

# THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

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Email: Jrob1517@aol.com      Website: www.trinityfoundation.org      Telephone: 423.743.0199      Fax: 423.743.2005

## Counterfeit Miracles

John W. Robbins

Editor's note: This is the Foreword (edited for space) to the new edition of Benjamin Warfield's 1918 lectures on *Counterfeit Miracles*, to be released by The Trinity Foundation in June. As the United States becomes more religious, it becomes more superstitious; it is rediscovering and reinventing full-blown heathen religion – signs and wonders, priests, shrines, meditation, "spiritual formation," "incarnational worship," spiritual communities, healings, asceticism, monasticism, ecstatic "speech." Warfield's explanation of Biblical miracles and his dissection of modern heathenism are more timely today than they were 90 years ago. If you would like a copy of *Counterfeit Miracles* (300-plus pages, fully annotated and indexed), the U. S. postpaid price is \$20.

Despite the growing interest in religion, most churchgoers in America – perhaps most churchgoers worldwide – seem never to have read the Bible. That in itself is a damning indictment of contemporary churches. Suppose a literary club were organized to study Shakespeare, but read only snippets from his plays and a few sonnets, and spent most of its meetings doing other things. Would we call it a Shakespearean society? Hardly. Yet churches that claim to be Christian have not taught their members even the most basic things about Christianity. Most of them, in fact, depreciate the truthfulness and importance of Scripture, and instead emphasize religious ritual; social, charitable, and political activity; and emotional experience. It's as if the Shakespeare society ignored Shakespeare and spent its time bowling. Churches neither encourage nor practice the intellectual experience of studying the Word of God. That, if it is to be done at all, is to be done only by the experts – the academicians in seminaries and universities.

There is a nasty motive for this inculcated ignorance of the Bible, a motive that is never mentioned in theological discussions, because it has a nasty name: powerlust. The last thing false teachers in the churches want is a Biblically-informed membership. People who study the Bible and think for themselves, as Jesus commanded (*Luke 12:57*), are impossible to manipulate and control.

What church leaders (and they are leaders – *Führers* – not church officers) want is members who will follow them blindly. And they have succeeded. Members fund and obey their leaders because they have no objective standard of truth by which to judge them. In fact, church leaders tell church members it is sinful to judge anyone, and especially sinful to judge "God's anointed." Members should be making faith promises and writing checks.

The false teaching church leaders use to accomplish this result is the profoundly anti-intellectual philosophy that pervades contemporary religion and churches: This philosophy says religion is a matter of the heart, not the head; a matter of how one lives, not how one thinks. Christianity is orthopraxy, not orthodoxy; it is life, not theory. The desired result of this teaching is an abysmal ignorance among churchgoers of even the most elementary truths of Scripture. Perhaps some churchgoers have read passages of Scripture as "devotions"; perhaps a few have even read entire books of the Bible; but the churchgoer who has read the Bible from cover to cover is rare. And the churchgoer who understands what he reads, and believes it, is almost extinct.

The results of this vast ignorance (and therefore vast unbelief) are all around us. The zealous atheist Sam Harris, a gullible man who apparently believes every opinion poll he reads, informs us that 80 percent of the American people believe the Bible is the inspired and inerrant Word of God. The statement is ludicrous. Eighty percent is 240 million Americans. It is an exaggeration to say that even eight percent of the American people believe the Bible is inspired and inerrant. Twenty-four million Bible-believing Christians, the salt of the Earth, would transform American society. But American society has not been transformed, at least not for the better. Instead, American civilization is rapidly disappearing. The churches and people Harris describes as true believers are actually true apostates, having more in common with Harris' worldly philosophy than with the Bible's teachings.

Because American churches are led by false teachers and filled with unbelievers, the society of which they form a

part is rapidly losing all the characteristics of a civilized society. The rapid growth of both crime and government (that is, both individual and political lawlessness) are two leading indicators of a civilization in collapse. The radical Muslims have one thing right: The United States is a decadent nation. Those who deny our decadence are fooling only themselves. The lawlessness of churches that profess to be Christian appears in their admitting homosexuals to membership and ordaining them to office; sponsoring gambling; supporting abortion and terrorism; inculcating false doctrine; and ritually eating what they solemnly state is the physical body and blood of Jesus.

This self-professed ritual cannibalism (there is no more accurate word to describe what the Roman Catholic Church admits is its principal sacrament), practiced by the Roman Catholic Church-State – more than one billion professed Christians – is the result of another Antichristian belief: Divine miracles have never ceased, and they continue to occur in the twenty-first century. In fact, the Roman Church-State claims to have institutionalized miracles: At every Mass, the priest miraculously changes the bread and wine into the divine and physical body and blood of Jesus Christ so that devout Catholics may eat and drink them. (Catholics are saved from Hell by a personal relationship and union with Christ in the wafer and wine.) The Roman priest merely has to speak the formula – “Hoc est corpus meum” – “This is my body” – and the wafer miraculously becomes the literal body of Jesus Christ.

Such beliefs and practices are indistinguishable from ritual magic, and such miracles and magic were characteristic of ancient pagan societies. (The phrase “hocus-pocus,” used in amateur theatrical magic, derives from the Latin “hoc est” of the Catholic ritual.) According to the Roman Catholic historian Carlos M. N. Eire of Yale University, the consecrated host, itself a miracle, became the worker of many miracles in the middle ages:

The laity crowded to see the host and ascribed all sorts of miracles to it... The host bled, levitated, transfigured itself into the likeness of Christ, protected itself from impious hands, and sometimes even controlled the elements.<sup>1</sup>

Ancient pagan societies (and some modern animistic cultures) had miraculous healings, shamans, healing priests, temples and rituals, ecstatic speech (now called “tongues”), apparitions, and virtually every sort of miracle known to the medieval and modern Roman Church-State.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *War Against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin*. Cambridge University Press, 1986.

<sup>2</sup> To better understand the religions of Greece and Rome, see *Paganism and Christianity 100-425 C.E.* by Ramsay MacMullen and Eugene Lane (Fortress Press, 1992); *Survivals of Roman Religion* by Gordon J. Laing (Cooper Square Publishers, 1963); *The Religious Life of Ancient Rome* by Jesse Carter (Cooper Square Publishers [1911] 1972); *The World of Late Antiquity* by Peter Brown (W. W. Norton, 1971); *The Oxford History of the Classical World* by Boardman, Griffin, and Murray (Oxford University Press, 1986), and, of course, the works of M. I. Finley.

Most churchgoers do not know this history, nor do they realize that the Bible teaches that demons can perform miracles. In the twentieth century, both government and parochial schools deliberately miseducated their students about the religiosity of ancient civilizations such as Egypt, Greece, and Rome: The humanists wanted to propagate the myth of rational, tolerant pagan societies, because they wanted to claim that the peace and freedom enjoyed by Americans were due to the influence of Greece and Rome, not the Bible. The Romanists, wanting to claim that Roman Catholic miracles were unique and divine, obscured the religion and miracles of the pagan societies from which the Roman Church-State adopted its religion and practices. Neither the humanists who ran the government schools nor the Romanists who ran the parochial schools taught the Bible to their students. Rather, both perverted the teaching of Scripture in their classrooms for their own evil reasons.

