

## Two-Faced Paper Tiger

Depending on what issue or part of an issue of The Trinity Review (TR) one reads, one

could come away with the impression that John Robbins, president of The Trinity

Foundation and writer of most of the articles in TR, along with the other writers and

those whom he endorses, are solidly on the side of the true gospel. Over the years, TR

has exposed anti-gospel heresies and heretics in both liberal and conservative

Christendom, even within Reformed denominations like the Orthodox Presbyterian

Church (OPC). Robbins and TR have garnered a reputation for its hardline stance

against compromisers wherever they are. In fact, Outside the Camp once endorsed TR

before we saw the other face of John Robbins (see "Why We No Longer Endorse The

Trinity Foundation" in the May 1999 issue of Outside the Camp).

TR has come out against such heresies as Arminianism, the charismatic movement,

common grace, dispensationalism, inclusivism, liberalism, neo-liberalism, modernism,

mysticism, neo-orthodoxy, neo-evangelicalism, neolegalism, paradox theology,

Pentecostalism, neo-Pentecostalism, revivalism, Roman Catholicism, and synergism. It

has come out against such heretics as Greg Bahnsen, Karl Barth, Donald Bloesch, Emil

Brunner, David Chilton, Charles Colson, Raymond Dillard, Charles Finney, John Frame,

Richard Gaffin, Norman Geisler, Billy Graham, Scott Hahn, James Jordan, Soren

Kierkegaard, John Kinnaird, C. S. Lewis, Tremper Longman, John MacArthur, George

Marston, Gary North, Clark Pinnock, John Piper, Norman Shepherd, Ronald Sider,

Cornelius Van Til, and Doug Wilson.

TR has even come out and said that these are heresies and heretics who are promoting

and spreading pernicious and detestable doctrines, false gospels, other religions, and

anti-Christianity.

Thus far we have seen the orthodox face of TR. But, as Satan marvelously transforms

himself into an angel of light, so it is not a great thing if Satan's ministers transform

themselves as ministers of righteousness (2 Corinthians 11:13-15). The transformation

can look quite good. But eventually, the dead men's bones inside the beautifully

whitened graves come peeking out, and the smell is putrid.

The most conspicuous example is in the September-October 2005 issues of TR entitled

"The Marks of Neo-Liberalism" by Paul M. Elliot. In the preface to the article, Robbins

writes, "In October The Trinity Foundation will release an important new book by Paul M.

Elliot, former Ruling Elder in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. This essay is an excerpt

from chapter 2 of that book, Christianity and Neo-Liberalism: The Spiritual Crisis in the

Orthodox Presbyterian Church and Beyond." Obviously, Robbins and the Trinity

Foundation, in publishing and publicizing Elliot's book, agree with its contents.

Elliot's article first goes into the marks of "Old Liberalism" as put forth by one of TR's

favorite theologians, J. Gresham Machen (founder of the OPC). Elliot quotes from

Machen's Christianity and Liberalism:

"Machen said that liberalism is chiefly characterized by 'its attack upon the fundamentals of the Christian faith.' These fundamentals include the Biblical doctrine of

God, and the Biblical doctrine of man. ... He said that 'in their attitude toward Jesus,

Christianity and liberalism are sharply opposed.' He said that 'with regard to the gospel

itself, modern liberalism is diametrically opposed to Christianity.' Machen observed that

liberalism differs from Christianity with regard to the presuppositions of the gospel (the

view of God and the view of man), with regard to the Book in which the gospel is

contained, and with regard to the Person whose work the gospel sets forth.

It is not

surprising then that it differs from Christianity in its account of the gospel itself; it is not

surprising that it presents an entirely different view of the way of salvation.

Liberalism

finds salvation (so far as it is willing to speak at all of 'salvation') in man; Christianity

finds it in an act of God. ... Machen rightly viewed the crisis in the PCUSA as not merely

an intramural dispute among conservatives. Thus, he defined the conflict in its proper

terms - the warfare between authentic Biblical Christianity and liberalism's counterfeit.

