

Wartime Sermons: Twelve Pulpit Messages from Georgia Presbyterians During World War II

By Frank J. Smith

LIVING ECHOES

Three quarters of a century ago, Southern Presbyterian pastors were dealing with the challenges and suffering and questions engendered by World War II. How does one find comfort? What is the meaning of it all? In the midst of the carnage, where is God?

At the same time, there were ongoing pastoral matters that needed to be addressed. Because we usually focus on the Second World War, particularly the military dimension, whenever we think of the early to mid-1940s, we often forget that people were still carrying on with their lives. People still graduated from high school; went to proms and to dances at the “Y”; got married and had babies; attended colleges and universities; rooted for their football teams as they competed on the gridiron during the regular season and, perhaps, in bowl games; drank soda and ate popcorn and Neccos while watching Westerns at the movie theater; swung to big-band music from the radio; engaged in the full scope of civilian employment; and had all the usual emotional ups and downs of life. In a similar way, even in wartime, the pastoral ministry continued to deal with the usual spiritual needs and doubts and fears and questions with which men have always wrestled—coupled with anxieties about national security and the safety of loved ones far away.

There was also the backdrop of a theological shift that was occurring, as liberalism was starting to make decisive thrusts into the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS, known informally as the Southern Presbyterian Church). One could argue that that spiritual and theological war would prove to be far more significant and devastating than the destruction wreaked by Stuka dive bombers, U-boats, Sherman tanks, howitzers, and atomic weapons.

In 1943, a small book—a bare 112 pages—was published by John Knox Press, the official publishing arm of

the PCUS. It contained a dozen sermons from as many Presbyterian ministers from the state of Georgia. It provides a window into the Southern Presbyterian sanctuary at a critical time not only of world history but also of church history.

The book was entitled, *Living Echoes: Sermons by Twelve Georgia Presbyterian Ministers*,¹ and the editor of the collection was Ferguson Wood, pastor of the Westminster Presbyterian Church. Located at the time in the Midtown area of Atlanta, a bit over a mile east of Georgia Tech, Westminster was a noteworthy congregation whose previous pastor was Peter Marshall, a native Scotsman who would leave that pulpit for a pastorate in Washington, D.C., and an eventual appointment as the Chaplain of the U.S. Senate.²

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1. *Living Echoes: Sermons by Twelve Georgia Presbyterian Ministers* (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1943).

2. His wife, Catherine Marshall, was the beloved authoress of the novel *Christy*, set in a fictional Appalachian town in Tennessee. She also wrote a biography of her husband, *A Man Called Peter*.

All of the congregations represented in *Living Echoes* were prestigious. Here is a list of them, along with the respective communicant membership: First Presbyterian Church, Atlanta, 1906; Druid Hills Presbyterian Church, Atlanta, 1703; North Avenue Presbyterian Church, Atlanta, 1209; First Presbyterian Church, Columbus, 1155; Morningside Presbyterian Church, Atlanta, 592; First Presbyterian Church, Thomasville, 569; Westminster Presbyterian Church, Atlanta, 565; First Presbyterian Church, Valdosta, 527; First Presbyterian Church, Marietta, 542; Reid Memorial Presbyterian Church, Augusta, 429; and Pryor Street Presbyterian Church, Atlanta, 419.³

Two things immediately stand out via perusing this list. One is that all of them are city churches with significant membership. The other is that the list is heavily tilted toward Atlanta. Of the seven presbyteries in the Synod of Georgia, sermons by ministers from these judicatories were featured in this volume: Atlanta (7); Southwest Georgia (2); Cherokee (1); Augusta (1); Macon (1). Not represented were Athens and Savannah Presbyteries.

What we have, therefore, in this book is a snapshot—or, better yet, we could say an album of snapshots—which may or may not accurately portray the whole scene of the Presbyterian pulpit in the South or even the state of Georgia seventy-five years ago. For instance, what was being preached in the rural churches and in those urban congregations that were not as wealthy? But, on the other hand, given the influential nature of these congregations, and the fact that the Synod of Georgia was home to Columbia Theological Seminary, and that the state of Georgia was increasingly becoming industrialized and urbanized in earning its moniker of “Empire State of the South,” this series of snapshots may, at the very least, portend trends as to where the denomination as a whole was headed.

The first thing to note is the Foreword, penned by Ferguson Wood. He wrote:

3. These figures are taken from the *Minutes of the Eighty-Fourth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States with an Appendix* (Richmond, Va./Dallas, Tex.: Presbyterian Committee of Education, n.d. [1944]), which included the statistics for 1943.

4. Not all of the ministers were under forty when the volume was published: e.g., J. McDowell Richards was born in 1902, while John Calvin Reid was born in 1901. Of course, it is possible that their sermons were actually preached while they were still in their thirties, and published after they turned forty. (The volume was copyrighted on May 18, 1943.) In any case, even if the precise claim is not accurate, the general thrust is true—these ministers were not part of the older generation.

5. “Continuing Church Committee Holds Meet in Atlanta,” *Southern Presbyterian Journal* (December 15, 1945), 5–7.

Each week nearly two hundred Presbyterian ministers proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ Jesus from the two hundred and fifty-five Presbyterian pulpits within the bounds of the State of Georgia. In this volume we are endeavoring to present a cross section of this great group. The twelve sermons herein were all preached by men not yet forty years of age who are serving, with one exception, churches with at least four hundred members. Sermons like these may be heard any Sabbath. Sermons like these are representative of the whole. Sermons like these have been the means through which many footsore and weary pilgrims have found relief from their pains, balm for healing, and inspiration for nobler and more Christlike living. For the message of the Presbyterian pulpits in Georgia is clear, uplifting, forceful, timely, and courageous. Our earnest prayer is, as we send this volume forth, that sermons like these may prove as rich a blessing and spiritual uplift to their readers as they did to their hearers.

The Editor did state that these sermons were representative of the whole of preaching in Georgia Presbyterian pulpits, and perhaps he was right. However, on the other hand, that fact is hard to demonstrate for two reasons: one, the sample is small; and two, as noted above, only sermons from large and prestigious congregations were included. Furthermore, as Dr. Wood mentioned, every preacher whose sermon is in this volume was relatively young—leaving open the question as to whether there was a generational difference between these sermons and those preached by an older generation.⁴ So, while this collection may not be representative of the whole in 1943, it might give us a clue as to where the Southern Church was going—not only because of the influential nature of the congregations, but also because of the fact that all the sermons were preached by men of a younger generation.

Before we consider each of these sermons, let us pause to consider who Ferguson Wood was. He was a leader of the Continuing Church Committee—the conservative group that wanted to preserve traditional Southern Presbyterian theology and piety, by continuing the PCUS as a distinct denomination. This movement, which was associated with the *Southern Presbyterian Journal* (founded in 1942, later renamed the *Presbyterian Journal*), in the 1940s and 1950s strongly enunciated its opposition to merger with the “Northern” Presbyterian Church. In 1945, the *Journal* announced that Dr. Wood was Co-Chairman of the Continuing Church Committee.⁵

We mention Dr. Wood’s public commitment to the

Continuing Church ideology since, as a leader in that movement, one would imagine that he would not have endorsed sermons that were weak or suspect theologically. But we shall see whether that expectation is accurate.

THE FIRST SERMON

The first sermon was by James McDowell Richards, D.D., President of Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia. A Phi Beta Kappa member, he studied at Davidson College, then at Princeton University, and later was a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford University. He also graduated from Columbia Theological Seminary.

Entitled “The Inevitable Choice,” the message was based on Matthew 6:24 (“No man can serve two masters”). Dr. Richards posited that “life is after all only a continual making of choices. There is never a day which does not offer two or more alternatives between which we must choose; there is hardly a situation which can arise but that we may meet it in at least two different ways. . . . There are certain things in our lives which must be condemned to die if others are to live, and on the other hand if we choose that these latter things are to live, it becomes necessary that the former things shall die. There is not time enough, nor strength enough, nor steadfastness of purpose sufficient to see all these things through to their full development. If we endeavor to keep them all it is certain that all of them alike must suffer, and that we shall only fail in all directions rather than succeed in a few. Yes, life is a matter of making choices” (11f).

The preacher used the words of Jesus to the rich young ruler to illustrate the truth that in the matter of trying to serve God and hold onto his riches, “the Master told him that day that the one thing or the other must die; there was not love enough in man’s heart for both” (12).

Dr. Richards then applied this principle of not serving two masters, in a variety of ways. “In the first place we cannot choose both indolence and accomplishment, both ease and achievement. It matters not how much one may desire to reach the summit of some lofty mountain, he will never succeed by reclining in the shade at its foot and dreaming of the pleasure that would be his if only he were upon those heights. . . . Labor is the price of success.” He continued: “It is so in every department of life. No man or woman has ever become or remained strong physically without exercising the body. . . . Regular exercise, a sufficient amount of rather strenuous activity, a refusal to indulge oneself in idleness or in intemperance—these are the only means by which we can keep

the body strong and well. Physical effort is the price of physical development” (13).

Again, “It is true likewise of the mind. We cannot expect to spend our days in mental inactivity and yet to have brains which shall be worthy of the respect of our fellows. No man ever yet became well educated on fifteen minutes a day—the advertisements to the contrary. There is no other way to a well-developed mind than the way of laborious study. . . . If you would really be a scholar, a thinker above other men, you must make the choice between your studies and some other things less vital” (14).

He applied his message to “our various callings and professions,” arguing that the “man who succeeds best is in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the man who works hardest. Pre-eminence and fame do not come by accident” (14).

“Again,” he wrote, “we cannot choose the good and the bad, however much we might like to do so. We may succeed in mixing the two with some degree of seeming success for a time, but in the end we shall find that the evil has prevailed. . . . The building of character is a constant process of choosing between the beautiful and the ugly; the enduring and the transient; the evil and the good” (14f).

He then argued that “it is eternally true that the good is the enemy of the best. Life is too short and our ability too limited for us to compass all that we would in our brief day. If we make choice of even the second best on any one day, the structure which we build is by that much inferior to what it might have been. We cannot read both the worthless books and the good. In this day when volumes are pouring off the press by the thousands, the process of choosing is difficult enough at best and we cannot possibly read all. If the cheap book or trashy magazine occupies our attention, some good book must necessarily go unread. We cannot enjoy all” (15).

Similarly, we must choose between “the wholesome amusements and those which degrade as well”; between “good friends and bad”; between “honesty and dishonesty”; between “purity and impurity”; and between “noble and degrading thoughts” (15–16).

And ultimately, “we must choose between the way of selfish desire and the way of Christ.” For,

the final choice is, after all, a choice between the way of selfish desire and the way of Christ. Sin, in whatever form it shows its head, is invariably a form of selfishness. It is selfishness which makes us willing to commit any of the sins that injure our neighbor. It is selfishness

which makes us willing to commit those sins that injure our own bodies and souls, without pausing to reflect that in so doing we are bringing irreparable injury to our families, to our children, to society, and that we are wronging God Himself. It is selfishness which makes us refuse God those things which are His due. It is selfishness which makes us choose indolence rather than effort; which makes us prefer evil to good; which leads us to choose as our lifework the profession that is easiest or that seems to offer us more opportunity of fame or of fortune rather than that which, though hard, offers an opportunity for service to men and to God. However subtle the form in which it presents itself, the choice always narrows itself down to this. On the one side there is self-interest, saying, "This way there is ease and the approval of men, and good times, and perhaps gold. This way you may be of some benefit to the world without inconveniencing yourself overmuch." And on the other hand there is Christ, with His nail-pierced hands and His cross-crowned way, and with that tone of authority which our hearts recognize in spite of themselves when we pause long enough to listen. He says: "No man can serve two masters. He that will be greatest among you, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." Which master will you choose?