The Roman Church-State adopted miraculous paganism from ancient society, sprinkled it with holy water (another pagan idea), and passed it off as Christian. The result is described by Roman Catholic historian Carlos Eire:

In 1509, when John Calvin was born, Western Christendom still shared a common religion of immanence. Heaven was never too far from Earth. The sacred was diffused in the profane, the spiritual in the material. Divine power, embodied in the Church and its sacraments, reached down through innumerable points of contact to make itself felt: to forgive and to punish, to protect against the ravages of nature, to heal, to soothe, and to work all sorts of wonders. Priests could absolve adulterers and murderers, or bless fields and cattle. During their lives, saints could prevent lightning from striking, restore sight to the blind, or preach to birds and fish. Unencumbered by the limitations of time and space, they could do even more through their images and relics after death. A pious glance at a statue of St. Christopher in the morning ensured protection from illness and death throughout the day. Burial in the habit of St. Francis improved the prospects for the afterlife. Pilgrimage to Santiago, where the body of the apostle James had been deposited by angels, or to Canterbury, where St. Thomas à Becket had had his skull split open by knights of King Henry II, could make a lame man walk, or hasten a soul's release from purgatory. The map of Europe bristled with holy places; life pulsed with the expectation of the miraculous. In the popular mind and in much of the official teaching of the Church, almost anything was possible. One could even eat the flesh of the risen Christ in a consecrated wafer [*Idols*, 1].

The adoption of pagan religious practices by the Roman Church-State is the principal reason for the survival of belief in the miraculous in so-called Christian countries in the twenty-first century. Worse, because the Roman Church-State has repackaged these pagan wonders as Christian and divine, those who believe that contemporary miracles are divine think that those who do not believe are

not Christian. The Roman-Church State requires its subjects to believe that its priests perform miracles. It encourages its subjects to believe that the relics of the saints and apparitions perform miracles. Millions of Catholics, Protestants, and others flock to so-called holy places where paintings cry, statues bleed, and apparitions appear. Televangelists, whose doctrine of salvation is essentially Roman Catholic, perform miracles according to their broadcast schedules, and local church charlatans throughout the world try to imitate them. Like medieval Europe, the modern world is suffused with superstition and the miraculous, and it is worsening. Materialism and miracles are merging once again, just as they did in the middle ages. Should Christ not return soon, should there be no second Reformation in the twenty-first century, the world will fall off the precipice into a new, global, Dark Age.

Eire recognized and reported one of the effects of the Christian Reformation of the sixteenth century:

By the late fifteenth century, life was so saturated with religion that the people of Western Europe ran the risk of confusing the spiritual and the temporal, the sacred and the profane, It was a religion that seemed most interested in tapping supernatural power... [M]uch of late medieval religion was magical, and...the difference between churchmen and magicians lay less in what they claimed they could do than in the authority on which their claims rested [*Idols*, 11].

Fourteen years later [1523], as Calvin began his studies at the University of Paris, it was no longer possible to take this intermingling of spiritual and material for granted. Among the many changes brought about by the Reformation, none was more visible, or tangible, where it triumphed, than the abolition of this kind of religion... [*Idols*, 1].

The preaching of the Gospel by Luther and the other early Reformers transformed Europe. It freed believers from Roman Catholic religion, superstitions, and tyranny. It encouraged education, science, letters, art, and business. It began the separation of church and state and the growth of capitalism. But it did not end religious superstition; the idols are always with us. The religious skepticism inculcated by the Bible and taught by the Reformers has been replaced by religious gullibility. Churchgoers, being ignorant of the Bible, confuse that religious gullibility with faith. But Christian faith is not gullibility; it is, in fact, a shield against gullibility.

Scripture repeatedly commands Christians to be skeptical of religious claims; many churchgoers do not realize how many warnings there are in Scripture about false teachers:

But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die. And if you say in your heart, How shall we know the word which the Lord has not spoken, when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that *is* the thing

which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously: You shall not be afraid of him [*Deuteronomy* 18:20-22].

When he speaks kindly, do not believe him, for there are seven abominations in his heart [*Proverbs* 26:25].

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves [*Matthew* 7:15].

Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in my [Jesus'] name, saying, "I am the Christ," and will deceive many.... Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.... Then if anyone says to you, "Look, here is the Christ!" or, "There!" Do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand. Therefore, if they say to you, "Look, he is in the desert!" Do not go out. Or, "Look, he is in the inner rooms!" Do not believe it [*Matthew* 24].

If I [Jesus] do not do the works of my Father, do not believe me [*John* 10:37].

Such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore, it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works [*2 Corinthians* 11:13-15].

Now I [Paul] say thus lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words.... Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ [*Colossians* 2:4, 8].

Test all things; hold fast what is good [*1 Thessalonians* 5:21].

But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed [*2 Peter* 2:1-2].

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world [*1 John* 4:1].

This skepticism was and is necessary because there are many imposters, false teachers, and false religions. In fact, all religions are false except one. The humanist philosophers who have said that religions have deleterious effects on society have a point: Non-Christian religions are in fact harmful – now and forever. They are not to be believed. When Paul arrived in Athens, he was impressed with the vibrant, pulsating religiosity of the city. The public square of Athens was not naked, as it should have been, but was filled with idols:

Now while Paul waited for them [Silas and Timothy] at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols. Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there.... Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious, for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: To the Unknown God" [Acts 17:16-23].

Ancient Greek and Roman society, to say nothing of the Egyptians and Babylonians, like all Roman Catholic societies, medieval and modern, was very religious, and given over to idolatry. The Christians, because of their religious skepticism, which was a logical result of their belief in only one God, only one mediator, Jesus Christ, and only one revelation, the Bible, were persecuted by Jews, pagans, and Romanists because of their refusal to believe their non-Christian religions. The beginnings of that persecution of Christians are recounted in *Acts*:

Peter and John: Now as they [Peter and John] spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the Temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening [Acts 4:1-3].

Stephen: They [the unbelieving Jews] were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he [Stephen] spoke. Then they secretly induced men to say, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God. And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes, and they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the Council. They also set up false witnesses who said, This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us.... Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord, and they cast him out of the city and stoned him [Acts 6:10-7:60].

Paul: Immediately he [Paul] preached the Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. Then all who heard were amazed, and said, Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests? But Saul increased all the more in strength and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ. Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him. But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall in large basket [Acts 9:20-25].

Also many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the Word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed. ... And about that time there arose a great commotion about the way. For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no small profit to the craftsmen. He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said, Men you know that we have our prosperity by this trade. Moreover, you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying they are not gods which are made with hands. So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship. Now when they heard this, they were full of wrath and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians! So the whole city was filled with confusion and rushed into the theater with one accord, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, Paul's travel companions. And when Paul wanted to go in to the people, the disciples would not allow him [Acts 19:19-30].

When 86 year old Polycarp was arrested by the Romans, he refused to offer the sacrifices to the gods of the Romans. Then his confession was read aloud three times: "Polycarp has confessed that he is a Christian." Immediately the assembled mob of pagans and Jews cried out: "This is the teacher of Asia. The father of the Christians, and the overthrower of our gods, he who has been teaching many not to sacrifice, or to worship the gods." Polycarp was legally murdered for his opinions about Roman gods: He refused to worship them. His religious skepticism cost him his life.

