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BULLETIN

THEOLOGICAL STUDENTS FELLOWSHIP

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 1984

Vol. 8, No. 2

\$3.50

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As important as the agreements reached in the Letter was the Craigville process. From invitation through pre-Colloquy discussion to the exchanges at the Colloquy, accent was placed on self-activated, theologically energetic participation. No official "line" was laid down, and no pattern of representation was demanded (either confined to or dominated by one theological perspective, or determined by proportional representation of advocacy groups). Does the Spirit work best in such an open-ended venture? Can there be a *sensus fidelium* as the matrix of sound theology? The vitality of the exchange among diverse groups and the remarkable consensus that developed are strong arguments for trust in this kind of forum. Those with heavy axes to grind will, of course, be suspicious if the result does not include their conclusions. The Colloquy assumed that the UCC is a Church of Jesus Christ in which the Spirit lives, a Spirit who will let light and truth break out when the ways of the Spirit among the people of God are honored.

The reception and sequel events are a measure of the UCC quest and hope for theological identity and integrity. Recognizing the significance of a theological framing for which the UCC had not often been known, the media gave Craigville wide coverage, with long articles in the *Boston Globe*, a Religious News Service report, *Christianity Today* and *Christian Century* coverage and front-page stories in UCC-related organs *KYP* and *Seventh Angel*. Many UCC members committed to the Church's justice and peace agenda but troubled by its theological unclarity and developing polarization in its ranks, responded enthusiastically to a statement of first principles and an apparent consensus on the biblical and christological basics by the otherwise diverse constituencies present at Craigville. A number of letters and testimonies from leaders in other denominations and in the larger Christian community expressed appreciation for UCC commitment to biblical authority and classical faith, assuring continuing linkage with the ecumenical movement. Evangelicals in the UCC, including BWF leadership were on the whole pleased with the sections in the Letter that declared UCC commitment to biblical authority and the hope it represented for coming together of partisans around matters of basic framework.

Critics soon appeared. A Boston Feminist Dialogue group was formed to assess the Craigville letter and raised questions about the weight given to biblical authority, traditional theological formulations and matters of inclusive language (the Letter was scrupulous

in its use of inclusive language but employed the baptismal formula "In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" to affirm ecumenical Christian usage in this binding rite.) On the other hand, one editorialist criticized Craigville for taking up issues in a denominational context that belonged more appropriately to an ecumenical setting. Some evangelicals were unhappy about a view of biblical authority that appeared to be limited to faith and morals and made a place for "ever new light and truth," a position which they judged contrary to the necessary conception of inerrancy. On the other hand, some advocacy groups and activists were concerned that more explicit positions on current ethical issues from a nuclear freeze to the abortion debates were not included.

A long critique by Al Krass in *Seventh Angel* faulted the Letter for its "blandness," failing therein to condemn specifically such evils as "the social and economic policies of Reaganism," and judged that the Colloquy was the product of aging middle class male clergy and seminary professors seeking to reassert their authority in the UCC after a season of contextual theology, much like the restrictiveness of the John Paul II era in Roman Catholicism vis-à-vis Küng and Gutierrez. Some from denominations with more dogmatic definition thought Craigville's theological assertions too minimalist. Others felt that the openness of the UCC was imperiled by any attempt to bring up theological premises, including the elemental one found in the UCC Preamble to the Constitution.

The Craigville event is having its own immediate institutional effects—widespread study of the Letter in congregations and pastors' groups, and the planning of two subsequent events: a May, 1985 BTL-Mercersburg meeting in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, responding to the WCC proposal "Toward Confessing the Apostolic Faith Today," the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, and the Lutheran-Reformed dialogue agendas, and a September, 1985 church-wide Craigville II on the critical questions of Scripture/Word in the United Church of Christ (organized by a diversity of theologically active groups, official and unofficial). Even more, it has accelerated the theological soul-searching we have traced here, accenting a special dimension to that process, the work of "theology from below:" pastors and people of the UCC making their views and concerns known, especially as they are concerned with grounding the witness of this Church to justice and peace in the soil of biblical authority and classical faith.

The Craigville Letter

Grace and Peace:

On the 50th anniversary of the Barmen Declaration we have come together at Craigville to listen for God's Word to us, and to speak of the things that make us who we are in Christ.