There is, of course, much that could be commended in this discourse. Indeed, one might appropriately feel convicted of wasting time and effort on those things that really are not important or are even harmful. However, what struck us as we read the message was this: Where was the gospel? What was distinctly Christian about this sermon? Was there anything in this message that could not have been preached by a promoter of the Social Gospel, or by a denier of the substitutionary atonement? Notice that though there is not an explicit denial of sin as being rebellion against God, the minister emphasized sin as being selfishness—not exactly the type of message one would expect from one standing in the line of Puritans and Scottish Presbyterians.

But, of course, Dr. Richards was not standing solidly in the line of Puritans and Scottish Presbyterians. Even though that was his doctrinal heritage, and even though he did profess belief in many of the doctrines of the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms, and even though he was not what was considered to be a theological liberal, nevertheless, his perspective

represented a diversion from historic Southern Presbyterian theology.

One way to illustrate this point is via the words of a strongly supportive biographer, who, in defending his mentor, actually gives credence to the charges of heresy against Columbia Theological Seminary. For example, Dr. Richards tried to rebut the allegation by Joseph C. Morecraft, III, a student at Columbia Seminary in the 1960s, that there were two radically different views of theology being taught there, viz., Calvinism and Neo-orthodoxy. Those holding to classic Calvinism would believe in the plenary, verbal inspiration of the Bible, inerrant and infallible in the original manuscripts. President Richards' response was as follows: "We do not have the original manuscripts, and in dealing with those we do have, we believe that the teaching of the Bible as a whole, when fully read and understood under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is the Word of God to us."⁶ Please note that there is no affirmation of the nature of the particular words of Scripture, but only of the Bible as a whole; and furthermore, that there is no affirmation that the Bible objectively speaking is the Word of God, but that it "is the Word of God to us" only after we have read and understood it. The defense by the seminary president was basically a concession that yes, in point of fact, many on the Columbia faculty were indeed Neo-orthodox. As another example, a woman wanted to give a gift to the seminary on this condition: "The institution would continue to teach that the Bible is the Word of God, not part of the Word of God, and part of the word of man, or that it becomes the word of God to the individual." Dr. Richards negotiated with this woman so that she agreed to change the stipulation to the following: that "the view of inspiration of Scripture at Columbia be that taught in the *Confession of Faith* of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.) in 1944." The biographer goes on to note: "There is no record of a final resolution to the discussion. Indeed, no commitments could have been made permanently unless they were carefully and legally restricted. The *Confession of Faith* has been rewritten and revised since that time."⁷ Again, if there was no theological disagreement, then why the necessity to negotiate the wording?

In point of fact, Dr. Richards himself confessed his view as being a belief "in the total infallibility of Scripture as a guide to faith and to morals, which I understand to be the teaching of our standards, but that I did not think this necessarily meant that every individual word of Scripture was to be taken literally as it stands. This I believe to be the correct view of Scripture. It is a view which I characterized by saying that I believed in

6. As quoted in James Davison Philips, *Faithful Servant: The Life & Times of James McDowell Richards* (Nashville: Providence House Publishers, 2004), pp. 75–76.

7. *Faithful Servant*, p. 70.

the doctrinal inerrancy of Scripture insofar as all matters of faith and practice are concerned.”⁸

Squaring that view of inspiration and inerrancy with the Westminster Standards does not seem possible. The Confession of Faith, I.4 explicitly says that the Holy Scripture “is to be received, because it is the word of God.”

Or consider a Christmas message that Dr. Richards preached December 1946 on radio’s *The Presbyterian Hour*. The climax of the message came when, in quoting a British minister, he declared, “When a wrong wants righting, a work wants doing, or a truth wants preaching, or a continent wants opening, God sends a baby into the world to do it. That is why, long ago, a baby was born in Bethlehem.”

Really? That’s the reason why Jesus was born in Bethlehem? There is simply no way that those who held to Reformed thought, including the Southern Presbyterians of the nineteenth century, would have approved of such a notion.

A forthcoming biography of a Columbia Seminary graduate from the 1950s contains the following assessment:

J. McDowell Richards was regarded as conservative; but, according to Morton Smith, Dr. Richards was willing to tolerate in the seminary the wide variety of views found throughout the denomination. Another student from the 1950s contended that Dr. Richards believed that the Bible contains errors; furthermore, he was “an honest churchman who felt that the seminary should not be out of step with the denomination. Thus he progressively changed the character of the faculty, to drift toward liberalism more and more”—to match the drift of the Southern Presbyterian Church.⁹

Dr. Richards was not a flaming liberal. He disagreed with much of the theology being taught by the professors in his seminary. This fact was confirmed by Joseph Morecraft, who, during a visit with Dr. Richards after his retirement, asked him point-blank whether he agreed with the views of the professors which Dr. Morecraft had pointed out as heretical; Dr. Richards said, “No.”¹⁰ He certainly would have professed doctrines such as the Trinity, the deity of Christ, His death on the cross, His bodily resurrection, and the necessity of believing in and accepting Him. And there was enough gospel language in his messages for the elect to be comforted and edified. But at the same time, his messages as a whole did not present the gospel with crystal clarity—a fact illustrated by means of the

representative sermon that was in this collection of pulpit messages from 1943.

THE SECOND SERMON

The second sermon, “Behind the Scenes of Suffering,” based on Job 23:3, 4, was by Richard Thomas Gillespie, pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Thomasville, and formerly pastor of Atlanta’s Rock Springs Presbyterian Church. His B.A. degree was from Presbyterian College. He received an M.A. from Emory University and a B.D. from Columbia Theological Seminary. During his time pastoring in Thomasville, he was granted a leave of absence in Fall 1939, in order to start work on a doctorate in theology at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia—a degree he completed in 1947. Meanwhile, he had vacated the Thomasville pulpit in 1944, in order to become Candidate Secretary of the PCUS Board of World Missions. In 1950, he became homiletics professor at Columbia Theological Seminary until 1956, when he went back into the pastorate.¹¹ His late father, also named Richard Thomas Gillespie, had been President of Columbia Seminary immediately prior to the tenure of J. McDowell Richards.

Early in the message, Gillespie alluded to the world war: “Surely once again we have come to one of those convulsive hours in the life of men and nations when the cry is going up from many hearts, ‘Oh that I knew where I might find him!’ It is not unnatural that we should turn to the book of Job for light in our puzzling perplexity” (21).

Gillespie dealt with the answers given by Job’s “comforters”; and spoke of a minister from Bournemouth, England, who declared to the people from the pulpit

8. Dr. J. McDowell Richards, *As I Remember It: Columbia Theological Seminary 1932–1971* ([Decatur, Ga.]: CTS Press, 1985), 74–75.

9. Frank J. Smith, *God’s Man from Brooklyn: The Story of a Twentieth-Century Minister* (forthcoming). Further confirmation of the leftward theological direction can be seen by consulting a series published by the denominational press, *The Presbyterian Presence: The Twentieth-Century Experience*. See James H. Moorhead, “Redefining Confessionalism: American Presbyterians in the Twentieth Century,” in *The Confessional Mosaic: Presbyterians and Twentieth-Century Theology*, ed. Milton J. Coalter, John M. Mulder, and Louis B. Weeks (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 71; John M. Mulder and Lee A. Wyatt, “The Predicament of Pluralism: The Study of Theology in Presbyterian Seminaries Since the 1920s,” in *The Pluralistic Vision: Presbyterians and Mainstream Protestant Education and Leadership*, ed. Milton J. Coalter, John M. Mulder, and Louis B. Weeks (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 42, 47–48.

10. Joseph C. Morecraft, III, telephone interview, August 17, 2018.

11. Lillian Britt Heinsohn, *Saints and Sinners: The History of the First Presbyterian Church, Thomasville, Georgia* (N.p.: n.p., n.d. [1967]), 168.

that “their nation’s sufferings are the judgments of God. He reminds them that the people have made Sunday a day for going to the beach and for other motor travel, but that now there is no motor fuel, and the beaches are barred to secure them from invasion. He says that they have left the churches half empty, and that now many of them are in ruins. He says that they have ignored the ringing of church bells and that now they cannot be rung except to warn of mortal danger.” Gillespie acknowledged “that in some sense at least, the dreadful things we see across the face of the earth are the judgments of God on a ‘wicked and adulterous generation.’” He also quoted Dr. John A. McKay of Princeton Theological Seminary, who said: “Calm reflective thought cannot fail to come to the conclusion those psychopathic men and nations that have plunged the world into the present distress, are the children, albeit the monstrous children, of Christian democratic nations. Nations which today are engaged in conflict with these powers, and who we hope may win the victory over them, must nevertheless admit to the paternity of those terrible sons We are listening today to the outraged voice of history” (23).

However, for Gillespie, the answer of Elihu at the end of the book of Job is more accurate than the advice proffered by Job’s three friends, by maintaining that with regard to Job, “God is the God of discipline—discipline not in the sense of punishment, but in the sense of instruction and training.” Even though Job was “a ‘perfect and upright’ man . . . and ‘one that feared God, and turned away from evil,’” because he had “never known poverty nor want nor affliction, he had not truly known life” (23).

Gillespie continued:

We can set it down that it is only when a man has been reduced to the essentials that he can truly understand life. About a hundred years ago, the New England philosopher, Henry David Thoreau, was so convinced of this that he went out to the shores of Walden Pond to live in solitude for two years. “I went out to the woods,” he says in his *Walden*, “to front only the essential facts of life, and to see if I could not learn what it had to teach. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live sturdily and so Spartanlike as to put to rout all that was not life, to reduce life to its lowest terms and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience.” Toyohiko Kagawa, who has come to the depths of simple living in another way, has this to say: “There is nothing more exhilarating than to walk through the world unencumbered. If possessions

abound there is a haunting fear they may be stolen. If you are beautifully gowned you worry lest your garments be soiled. If you are of high rank you are anxious lest you may be thrown down. If you pride yourself on being erudite you are cut to the quick if someone makes light of you. Stripped to the skin! Stripped to the skin! That is the way to walk.” (24)

We’re all familiar with Thoreau and his thoroughly heterodox views. But who was Toyohiko Kagawa? Born in 1888, he was converted to Christianity by Southern Presbyterian missionaries and baptized in 1904, and later studied at Princeton Theological Seminary. He was a social reformer given over to mysticism. He argued for the necessity of Christianity—but what kind of Christianity was it? In his book *Christ and Japan*, he wrote:

Are not the economic chaos and the unemployment crisis which today have plunged the nations of the West into unspeakable agony, directly due to the fact that the peoples of these lands have wandered away from Christ’s way of life? If men everywhere gave Christ the right of way, toiled as he toiled, loved purity as he loved it, devoted themselves to a service motivated by love and had his passion for peace, would the present problem of unemployment and this economic distress have come upon the world?

The love-divorced reverence of Shinto, the love-divorced other-worldliness of Buddhism and the love-divorced Confucian way of the golden mean doomed me to pass my boyhood in tears. Today the nations of the West are weeping. Why these tears? The cause is clear. Devotion to doctrine stifles love. Scientific civilization crowds love out of life. The economics of capitalism makes love an alien. . . .