This book is based on a series of lectures on counterfeit miracles that Warfield delivered at Union Seminary in South Carolina in 1918. Warfield, one of the most accomplished theologians of the twentieth century, professor at Princeton Seminary, and prolific systematic theologian, expresses once again the skepticism commanded by Christ. There are demonic miracles in the modern world; there are unscrupulous impostors; there are weak-minded and gullible churchgoers; there is the power of suggestion; but there are no divine miracles. Divine miracles had a specific purpose, and when that purpose was accomplished, divine miracles ceased. The present fascination with miracles, no longer restricted to the superstitions of the Roman Catholic Church-State, but now spread throughout the world by the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements, is not a sign of resurgent Christianity, as many have said, but a sign of resurgent paganism. The sort of religion that pervaded ancient Rome and medieval Rome has returned, just as, and because, Christianity is fading from the modern mind.

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## Sacramental Sorcery

John W. Robbins

**Editor's note:** This month The Trinity Foundation is scheduled to release a new book, *Sacramental Sorcery: The Invalidity of Roman Catholic Baptism*, by James Henley Thornwell, a Southern Presbyterian theologian of the mid-nineteenth century. Thornwell wrote the book in response to Charles Hodge's attack on the decision of the 1845 Presbyterian General Assembly (Old School) declaring that Romanist baptism is not Christian baptism. Despite the General Assembly's Biblical declaration, Hodge, who was very sound on other doctrines, continued to teach his erroneous views on Romanist baptism in his classes at Princeton Seminary, and his soft-on-Romanism approach shaped the minds of the Princeton students who occupied Presbyterian pulpits in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was Hodge's error that became the majority view in Presbyterian churches in the twentieth century, and contributed to the ecumenism and apostasy of that century. This single example illustrates how seminaries can corrupt churches and entire denominations by their errant teaching.

The following essay is the Foreword to Thornwell's book. The 200-page book is available from The Trinity Foundation for \$12.95, plus \$5 shipping.

The twentieth century was a century of unprecedented ecumenical acceleration, characterized by religious congresses, theological seminars, joint manifestos, and combined worship services between Roman Catholic laymen and officials and Protestant laymen and officials. From the Roman side, the theological and organizational ecumenism started in the late nineteenth century when the Roman Church-State officially adopted the philosophy of the thirteenth-century thinker Thomas Aquinas as its doctrine, and Pope Leo XIII commanded all the loyal subjects of the Church-State to advance that philosophy on all fronts. The result was not only the appearance of an aggressive Neo-Thomism in the twentieth century, but a

rapprochement between the more ritualistic and liturgical denominations, which then spread to conversations and meetings with liberals and modernists in the mainline denominations. The Charismatic movement, beginning in the 1960s, cemented at the popular level the fundamental theological unity between Romanism and Pentecostalism, and members of the more conservative and even nominally Reformed denominations got on board the ecumenical train engineered by Cardinals Cassidy and Dulles and conducted by Southern Baptist Charles Colson and Anglican J. I. Packer.

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Part of the reason for the dramatic development of favorable opinion toward Romanism in the twentieth century is the opinion, long held by many Protestants, that both Romanism and Protestantism hold many things in common – the first three, four, five, or seven “ecumenical councils,” the “fundamental doctrines” of the faith, the so-called Apostles' Creed (which the apostles neither wrote, approved, nor even read), the Nicene Creed, and even Christian baptism. To this way of thinking, there are so many things that Romanists and Protestants share that it is a tragedy the Reformation happened, and perhaps, even now, at this late date, it can be reversed. (Charles Colson has boasted that had he been around in the sixteenth century, he might have been able to prevent the “split.”) By adopting Thomism as its official philosophy in 1879, the Roman Church-State achieved at the level of philosophy the intellectual convergence that the twentieth-century ecumenical movement reflected in theological terms.

The diabolical brilliance of this philosophical thrust may be seen in the fact that many, if not most, of the prominent Protestant theologians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had themselves adopted some variant of Thomism as their own, accepting Thomas' arguments, or at least some of them, for the existence of God; and, more importantly, accepting Thomas' basic empiricism, in which Christian theology is made to rest on the greater and prior certainty of sense experience. By thus making a sensate philosophy that many Protestant theologians already accepted its official doctrine (it had long been its unofficial doctrine), the Roman Church-State effectively disarmed them, removing the possibility of any effective philosophical criticism of Rome.

In twentieth-century America, the Lutheran John Warwick Montgomery, the Presbyterian R. C. Sproul, and the Baptist Norman Geisler were all self-confessed followers of the official philosopher and "Angelic Doctor" of the Roman Church-State. Though they have remained in their own communions, their philosophical compromise with Rome rendered them ineffective as critics of Rome, for they cannot criticize Rome at the root, where it is most important, for they would then be criticizing themselves. Worse, their philosophical compromise renders Rome's theological arguments very persuasive to many Protestants they have influenced.

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But the compromise with Rome neither began nor ended with Montgomery, Sproul, and Geisler. One prominent American theologian of the nineteenth century, Charles Hodge of Princeton Seminary, otherwise noted for his fidelity to Scripture and the theology of the Reformation, was also an empiricist of the Scottish Common Sense variety, and accepted some of Thomas' arguments for the existence of God, and all that that implies. In theology, Hodge held not only that Romanist baptism is Christian baptism, but also that the Roman Church-State had preserved and taught the great truths of the Christian faith. Among other things Hodge wrote:

Indeed it is a matter of devout thankfulness to God that underneath the numerous grievous and destructive errors of the Romish Church, the great truths of the Gospel are preserved. The Trinity, the true divinity of Christ, the true doctrine concerning his person as God and man in two distinct natures and one person forever, salvation through his blood, regeneration and

sanctification through the almighty power of the Spirit, the resurrection of the body, and eternal life, are doctrines on which the people of God in that communion live, and have produced such saintly men as St. Bernard, Fenelon, and doubtless thousands of others who are of the number of God's elect.

In his reply to Hodge, Thornwell pointed out that these doctrines *per se* are not Romish, for Rome's doctrine is the combination of these and the "destructive errors" that even Hodge admitted. That combination is lethal, just as orange juice laced with strychnine is lethal. To argue that the orange juice, considered by itself, is nutritious is to miss the point, for Rome does not offer orange juice alone. It presents only the mixture, and the mixture is not the Gospel. It is a lethal lie.

But there is a further point: Hodge made this remark in the context of his discussion of justification in his *Systematic Theology*. He admitted that Rome's doctrine of justification is not the Bible's, yet he asserted that Rome had preserved "the great truths of the Gospel." It follows that either justification is not one of the great truths of the Gospel, or Rome has not preserved all the great truths. But so great was Hodge's ecumenical spirit that he was led to make such foolish statements. Even though he recognized the major contribution the American Presbyterian Church had made by separating state, that is, the use of force, from church, Hodge failed to recognize the American Church's correction of the errors of the Reformation on Romanist baptism. Such confusion may have been due to his acceptance of common ground with Rome in philosophy: empiricism. It was not until the twentieth century, in the work of Dr. Gordon H. Clark, that the consistent philosophical system required to oppose both Rome's philosophy and its theology appeared. Unfortunately, in their empirical blindness, twentieth-century American churches ignored or condemned Dr. Clark's Christian philosophy.

While it would be a mistake to blame the ecumenism of twentieth-century American Presbyterian churches on Hodge exclusively, he did play a significant role. Fortunately, on the questions of whether the Roman Church-State is a Christian church, and whether Roman baptism is Christian baptism, he was ably opposed by the Southern Presbyterian theologian, James Henley Thornwell, who wrote the present essay on "The Validity of the Baptism of the Church of Rome." (Unfortunately, Thornwell, like Hodge, did not challenge Romanist philosophy, but accepted its basic principle of empiricism.)