We praise God for the theological ferment in our Church! When such life comes, and light is sought, we discern the Spirit's work. The struggle to know and do the truth is a gift of God to us. So too are the traditions that have formed us — Congregational, Christian, Evangelical, Reformed, and the diverse communities that have since shaped our life together. We give thanks for the freedom in this family of faith to look for ever-new light and truth from God's eternal Word.

Thankful for the vital signs in our midst, we know too that our weaknesses have been the occasion for God's workings among us. To make confession at Craigville is also to acknowledge our own part in the confusions and captivities of the times. The trumpet has too often given an uncertain sound. As the people of God, clergy and laity, our words have often not been God's Word, and our deeds have often been timid and trivial. Where theological disarray and lackluster witness are our lot, it is "our own fault, our own most grievous fault."

Yet we trust God's promises. Mercy is offered those who confess their sin. Grace does new things in our midst. Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto God!

In our deliberations we have sought to honor the ties that bind us, and to learn from the diversities that enrich us. We gladly speak here of the

affirmations we can make together, and the judgments we share.

Authority

Loyal to our founders' faith, we acknowledge Jesus Christ as our "sole Head, Son of God and Saviour." (Preamble, Para. 2, *The Constitution of the United Church of Christ*). With Barmen we confess fidelity to "the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and death." (Barmen, 8:11). Christ is the Center to whom we turn in the midst of the clamors, uncertainties and temptations of the hour.

We confess Jesus Christ "as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture." (Barmen, 8:11). As our forebears did, we too look "to the Word of God in the Scriptures." (Preamble, Para. 2). Christ speaks to us unfailingly in the prophetic-apostolic testimony. Under his authority, we hold the Bible as the trustworthy rule of faith and practice. We believe that the ecumenical creeds, the evangelical confessions, and the covenants we have made in our churches at various times and places, aid us in understanding the Word addressed to us. We accept the call to relate that Word to the world of peril and hope in which God has placed us, making the ancient faith our own in this generation "in honesty of thought and expression, and in purity of heart before God." (Preamble, Para.2).

Affirmation

According to these norms and guides, we call for sound teaching in our Church, and so confess the

trinitarian content of our faith. Affirming our Baptism "in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," (Matthew 28:19) we believe that the triune God is manifest in the drama of creation, reconciliation and sanctification. Following the recital of these mighty acts in our Statement of Faith, we celebrate the creative and redemptive work of God in our beginnings, the covenant with the people of Israel, the incarnation of the Word in Jesus Christ and the saving deed done in his life, death and resurrection, the coming of the Holy Spirit in church and world, and the promise of God to consummate all things according to the purposes of God. In the United Church of Christ we believe that the divine initiatives cannot be separated from God's call to respond with our own liberating and reconciling deeds in this world, and thus to accept the invitation to the cost and joy of discipleship.

Church

Our faith finds its form in the Christian community. We rejoice and give thanks to God for the gift of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, gathered by the Holy Spirit from the whole human race in all times and places. That Church is called to share the life-giving waters of Baptism and feed us with the life-sustaining bread and wine of Eucharist; to proclaim the Gospel to all the world; to reach out in mission by word and deed, healing and hope, justice and peace. Through Baptism the Church is united to Christ and shares Christ's prophetic, priestly and royal ministry in its servant

form. We rejoice that God calls some members for the ministry of Word and Sacrament to build up the Body and equip the saints for ministry in the world. We rejoice that God calls the laity to their threefold ministry, manifesting the Body of Christ in the places of work and play, living and dying.

We confess that although we are part of the Body in this Church, we are not the whole Body. We need always seek Christ's Word and presence in other communities of faith, and be united with all who confess Christ and share in his mission.

Polity

We confess our joy in the rich heritage of the Congregational, Christian, Evangelical, and Reformed traditions and the many diverse peoples who compose the fabric of the United Church of Christ. We are a "coat of many colors" and we give thanks for this diversity. We affirm the value of each voice and tradition that God has brought together and that our unity in Christ informs our faith and practice. In these days together, we have been reminded of the search for unity amidst the marvelous diversity in the United Church of Christ. We acknowledge that our diversity is not only a precious gift of God but that it is sometimes the source of hurt, frustration and anger.

