Church-over-Scripture design is the old Roman fraud, i.e., history, not scripture, becomes the canon of truth. It creates a theology of historicism—whatever happens is what should happen; whatever is going on with the Church is announced under the rubric "what God is doing." It's as if Church history were a guided progression that operates independent of human will or written law. It founds the Church of Historical Necessity with its members always on the move, i.e., in doctrinal transition. History becomes a polemic device; by the alchemy of history whatever happens becomes indisputable because it is the work of the Holy Spirit. Facts are

translated into providence; what happens becomes a value; a blip in Church history becomes an authority. By some mad calculus numbers become doctrine. The door is thrown wide open to relativism and pragmatism, already pushing in from culture to Church. What works and what's happening transmute into what is true. Scripture follows along a half-step behind and is made to walk on all fours so it can legitimize the latest development in the mystical church. The Scripture-as-norm fellows will object here that their view does not permit the Church such freedom; I reply that their reductionist concept of Scripture logically and ultimately leaves the New Testament helpless in the face of what pious and ambitious men choose to do. And this is precisely what is happening in our movement, all in the name of the Holy Spirit.

The Sissification of the Church. The universal trend is for Church to surrender to culture, and our culture is a sissified one. That's the word, not feminine. Modern so-called feminism is not feminine; it is little more than broken womanhood crying out for identity and significance. As a culture removes itself from God, its masculine virtue fades and a twisted femaleness takes over. That's why homosexuality is the end of the line in the mind of God. Good men become bad men, but when men stop being men and women stop being women, the creation image is destroyed and all is lost. Ours is a country that can barely, if at all, bring itself to execute its child murderers; it doesn't have the nerve to defend its legitimate international interests. It divinizes poverty and failure while it denigrates successful competence. It has no future but limp-wristed oblivion. The real world is not the place for sissified men, societies, or churches.

The modern Church is being sissified. It whispers repentance and shouts forgiveness. Permissiveness reigns falsely in the name of grace. Church discipline? Since when? The modern Church appears to believe that patience is the only virtue. It remembers to sing but forgets to spank. The church that cannot work up the nerve to excommunicate its pro-abortion people, its life-destroying gossips, or its womanizing deacons, is hardly tough enough to threaten Satan's world system. The sissified Church has an astounding toleration for false doctrine.

The Sissified Church wants to do formally what it has done actually in hundreds of congregations—turn over leadership to the women. This is a dreadful offense to godly women and a threat to their dynamic, legitimate ministries. Weak men want to escape the responsibility that God has given them in the church and in the home; women who are the product of third generation matriarchies have no idea how to be in submission to any man, husband in the home or elder in the church. Few local congregations attract what natural male leadership is available; true masculinity cannot stomach the saccharin unreality that oozes from the pulpit and glows in the assembly.

A new and imaginative system of hermeneutics is surfacing; the object of this creative exegesis is to lend scriptural support to a unisex church. Scholars and writers can become very popular by easing the pressure of uncomfortable texts. It is being suggested that a superior science of interpretation discovers that women can preach and be elders and wives are no more in submission to their husbands than husbands are to wives. Freedom, brother, freedom!

The Psychologized Church. Our movement is involved in the general evangelical trend toward the gospel of psychology. Theology is out, therapy is in. Jesus as God and Redeemer steps aside for Jesus as the model of psychological fitness. Self-affirmation replaces self-denial and self-

crucifixion. Just when psychology and psychiatry are beginning to admit the damage done by their Darwinist systems—ideas that were supposed to be curative—preachers by the hundreds are hanging out their shingle to offer pseudo-biblical treatment based on those very assumptions. The preaching of the therapeutic Christ is so intense in some congregations that members are made outsiders and oddballs by failing to be blessed with dramatic personal problems. The trend from doctrine to psychology is a clear instance of the Church, in the effort to become acceptable to the modern mind, ensuring its own irrelevance.