In 1845 the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (Old School) declared, almost unanimously (169-8, with six abstentions), that Roman Catholic baptism is not Christian baptism. Hodge, who apparently was not present at the Assembly, immediately took exception to the clear and Biblical statement of the Assembly and quickly published a long essay in the July 1845 issue of the *Princeton Review*, a theological journal that he edited.

Thornwell, in turn, replied to Hodge's arguments in the *Watchman and Observer* (published in Richmond) in 1846.

By replying to Hodge and defending the decision of the 1845 Assembly, Thornwell tried to lay to rest the un-Biblical and fallacious reasoning of those Protestants who defend Roman Catholic baptism as Christian baptism. But Presbyterian churches in the twentieth century forgot about the declaration of the 1845 General Assembly (and subsequent declarations supporting it) and adopted Hodge's view, which he taught to generations of ministers graduating from Princeton Seminary. In the present and growing apostasy in Presbyterian churches, not only is Romanist baptism being defended as Christian baptism, but Presbyterian ministers are also asserting a doctrine of baptism similar to Rome's. This sacramental convergence is defended by those who favor cooperation with Rome at some level – in missions, politics, evangelism, worship, or education – and it is time once again to present Thornwell's devastating reply to Hodge.

Contemporary Presbyterians who defend Hodge's view on Roman Catholic baptism generally do not share his otherwise strict Calvinism. They have ignored or rejected the truth in Hodge and eagerly embraced his errors. (The current apostasy in American Presbyterian churches on the doctrine of justification is led by men whose notion of scholarship is, first, mining the writings of the Reformers, finding their errors, and then asserting those errors to be their major doctrines and "real" teaching; and second, historical revisionism in which heterodox and heretical theologians of the past are portrayed as defenders of the faith. Peter Lillback, President of Westminster Seminary [Pennsylvania] and D. G. Hart, formerly of Westminster Seminary [California], are two practitioners of this form of "scholarship.")

If one reads the arguments offered by Protestants in defense of Romanist baptism, one will be struck by the complex tissue of fallacies deployed to buttress an indefensible conclusion. Unlike the sound and simple arguments offered by the Reformers and their children on other doctrinal matters, this practical question of Romanist baptism, which had enormous political implications at the time of the Reformation, is replete with legerdemain. One cannot help thinking that politics, not theology, was the driving force requiring a certain conclusion, and that any argument whatever had to be marshalled in order to avoid admitting that the so-called Anabaptists (Calvin contemptuously called them Catabaptists) might have been right about anything, especially about Romanist baptism.

As a Presbyterian and a Calvinist I admit that Calvin's Catabaptists were right about Romanist baptism, and Calvin was wrong – Romanist baptism is in fact not Christian baptism – just as they were right about the separation of church and state. (The early Luther and the American Presbyterians were right on that point as well, and those who favor an established church have adopted

a thoroughly un-Biblical and Antichristian position.) Thornwell destroys the arguments of those Protestants who defend Romanist baptism; there is nothing left of them; and Hodge never published a reply to Thornwell. To stubbornly maintain, after Thornwell, that Romanist baptism is Christian baptism reveals anti-Baptist, pro-Romanist bigotry, not sound theology.

The arguments marshalled in defense of Romanist baptism range from the patently absurd to the superficially plausible. An example of the absurd is the argument that even though some of the priests of ancient Israel were apostate, the circumcisions they performed were never repeated; therefore, Romanist baptism is valid Christian baptism. An example of the superficially plausible is that since Romanist baptism is done in the name of the Trinity, it is valid Christian baptism. Thornwell disposed of the plausible; the patently absurd needs no refutation.

Thornwell began his refutation of Hodge by reviewing (since Hodge did not seem to know) exactly what Romanist baptism is. One gets the impression that those contemporary Protestants who defend Romanist baptism also do not understand what Romanist baptism is. Thornwell's detailed description of Romanist baptism should, therefore, be an education for them. Among many other things, Thornwell showed that Romanist baptism does not involve the use of mere water, as Christian baptism does, but requires the use of adulterated water, the efficacy of which depends upon the deliberate and ritual corruption of mere water.

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**To argue, as Protestant sympathizers with Rome do, that baptism is valid if it is performed in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, is, ironically, to argue that pronouncing that name works *magically* – *ex opere operato*.**

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Thornwell showed that the ritual use of the name of the Trinity in baptism is not a magic incantation, as the Protestant sympathizers with Rome seem to believe, but must involve the faith of the Trinity, which the Roman Church-State does not have. To argue, as Protestant sympathizers with Rome do, that baptism is valid if it is performed in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, is, ironically, to argue that pronouncing that name works *magically* – *ex opere operato*, even if the church, the priest, the parents, and the child lack the faith of the Trinity. Thornwell wrote:

To baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit is not to pronounce these words as an idle form or a mystical charm, but to acknowledge that solemn compact [the covenant of redemption] which these glorious agents entered, for eternity, for the redemption

of the church. It is the *faith* of the Trinity, much more than the *names* of its separate Persons, that belongs to the essence of baptism....

A standard argument used by Protestant sympathizers with Rome is that if it is true that Romanist baptism is not Christian baptism, then the church was without Christian baptism for centuries. This historical argument is of particular importance to those who favor Tradition and exalt the Church. Here is Thornwell's devastating reply to opponents who ask:

Did baptism become extinct when this innovation [adulteration of the water] was first introduced among the churches that adopted it? My reply is that I know of no sacredness in baptism which should entitle it to be preserved in its integrity when the ordinance of the Lord's Supper has been confessedly abolished in the Latin Church. Why should baptism be perpetuated entire, and the Supper transmitted with grievous mutilations? Or will it be maintained that the essence of the Supper was still retained when the cup was denied to the laity? Is it more incredible that an outward ordinance should be invalidated than that the precious truths which it was designed to represent should be lost? Is the shell more important the substance? And shall we admit that the cardinal doctrines of the Gospel have been damnably corrupted in the Church of Rome, and yet be afraid to declare that the signs and seals of the covenant have shared the same fate? If Rome is corrupt in doctrine, I see not why she may not be equally corrupt in ordinances, and if she has lost one sacrament, I see not why she may not have lost the other; and as the foundations of her apostasy were laid in the ages immediately succeeding the time of the Apostles, I cannot understand why the loss of the real sacrament of baptism may not have been an early symptom of degeneracy and decay.

Then Thornwell drove his unanswerable argument home:

But our business is with truth and not with consequences. We should not be deterred from admitting a Scriptural conclusion because it removes, with a desolating besom [broom], the structures of antiquity. We are not to say, *a priori*, that the Church in the fifth or sixth centuries *must* have had the true sacrament of baptism, and then infer that such and such corruptions do not invalidate the ordinance. But we are first to ascertain from Scriptures what the true sacrament of baptism is, and then judge the practice of the church in every age by this standard. If its customs have at any time departed from the law and the testimony, let them be condemned; if they have been something essentially different from what God has enjoined, let them be denounced as spurious. The unbroken transmission of a visible Church in any line of succession is a figment of papists and prelatists. Conformity with the Scriptures, not ecclesiastical genealogy, is the true touchstone of a sound church;

and if our fathers were without the ordinances, and fed upon ashes for bread, let us only be the more thankful for the greater privileges vouchsafed [given] to ourselves.