God is gracious. Through God's grace we are able to embrace in forgiveness and to reconcile divisions. In covenant we are continually being called to be present to and for one another. In covenant we are being called to acknowledge that without one another we are incomplete, but together in Christ we are his Body in which each part is honored.

We have not yet reached agreement in our discussions regarding the governance of the Church. We acknowledge a need to develop further our polity; to hold together in mutual accountability all the various parts of our Church. We affirm that the Christian community must conform its life and practice to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and dare not heed the voice of a stranger. We affirm that in the United Church of Christ the Holy Spirit acts in powerful ways as the communities of faith gather for worship and for work, in local churches, in the Associations, in the Conferences, in the General Synod, and in the Instrumentalities and Boards. As a servant people, the prayer on the lips of the Church at such times is always: "Come, Holy Spirit!"

Justice

We have not reached agreement on the meaning of peace with justice. We confess however our own involvement with the injustices present in our society. We acknowledge our need to embody God's eternal concern for the least and most vulnerable of our neighbors. This shall require a renewed commitment to the study of the biblical teachings on justice and a fresh determination to do the things that make for peace.

We invite you to join us in reconsidering the meaning of Jesus' call and the summons to the Church to preach good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives, enable recovery of sight to the blind, set at liberty those who are oppressed, and proclaim the acceptable year of our Lord.

Where justice is compromised and the rights of the weak sacrificed to the demands of the strong, the Church is called to resist. Christ stands alongside those deprived of their just claims. We pray for ears to hear God's voice resounding in the cries of those who are victimized by the cruel misuse of power. God's tears are shed also amidst the indifferent. We share with each of you the ministry of reconciliation. We ask you to consider thoughtfully the meaning and implications of this high calling in the world God loves and to which Jesus Christ comes as the embodiment of hope, the messenger of love, and the guarantor of the divine intention

that the bound be set free from the unjust yoke.

In response to the witness of the Holy Scriptures and the example of Jesus Christ, we beseech our government at every level, to be steadfast and persistent in the pursuit of political, economic and social justice with mercy and compassion. We are of a common mind, inviting you to join us in the urgent pursuit of those longings which compel a just peace in the nuclear age. Where justice is withheld among us, God is denied. Where peace is forsaken among us, we forsake Christ, the life of the Church is compromised, and the message of reconciliation is gravely wounded. Let us bear witness to the truth in this.

Ambiguities

We acknowledge with joy that new light is yet to break forth from God's Word. This bright light is a gift for the nurturing of our lives as Christians. At the same time, it is our experience that this vision of the Church is often blurred and incomplete. "For now we see through a glass, dimly" (I Corinthians 13:12). Where our vision is unclear and the voice of the Church uncertain, we are urged not to indifference or compromise, but to our knees; to repentance, to prayer, and an earnest quest, seeking together the way of Christ for us.

We acknowledge with gratitude that in Christ every dividing wall of enmity or hostility is broken down. How do we celebrate this when we are tempted to ignore, avoid or resist some members of the community? Is not such resistance a contradiction of love of neighbor? As brothers and sisters in Christ we are summoned to address one another with humility knowing that our words and actions are subject to the judgment of God. Are we not to trust God to reconcile divisions among us, and when there has been separation or hurt to lead us back to one another as a shepherd searches for the flock? Can we afford to be any longer apart from the promise of the Gospel? Are we not to live this promise in the brilliant light of God's redeeming ways with us? God is faithful and just. Trusting in that faithfulness and the enormity of divine grace, surely we may bear the tension of the paradoxes of salvation not yet fully realized.

Rejections

Ours is an age of a multitude of gods and we are tempted on every side to cling to a false message and a false hope. This is a dangerous path and it is no stranger to any of our congregations. Idolatry can tempt us and lull us to sleep; it offers us false comfort and false security. We ask you to consider with us the idolatries of our time and to reject all that denies the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

We reject "the illusions of self-liberation." (WARC, II, 2, p. 12). With the framers of the Barmen Declaration, we reject the false teaching that there may be "areas of our life in which we would not belong to Jesus Christ, but other lords; areas in which we would not need justification and sanctification through him." (Barmen, 8:15).

We reject the racism and sexism that demean our lives as those created precious in the sight of God.