Machen saw Christianity and liberalism as we must see them today: not two different

brands of Christianity, but two different and irreconcilable sets of beliefs, one leading to

Heaven, the other to Hell. The two may often use the same vocabulary, but one is true,

while the other is false. There is no middle ground. Counterfeits often look exactly like

the genuine article, except on careful examination. Machen wrote:

'Clear-cut definition

of terms in religious matters, bold facing of the logical implications of religious views, is

by many persons regarded as an impious proceeding. ... In the sphere of religion, in

particular, the present time is a time of conflict; the great redemptive religion which has

always been known as Christianity is battling against a totally diverse type of religious

belief, which is only the more destructive of the Christian faith because it makes use of

traditional Christian terminology. This modern non-redemptive religion is called

'modernism' or 'liberalism.'

Wow - how much bolder can it get? Machen (and Elliot and Robbins by extension)

believe that Christianity and liberalism are two different religions. They believe that

liberalism, while it uses much of the same terminology as Christianity, is completely

different than Christianity, attacks the fundamentals of the Christian faith, and presents

an entirely different view of the way of salvation. So far so good.

Elliot then goes on to compare liberalism with neo-liberalism and concludes that neoliberalism,

like liberalism, has a different view of fundamental Christian doctrines, including a different view of salvation. He uses Norman Shepherd as an example:

"Shepherd's 'gospel' is not the good news of redemption for helpless sinners who stand

under God's condemnation and wrath, who have no righteousness of their own, and who

need their sins imputed to Christ and the righteousness of Christ's active obedience

imputed to them. On the contrary, Shepherd rejects what he at least correctly calls the

'evangelical view' that Jesus 'fulfilled all the requirements of the law, and his law keeping

is imputed to believers for their justification.' He claims that the Apostle Paul did not

teach this ... Rather, Shepherd teaches that the doctrine of the imputed righteousness of

Christ was a later corruption of Reformed theology. In its place, Shepherd teaches a

pseudo-gospel of salvation through good works done by people who have been made

capable of doing good works because they have been baptized. ...

Shepherd and other

neo-liberals teach that man's salvation depends on a combination of God's grace and

personal obedience beginning with water baptism, with the clear implication that man is

capable of doing his part in effecting his salvation. Shepherd asserts that 'abiding in

Christ by keeping his commandments (John 15:5,10; 1 John 3:13, 24) [is] necessary for continuing in the state of justification' and 'the personal godliness of the believer is also necessary for his justification in the judgment of the last day."

Again, so far so good. Obviously, liberalism and neo-liberalism are false gospels, right?

Machen and Elliot correctly identify them as counterfeits that are diametrically opposed

to true Christianity. Obviously, then, all liberals and neo-liberals are unregenerate, right?

Yet out of the midst of this veneer of orthodoxy come these astounding words from

Machen's Christianity and Liberalism, quoted in agreement by Elliot:

"We are not dealing here with delicate personal questions; we are not presuming to say

whether such and such an individual man is a Christian or not. God only can decide

such questions; no man can say with assurance whether the attitude of certain

individual 'liberals' toward Christ is saving faith or not. But one thing is perfectly plain -

whether or [not] liberals are Christians, it is at any rate perfectly clear that liberalism is

not Christianity."

And Elliot uses the same words at the end of his article to describe neo-liberals: "But on

the authority of Scripture, one thing is perfectly plain even now: whether or not some neoliberals

are Christians, neo-liberalism is not Christianity. And those who continue to reject

Christianity will be lost."

Can you believe what you just read? After all that Machen said against liberalism, and after all that Elliot said against neo-liberalism, their entire thesis is vitiated in one fell swoop! Machen, Elliot, Robbins, and all who agree with them believe that it is possible that some who hold to a totally different religion, who differ from Christianity in fundamental doctrines, including believing a false gospel of salvation through good works, are SAVED!! Their entire case against ALL FALSE GOSPELS has been utterly obliterated!! All of their supposed boldness against anti-gospel heresies is nothing but a sham! The TR tiger has no teeth! TR is nothing but vanity and wind! For a "ministry" that is supposedly so opposed to contradiction, contradiction runs throughout TR.