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**We are first to ascertain from Scripture what the true sacrament of baptism is, and then judge the practice of the church in every age by this standard. If its customs have at any time departed from the law and the testimony, let them be condemned.**

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Thornwell realized that it is not enough to discuss baptism in isolation, since Christianity is a system of thought, and so he discussed many doctrines. One of them was worship. He accurately described Romanist worship as sensate, and pointed out that

the miserable votaries of Rome confound the emotions of mysterious awe produced by the solemnities of sensual worship with reverence for God and the impressions of grace. Doomed to grope among the beggarly elements of Earth, they regale the eye, the fancy, and the ear, but the heart withers. Imagination riots on imposing festivals and magnificent processions, symbols, and ceremonies, libations and sacrifices; the successive stages of worship are like scenes of enchantment, but the gorgeous splendors of the liturgy, which famish the soul while they delight the sense, are sad memorials of religion "lying in state surrounded with the silent pomp of death." The Holy Ghost has been supplanted by charms, and physical causes have usurped the province of supernatural grace.

The swift currents of apostasy now racing through the American Presbyterian churches (in fact all American Protestant churches) include the sensate worship that Thornwell condemned. This sensate worship flows directly and inexorably from the philosophy of empiricism that virtually all churchmen accept and teach. This sensate, idolatrous worship is sanctimoniously defended as "full-orbed," "incarnational," "creational," "wholistic," and the devotion of the "complete man." These same churchmen condemn the intelligent, spiritual worship that God requires as "gnostic," "rationalist," and "reductionist." The false teachers who exalt the imagination and malign the intellect, the false prophets who exalt experience and malign the Word, the false shepherds who starve the sheep and feed the goats run riot in the churches, and no one dares to identify them for what they are, let alone stop them.

May God use this book to defend his truth and his people.





# THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

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Email: [Jrob1517@aol.com](mailto:Jrob1517@aol.com)

Website: [www.trinityfoundation.org](http://www.trinityfoundation.org)

Telephone: 423.743.0199

Fax: 423.743.2005

## The Shroud of Turin

John W. Robbins

*Editor's Note: This essay is the Introduction to Gordon Clark's book, Three Types of Religious Philosophy.*

*Three Types of Religious Philosophy* may be a forbidding title to most Americans, including many American Christians, who are not interested in philosophy. Perhaps they think that philosophy is for scholars, those sheltered residents of ivory towers who do not have to deal with the "real world." Perhaps they simply feel overwhelmed by the difficulty of the arguments.

Still worse, they may ask, What has Christianity to do with philosophy? Does not the Apostle Paul warn us not to be deceived by philosophy? Surely we have better things to do than read about philosophy, let alone three different types. Why, then, a book by this title?

To reply: Just as all men speak prose whether they know it or not, so all men, not simply philosophers, have a philosophy. There is no possibility of a rational being not having a philosophy. And if all men speak prose, the question is not prose or no prose; the only question is whether they shall speak it correctly or not. Similarly the question is not philosophy or no philosophy; the only question is whether a man's philosophy shall be correct or not.

Second, Paul warns us very strongly, not against all philosophy – that would be even more absurd than urging men not to speak prose – but against unbiblical philosophy: "Beware lest anyone cheat

you through philosophy and empty deceit according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ." Paul is warning us, not about all philosophy, but about non-Christian philosophy. Philosophy means the love of wisdom. Christ is the Wisdom of God, according to John and Proverbs, and true philosophy consists in the love of God.

There is, however, much confusion among both ordinary Christians and their leaders about philosophy. Many Christian leaders, in fact, teach philosophies according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.

Examples abound. Let me suggest just one: the belief that the shroud of Turin is the burial cloth of Christ. Many Protestants share Roman Catholicism's religious philosophy, empiricism, the notion that truth comes through the senses: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and perhaps a few more. (The empiricists have not yet furnished us with a complete list of the senses.) This empiricism, with its emphasis on the importance of experience, has led to a growing acceptance of relics and rituals, which appeal primarily to the senses. There is a great and growing abandonment of the intellectual Word in worship in favor of the empirical smells and bells of Roman, Episcopal, and Orthodox liturgy. Ritual and rote are fast replacing sermons and study in church.

One indication of the growing Protestant affinity for Rome's religious philosophy is the sympathetic reception the Catholic Church's claims about the shroud of Turin have received from certain Protestants. The Chairman of the Department of Philosophy at the Baptist, fundamentalist Liberty University, Gary Habermas, published a book in 1981 (actually a Roman Catholic publisher, Servant Books, published it) arguing that the shroud was, in fact, the burial cloth of Christ. He solemnly declared that "there is no practical possibility that someone other than Jesus was buried in the shroud."

Nor is Mr. Habermas' statement the only example of philosophical incompetence supporting religious superstition. A leader of the scientific team that investigated the shroud in October 1979, Thomas D'Muhala, a "born-again" Christian, also asserted, "Every one of the scientists I have talked to believes the cloth is authentic. Some say, maybe this is a love letter, a tool he left behind for the analytical mind."

In 1979, after a team of scientists had examined the shroud, a leading conservative lawyer in the "pro-family" movement had this to say about the shroud of Turin:

At long last, we have the proof demanded by the doubting Thomases. The proof is the Shroud in which the body of Jesus was wrapped, and is now preserved at Turin, Italy, in the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist.

A recent movie called *In Search of Historic Jesus* shows the Shroud and details its proof. The Shroud bears many scourge marks from the back of the body it wrapped. It shows marks of thick, tightly compressed long hair, gathered at the back of the neck, in the unique fashion of young Jewish men of the first century.

Even while he was announcing the results in the latest scientific tests showing that the shroud could be dated only to the fourteenth century, Cardinal Ballestro of Turin assured his audience that "the holy Shroud has produced miracles and continues to."

The front of the Shroud shows the wound in the side and the prints of the nails on both wrists – not through the hands, as portrayed on most crucifixes....

The thumbs are pulled tightly into the palms of the hands, in accordance with the reflex which medical science tells us would result from the nail wounds in the wrists. The knees appeared severely damaged as if from repeated falls.

Close examination reveals abrasions on the shoulder which could come from carrying the cross, The nose is broken and the beautiful face is disfigured by violence.

The body shown by the Shroud is muscular, and devoid of any excess weight. The body is estimated to have weighed 170 pounds and to have a height of 5 feet 11 inches. The man's age appears to be between 30 and 36 years, and the appearance is majestic.

There are eight independent puncture wounds of the scalp which could have been caused by the crowning of thorns....

The evidence of the murder of Jesus Christ is far greater than of Julius Caesar's murder by Brutus and others. We have no modern proof of the wounds which killed Caesar. We don't have the Shroud in which Caesar was buried.

We cannot match the accounts of Caesar's murder with his Shroud, as the accounts of the four Gospels perfectly match the body marks on the Holy Shroud....

The Shroud provides overwhelming proof of the accuracy of the Gospel's history of the crucifixion of Jesus.

Likewise, the Shroud gives proof of the Resurrection. The numerous experts who examined the Shroud within the last year, including all varieties of Christians, Jews, agnostics, and atheists, have concluded

that the body suddenly left it with a great burst of radiation-like energy....

The Shroud proves the most remarkable miracle in history.