If looked upon simply as a compilation of doctrine, the Bible is a dead book. The mission of Christianity in Japan is to put the Bible into life. This is not to say that its doctrine is bad. If it interprets God’s love, well and good. When, however, doctrine hides the love of God, and entangles us in a maze of theological theories, Japan is bored by it. Japan is famished for the love of God. She yearns for the Cross.

Unfortunately the Protestant church is giving the nation a Christianity which makes the pulpit and preaching central. Japanese youth, dissatisfied with this emphasis, are drifting away from the church. Their recent flight to communism is caused by this situation. The

communists are bent on realizing love in a social order based on materialism and buttressed by violence as its compelling force. To this the youth of Japan responds. They are on the wrong road. But they will positively not return to a Christianity which deals only in doctrine. It was their recoil from this doctrine that drove them into the communistic fold.

Moreover, doctrine and individualistic Christianity must be held responsible for the spread of materialistic communism in the nations of the West. Needless to say Christ is not responsible for this. It is because Christians have not made redemptive love a living reality in every phase of their lives, and have failed to realize it in all social relations. The over-emphasis on individualism has brought on the present-day phenomenon of a chastising communism that is teaching the church social love.

In Kagawa's view,

It goes without saying that such a social and economic movement as this is not the whole of Christianity. God's love is revealed not only in the social order but in the life of every individual. The love of God ministers to the individual intellect. It ministers to man's emotions, as in religious art. It ministers to the will of the individual in such virtues as self-control, temperance, courage, diligence, forbearance, love, loyalty and the realization of his highest self. Moreover, it gives an assurance of the immortality of the soul and furnishes for the individual various metaphysical and mystical experiences. I reject none of these individual elements.

I simply insist that these strictly individual experiences of God's grace are not enough. The social life of our day is more complex than any aggregation of individuals. As the correlated activity of five fingers is greater by far and more fundamental than the aggregate activity of each individual finger, so it is not enough to save only the individual and set up no principles for the social order. Unlike Buddhism, the religion of Jesus teaches not only grace for the individual; it also postulates the Kingdom of God. Christ revealed not only the God of creative but of redemptive love.

Christ is able to save not only the individual but society as well. How then can society be saved? By actually realizing, through the development of the cooperative movement, the brotherhood-love and the socialized-love which Christianity in various forms conserved across a period of nineteen hundred years. Then, if we

utilize on an international scale, and in the interests of world peace, the benefits derived from such cooperative effort, war will be definitely eliminated from the life of mankind.¹²

Gillespie's use, in the midst of World War II, of a Japanese writer might have seemed unusual for an American audience—even though that author had been imprisoned before the war in Japan for his pacifism and opposition to militarism, and had warned America about Japan's imperialistic intentions. But what is particularly jarring is that Gillespie utilized a staunch supporter of the social gospel in a sermon preached in a modest-sized city (population about 13,000) in Southwest Georgia, in the middle of the Bible Belt. Kagawa's gospel was no gospel at all—there was no atonement and no reconciliation with God; the individual application was man-centered (meeting the individual's needs and feelings of guilt), not appeasing the wrath of God. As he wrote in 1929,

Why, then, are sinners forgiven? The thought of Christ's atonement as something resembling barter or exchange of commodities is not current in these days. The atonement means a re-creation in which "self" is melted in the perfect crucible called Christ. When the new creation begins, sin is suddenly dissolved and disappears in just the same way that iron and copper are melted in the electric furnace. It is in this sense that I conceive the love of God to have been revealed. Love means, then, exactly this, that God does make new creations.¹³

Toward the close of the message, Gillespie declared that God's "final word is a word of love—the Cross!"; and then quoted from a poem/hymn, "In the Cross of Christ I Glory": "... the cross of Christ ... Towering o'er the wrecks of time; All the light of sacred story Gathers round its head sublime." That piece of poetry had been penned by John Bowring, a nineteenth century British diplomat, polymath, polyglot, linguist, and political economist who "was among the most famous Unitarians of his time." He was involved in radical politics, including association with Jeremy Bentham. He was also a devotee of Romanticism. Even though he and Lord Byron never

12. Toyohiko Kagawa, *Christ and Japan*, trans. William Axling (New York: Friendship Press, 1934), 111–12, 120–21, 124–25. The Kagawa reference made by Gillespie can be found in James H. Franklin, *The Never Failing Light* (New York: Missionary Education Movement of the United States and Canada, 1933), 77; which itself was quoting from William Axling, *Kagawa* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1932), 142.

13. Toyohiko Kagawa, *Love the Law of Life*, trans. J. Fullerton Gressitt (Chicago/Philadelphia/Toronto: The John C. Winston Co., 1929), 58.

met, “through correspondence he influenced Byron to go fight for the liberation of Greece. When Byron died his body was consigned to Bowring in a cask of rum.” Through his efforts, Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s opium-induced *Kubla Khan* was popularized.¹⁴

Gillespie’s thinking was also revealed in his doctoral thesis, which dealt with the three great missionary conferences of the early-twentieth century—Edinburgh (1910), Jerusalem (1928), and Madras (1938)—gatherings which were, in measure, run in tandem with the ecumenical movement, and where greatly divergent views came to expression.¹⁵ Consider the following examples. Gillespie expressed great appreciation for Hendrik Kraemer as helping him to formulate his views on modern missions and the notion of the kingdom of God; Kraemer was Barthian in his approach. In dealing with two contradictory positions as to how to evaluate Hinduism—the idea “that there were elements in the Hindu faith which paved the way for the preaching and teaching of the Gospel” and the idea that “Hinduism was composed of nothing but beggarly and pagan elements which must needs be swept away before the Gospel of Christ could be preached”—Gillespie averred that the truth “is probably to be found not in either extreme but somewhere in a middle position.” He made several favorable references to Toyohiko Kagawa, as well as others with questionable theology. He concluded by saying that the “institutional,” the “social,” and the “eschatological” concepts are equally significant: “no one

is more important than the others. They are all three essential to an understanding of the relationship which exists between the Kingdom of God and the modern Missionary Movement.”¹⁶

So, even though Gillespie posited that we can find God in “His works of judgment, or discipline, and, ultimately, redemption” (25), what kind of redemption did he have in mind? Whatever kind of redemption it was, it was evidently capable of making common cause with a broad ecumenical program and of embracing conferences in which there were presentations by liberals such as Henry Sloane Coffin. Though Gillespie certainly would not have denied that men must believe in Jesus for salvation, the strong emphasis in his doctoral thesis was that of including a social gospel component with that message.

This hybrid way of thinking was anticipated in his master’s thesis, completed just a few years previously, during his tenure in Thomasville.¹⁷ Written about and in honor of his father, this work attributed the older Gillespie’s “fruitfulness” as being “due in large measure to the fact that his life was based on a definite theology.” However, noting that his father “was a strict adherent of the Calvinistic system,” he commented that his father “might have given more credence to insights from other points of view.”¹⁸

The young Gillespie affirmed that “to meet the needs of youth today the church’s educational program must be based on a theology that will give it coherence and unity and that will keep the church true to her divine mission.” But, what was the nature of that theology? Gillespie quoted with approbation Professor Edgar S. Brightman, a Methodist minister who taught at Boston University; and, though he did not specifically embrace Brightman’s strange views (he was a progenitor of the movement called Boston Personalism, and believed in a God who is limited), nevertheless, why would Gillespie rely on a source like that? Similarly, Gillespie quoted John A. Mackay, president of Princeton Theological Seminary, who was a missiologist committed to ecumenism. According to a review in a Jesuit journal of Mackay’s *A Preface to Christian Theology* (1942), “the book is patently the result of the combined influence” of Søren Kierkegaard as well as Blaise Pascal and Fedor Doštovskiy.¹⁹

From all appearance, Gillespie regarded himself as a conservative, in contrast and in opposition to flaming liberals. As a matter of fact, in his doctoral thesis, he referenced the condemnation by the 1935 PCUS General Assembly of the radical volume *Rethinking Missions* (1932), as being a denial of the gospel.²⁰ But his

14. Alan Rushton, “Sir John Bowring,” *Dictionary of Unitarian and Universalist Biography*; Philip Bowring, *Free Trade’s First Missionary: Sir John Bowring in Europe and Asia* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2014), 47–48, cited in “John Bowring,” Wikipedia.

15. Richard Thomas Gillespie, “Edinburgh, Jerusalem, and Madras in the Light of Kingdom Concepts: A Study of the Official Literature of the Modern Missionary Movement as Related to Various Concepts of the Kingdom of God” (PhD thesis, Union Theological Seminary [Virginia], 1947).

16. Gillespie, pp. xii, 202, 346, 427, 442, 497, 513.

17. Richard Thomas Gillespie, “The Life and Work of Richard T. Gillespie in the Field of Christian Education” (master’s thesis, Emory University, 1938).

18. “The Life and Work of Richard T. Gillespie,” 201. Curiously, the author quoted with favor Pope Pius XI: “Christian Education comprehends the whole sphere of human life, both earthly and spiritual, both intellectual and moral, both individual, domestic and social; not to diminish it in any way, but to elevate, regulate and perfect it, according to the example and doctrine of Christ” (199). Why not refer to a Reformed thinker in order to speak of Christian Education?

19. “The Life and Work of Richard T. Gillespie,” 202–04; Clement Du Muth, S.J., “Review of John A. Mackay, *A Preface of Christian Theology*,” *Theological Studies* 3.1 (February 1942).

20. “Edinburgh, Jerusalem, and Madras in the Light of Kingdom Concepts,” 480–83.

“conservatism” was more akin to neo-orthodoxy. In subtle ways, Gillešpie’s thinking was being influenced by not only Barthianism but by the social gošpel and the ecumenical movement.

This sermon which he preached around 1943, in and of itself, is not heretical (and therefore the laity in the pew might very well have been edified by it rather than alarmed). But, it was significantly different from the type of sermon that would have been preached in a previous generation. And though it was not an exploding bomb or a flame thrower, in inconspicuous and quiet ways it undermined the traditional understanding.²¹

THE THIRD SERMON

The third sermon, “On Making Your Faith Your Own,” based on Psalm 63:1 (“O God, thou art my God”), was preached by William Marion Elliott, Jr., Ph.D., D.D., pastor of the Druid Hills Presbyterian Church in Atlanta. He graduated from Park College (B.A.) and Louisville Theological Seminary (B.D.), was honored with a Doctor of Divinity degree by Davidson College in 1937, and earned a Ph.D. at the University of Edinburgh in 1938.

Dr. Elliott began his message by saying, “Here is religion of personal experience. These are more than a theological admission; they are a personal confession. The psalmist is saying here that his faith in God is no academic thing, but a vital, personal relationship.” However, even among professing Christians, there are many who “could not join the psalmist in his confession. They belong to the church, they help to support its work, they take part in its worship, and they subscribe to all the basic Christian doctrines, but their faith has never taken hold of them in any vital way. Their religion is institutional, or liturgical, or theological, but it is not personal” (29).

The Atlanta minister quoted from George Eliot, G. K. Chesterton, Frederick Faber, and others in arguing for the personal nature of faith. He cited Dr. John Bailie, who said: “Our doctrines about God are always secondary to our direct finding of God in the realities of our experience.... God does not communicate with us: He does something far batter—He communes with us. Not the communication of propositions, but the communion of spirits is the last word about divine revelation” (30). And he followed that quotation with a poem: “Though Christ a thousand times In Bethlehem be born, If He’s not born in thee Thy soul is still forlorn. The Cross on Calvary Will never save thy soul; The cross in thine own heart Alone can make thee whole!” Dr. Elliott set forth four ways by which we can get this kind of faith: “*First, we must want this experience.*” “*Second,*

we must make a practice of daily communion with God.” “*Third, you must read and study the Scriptures.*” “*And fourth, we must obediently follow God’s will as He makes it known to us*” (33–34, emphases in original).