We reject materialism and consumerism that put things in place of God and value possessions more than people.

We reject secularism that reduces life to its parts and pieces, and relativism that abandons the search for truth.

We reject militarism that promises "security" by means of a nuclear balance of terror, threatening God's creation with destructive "gods of metal."

We reject identification with any ideology of the right or the left "as though the Church were permitted to abandon the form of its message and order to its own pleasure or to changes in prevailing ideological and political convictions." (Bar-

men, 8:18).

We reject cultural captivity and accommodationism as well as the notion that we can turn aside from the world in indifference, for we remember that "the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof . . ." (Psalm 24:1)

We urge the Church in each of its parts to prayerfully consider the meaning for our times of Paul's admonition in Romans 12:2 " . . . Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." Pray that God will help the United Church of Christ discern the things we must reject as well as the things we must affirm, that to which we say "no" and that to which we give our glad assent.

Life Together

For the health of the Church and the integrity of our witness and service, we urge clergy and laity to gather in timely fashion for prayer, study, and mutual care. We encourage the mutual support of clergy for one another in their ministry, and ask the theological faculties to maintain communion with students beyond the years of their formal study. We ask Church and Ministry Committees to nurture Christian love and concern for seminarians during the course of their preparation for ordained tasks in the Church. We hope that retreats and periods of rest, reflection and spiritual renewal will become part of our life together in each Conference, and that the teaching ministry might be affirmed by laity and clergy to the end that our congregational life and our mission be anchored deeply in Scripture and informed generously by the urgent realities of our time.

Doxology

To the truth of the Gospel that has sustained and emboldened the Church in each generation, we too say "yes." With grateful hearts, we affirm the gift of faith present in the United Church of Christ — evangelical, catholic, and reformed — which we are being called to live out in these fragile and bewildering times.

While the way ahead is not always clear to us, we dare to hope and rejoice, believing that we belong to our faithful Saviour, Jesus Christ, our "only comfort in life and death." (Heidelberg Catechism, Ques. 1). We seek to hold together worship, discipleship, proclamation and service, Word and world.

As our forebearers have done, we too declare that we shall tread this path with all who are "kindred in Christ" and "share in this confession." (Preamble, Para. 2). We invite you to walk with us in this way.

In Christ

The Participants in the Craigville Colloquy, Craigville, Massachusetts, May 16, 1984

(This document, in substance, was voted as "an epistle to the churches" by colloquy participants present at the final session, May 16 (approximately 140 in attendance), with one dissenting vote. Those taking part in the Colloquy, convened at Craigville Conference Center, May 14-16, 1984.

The letter took form from materials developed in 12 Colloquy Working Groups meeting three times on May 14, and 15, and reporting their conclusions in plenary session. A Drafting Committee of seven-five chosen from the Colloquy by the drawing of lots from a pool of 30 volunteers, and two appointed by the Colloquy's Organizing Committee—spent eight hours sifting the Working Group's proposals, writing sections of the letter, and editing the overall document. Drafters names appear with asterisks. The draft letter was reviewed, amended, and editorially refined in a two hour plenary session, and approved in substance, with the Drafting Committee charged to incorporate editorial clarifications.)

The Dubuque Declaration

We declare our continuing commitment to the truths set forth in the Basis of Union and the Constitution of the United Church of Christ.

We perceive an erosion and denial of these truths in our church. Because of our concern for the people of our churches and the well-being of our denomination as a member of the body of Christ, we are called by God to make this confession:

1. We confess our faith in the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

2. We confess that Jesus Christ is truly God and truly man. Because of our sin and estrangement from God, at the Father's bidding the Son of God took on flesh. Conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, He became like us in all things apart from sin. He died on the cross to atone for our sin and reconcile us to God and on the third day rose bodily from the dead. He is the sole head of the church, the Lord and Savior of us all, and will one day return to glory, power, and judgment to usher in the kingdom of God in its fullness.

3. We hold that the Bible is the written Word of God, the infallible rule of faith and practice for the church of Jesus Christ. The Scriptures have binding authority on all people. All other sources of knowing stand under the judgment of the Word of God.