Now the writer of those words, Phyllis Schlafly, is a well-educated lawyer and quite famous. She is a Roman Catholic who has preached at Thomas Road Baptist Church -- Jerry Falwell's church -- in Lynchburg, Virginia. She knows -- or rather, she ought to know -- that the shroud does not and cannot provide "overwhelming proof of the accuracy of the Gospels," and that it certainly does not "give proof of the Resurrection." But she is an empiricist, and thus is blind to the logical gaps in her argument. It is precisely such logical voids between premises and conclusions that characterize superstition.

But we need not restrict our charges of incompetence and superstition to lawyers and philosophy teachers. The infallible popes themselves have expressed their belief in the authenticity of the shroud. Nineteen popes have expressed their confidence in the authenticity of the shroud. Pope Paul VI called the shroud "The most important relic in the history of Christianity." Between 1472 and 1480, Pope Sixtus IV issued four bulls indicating that he believed the shroud to be worthy of the highest veneration. In 1506 Pope Julius II proclaimed the Feast of the Holy Shroud. In 1950, Pius XII addressed the First International Shroud Congress and expressed his wish that the participants at the Congress contribute even more zealously to spreading the knowledge and veneration of so "great and sacred a relic."

What has all this to do with religious philosophy? The case of the shroud of Turin graphically illustrates some of the matters at issue between empiricism, which is the dominant religious philosophy of the twentieth century, and Scripturalism, which is the Christian view.

A Scripturalist, that is, one who assumes what the Bible says is true as an axiom, a first principle, would have known from the start that the shroud of Turin was a fake. The Bible says quite clearly,

After this Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took the body of Jesus. And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds.

Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury.....

Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; and he saw the linen cloths lying there, and the handkerchief that had been around his head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself.

A Scripturalist should not have been fooled by the shroud, and many were not. Christ's body was not covered by one strip of cloth, but wound with several (note the plural *cloths*), together with 100 pounds of spices. Furthermore, his head was wrapped separately from his body.

But an empiricist, one who believes that the evidence of the senses is more certain than the statements in the Bible, one who chooses the authority of the senses rather than the authority of God, might have been fooled, and many were. Some felt the shroud offered "overwhelming proof" of the death and resurrection of Christ. They have been embarrassed by the latest scientific tests -- empirical tests -- which seem to show that the shroud dates only to the fourteenth century, not the first. Liberty University's Department chairman, even after the latest scientific findings were made known, asserted that "if the shroud is authentic, it offers incredible[!] further proof of the Crucifixion, and possibly the Resurrection." This statement offers credible further proof that Mr. Habermas simply does not know what proof is.

The case of the shroud of Turin brings into focus the central issue in philosophy: the source of our knowledge. How do we know? Do we trust the authority of our senses (and of science)? Do we

trust the authority of the unaided human mind? Or do we trust God? Many professing Christians would agree with Aristotle that knowledge comes through the senses. That is the official position of the Roman church, and the unofficial position of most Protestant churches. Some of those Christians have been avidly promoting the shroud of Turin as empirical evidence of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is the evidence that "proves" the Gospels. But the Scripturalist must ask: What is proof? Are the Gospels documents the truth of which needs to be proved? Can science and religious relics prove the truth of the Bible? Even more fundamentally, can science or sense experience prove anything at all? *Three Types of Religious Philosophy* answers these questions, and the answers turn the secular philosophical world upside down.

In 1982 *National Review*, the conservative magazine of opinion edited by William F. Buckley, Jr., commented:

The fact now appears to be that the famous Shroud of Turin has been accurately dated. High-contrast photography reveals a coin placed on the right eye of the figure. The coin can be identified. It depicts a *lituus*, or astrologer's staff, and the letters UCAJ can be discerned, part of an inscription referring to Tiberius Caesar. This coin was minted during the procuratorship of Pontius Pilate. Pilate went out of office in 36 A.D., but coin specialists assert that he had coins minted only between 30 and 32 A.D.

Well, that pretty much does it. The Shroud is in fact a kind of photograph of Jesus Christ. The coin pins down the dating.

One intelligent *National Review* reader replied to this asinine argument with these words:

I have, hermetically preserved between the pages of an old *National Review*, a picture of my Labrador Retriever, revealing a coin placed on the right eye of the dog. The coin can be identified as a zinc penny, minted during the Presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt. Roosevelt went out of office

in 1945, but coin specialists assert that such coins were minted only in 1943.

Well, that pretty much does it. My Labrador was in fact Sergei Rachmaninoff, who died March 28, 1943.

Absurd, you say? But this argument is no more absurd than the arguments purporting to prove that the shroud of Turin is the burial cloth of Christ. In two clever paragraphs the writer exposed a few of the many logical fallacies that the empiricists commit every time they argue. Gordon H. Clark does far more. He demonstrates that empiricism, and rationalism as well, though hardly anyone is a disciple of Anselm these days, is a tissue of logical fallacies.

The result is a classic introduction to religious philosophy that avoids the errors of empiricism and rationalism and presents the Biblical view, which Clark calls dogmatism. One ought to believe the Bible simply because it is the Word of God; there is no greater authority. Empiricism, the belief in the authority of the senses, is a form of philosophy "according to the principles of the world." To try to prove the Bible by relics and science is more absurd than trying to find the sun with a flashlight, and those who do so open themselves not merely to refutation, but to ridicule as well. Those who think themselves wise, as well as humble laymen, would do well to read this book, for until Christians, especially university professors, get their philosophy straight, the superstitions of the twentieth century will continue to grow, and we shall continue our rapid retreat into the Dark Ages.

## An Open Letter To My Neo-Pentecostal Friends

**Peter J. Herz**

You may be surprised, but I am not really gloating over the scandal that has rocked the Pentecostal broadcasting world. I have the sort of personality that does not enjoy seeing people publicly

humiliated or embarrassed. Further, the influence of the charismatic movement in Evangelicaldom is so pervasive that, in the eyes of the world, the whole Evangelical world, and not just its Pentecostal portion, has received a black eye.

I know that many of you will reject what I am saying in this paper, for I am a Reformed Elder who has little use for modern tongues and prophecy. Many of you have received the catechetical instruction of my church, and now see it as a church that is "asleep" or even "dead."

But I also know that many of you are neo-Pentecostal for the same reason I am Reformed. Against the trendy mainline denominational hierarchies that allowed the world to set the church's agenda, we both believed that only God had the right to give His church's marching orders. Against those who preached an undefined works righteousness and called it "love," we both sought forgiveness of our sins and reconciliation with God through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. Against those who declared God dead, we both confess the Living God who speaks through the Holy Scriptures. I am also in full sympathy with your desire to experience victory over indwelling sin.

### *The Failure of Pentecostalism*

But it is now very apparent that the neo-Pentecostal movement has not delivered on its promise of quick spiritual maturity through the exercise of certain gifts which Protestantism (the Biblicist, confessional, 16th and 17th century kind, not modern religious trendiness) saw as temporary features of the apostolic age. And it is unlikely that it ever will. While proclaiming victorious, Spirit-controlled Christian living, Jimmy Swaggart and Jim Bakker were guilty of adultery. While touting a wholesome lifestyle over the airwaves, Tammy Bakker was in the grip of drug dependence and a number of other unwholesome compulsions. Pat Robertson's presidential campaign has brought his record under public scrutiny, revealing a "cooked" resume and failed prophecies. Oral Roberts has used the crassest psychological manipulation to get his fundraising over the top, and in spite of American Protestantism's long-standing condemnation of

gambling as sin, Roberts has taken over a million dollars from a Florida dog-racing kingpin.