While it is true that a genuine faith must be personal and the promises of Christ must be personally appropriated, the poem from which Dr. Elliott quoted is problematic—specifically, the suggestion that the cross on which Jesus was crucified was not salvific, and that the cross “in thine own heart” can alone bring salvation. Nevertheless, in his doctoral thesis, Dr. Elliott did champion the views of John Calvin with regard to the holiness of God and the idea of the imputation of Christ’s righteousness as the basis of justification by faith alone, while finding the mystical views of Rudolph Otto to be wanting, even dangerous.²²

THE FOURTH SERMON

The fourth sermon, “God at Athens—and Everywhere,” based on Acts 17:27 (“Though he be not far from every one of us”), was preached by Dr. William Vardman Gardner, D.D., pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Atlanta. He graduated from Southwestern at Memphis (B.A.), and from Union Theological Seminary in Virginia (B.D. and Th.M.), with an honorary doctorate from Presbyterian College in 1937.

He began his message by referring to a London bomb shelter that had been blasted, and the “plaguing questions” which a minister hears these days:

Where is God? Where is He? Is He concerned about all this world carnage? If He is concerned, is He impotent to do anything about it? Church folk, those who vote “yes” for religion, are perplexed, and many of them are asking these very questions. We may dismiss the matter

21. Interestingly, two presidents of Columbia Theological Seminary, J. McDowell Richards and his biographer J. Davison Philips, also served as pastors of the Thomasville congregation.

22. William M. Elliott, Jr., “The Holiness of God in John Calvin and Rudolph Otto” (PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1938). After World War II, he published a collection of sermons, *Lift High That Banner!* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1950). Also, see his *What About the National Council of Churches?* (Dallas: Highland Park Presbyterian Church, [1960]), in which, ignoring evidence (including testimony given to the House Un-American Activities Committee), he defended that ecumenical organization against the charge that it was influenced by Communism. Perhaps this little booklet illustrates that Dr. Elliott, who was elected Moderator of the PCUS General Assembly in 1958 and pastored prestigious churches in Atlanta and Dallas, can be characterized as being an “establishment” man—one who doesn’t rock the boat. If that is an accurate assessment, then one would expect his preaching similarly would not step on toes or demonstrate the piercing type of message of a previous generation.

by saying that this is another evidence of spiritual illiteracy, but still the mind wonders and the heart is lonely. Darkness is gathering. Hearts are deluged with fear. Faith in God clearly has deadly foes to meet. What are we to do? Is there any light color to be found on the shroud of black that a sorrowing world is wearing? (37)

Dr. Gardner had two major points. The first was Paul's Evidences for God. The first evidence is the existence of the world itself, including the principles of cause and effect and of design. The second evidence is the existence of man. Even though man has "his seamy side" ("What a spectacle it is to see our world of men at the edge of a canyon of engulfing fire, and men ready to push men into it and then to be pulled in themselves"), nevertheless, he is the workmanship of God. "How far then is God from us? No further than our own redeemed hearts and lives! Just as close as our own selves, creatures made by God and for God. This impressed Paul and it impresses us—mother love and sacrifice, heroism and brotherhood, the noble and the true—all of them spiritual values within man" (40). The third, and strongest, evidence was that of Jesus and resurrection. "Paul was assured that God raised Christ from the dead. He died for our sins and rose again for our justification. This assurance was the corner stone of Paul's life and doctrine. It is also the strong arm of Christendom." Furthermore, Paul "is very sure that if this foundation of the Christian creed be shattered, then God's wonder-working power is gone. The apostle does not argue that fact here, he simply declares it. God 'hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.' In the risen Christ God was near us in friendship, and with us as the giver of life" (41).

The second major point was, What Are the Practical Issues for Us? The preacher averred:

If God is "not far from every one of us" the truth ought to mean a comradeship with all men. Paul said as much, "And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth." The issue is clearly stated: The circle of God's care is drawn so as to include all men. You and I have been zealous to proclaim the supernatural in religion. We have been pathetically diffident to proclaim the supernatural [sic] in religion. Thus, our holy religion has become confined and exclusive. It must be expansive.... Shamefully, let us confess that we have sought by our silence to imprison the presence of God. We have created social limits, national limits, racial and creedal limits. We might as well try to break up the Pacific Ocean into allotments. God's presence and

care are as broad as life. No man has an orphaned place in the heart of God. Yes, "God is not far from every one of us," and that should mean a new missionary passion in our church that will force us to trumpet that in Him "there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all." In a day when our loyalties are being nationalized, let us who have named the Lord as our God see Him as the God of all nations (42–43).

The pastor of First Pres mentioned Pastor Martin Niemoeller, a heroic figure in Nazi Germany who "refuses to bow his knees and sell his soul" and who was then in a concentration camp—a reminder of the ongoing world war and the events in Hitler's regime.

Dr. Gardner said:

Today one sees the multitude who have turned from the worship of God to the worship of self. They are bowing at the altar of their own idolatry and receiving only a benediction of despair. Therefore, let us boldly declare that only the gospel of Christ, personally received and socially applied, will change us and our staggering world. It will restore the broken fragments of shattered homes. It will emancipate our imprisoned wills and lives. It will make sober men of drunkards. It will make honest men from crooks in high and low places. It will stop war and establish brotherhood. It will create tolerance and force us to justice. It will turn men from self to God. Thus changed by the gospel and inspired by Him who is ever near us, a new passion for evangelism ought to impel us. With full assurance let us plan and pray and work, ever conscious that there are forces loose in our land which may make our civilization but a memory (44–45).

Of course, there is much in this paragraph that is true. Certainly the gospel has both personal and societal application. Surely the gospel is able to reform men's lives. Most definitely the gospel has the power to bring about peace.

But, what is missing is an explanation of what the gospel actually is—particularly in terms of its divine aspects, viz., the appeasing of God's wrath and His reconciliation with sinners. Also not present in the message is the explanation of how and why Christ's resurrection—a truth which Dr. Gardner unequivocally affirms—figures into our justification.

And the fact that the full understanding of the gospel is missing is especially significant given the questionable sentiment previously in the sermon, in which he

suggests that in addition to eliminating social limits, national limits, and racial limits, we must also eliminate creedal limits—a statement which hints at a church that is not defined by doctrine.

THE FIFTH SERMON

The fifth sermon, “Christian Viewpoints,” based on three texts, was preached by Cecil Asbury Thompson, who served as pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Valdosta from 1938 to 1947. He graduated from the University of Florida and then Columbia Theological Seminary. When he went to Valdosta, he brought his new bride Mary, daughter of the late president of Columbia Seminary, Richard T. Gillespie, Jr. Thompson would eventually go back to Columbia as a professor of homiletics.

Thompson’s first point was “Look Out!”, taken from Philippians 2:4. He began this way: “Christianity is missionary, universal, world-wide. Its attitude is outward. It is a door that opens outward. It has large windows that look outward.” Thompson continued: “Christianity opposed all that smacks of the narrow, the selfish, the stagnant, and self-complacent. It is the wine that constantly demands new skins” (49–50).

His second point was “Look Ahead!”, based on Luke 9:62. “God is challenging us always to live for the future. The Christian church even in a turbulent, transient time such as ours needs to bring out the telescope of faith and look into the future. How vain are the past and the present if there be nothing prepared for the days to come!” Thompson decried the “tendencies of looking back and looking about” as being “constant threats to personal spiritual development of the individual Christian and to active spiritual expansion of the church. Too many times the church has failed by harking back to a noble past or to empty traditions, or looking about in other directions than that of saving souls and preaching the gospel” (51–52). Of course, Thompson did not specify what he meant by the attack on the church’s “noble past” or “empty traditions.” Is it possible that he was driving a wedge between traditional church doctrine and practice, and the preaching of the gospel?

His third point was “Look Up!”, based on Psalm 123:1. The preacher pondered:

I wonder what David would say in our day and world when things are rocking and reeling. There is much in your world and mine that is disquieting and that causes us to be cast down. To look out over the sea of strife today is enough to make anyone heartsick and spiritually disquieted.

I pity the people today who can see nothing but the world and the things that are happening in the world and who never behold the Unseen on High. I pity those today who hear nothing but the hourly broadcast of the world’s discouraging and disintegrating catastrophes and never hear the triumphant news from an eternal throne that speaks of everlasting victory of righteousness against evil, of salvation, and life, and faith, and hope. This unchanging Word of God continually bids us LOOK UP...

When the kings and rulers of the nations of the earth once more look up, reason and enlightenment and peace will come. Not only throughout all the Old Testament history but on almost every page of the New Testament and in the life of Jesus and the early apostles, we see the reality of this upward look (53–54).

As noted by Dr. Morton H. Smith in a 2005 telephone interview, Professor Thompson was regarded as a warm-hearted evangelical, but not as much of a scholar—an evaluation that is illustrated by this sermon.

THE SIXTH SERMON

The sixth sermon, “Debtors to All,” was based on three passages: John 17:11; Galatians 3:26–28; and Ephesians 4:4–6, 25. The preacher was Vernon Seba Broyles, Jr., pastor of the North Avenue Presbyterian Church in Atlanta. Dr. Broyles graduated from Davidson College and received his B.D. and Th.M. from Union Theological Seminary in Virginia.

He began his message by speaking of how, during the ongoing war, “our hearts and minds are filled with invitations to hate and despise and distrust our fellow man, the man across the street and across the sea.” However,

Surely it is more imperative than ever before in recent generations for the universal, inclusive gospel of Christ to be preached, for the fact of the holy and universal church of Christ to be kept before all men and declared among all races and nations and individuals.

There is much talk today about winning the peace—most of it unthinking. Nothing can win the peace but a brotherhood in which *all* men share—and there is no such thing outside Christ. Outside of Christ you will witness revenge, reprisal, hatred—seeds from which will flow the next generation’s war.

Today God’s judgment on history and on nations is raging. Read Amos 1 and 2 for a picture of the impartiality

of this judgment. In the light of this holy judgment there comes to the Christian church an urgent and realistic challenge to give its message of hope to the men and women and children who make up our nations—to you and to me, and to all like us of all colors and classes and races and nations (59–60).

The minister sounded a “twofold note in this urgency.” First, men and women are in need, as they are experiencing “a deep abyss of loss, fear, despair.” One problem is that of “providing a common denominator for men of different cultures and nations that they may sit down in peace.... We must preach the universal gospel as the necessary thing for such a world as this and for such a time as now—to make it perfectly clear that Jesus Christ is sufficient for every need, of any person, and that those who are His are bound in the fellowship of Christian love, regardless of barriers of race or nation, of peace or war” (60).

Secondly, the church is under pressure.

The church of Christ, you as an individual Christian, must witness to God’s whole truth everywhere or suffer spiritual death. You must witness to the universal church as the Body of Christ who loves all men and who welcomes all who confess Him.

Today there is acute danger that we shall be tempted to narrow our witness; to limit our ideas of brotherhood by the barrier of war; to hate and despise our fellow Christians of Japan, Germany, and Italy.