It is no wonder that John Robbins, when confronted with quotes from Gordon Clark showing that Clark believed that all true Arminians are saved, said, "No, all those individuals who believe in universal atonement are not necessarily unregenerate. ... One must keep in mind the distinction between a system and a person. In one of the quotes you provided, Clark pointed out that people are sometimes wonderfully confused, and they are saved in spite of that confusion."

Yet Robbins himself, in the October 1979 issue of TR, wrote, "To return to our example, the editors of Present Truth suggested that a separation be made between Karl Barth's

theology and his person, indicating that it is permissible to judge his theology, but not his person. Such a separation is foreign to the Scriptures. ... Not only are we not to make a separation between a person's theology and his person, we are commanded to judge another person by his theology."

Are we to "keep in mind the distinction between a system and a person" or "are we not to make a separation between a person's theology and his person"? Would the real John Robbins please stand up? Actually, the real John Robbins has stood up - and he has two faces, just like his newsletter. The proponent of non-contradiction is a walking contradiction.

[As much as Robbins and Clark have said they are opposed to Van Til, their view is exactly the same as Van Til's, who wrote the following in a 1939 article in The Banner entitled "The Resurrection As A Part of Christian Truth": "It is not merely on the so called 'five points of Calvinism' that people of the Reformed persuasion are to be distinguished from those who hold to Arminian teaching. The difference goes, in the last analysis, to the foundation of all Christian belief. Happily, however, Arminians are usually inconsistent." In the January 2001 issue of TR, G.A. Chan writes: "Are Arminians Christians? Sproul answers, 'Yes, barely. They are Christians by what we call a felicitous

inconsistency' (R.C. Sproul, *Willing to Believe: The Controversy Over Free Will*). Robbins,

Clark, Van Til, and Sproul are all brothers in Satan.]

It is also no wonder why regular contributors to TR include W. Gary Crampton and Sean

Gerety. Crampton says it is possible that some who call themselves Roman Catholics

and Arminians are true Christians. Gerety (who ironically wrote an article entitled "The

Evisceration of the Christian Faith") says that it is possible for a true Christian who

knows what Muslims believe to confess that some Muslims are saved.

From now on, when you're reading TR, keep these things in mind. It's all billows of

bombastic bluster with no backbone. The following are examples from past TRs:

"Second, Frame's eclectic epistemology is fatal to Christian thought. Frame repeatedly

speaks favorably of theological liberals" (Nov. '92).

"MacArthur rejects the biblical view of justification and adopts the Roman Catholic view.

... MacArthur's view of justification is Rome's ... One can only conclude from this that

what makes faith saving, in MacArthur's view, is works" (Apr. '93).

"Contemporary Religion vs. the Gospel ... The Charismatic Movement ... Romanism ...

Neo-evangelicalism ..." (June '95).

"Although he uses many Christian words and phrases, Barth's theology is not

Christianity. It is, just as modernism itself is, another religion" (Feb. '98).

"[Kinnaird believes] Good works are a 'required condition' of salvation. The imputed

righteousness of Christ is insufficient. Those who will be 'declared righteous,' that is, justified, will be 'those who obey the law'" (Nov. '04). "The justification controversy actually began 30 years ago in 1975, when students of Professor Norman Shepherd of Westminster Theological Seminary gave the wrong answers to questions posed by presbyteries examining them for ordination. When asked how a sinner is justified, the Westminster Seminary students answered: by faith and works. ... Professor Shepherd was not the only member of the Westminster faculty who taught justification by faith and works; in fact, the reason that the controversy lasted so long was that the majority of the Seminary faculty and Board of Trustees approved his teaching and defended him against his critics. ... One of Westminster Seminary's oldest and most revered professors, Dr. Cornelius Van Til, publicly defended Professor Shepherd and his doctrine of justification by faith and works. Other Shepherd defenders included Professor Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., now de facto dean of the faculty at the Seminary; Dr. Samuel Logan, who later became president of the Seminary; and Mr. John Frame, now teaching at Reformed Theological Seminary. These men and others ensured that though Professor Shepherd was no longer at Westminster Seminary, his teaching would continue in that institution" (Apr. '05).