At the top, Pentecostalism has revealed a world of hypocrisy, cover-up, and cupidity. We ought to ask why.

### *The Third Commandment*

Long before any of the televangelists lusted after women and wealth, the neo-Pentecostal movement was caught up in a persistent pattern of taking the Lord's name in vain. The worst violator of the third commandment isn't the man who blurts out "Jesus!" when he hits his thumb with a hammer: That dubious honor, according to Scripture, belongs to the man who pretends to have a direct word from the Lord when he really doesn't, the man whose prophecies do not come to pass and the corrupter of the Word and worship of God.

False prophecy is not new. The ancient church had a "Jezebel" at Smyrna, and the early medieval world had Muhammad. Mormons regularly prophesy in the name of a glorified Adam. Neo-Pentecostalism seems to be inundated with the phenomenon. In 1972, David Wilkerson prophesied that the Berlin Wall would be down within a year and there would be free access to the various Iron Curtain countries of Europe. Pat Robertson prophesied that the Soviet Union would make a major military move into the Middle East in the early 1980's. As a college student, I heard an earnest Pentecostal quote Jesus – apparently speaking of a face-to-face encounter, because I couldn't find it in the New Testament – as saying that he would return in 1975.

But it is now 1988. The Berlin Wall and Iron Curtain are still in place, *Glasnost* notwithstanding, the Soviet Union has not intervened in the Middle East, and Jesus has not returned. Yet the Bible clearly teaches that one test of a prophet's genuineness is whether or not his utterances come to pass. If he prophesies and his prophecy does not come to pass, then "that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him [the prophet]."

Modern glossolalia and its "interpretation" provide more examples. Seminary students and faculty sometimes attend charismatic meetings, quote passages of Scripture in Hebrew or Greek, then compare notes afterward on how the "interpreters" explained them. I have known of one who was so bold to quote the twenty-third Psalm in Hebrew, got an exhortation on tithing by way of "interpretation," called the error to the attention of those present, and then got thrown out of the meeting instead of hearing anyone admit his error.

Healing meetings are a further source of corruption. Look at the despairing faces of the wheelchair-bound as they leave a faith healer's meeting unhealed. In the early '70's, a pretended "healer" influenced the parents of a diabetic boy to withhold insulin. The boy died, and his parents went to prison for manslaughter. In fairness to the family, the parents repented and wrote a book about the affair, and charity compels me to accept their repentance as genuine, since I lack any compelling evidence to the contrary. But once again, God's name was taken in vain, resulting in tragic consequences.

Once I attended a healing service in Taiwan. Simple persons with minor ailments were called to the front, hands were laid upon them, prayers uttered, and the people were said to have been healed "in Jesus' name." Those "healed" were then exhorted to testify. But instead of bold, confident affirmations, people gave the Chinese equivalent of "Yeah, I guess so," afraid to let the American healer lose face when he had come so far to help them. Yet on the sidelines, a mountaineer carrying a crippled friend or relative on his back was skillfully managed to the back of the line. As the meeting broke up, an old veteran hobbling painfully with the aid of a cane complained that he was still just as sick as ever.

You may say that those who went away without healing lacked faith. But if they lacked faith, why would they have gone through the trouble of going to the meeting when they could have scoffed in greater comfort on their beds at home?

In the Old Testament economy, false prophecy was a capital offense. The New Testament also warns us

to stay away from false prophets like the woman who plagued ancient Thyatira. We may no longer live under the Mosaic economy, and we may no longer possess living Apostles in our midst to guide us, but we do have the Scripture that warns us that God will not be mocked. I sincerely hope that the current shaking of what was once hailed as the "Third force in Christendom" will wake us up to blatant violations of the Third Commandment that go uncorrected in our midst, and worse yet, parade as spiritual power and light.

### *The Futility of Management Reform*

Some say that governing boards and open account books in Pentecostal ministries will solve the problem. I, however, doubt it. Doctrinal and spiritual agreement are necessary preconditions for a board and a minister to work together. But what happens when a member of the overseeing board doesn't accept his preacher's self-styled "prophecy"? He will probably be bounced from the board as a troublemaker and scoffer, and the spineless yes-men who remain will be unable to prevent their man from creating a new scandal.

I know from sad experience that habitual violation of the Third Commandment has distorted expectations and encouraged lying to God and others. At one point in my career, I knew some wonderful brothers and sisters who claimed to possess those gifts, and exhorted others to seek them. I wanted a better walk with God and the fellowship of those whom I believed to be better Christians than I. It took a mini-scandal in our fellowship (I shall not give details lest I bring shame on people who have already suffered enough) to make me realize that we had been claiming gifts that we did not possess, and we were too proud in our shame to admit it. The faith of many suffered, and non-believers close to us mocked. In spite of the hard lessons we were learning, some persisted in claiming direct communications from God or being misled by people who claimed such gifts.

It was with a great sense of relief that I discovered that the New Testament saw the work of the Holy Spirit as the creation of faith in men, rather than the distribution of extraordinary gifts. Further, *Hebrews* 2:3-4 taught me that such signs and wonders were given to authenticate the message of the Apostles and their circle, just as miracles were given to Moses and Joshua to authenticate the Law, and to Elijah and Elisha to authenticate Old Testament prophecy.

### *Supernatural Gimmicks*

Devout, Bible-believing people have done very well without pretended supernatural gimmicks. In the 16th century, an age which lacked our own age's animus against the supernatural, John Calvin defended the early French Evangelicals against the charge that their lack of miracles proved them heretical. Writing to his sovereign, Francis I of France, he stated that the miracles which proved Biblical doctrine true were performed by Christ and the Apostles, so no more miracles were needed. (We recommend the English translations of either Battles or Beveridge). And this was said in the face of an age in which friars claimed the ability to fly, unhealthy girls claimed ecstatic visions, and images of Mary and the saints were often made with hollow heads, that they might "weep" for the benefit of superstitious and credulous folks and the covetous spiritual Disneyland that had bamboozled them.

But what of modern missionaries who have discovered that modern charismata are effective in combating rampant demonic activity in nations long steeped in ancient idolatries?

Having lived among Buddhists, Animists, and Taoists in Taiwan, I do not doubt that demons act through idolatrous media to ruin human personalities. I've heard reports from sources I consider reliable (although usually second and third-hand by the time they reached me). But most of the non-Christian Chinese I have known personally, including many who regularly worshiped idols, have been normal, responsible people, good neighbors, diligent students, and sometimes good prospects for conversion to Christ. I personally know of one woman who claims that

the prayers of her neo-Pentecostal Christian friends delivered her from demonic possession and brought her to Christ: I am still praying that the Holy Spirit would, through the Word, move her on to show due respect for her husband and grown sons, overcome the greed of gain and immaturity that has given her a bad name among many, and refrain from the manipulative behavior that has poisoned many of her interpersonal relationships.

Any movement that gains prominence among older Christian communities will sooner or later crop up in newer ones. Taiwanese Christians' expectations have been as distorted by neo-Pentecostal beliefs as those of their American brethren. They also want to see powerful manifestations of the Holy Spirit and hear fresh words from God, and usually get the same sort of vague, bland, trite, and hedged messages heard elsewhere. Knowing that a command of English (a very difficult language for Chinese-speaking people to master) is necessary for Taiwanese students' academic advancement, I can sympathize with young people's desire to have the gift of tongues!