We must face the fact that the breaking of our sense of fellowship in this way excludes no one from God’s presence but ourselves. You can exclude no one but yourself from the presence of God. In each country there is a body of believers, seeking to do God’s will—aligning themselves with their government as conscientiously as do many Christians here. With these Christians there must be maintained the fellowship of the Body of Christ. The Christian denies his Lord when hatred and the spirit of revenge drive from him his sense of the universal church and so drive him from the universal and eternal church of Christ (60–61).

The preacher noted that the holy catholic church referenced in the creed is not the Roman Church. Nevertheless, “This holy catholic church includes everyone accepting Jesus as Redeemer and Lord,” and “includes Roman, Greek, Protestant, German, Japanese, English, Chinese, Russian, and American branches. It is

The Church, knowing no barriers of denomination” or “of race or of nation or of birth or of talents.” He went on to contend:

If you are not interested in and praying for the conversion of the Japanese, your interest in the Chinese is probably political. If you are consigning the Germans to hell, why should you be interested in giving to save Brazilians and Africans? If your likes and dislikes are simply a matter of political and economic alignments, then why worry about preaching Christ at all? Christ gave and gives no economic panaceas—though hunger was everywhere. He gave and gives no political manifesto, though human liberty was a joke. He gave no plan for the rearrangement of society, though the race was enslaved and conquered, yet this gospel has inspired more men and movements to eradicate human ills and to establish brotherhood than any other force in history, and the method has been the simple proclamation, *everywhere*, of the things seen and heard of Jesus (61–62).

He followed with a quotation from church historian E. T. Thompson, as follows:

Our duty is to witness for Jesus, who reveals God’s love, God’s will for all mankind; who by His life and by His death offers to save men from sins which threaten to destroy the individual soul in hell, and to plunge our civilization into the darkness of the abyss. From the heart of suffering, tortured humanity there comes the cry, What must I do to be saved? And to us who have learned to see God in the face of Jesus Christ, to us only, there has been given the answer (62).

Broyles declared that “the rising tide of nationalism is leading many to feel that since you can’t weigh and show results of the Church’s ministry, the preaching of the gospel can wait till a more convenient season.” However, despite all the difficulty and seeming impossibility of preaching the Christian gospel, she must continue to do her duty (63).

Notice that Broyles’ quotation of Thompson implies Amyraldianism, as well as a watering down of the effectiveness of Jesus’ atonement. Biblically speaking, Jesus’ death doesn’t merely provide for the possibility of salvation, but actually saves His elect. Nevertheless, he was a minister who boldly preached the necessity of believing in Jesus. As attested by his son, he believed that the Bible is the Word of God and that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior. He was involved in ecumenical activities, including helping to found the Federal Council of

Churches, and participating in the Church World Service, a post-World War II relief agency which included participation by the Catholic Church as well as Protestant churches. However, at least in 1954, he opposed the proposed three-way merger of the PCUS, the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., and the United Presbyterian Church in North America.²³

THE SEVENTH SERMON

The seventh sermon, "They That Worship Him," based on John 4:24, was preached by John Butt Dickson at the Morningside Presbyterian Church in Atlanta. Mr. Dickson was educated at Gettysburg College and Columbia Theological Seminary. He served the Morningside congregation from 1937 to 1943.

The message began with the lament that the current age "has minimized and is neglecting the services of public worship in the Christian church." The preacher asserted that

we have learned from the students of primitive religions and the anthropologists that one of the fundamental characteristics of men was the sense of a presence or only a force, apart from his friends and fellows tribesmen, whom he must satisfy by foods, offerings, attention, etc. He felt that his existence as a man or a part of a family or village would be hazardous without this effort on his part. Thus, there may have developed slowly a sense of relationship between families and tribes who would worship the same "gods" and develop the same means of approach to their deity. The cultus of worship came into being this way. In this manner, we see the ever-present urge of mankind, the most primitive and the most "advanced," attempting to pay his respects to the deity who shapes his destiny.

There is a great leap from that idolatrous worship to "respect for truth and the worship of the One who is the fountain source of all goodness, truth, and beauty. In God's message to men, the opening chapters, we see one day in seven given for re-creation, renewal, pause, rest, and worship" (67).

Dickson proceeded to speak of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well. He argued for the importance of worship: "What a curb it can be today, when the forces of evil and unrighteousness are about us, if we take the matter of worship seriously" (68). Noting the Anglo-Saxon origin of the word "worship" as denoting "worth-ship," Dickson spoke of how all the Calvinistic branches of the Reformation discarded "all of the rich pageantry and symbolism of the Roman tradition," in

accord with Jesus' words at the well, "They that worship [God] must worship him in spirit and in truth."

In spirit, we oppose that which is sensual; and in truth, we seek, by the highest wisdom of knowledge, that which man is capable of achieving only by the Spirit. Because of Calvin's view of worship, the churches which bear his name and have followed in his tradition have been sanctuaries of simplicity and with none of the aids of worship admitted. The Presbyterian tradition of spiritual worship is a natural reaction against the present tendency in many branches of the church to a more elaborate ritual and symbolism. However, the Presbyterian when he understands the meaning of his own service of worship has much that can inspire him and challenge him to greater Christian living (68).

Dickson spoke of the prominent place of the pulpit in a Presbyterian church. "The Holy Bible, the Word of God, is our rule of faith and practice." God's revelation teaches us of "His majesty, of the awful and lovely order of the universe," of "our true condition as men," "the words of faith and the meaning of peace and communion in redemption," and also challenges us "to manly and Christian living during our days here." The Spirit takes this divine revelation and applies it. "Prayer, preaching, the elements of worship generally, are only meaningless without the words of Scripture. If the believer is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever he must know the will of God and he can find it nowhere else than in Holy Scripture" (69).

The Lord's table carries the words "In Remembrance of Me," for the sacrament of communion, administered in most PCUS churches quarterly, "is a perpetual reminder of His death for our sakes and the promise of

23. Morecraft, telephone interview, August 17, 2018; Vernon Broyles, III, telephone interview, August 22, 2018; "Some Thoughts on Union," *Southern Presbyterian Journal* (December 12, 1954), 2-3. See also *In the Cool of the Evening: The Distilled Wisdom of Dr. Vernon S. Broyles, Jr.* (N.p.: [Big Canoe Chapel], n.d.), comprised of various messages which appeared as a column in *The Atlanta Constitution*. He clearly proclaimed the necessity of believing in Jesus, as when he said, "The love of God revealed in Jesus Christ will be the same. Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. In all your ways, He will be seeking you to give you His divine gifts of forgiveness and strength and hope" (1). Speaking of the apostle Paul: "He found himself reconciled God by the cross of Christ. He discovered that the fires of his hatreds were put out and that the walls which divided him from others were destroyed. He found that in Christ, enmity was destroyed and that God made a new man of him" (5). And again: "The Bible's chief interest is in reconciling man to God" (69). And again: "The central message of the Christian faith is 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.'" (377).

His undying love.” The preacher declared: “When the elements of bread and wine, accompanied by the words of the institution, are presented to and received by the sincere believer, then can he be assured of our Lord’s abiding presence in his heart.” This sacrament “is a bond of our union with Him and with each other as followers of His. It is a seal of His promise to us and a renewal of our spirit to Him. It is the assurance of His presence to us who are gathered in His name and the promise of His coming again” (69–70).

At the baptismal font “we see re-enacted the lovely drama of Christ calling the little ones unto Himself. When the parents in Christian faith bring their little one for baptism, they claim for him the blessings of the new covenant in Christ” (70).

The final element that Dickson mentioned was the offering. In light of Christ’s great sacrifice, we owe Him everything. “Therefore, as a humble believer, on the first day of the week we offer the first fruits of our blessings, which we have set aside for the glory of His name upon the earth, together with our lives to Him who is our Master and our Friend” (70).

This message does not directly speak of how our worship should be specifically ordained by Scripture—the doctrine which today we refer to as the regulative principle of worship. On the other hand, it does note the traditional Presbyterian understanding of the simplicity nature of worship and its character of “less outward glory.”

However, please note that despite this proclamation of Presbyterian principles of worship, just a few years later, in 1949, Atlanta’s Morningside Presbyterian Church completed a new church building, the architecture of which contradicted what Dickson had preached. Though the structure was Colonial-style rather than Gothic, the edifice demonstrated that there was a hankering after symbolism. In the words of a booklet on the congregation’s history:

Symbols are meant to remind us of deep truths. Knowing this, the pastor [Dr. Arthur Vann Gibson] and the Building Committee of Morningside Church asked the architect . . . to build into the church many of these “sensible signs”. The result you can today see all about you, and these symbols of our faith are constant reminders of deep and abiding truths.

24. *Morningside Presbyterian Church, Atlanta, Georgia* (N.p.: n.p., n.d. [1964]). Even though a new pipe organ was installed during Dickson’s tenure, we are certain that he would have been disappointed that the congregation rejected his affirmation with respect to worship that is in spirit and in truth.

That booklet went on to describe the numerous symbols in the building’s architecture, and concluded as follows: “It is the hope of those who planned this building that all who worship here may be reminded, wherever they look, of the deep truths of their faith, and helped in worship by these meaningful symbols.”²⁴

THE EIGHTH SERMON

The eighth sermon, “The Right Man for Rough Places,” based on selections from Acts 27, was preached by Alton Henley Glasure, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Marietta. He received an A.B. degree from North Georgia College, a B.D. degree from Columbia Theological Seminary, and an M.A. degree from the University of Georgia.

The minister spoke of the important role that one man can play—someone like George Washington. On the other hand, “Today the world is conscious of another man, the head of another nation. This man is causing the old ship of state to rock because of his totalitarian philosophy. The storms are again howling; mad destruction and death are everywhere evident. The first man saved a nation, the second is destroying nations” (74). Glasure then turned his attention to Paul and his “stormy experience.” First of all, Paul warned against the danger. Similarly, the church “has ever warned against aggrandizement, selfishness, hate, sin, immorality, and the whole field of carnal thought” (75).

Secondly, Paul comforts in the storm. Similarly, the church must not only “tenderly [warn] the people of impending danger,” but also “seek out those who heeded not, must lift up the fallen, strengthen the weak, help the helpless.” This message of being of good cheer must go out today: “We are being storm-tossed, bruised, and broken. Nations are being destroyed; governments are being upturned; our smug society may be disturbed, and the tall spires of our cosmopolitan churches may be bombed; but the message of the church will still be delivered in the streets and in the chapels, along the byways and hedges, to the simple and sincere” (75–76).

Thirdly, when the storm was over, Paul, by God’s grace, had saved himself and the crew. Paul was a big man: “Those aboard the ship were not saved by their knowledge of nautical science, nor because of the organized efforts of the crew, nor even because of the prowess of their boat. They were saved because of one man, of one purpose, one hope, one faith, one clear-cut conviction—‘I believe God’” (76–77).

The bottom line was this:

Our world today cannot be saved alone by arms, by machines, by military science, by geographical positions, or by diplomatic emissaries. We must add to these prayer, faith, hope, and a constant keeping of the eye upon the goal. Our world cannot divorce itself from the supernatural and the divine. We must depend on God (77).

This message is a classic example of how not to preach. Instead of preaching the text in its context and with respect to its redemptive-historical backdrop, the minister used this text in order to apply moralistic lessons. As is often the case with the selections in this little volume, we come back to the question: Where is the gospel?