Unity. The idea is spreading, especially among and from our Tübingenized brothers, that the Restoration Movement was a mistake. A recent history of the movement declares that the Stone-Campbell program was to have been a unity movement from within denominations; it betrayed the *Declaration and Address* when it allowed itself to become a restoration movement from the outside. It's time, we hear, to reclaim that ecumenical spirit and seek unity and union with other believers, a unity based on the Lordship of Jesus, not on doctrine. This is historical malpractice. The Restoration fathers, true, started out with the vision of a mild reform. When Thomas Campbell wrote the *Declaration and Address*, he thought that the Protestant churches were already united on matters of faith, divided only on grounds of opinion. But the commitment to the authority of Scripture gradually forced the restorationists to acknowledge that division, as a matter of fact, involved matters of faith as well as matters of opinion. Reformation became restoration; the movement became a revolution. The authority of the Bible, including doctrine, still forbids ecumenism. A unity that sets aside doctrine is not the answer to the prayer of Jesus, it is the rejection of His authority.

The Pastor. In the current urge to "repent and be Baptist," it is common to find congregations that have adopted the second-century model of church polity: the monarchical bishop. Preachers are declaring themselves the pastor of the Church, as if the biblical doctrine of leadership has somehow become irrelevant. It harmonizes with culture to give ecclesiastical authority to a winning and competent personality, but it defies the authority of Scripture, and it ignores the lessons of history.

Calvinism. The surge of Calvinism continues in the movement. Some of our best-known preachers have abandoned salvation by faith in favor of miraculous regeneration. Salvation, for these men, is "asking Jesus into your heart"; baptism for the remission of sins is watered down to "follow Jesus in baptism," whatever that means. Even among those who reject Calvinism, the baptism question is being reopened (as if the Spirit had not made Himself clear), with the conclusion set forth that we cannot allow the unimmersed into church membership, but that doesn't mean they aren't Christians. If it is a reasonable expectation that God will make allowance for those who learned false doctrine, we overstep our authority to grant salvation to them. We ought to mind our own business and trust God to take care of that over which He alone is sovereign.

It is with many in our brotherhood as Herbert Schlossberg says, "When theology degenerates, we are given instead a modernized version of the old-time religion of emotional exhortation, with a little existential mystification for good measure." The rising tide of Calvinism solves one problem for us: The appearance of denominationalists on the NACC platform has caused heated controversy in the past. Now we hear the fundamental and definitive doctrines of belief-only

Protestantism without looking outside the brotherhood for speakers; our own men do it very well.

The Neo-charismatic Movement Neo-pentecostalism continues to plague the movement, encouraged, I suspect, by the heavy influence of the Christian cable networks. It is as if the whole body of prophecies given—by the Spirit, of course—in the early 1960's had not fallen to the ground. It is as if the neo-charismatic movement had produced anything like new New Testament Christianity. I fail to see the attraction of a movement characterized by peroxided TV nitwittery and sustained by astounding interpretations of Scripture that certainly the authors themselves could never have imagined, usually prefaced by "the Lord has been showing me ...". Charismatics seek religious leaders who will bless their idols—wealth, power and well-being. True to its Roman roots, it is descending into doctrinal chaos, superstition, and blasphemy. Charismatism represents, perhaps, the ultimate pseudo-freedom, the final rejection of the authority of the Bible.

Conclusion: Where do we go from here? First, we rejoice in all that is healthy and vigorous about our movement. Despite the negative trends, much is well with our soul. Second, we resist the temptation to seek safety in a sterile conservatism that idolizes the 19th century. Third, we equally refuse to continue the trends toward a sterile liberalism that panders to changing public moods. Fourth, we regain our nerve. The Old Jerusalem Gospel will produce a dynamic church for ourselves and for our children if we but trust the Word enough to learn it and preach it. This is not the time— never was—to blink when confronted by the modern doctrinal dog-and -pony show. It's time to trust, and contend earnestly for, the faith once delivered. History is not a juggernaut that rolls over and devours us no matter what. God pays us the intolerable compliment of taking us seriously enough to make it so that what we do—or do not do— makes a difference in history, and in eternity.