Isolated in an alien culture, even highly gifted missionaries who ought to know better are sometimes caught up in a misdirected search for extraordinary gifts. More so than Christians in the West, who have dozens of fellowships and support systems to choose from should their original church home go bad, missionaries get their emotional support from the very limited circles of believers to whom they minister. Thus, rather than permit a split (and lose most of their friends to boot) when the church is infected by distorted beliefs, many missionaries (and others) will choose the path of least resistance and go along with the new movement as far as they possibly can. It usually requires more than the ordinary dose of courage, spiritual authority, tact, and cross-cultural sensitivity for a missionary to successfully confront and root out an error in a foreign congregation, especially if it is an error with which his home church has not successfully dealt.

Nor is neo-Pentecostalism's role as a modern "martyrs' faith" impressive. History shows that these are especially prone to distortion, and that we



should daily thank God that we do not live under a new Nero or Domitian. After the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, the Reformed Churches of France were plagued not only by persecuting Romanist authorities without, but by fanatical self-styled "prophets" within, people who discarded the Bible and claimed various miraculous powers. The "wonder-working" underground churches of mainland China have produced such superstitions as the belief that a Bible placed on a sufferer's chest can bring healing. Communist persecution in northern Korea produced much charismatically oriented expectation between 1945 and the end of the Korean War. It just so happened that among the prisoners rescued by American and South Korean forces during that conflict there was a certain Reverend Sun Myung Moon who went on to become a pseudo-Messiah in America.

### *Spiritual Decadence*

The modern charismatic movement represents decadence, not health, in the body of Christ. Its greatest sin has been the cavalier way in which it treats the name of God, and this sin has come home to roost in the form of widespread lying and false doctrine. The lies and cover-ups in Pentecostal broadcasting have given the enemies of Christ a field day. But these are only the tip of a vast iceberg of people taught to lie to themselves, to others, and to God.

The charismatic movement possesses devout and seeking persons who deserve charity, not condemnation. But if these people are honest, they cannot but be bothered by the mess their leaders have made. They deserve to know that other fellowships of Christians treat the name and Word of God with greater respect, and that they are welcome elsewhere if they are uncomfortable with their current associations – as they ought to be, if they indeed seek to honor God.

The time has also come for non-Charismatics to take a long, hard look at the growing rapprochement between the charismatics and the rest of Evangelicaldom. The Pentecostal heresy needs confrontation, and its spectacular successes need to be recognized as a temporary aberration – a corrupt

church attracting multitudes of immature and gullible people, along with a number of honest souls who sooner or later leave.

## Unpublished Letters

August 24, 1988

Mr. Richard Knodel

*Journey* Magazine

Lynchburg, Virginia 24504

Dear Mr. Knodel:

A friend recently showed me the review of *Pat Robertson: A Warning to America* that you had published in your May-June issue. Since the reviewer issues a challenge to me, let me take this opportunity to respond.

His challenge is as follows: "I would challenge Dr. Robbins to clearly, concisely, and openly proclaim *his source* [italics his] of civil law and political ethics."

Now this challenge indicates that the reviewer has carefully read neither *Pat Robertson*, nor any of my previous books, nor the many publications of The Trinity Foundation. Had he done so, he would have known quite well what "my source" is. For example, in *Pat Robertson*, the book under review, I wrote: "Christianity is, first of all, belief in the sixty-six books of the Bible as the Word of God. These books, this Bible, are, in the words of the first chapter of the *Westminster Confession*, 'given by inspiration of God to be the rule of faith and life.' Not a rule. Not one rule among several. *The rule*. The *only rule*" (9; emphasis in the original). If that is not clear and concise enough, I explain further on page 23, "The Bible claims to have a monopoly on truth." Indeed, the reviewer himself acknowledges that "Robbins is to be commended for reminding the Church – and even as prominent a figure as Pat Robertson – of the absolute necessity of 'sola scriptura.'" If the reviewer understands that – and I do not see how anyone could read *Pat Robertson* and not understand that – then why does he

challenge me to "clearly, concisely, and openly proclaim" my source of ethics?

But that is not the only confusion displayed by the reviewer. He asserts that Robertson "is not a part" of Reconstructionism, and that "Robertson has been moving in a 'reconstructionist' direction." Which is it? Does Robertson advocate some Reconstructionist ideas or not? I have supplied quotations in my book to show that he does, and indeed, the reviewer himself insists that he is moving in that direction.

The reviewer, moreover, seems to want to go further and assert the notion that Robertson is not a charismatic. He writes: "I am not convinced that Robertson still sincerely holds to his previous charismatic theology." In view of the plethora of quotations that I have furnished from Robertson's books, including books published as recently as 1987, this assertion is both unsubstantiated and preposterous. Any reviewer who thinks that Robertson is not a charismatic is likely to be an incompetent judge about anyone's views. Perhaps, however, the reviewer is basing his judgment on "inside" information. After all, he did use the word "sincerely." Is he saying that Robertson is now lying about what he believes? If so, I urge him to furnish evidence for the lie.

Furthermore, the reviewer asserts that I have not furnished a "real argument" for Robertson's heterodoxy. Apparently the reviewer had forgotten what I wrote in my book by the time he wrote his review. I furnished arguments for Robertson's anti-Christian views of (1) revelation; (2) the Bible; (3) God's sovereignty; (4) miracles; (5) tongues; (6) man; (7) logic; (8) salvation; and (9) politics. The reviewer, who himself professes some interest in Christian theology, thinks that Robertson is "generally an orthodox Christian." Is one generally an orthodox Christian if he believes in continuing revelation, twentieth century miracles, the insufficiency of the Bible, the free will of man (Robertson goes beyond even Arminianism in his assertions), if he denies predestination and the sovereignty of God, and perverts the Gospel of Christ? I think not.

Your reviewer also wonders why I have not called Jesse Jackson and other politicians false prophets. The reason is simple: I am not aware that any other national politician has written books in which he claims to get messages directly from God and to perform divine miracles. If your reviewer knows of any, he should write a book about them. If he is a Christian, he should not criticize me for writing a book about a false prophet like Pat Robertson. After all, which is more important, electing a man president or witnessing to the truth? I think it is clear that many Robertson backers who claim to be Reformed have decided that electing a man president is more important than witnessing to the truth.

Finally, I must point out the serious threat that Reconstructionism poses to religious freedom. Your reviewer apparently considers himself a Reconstructionist or at least a sympathizer. He writes: "In a society where the Lord Jesus Christ would be pervasively obeyed, we could expect to see many 'better' political candidates than Pat Robertson; or we might (if he truly were a false prophet) execute a man like Pat Robertson."

Reconstructionists are serious about executing false prophets and teachers. That is why I raised the question in my book. If Reconstructionism is true, then men like Pat Robertson ought to be executed, not elected to office. We can thank God, however, that Reconstructionism is not true, and that we live in a country in which freedom of speech, the press, and religion are still respected. The Reconstructionists seem to want to execute people for what they think and teach. But, as the *Westminster Confession* says, the ceremonial and judicial laws of Israel expired with the nation of Israel. No government today has the right, much less the duty, of executing heretics and false prophets. Yet the Reconstructionists seem to be bent on a new Inquisition as they struggle to take dominion over men and nations. I find it appalling that your reviewer, who is Chairman of the Government Department at a university named Liberty, seems to be sympathetic to such a New Inquisition.

Sincerely,

John W. Robbins