THE NINTH SERMON

The ninth sermon, "Show Me Your Hands," based on Proverbs 19:24 ("A slothful man hideth his hand in his bosom, and will not so much as bring it to his mouth again"), was preached by Sidney Austin Gates, Ph.D., pastor of the Pryor Street Presbyterian Church, Atlanta. He graduated from the University of Louisville, received B.D., and Th.M. degrees from Louisville Theological Seminary, and his doctorate from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Dr. Gates began his message by stating, "The Bible says a great deal about hands. It contains hundreds of passages dealing with the activity rendered in the name of God. It is interesting to note that God's Book reserves its highest praise for a woman's hands, generous, tender, and kind." He went on to say:

Tolstoy ... gives us a picture of the ideal ruler. He represents this man as keeping open house and feeding those who labor with the finest food, while he gives to the lazy and indolent only crusts and crumbs. One is curious to discover just how the ruler is able to distinguish these people, and finds that as they enter the palace door they are required to show their hands. The hands that are rough and calloused are working hands, while the soft and unmarked hands tell a story of idleness and ease. It is a simple test, yet extremely effective.

There are far too many church members today who lift toward heaven hands with no callouses on them, no marks of labor for the Lord. We cannot sing lustily, "Work for the night is coming," and then fold our hands in idle acquiescence, expecting to be transported to heaven on flowery beds of ease (81).

God, according to the preacher, "wants consecrated

and active hands" and also "clean hands." That includes hands that are folded in prayer—as portrayed by Albrecht Dürer in his painting "Praying Hands." "I believe that such hands as those of the artist's friend bind the heart of the world to the throne of God. Through them the hand of God reaches ours" (82–83).

Gates appealed to the words of the Italian writer Giovanni Papini in his *Life of Christ* (1923) with respect to the hands of Jesus. At the close of the sermon, he told the story of a minister who was seeking to comfort a dying girl who had sacrificially cared for her family. When she asked, "But will He know me if I should go to Him?", the minister "noticed the calloused and bruised hands as she raised them pleadingly and he remembered that they had gotten that way in the service of her brothers and sisters, and he said, 'Yes, He will know you; just show Him your hands'" (84).

What is particularly striking in this message is that it is not even close to being exegetical. The Proverbs text was used merely as a pretext.

THE TENTH SERMON

The tenth sermon "Our Suffering Saviour," based on Isaiah 53:5–6, was preached by William Franklin Taylor, Jr. The pastor of the Reid Memorial Presbyterian Church in Augusta, he attended Davidson College and the University of Tennessee, and received a certificate from Columbia Theological Seminary.

Pastor Taylor noted that the virgin birth of Christ and His suffering constitute "the vital point" to those church patriarchs who penned the Apostles' Creed, while that statement makes no mention of Jesus' miracles.

The preacher cautioned that it is impossible to explain "in anything like adequate fashion an event so profound and so mysterious as the sufferings and death of Christ.... How can we, ... hampered as we are with finite abilities of reason, modes of thought and expression, understand such love as God has for sinful man, and such sacrifice as Christ has manifested in laying down His life for us on Calvary's cross?" Furthermore, "we cannot justly treat the sufferings and death of Jesus as some isolated event in the life of our Lord.... Christ's sufferings and death are forever and undeniably linked with that other great event, His resurrection." Indeed, "leaving Him dead in that tomb, would be to nullify all that for which He died" (89–90).

Taylor proceeded to use various Scriptural descriptions of Christ's sufferings and death: "ransom," "propitiation," "reconciliation," and "substitution." With regard to the idea of substitution, the preacher rhetorically asked: "Could language be any clearer? He bore our

penalty of guilt. He received the punishment we deserve. Christ died that we might not have to die" (92). He concluded his message this way:

And so Christ, the Son of the living God, our Saviour, has taken our punishment for us. "He was wounded for *our* transgressions, he was bruised for *our* iniquities; the chastisement of *our* peace was upon him; and with his stripes *we* are healed." May the knowledge of this lead us to fall at His feet in love and worship, to exclaim ... "Lord Jesus, I'll love you all my life for what you have done for me. Whatever you want me to do for you I'll do. I'm yours from now on" (93, emphases in original).

This message was, of course, a clear gospel presentation. However, there was one point which was questionable. In describing propitiation, he said that the word in I John 2:2 meant "'a covering' or, as used in the book of Exodus, 'mercy seat.' Christ's death is that by which God covers and therefore pardons the penitent and believing sinner" (91). Though Taylor immediately went on to say that Christ's death "is set forth as the ground upon which a righteous God can forgive a guilty sinner without in any way compromising His own righteousness," nevertheless, there does appear to be a conflating of propitiation and expiation.

THE ELEVENTH SERMON

The eleventh sermon, "God's Last and Tenderest Invitation," based on Revelation 22:17 ("And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely"), was preached by John Calvin Reid, D.D., Ph.D., pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Columbus. He graduated from Erskine College (B.A.) and Pittsburgh-Xenia Theological Seminary (B.D. and Th.M.) and received his Ph.D. from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Muskingum College awarded him an honorary doctorate in 1938. Dr. Reid authored several books, including *Reserves of the Soul, and Other Sermons* (1942); *On Toward the Goal: Sermons of Hope and Encouragement* (1949); *We Knew Jesus: A Series of Lenten Messages* (1954); *We Wrote the Gospels* (1960); *Prayer Pilgrimage through the Psalms* (1962); *The Marriage Covenant* (1967); *We Spoke for God* (1967); as well as books intended for children: *Bird Life in Wington: Sermonettes for Young Folk in Story Form* (1948); *Parables from Nature: Earthly Stories with a Heavenly Meaning* (1954); *Surprise for Dr. Retriever* (1962); *War of the Birds* (1963); and *Frisky Finds a Treasure* (1964).

In his sermon, Dr. Reid noted that though there are many invitations from God, His "tenderest invitation He has kept to the last." God's "unspeakable" love is seen in this invitation, as it is extended, as Revelation 22:15 intimates, to the "dogs, and the sorcerers, and the fornicators, and the murderers, and the idolaters, and every one that loveth and maketh a lie" (97-98).

This is a fivefold invitation. First, "The Spirit Saith, Come." Even though theology

may be too deep for you, ... in the midst of mystery and even darkness there is this inward reality—a lingering Presence which you cannot escape, and which you should not, if you could; a voice within, which in quiet church assemblies, or in the crush of sorrow, or in the hush of a midnight hour, whispers over and over again, "Come, come, come."

Call it the indwelling Christ. Call it the Holy Spirit. Call it God in the heart. It matters not. You know what it means. It is God's direct plea for your life—The Spirit saith, Come (98-99).

Secondly, "And the Bride Saith, Come." The preacher here suggested that though much of the criticism which the church was receiving may be true, nevertheless, "I am persuaded that most people who are criticising the church are doing so in a desperate effort to find a cloak for their sins and an excuse for their selfish neglect." But despite criticism, the church is the only organization that opens her door "to all who will come!" (99).

Thirdly, "And Let Him That Heareth Say, Come." This points to personal responsibility to witness.

When the church was being organized in Jerusalem, says Dr. A. Boyd Scott, there stood up one member who said, "We have all we want now, a sure scheme of salvation for ourselves. Let us furnish this upper room tastefully, and have a pipe organ in, and an expert quartette, and a nice tame minister who shall purvey to us week by week a couple of entertaining and harmless sermons ... etc., etc." But such was not Christ's program. He stood by them and said, "There is a band of painted barbarians on the bank of a river in a faraway land. There is a Negro in a mud hut beyond Carthage who has felt a drop of my blood fall upon his breast and knows not what the pain of it means." It is a rather sad fact, by the way, is it not, how easily we may be stirred for the Negroes in Africa, and how easily stirred against the Negroes in America! (100)

Fourthly, “Let Him that is Athirst Come.” By speaking of this universal thirst in the soul, God is leaving man without excuse. “You do not have to have any special preparation, no special feeling, no special anything—only the desire” (101).

Fifthly, “Whosoever Will, Let Him Come.” Dr. Reid stated: “Whosoever will”—does that include everyone? Yes, but also it *excludes* everyone who will *not!*” (102).

THE TWELFTH SERMON

The twelfth and final sermon, “The Power to Cleanse from All Unrighteousness,” based on I John 1:8–9, was preached by the volume’s editor, Francis Lloyd Ferguson Wood, D.D., pastor of the Westminster Presbyterian Church of Atlanta. He graduated from Davidson College and received his B.D. from Columbia Theological Seminary. Oglethorpe University conferred an honorary doctorate on him in 1941.

Dr. Wood, by appealing to a statement by the FBI’s J. Edgar Hoover about the rampant criminality in American life, demonstrated the sin problem. But the preacher, by quoting the text, quickly moved to “the great characteristic aim that distinguishes Christianity from every other system of religious thought on earth,” which is “to banish sin and to cleanse from all unrighteousness. The gospel lays its finger on moral evil as the primary cause of unhappiness and misery in the world. Compared with the supreme curse of human selfishness, nothing else seriously matters, and accordingly the gospel proposes to cure this inward malady of the soul” (106).

Dr. Wood noted the need to accept personal responsibility for sin rather than minimizing it. John’s epistle was dealing with Christians who had bought into the idea that God is

so great and comprehensive that He contained within Himself darkness as well as light and looked with equal complacency on the evil and on the good. To such people John declared that God is Light without any mixture of darkness, and that men can be partakers of His life only by refusing to do the works of darkness. He assured them that the power to cleanse from all unrighteousness comes from God and from Him alone. For we must not only refuse to say that we have no sin, but we must press forward to confess our sins, to carry them with shame before God for Him to cleanse. This cleansing rests upon the very faithfulness and righteousness of God. In doing it He is not indulgently breaking in upon the strict law of His nature, He is but perfecting what He began, refusing to despise the work of His own hands, fulfilling the purpose for which His Son died on Calvary’s cross (106–07).

With that as a foundation, Dr. Wood proceeded to examine various alarming conditions.

The first was “the breakdown of the home. To many Americans home is nothing more than a dormitory where they sleep at night, or a restaurant where they take their meals, or a garage to which they hurry for the family car after a busy day at school or work” (107). The minister lamented the divorce rate of one per every six marriages. “In this machine age we are unable to find time for quiet meditation and family prayers. Father is too engrossed with his business associates, mother with defense activities, sister with her friends, and brother with his athletics. Are we wise in abandoning the family altar for the family bar or a ping-pong table?”

The second issue was “the neglect and willful desecration of the Sabbath day. We have come a long way since the days of our early forefathers when it was necessary to tread deep snows with a gun on one’s shoulder to protect him from the Indians; when the church consisted of four bare walls, with little or no heat, and three-hour discourses. Yes, it’s a long way from those days of simple living to our maddening, non-stop, aspirin-conscious days” (108).

Dr. Wood quoted from the action of the 1942 PCUS General Assembly which adopted the recommendations of the Permanent Committee on Sabbath Observance, as follows:

1. That the ministers and officers of our church set a good example of reverence for and observance of the Lord’s Day.
2. That all our people be urged to be regular in their attendance upon the worship services of the church.
3. That Sunday-school teachers use their influence to have their pupils attend the morning service in the church.
4. That parents be urged to attend the church services, together with their children; that they occupy the same pew in order that “the family pew” might be restored.
5. that the use of the Lord’s Day merely for business or for pleasure be not only disapproved but also condemned.
6. That our people refrain from making purchases on the Lord’s Day, except in cases of necessity and mercy.
7. That employers, as far as possible in this present

emergency, do not require the employees to work on the Lord's Day.

8. That the pastors of all our churches be requested to read to their congregations the action of this Assembly in regard to Sabbath Observance.