4. We affirm that the central content of the Scriptures is the gospel of reconciliation and redemption through the atoning sacrifice of Christ and His glorious resurrection from the grave. The good news is that we are saved by the grace of God alone, the grace revealed and fulfilled in the life and death of Jesus Christ, which is received only by faith. Yet this faith does not remain alone but gives rise to works of piety, mercy, and justice. The Holy Spirit, who spoke through the prophets and apostles, calls us today, as in the past, to seek justice and peace for all races, tongues and nations.

5. We confess as our own the faith embodied in the great ecumenical and Reformation creeds and confessions, finding them in basic conformity with the teaching of the Holy Scriptures.

6. We confess that the mission of the church is to bear witness to God's law and gospel in our words and deeds. We are sent into the world as disciples of Christ to glorify God in every area of life and to bring all peoples into submission to the Lordship of Christ, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. We seek to obey this commission in the full assurance that our Lord and Savior is with us always, even to the end of the age.

—Adopted by the Board of Directors of United Church People for Biblical Witness, Dubuque, Iowa, November 17, 1983

THEOLOGY

Evangelical Theology: Where Do We Begin?

by Thomas Finger

I) The Present Situation

In recent decades systematic theology has fallen on hard times. This is due, in part, to our general cultural situation. Not only has knowledge in fields relevant to the discipline exploded beyond the capabilities of almost any individual, but the felt religious needs of most people are for something quite different from a complex, tightly interwoven, cognitive "system". In a world increasingly shaped by massive, impersonal and intellectually sophisticated technology, most people turn to religion for something intimate, personal and emotionally satisfying. Even those whose focus is "outward", toward challenging modern structures, want guidelines for concrete action, not carefully refined dogmas.

Systematically inclined thinkers can legitimately challenge this craving for experience or action at the expense of truth. But despite the extreme forms in which they are often phrased, might such concerns contain a kernel of truth? Is not systematic theology's ultimate purpose, after all, to guide the life and mission of the Church? And, might not one plausibly urge that its concepts and structure make closer contact with the outlook of the age and of ordinary Christians than often is the case?

Traditional theological systems usually begin with complex issues of epistemology: of revelation, reason and their interrelation. Then follow God's attributes and the Trinity—surely among the most intricate intellectual issues ever discussed. Systematic Theologies then descend to Creation, where sophisticated scientific issues come to the fore. To be sure, Systematic Theology must at some point deal with these important matters. But *beginning* one's system with them carries two liabilities.

First, discussion commences at an intellectual level so lofty that all but the highly educated or intelligent are left groping at the start. Second, the concepts employed are often deeply indebted to philosophy and science. The terms and style of argumentation are often

set before the data relevant to worship, fellowship, experience, ethics and mission are thoroughly explored. Such data, accordingly, may be neglected, distorted, or presented in a form undesirably disconnected from actual Christian living.¹

Beginning, then, from the purpose of evangelical Systematic Theology itself—to guide the Church's life and mission—and not primarily from the experience and action-oriented mood of the present, we may ask whether the discipline might helpfully adopt a different style and structure. We will do so by pondering, first, the meaning of "evangelical", and second, the meaning of "systematic".

II) What is "Evangelical"?

The voluminous literature on this topic suggests three main routes to definition: theological, historical and Biblical.²

A) Theological Definitions of "Evangelical"

According to Kenneth Kantzer, evangelicals affirm the authority of scripture and justification by faith.³ Evangelical theology, that is, is primarily reformation theology. Others, such as Bernard Ramm, identify it more with the specific Reformed tradition.⁴

Donald Bloesch's list of evangelical "hallmarks" contains a number of Reformed emphases such as: the sovereignty of God, total depravity, the substitutionary atonement, and the primacy of proclamation.⁵ Bloesch, however, recognizes that some groups stressing these "hallmarks" have neglected other important themes and practices. Some of these have been emphasized in Catholicism.⁶ Others, such as personal piety, sanctified living and social involvement, have been stressed by other Protestant groups, sometimes at times when Reformed Christians seemed to have lost them.⁷

We thoroughly agree with Bloesch and others that the authority of Scripture and God's initiating activity must characterize all theologies called "evangelical". However, by looking beyond the Reformed tradition, Bloesch points the way towards an historical definition of "evangelical", and one closer to common usage of the term.

B) Historical Definitions of "Evangelical"

Evangelicals, on this view, not only believe something, but are

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