My response to Robbins is: SO WHAT! BIG DEAL! What's the big fuss? Why are you wasting your time? After all, even though neolegalism and modernism and Romanism and Van Tilianism and synergism (etc., etc.) are not Christianity, you believe that not all neolegalists and modernists and Romanists and Van Tilians and synergists (etc., etc.) are unregenerate! "One must keep in mind the distinction between a system and a person," you know. Even those who hold to wrong ideas about the fundamentals of the faith (such as the person and work of Christ) are not necessarily unregenerate, according to you and your friends; they could just be "wonderfully confused." You even wrote that "O. Palmer Robertson pointed out, Norman Shepherd 'could affirm that justification was "by faith alone" and yet retain his position that justification was by faith and by works'" (Dec. '04-Jan. '05). Sean Gerety wrote that Shepherd's views are "contradictory and heretical" (Jul.-Aug. '05). Why can't a true Christian hold to contradictory views about an essential gospel doctrine? After all, you believe that a Christian can believe both universal atonement (salvation conditioned on the sinner) and salvation conditioned on the work of Christ alone at the same time. He's just confused! He's just contradicting himself because of his "wonderful confusion," just like Shepherd!

Your friend, Robert Reymond (who advocates common grace, a heresy you claim to hate), wrote an article entitled "The 'Very Pernicious and Detestable' Doctrine of Inclusivism" in which he decries the heresy "that the Bible is not clear about the eternal state of the adherents of other religions. They are opting for what they call 'inclusivism,' the teaching that God's mercy is so wide that it can and does embrace many, if not all, non-Christian religionists on the globe ... Evangelical inclusivists deny that conscious faith in Jesus Christ is absolutely essential to salvation" (May-June '03). If you are consistent, you would have to use the same words to describe inclusivists as Machen used to describe liberals (especially since inclusivism and liberalism are basically the same thing): "We are not dealing here with delicate personal questions; we are not presuming to say whether such and such an individual man is a Christian or not. God only can decide such questions; no man can say with assurance whether the attitude of certain individual 'inclusivists' toward Christ is saving faith or not. But one thing is perfectly plain - whether or not inclusivists are Christians, it is at any rate perfectly clear that inclusivism is not Christianity." Also, in spite of your sometimes exclusivist rhetoric (including words like "pernicious" and "detestable"), YOU YOURSELF are a kind of

inclusivist - you and your friends believe that, although heresies like neo-liberalism and Arminianism are false gospels, not all neo-liberals and Arminians are necessarily unregenerate. Your hypocrisy shines through for all to see.

Mr. Robbins, you wrote, "Paul wrote, 'As God is faithful, our word to you was not Yes and No, for the Son God...was not Yes and No' (2 Corinthians 1:17-19). Paul did not add, 'but our word to you might be Yes and No if we talk on different levels of discourse.' One reason Christians and churches are held in such low esteem by the world is that churchmen like Wilson, through the ages, have dishonestly played with words and denied the truth" (May-June '05). Those words can be thrown right back at you, Mr. Robbins. You are the pot calling the kettle black. You bellow out of one side of your mouth, "It's anti-Christian! It's a false gospel! It's a different religion than Christianity!" Oh, you sound so bold. Yet from the other side of your mouth, you speak peace to the false religionists, saying, "Not all false religionists are necessarily lost." You are a fraud. Your version of "Christianity" is a spineless, emasculated, fork-tongued monstrosity. And, unlike you, I am not afraid to judge you to be unregenerate based on God's testimony. I pray for your salvation and for the salvation of all who believe the way you do.