Dr. Wood concluded this second point by declaring: "It is essential for righteousness that there be a day of spiritual renewal and moral re-enforcement; without it we lose our ability to distinguish between right and wrong. Like the Christians of John's day, we become confused and are apt to call good evil and evil good" (109).

The third "alarming condition" was that of drunkenness and crime. He decried the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment. He argued that the Biblical statement about wine being a mocker, and strong drink raging, "is as modern and up-to-date as though it had been written yesterday. Modern scientific discovery has proved that alcoholic liquors chemically constitute a poison, the effect of which on the human body, among other things, produces carelessness." The minister declared: "After the collapse of France, the Vichy government announced through the Associated Press that one of the main causes of France's collapse was the heavy drinking of the soldiers while the Germans were under the strictest discipline against drink. Believe me, you and I can attend Defense Rallies, we can gird ourselves as true men and women, we can buy War Bonds and Stamps, we can pay taxes until there isn't any more money to pay, and still we can lose this war and go down in shameful defeat, if we allow our men to be destroyed by liquor and prostitutes and gamblers before they ever reach the battle line!" (110)

The preacher then connected crime with drunkenness.

Do you know that seventy per cent of all the arrests made are due to liquor? That a major crime is committed every twenty-two seconds? That one out of every four homes is troubled by crime, and that one out of every thirty-seven citizens is a lawbreaker? That thirty-five people are murdered daily? That there is one death by criminal violence every forty-five seconds, so that our murder rate is twenty times greater than that of Great Britain? That the annual amount spent on vice is six hundred and twenty-eight million dollars? That our annual crime bill is fifteen billion dollars, or four hundred per cent more than the United States spends on education each year? That each month one million five hundred thousand copies of horror magazines are sold,

and about ten times as many sex magazines, magazines that deal with sex from a standpoint of unimaginable lewdness and laxity? (110-111)

After noting the personal responsibility for sin, which also had national ramifications, Ferguson Wood urged that each one must not only confess his sins, but also confess that our sins "have not come out of nothing, but out of our own being." Indeed, "To confess sin is to come to the conclusion in your heart, and freely with your lips to make the admission, that your breach of God's law, and your not loving God with your whole heart and soul and mind and strength, and your not loving every human being as yourself, is an awful thing justly charged against you as your guilt" (111).

He concluded his message with this paragraph:

America, wake up and live! God cannot endure unrighteousness in high places, nor can He condone national evils and sins, but God has the power to cleanse from all unrighteousness! As a part of this great nation are you as an individual availing yourself of God's wonderful power? Have you been washed in the blood of the Lamb? Will you not come to the Cross just now and say, "Lord, my sins are many, but I believe! I know that Thou art faithful and just to forgive! I confess my every sin and yearn to be cleansed. Take me, cleanse me, and use me to teach transgressors Thy ways, for Jesus' sake." Will you do it? Will you do it? (112)

EVALUATING THE SERMONS' CONTENTS

So, how shall we evaluate these messages? What lessons can be learned, both historical and practical? In reading through this little volume, we were struck by several things.

- (1) Impact of World War II on the messages.

One would expect that the fact of a world war would impact the preaching in some way, and, in point of fact, as have seen, this was the case. On the other hand, it is fair to note that in the vast majority of these messages, World War II was not the main theme. Rather, the ordinary themes—of salvation, of doubt, of fears, of worship, of apologetics—that would normally be the subjects of sermons, are what one finds being preached from these pulpits in 1943.

What is most significant, however, is that when matters of war and international relations are discussed, the messages were not thumping triumphalistic or nationalistic or patriotic themes, but often were warning against nationalistic and ethnic pride, and encouraging a sense of solidarity with those who were regarded as

battlefield enemies. Perhaps this prophetic dimension, which proclaimed brotherhood over American interests, is what led Dr. Wood to state in the Foreword that the “message of the Presbyterian pulpits in Georgia is ... forceful, timely, and courageous.”²⁵

(2) Not much content.

One thing is abundantly clear about these sermons, and that is their brevity. This present author was able to read through a page (containing around 400 words more or less) in about two-and-a-half minutes. Here is a list of the approximate number of pages taken up for each sermon: 7, 5, 5-1/2, 8-1/2, 7, 5-1/2, 4, 4, 4, 5, 5-1/2, 7-1/2. That would mean that the longest sermon could be preached in less than twenty-two minutes, while the shortest ones could be preached in about eleven minutes. The average number of pages was not quite six, which means that the average length of a sermon could be under fifteen minutes.

Now, it is certainly true that one can convey significant truth in a brief period, and it is most definitely the case that length does not necessarily indicate great piety or profundity. Nevertheless, in point of fact, there simply is not much content. We would also suggest that the length of these messages, as a whole, may be a good indicator that these congregations were not willing to tolerate the longer sermons of a previous generation.²⁶

(3) Not much depth.

Not only were these sermons short—they were also shallow, in contrast to the rich and deep sermons of yesteryear. It also bears noting that the people quoted were, for the most part, not well-renowned churchmen—such as Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Owen, Thornwell, Girardeau, Dabney—but rather either thinkers of dubious pedigree, or figures of popular culture.

(4) Not much exegesis.

For the most part, these sermons were not very exegetical. As noted above, some of these examples are worse than others. Of the dozen, only less than a handful could be said to demonstrate a traditional approach of giving a *detailed* explanation of the text as well as applying it.

(5) Not very focused.

In contrast to messages with a unifying theme, most of these messages seemed to be all over the place. In at least two instances, the sermon was based on three different texts, with three different themes. To use a military analogy, in this series of sermons, one hears the staccato of a burp gun (which scatters bullets in a wide spray) rather than the report of a sharpshooter's rifle.

(6) Not much theology.

Although there was some theology presented in

these sermons, classical theology was, with rare exception, missing. There was precious little discussion of the doctrine of God, of creation, of providence, of the fall of man into sin, of justification, of adoption, of sanctification, and so forth. There was no presentation of traditional doctrines such as the Five Points of Calvinism (TULIP), nor of any of the solas of the Reformation. There was no preaching of the doctrine of imputation, and when the doctrine of propitiation was mentioned, the preacher confused it with expiation. In sum, there was not much evidence that Reformed theology informed the vast majority of these messages in any meaningful way.

(7) Not very theocentric.

Not only was there not much theology in the classic sense, but the thrust of the messages was, mostly, man-centered not God-centered. There seemed to be no awareness of the Westminster Shorter Catechism #1, that man's chief end “is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.” Yes, there was exhortation to live properly, to care for one's neighbor, to show brotherhood, to take heart, and so forth. But the focus was almost always on meeting man's needs, rather than the glory of God and His expectations and demands.

A tract by J. McDowell Richards, “The Christian Sabbath in the Twentieth Century,” written probably in the 1950s, illustrates this point. While Dr. Richards acknowledged that Sabbath observance is mandated by the Fourth Commandment, nevertheless, the focus was not on why the Sabbath is important for God's glory and worship, but why God has ordained the Sabbath in order to meet man's needs. These needs include the necessity of rest, the opportunity for “the cultivation of

25. According to Beverly Ann Zink, World War II did significantly affect Southern Presbyterian preaching. Common sermonic themes included the sovereignty of God in that time of turmoil; and patriotic tones, touting the role that America would play in a post-war world. “The fears and uncertainty of a world at war tested America's faith and institutions as wartime conditions impinged upon congregations and their members. The preaching of the PCUS represented in this study [i.e., the sermons she studied] expressed a concern for the alienation existent at all levels of society, from the individual to the international, during the war. Nevertheless, these preachers sounded a note of hope: hope generated by the reaffirmation of the healing presence of God in the midst of human despair.” See her “Themes in Southern Presbyterian Preaching, 1920–1983,” in *The Confessional Mosaic: Presbyterians and Twentieth-Century Theology*, 116–20.

26. Ernest Trice Thompson notes that the “orthodox level” in the 1880s was for sermons 45 minutes in length; “in the 1890s, 40 minutes was the more accepted length; in the next decade the norm became 30 minutes, and so remained for another generation when in many pulpits it dropped to 25 and even 20 minutes.” E. T. Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South*, Vol. Three: 1890–1972 (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1973), 342.

wholesome family relationships,” the opportunity for Christian training in the home and at church in order to prevent juvenile delinquency, and protection of society from various ill effects, including high divorce rates. Even the Sabbath providing opportunity for worship is viewed from the perspective of the benefit that worship is to man: “Man is a social being, and it is written into his nature, as into the Word of God, that he must worship often in company with others if he would attain his full spiritual nature.” In the last paragraph, the seminary president wrote: “The proper observance of the Sabbath is more than a duty. It is a privilege in which lies the hope of our homes, of our nation, and of the Church for tomorrow.... Let us remember this day to keep it holy, that it may come again to be a bulwark of God’s people against the advance of secularism, a blessing to our family life, and an instrument for the spread of the Gospel throughout all the world.” All of those sentiments are true, and it is perfectly fine to use such argumentation in making a full-orbed case for Sabbath observance. However, the fundamental reason for Sabbath observance is that God has commanded it, for His own glory. That God-centered perspective is what was missing in this tract on the Sabbath, and it is what was missing in many of these dozen sermons.

(8) Not much gospel.

In one of these messages, the preacher intimated that the Roman Catholic Church was part of the universal church—thereby implying that the message of Roman Catholicism with regard to salvation is legitimate. But, of course, the Romanist message is not legitimate—the denial of justification by faith alone by the pope is a damnable heresy. One could argue, therefore, that Vernon Broyles’ presentation shows an inconsistency with respect to the gospel.

However, the problem with many of these sermons

27. The message refers to the “tragedies of war”—a reference which would suggest that this message was delivered during World War II. No year is found at the top of the message, but given that it carries a date of Thursday, October 7, the year would have to be 1943.

28. “The Peace of the Believer,” J. McDowell Richards papers, box 75, folder 10, C. Benton Kline, Jr. Special Collections and Archives, John Bulow Campbell Library, Columbia Theological Seminary.

29. We would also note the editorial by Dr. L. Nelson Bell, “What is the Gospel?”, which appeared in the *Southern Presbyterian Journal* (August 1, 1946). After noting that the gospel “is not Christian ethics” nor “morality” nor “social righteousness,” he declared: “We are amazed at the number of fine sermons which emphasize Christian ethics but which totally ignore the source of power to live such a life.” Dr. Bell’s amazement at “the number of ... sermons” which do not present the gospel, would lend credence to the observation that a number of the representative messages in this collection of sermons were indeed lacking the gospel.

is not that of an actual denial of the gospel, either explicitly or implicitly. The basic problem is that the gospel, in about half of these sermons, is simply not there. And furthermore, even when the gospel is present, it is not very fully or adequately presented.

This observation is not making the point that the doctrine of justification needs to be in every sermon (though it should often be there, as this doctrine is the heart of the gospel). But the grand scheme of redemption should always be present one way or another, forming the backdrop for the text and therefore the message, providing motivation for obedience, displaying God’s grace, affirming that all of Scripture points to Christ and finds its fulfillment in Him. That’s what was missing!

Perhaps the best confirmation of this conclusion comes by considering a message on Romans 5:1 which J. McDowell Richards prepared as part of a series of brief messages for broadcast over the radio (“Thought for the Day”), apparently in 1943.²⁷ Romans 5:1, of course, is the classic passage for the doctrine of justification by faith alone (“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”). Despite that fact, Dr. Richards did not explain what is meant by having peace with God or how it is obtained. Instead, the emphasis was rather on the believer’s experience of happiness and peace. The prayer he offered at the close also illustrates the subjective rather than objective nature of his message: “O Lord, Thou didst make us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until we rest in Thee. We thank Thee today anew for thy love which commendeth itself to us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Help us to trust Him more fully and to follow Him more completely, that through Him our longing for Thee may be satisfied and we may be at peace. We ask it in His name. Amen.”²⁸ Notice that the whole thrust was on the individual’s being able to have his psychological and spiritual needs met so that he can experience peace, and not at all on God’s wrath being appeased via propitiatory sacrifice so that the peace treaty between God and man can be effected. If Dr. Richards could not bring himself to preach the heart of the gospel when the text was Romans 5:1, there is no reason to believe that he would touch upon that subject at all.²⁹

COMPARISON TO EARLIER PCUS SERMON COLLECTIONS

One way by which to evaluate this little volume of sermons is to compare it to three other sermon collections.

The first such collection we will consider is a nineteenth-century production. Published in 1896, *Southern*

Presbyterian Pulpit featured thirty-three sermons, many of them by PCUS luminaries.³⁰ The Preface stated that there were two motives that “prompted the issue of this volume.” One was “a distinct demand for a book of practical sermons, suitable for reading in the public worship of God when conducted by ruling elders of the church.” Additionally, “it has seemed very desirable to put in permanent form some examples of the work of our Southern Presbyterian pulpit, which is, we are confident, second to none in eloquence, doctrinal purity, persuasiveness, and practical power.”

Quite a few of these messages deal directly with the gospel.³¹ Other sermons at least allude to the gospel, or impress upon the hearer the need for personal faith and repentance.³² Two other sermons are distinctly doctrinal: T. D. Witherspoon, “Not One Forgotten” (Luke 12:6), which speaks of Providence; and W. F. V. Bartlett, “The Sabbath-Day” (Isaiah 56:23), which argues extensively for the observance of the Sabbath. Indeed, all thirty-three of these messages are seriously informed by doctrine.

There was much content as well as meat in these sermons. The average length was more than eleven pages, each page containing, say, about 350 words. This fact means that the average sermon length from the 1896 collection was about 3,800 words, or approximately fifty per cent more than the average sermon length from the 1943 volume, which was about 2,500 words. The shortest sermon from the 1896 collection ran about 2,400 words, while the shortest sermon from the 1943 volume was two-thirds of that at about 1,600 words. The longest sermon from the 1896 collection was about 6,300 words, while the longest sermon from the 1943 volume came in at around fifty-five percent of that figure (about 3,500 words).

A second collection, *The Southern Presbyterian Pulpit*, appeared in 1928.³³ Three years later, a pastor who had been 46 years in the ministry, Dr. George L. Bitzer, delivered Austin Theological Seminary’s annual alumni address and compared this volume with the one from 1896. In the words of historian E. T. Thompson, among the changes noted were

the fact that the chief stress in preaching was no longer upon justification by faith alone; that equal stress was now placed upon sanctification, the subjective aspects of sanctification; and again the fact that church and state were no longer regarded as so widely separated that ministers could not refer to social responsibilities. The old time Calvinism, Dr. Bitzer indicated, had lost its appeal. “Is there a personal God?” “Are we

real personalities, or mere cogs in the World Wheel?” These, he stated, were questions that men in the street were now asking, and it was to such questions that sermons must now be directed. Dr. Bitzer urged young ministers to make use of the new scientific thought of the day. “I think the world never needed ministers more than now,” he concluded, “ministers who do their own thinking, and speak with the power of

30. *Southern Presbyterian Pulpit: A Collection of Sermons by Ministers of the Southern Presbyterian Church* (Richmond, Va.: The Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1896). Interestingly, every one of the 33 ministers held the D.D. degree.

31. B. M. Palmer, “The Transforming Power of the Gospel” (II Corinthians 5:17); Moses D. Hoge, “The Changing World and the Unchanging God” (Hebrews 1:10–12); J. Henry Smith, “One Jesus” (Acts 25:18–19); George D. Armstrong, “The Gospel Call” (Revelation 22:17); John L. Girardeau, “Christ’s Pastoral Presence with His Dying People” (Psalm 23:4); R. L. Dabney, “The Happy Service” (Matthew 11:28–30); J. W. Rosebro, “Seeking the Lord” (Isaiah 55:6); Neander M. Woods, “Our Redeemer’s Prayer for Christian Unity” (John 17:21); W. U. Murkland, “The Divineness of the Family Bond” (II Timothy 1:3); A. W. Pitzer, “Why Believers Should ‘Not Fear’” (Revelation 1:17–18); J. H. Bryson, “The Ruler’s Question” (Matthew 19:16); S. W. Davies, “The Children of the Covenant: Their Privileges and Responsibilities” (Acts 3:25–26); G. R. Brackett, “Man Inspired of God” (Job 32:8); J. R. Burgett, “How Long Halt Ye Between Two Opinions?” (I Kings 18:21); G. B. Strickler, “Consecration” (Romans 12:1); Robert P. Kerr, “The Striving Spirit” (Genesis 6:3); R. K. Smoot, “Applied Christianity” (Luke 10:25–29); W. W. Moore, “The Three Causes of Salvation” (James 1:18); J. F. Cannon, “The Necessity of Christ’s Resurrection” (Acts 2:24); J. R. Howerton, “To Me to Live is Christ” (Philippians 1:21); C. R. Hemphill, “Jesus’ Supreme Authority” (John 13:13); and W. T. Hall, “The Gospel as First Revealed” (Genesis 3:15).

32. J. R. Stratton, “The Piteousness of Sin” (Matthew 27:3–5); J. W. Lupton, “What is the Chaff to the Wheat?” (Jeremiah 23:28); William N. Scott, “Personal Work for the Master” (Revelation 22:17); John A. Preston, “Joseph of Arimathea. The Christian Outside of the Church” (John 19:38; Mark 15:43); Peyton H. Hoge, “Natural Law and Divine Providence” (Matthew 10:29); James I. Vance, “Take Hold of God” (Isaiah 27:5); G. L. Petrie, “The Valley of Achor” (Hosea 2:15); Samuel A. King, “Religion Not a Vain Thing” (Deuteronomy 32:47); Joseph R. Wilson, “Trust in the Lord” (Psalm 118:8–9). We must acknowledge that the sermon by James I. Vance misses the point of how we achieve peace. Dr. Vance stated: “A human life, in its frailty and need, lays hold of God, and God comes down and dwells in the human life, invests it with the power and majesty of his presence, communicates the calm of heaven to the perturbed spirit, and there is ‘peace.’ Brethren, that is religion in its effect. ‘That he may make peace with me.’ God is anxious for us to come to that. The only safety for anything or anybody in the wide world is to be on God’s side. There is not room enough for two gods in the universe” (316). Of course, the Biblical understanding of peace and how it is established is by means of atonement based upon Christ’s propitiatory sacrifice and the imputation of His righteousness (Romans 5:1).

33. *The Southern Presbyterian Pulpit: Pulpit Addresses by Ministers of the Presbyterian Church in the United States*, ed. Charles Haddon Nabers (New York/Chicago/London/Edinburgh: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1928).

personal conviction, and with the passion of a great love. Men who study the problems of the time, and bring to doubt-ridden men a Gospel message in terms of the thinking of today.”³⁴

A third collection, *Some Southern Presbyterian Sermons*, featured a dozen sermons of just one man, Rev. J. E. Flow, D.D.³⁵ Born in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, in 1874, Dr. Flow graduated from Davidson College and Union Theological Seminary (Virginia). He pastored in Missouri, Oklahoma, West Virginia, and North Carolina. He served as stated clerk of Upper Missouri Presbytery, Greenbrier Presbytery, and the Synod of West Virginia. He was a superintendent of home missions and an evangelist and home missionary for Concord Presbytery. His collection of sermons is particularly relevant for purposes of comparison, since it was published in 1941, just two years before *Living Echoes* appeared. This little volume is also a study in contrast, in that he represented an older generation of Southern Presbyterian ministers.

Here is a list of these sermons which flowed from his lips:

The Inerrancy of the Scriptures
 Presbyterian Church Government
 The Greatness of God
 The Creation of Man in An Estate of Holiness and Happiness
 The Fall of Man Into an Estate of Sin and Misery
 The Covenant of Redemption and of Grace
 The Sovereign Electing Grace of Almighty God
 Christ, the Redeemer of God’s Elect
 Effectual Calling
 The Perseverance and Preservation of the Saints
 The Overruling Providence of God
 The Separation of Church and State or the Spiritual Mission of the Church

The titles of the sermons alone indicate not only the boldness of the minister, but also his commitment to and proclamation of standard Presbyterian doctrine. Moreover, not only are these messages chockfull of doctrine and meaty, but they also have substantial content. The sermons average about seven pages in length, with about 500 words per page.

In the Introduction, the author wrote:

We Presbyterians are not afraid of doctrine. In fact we believe in “sound doctrine” as the only sure basis for “sound speech” and righteous living. We have no sympathy with those who claim to have no creed, but believe only the Bible. That is shallow thinking. It is only another way of saying that they do not know what they believe or teach. A creed is what one believes the Bible to teach. We have a creed. We know what we believe and what we teach, and furthermore we know why we believe and why we teach it. We believe also that every Christian duty arises out of some Christian doctrine. The doctrines are statements of facts. Our duty to love and serve God is based upon the fact that there is a God who is worthy to be loved and served. But the existence of God is a doctrine. And that he is worthy to be loved and served is also a doctrine.

The Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms comprise the doctrines we believe the Bible to teach.... [The Westminster divines] produced the greatest creed the world has ever known. These Standards are firmly based on the Word of God. The proof texts are attached to every statement....

The Presbyterian Church has always stood for an educated ministry and an intelligent people. We believe in loving the Lord with all our mind as well as with all our heart, soul, and strength....

There are some doctrines that are distinctive of the Presbyterian Church. There are others we hold in common with all other evangelical denominations, and there are some we emphasize more than other denominations because we believe they are more important and essential to Christian faith and practice. These we teach and defend and “earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints” (3–4).

What a sharp contrast to the whole approach taken in *Living Echoes*! Without apology, Dr. Flow proclaimed and contended for the teachings of historic Presbyterianism.

At least one scholar has maintained that continuity of message characterizes the Southern Presbyterian pulpit over a number of years. For example, she concluded from her study “that preaching in the PCUS ... changed very little over the course of the century when considering the dominant homiletical themes” and that the sermons she reviewed displayed “a consistency of perspective and content that reflects the significant concerns of the twentieth-century church while adhering

34. Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South*, 3,360.

35. Rev. J. E. Flow, D.D., *Some Southern Presbyterian Sermons* (N.p. [Concord, N.C.?]: n.p., n.d. [1941]).

to the 'coherent theological tradition' which defined the 'solid South,' a tradition of preaching 'centered in the themes of man's depravity, Christ's atoning death, and the assurance of salvation.'"³⁶ But, as we have demonstrated, though there may be some superficial similarity of themes, the actual content differed considerably. (Indeed, given the doctrinal diversity and theological changes occurring within the PCUS, how could the situation be otherwise?) *The Southern Presbyterian Pulpit* (1928) represented a break with the traditional approach, which novel perspective was perpetuated and advanced in *Living Echoes* (1943), while both *Southern Presbyterian Pulpit* (1896) and *Some Southern Presbyterian Sermons* (1941) are decidedly different from the 1928 offering and particularly *Living Echoes*.³⁷

INFLUENCES ON THE SERMONS' CONTENTS

In addition to homiletical history, there are other historical considerations in evaluating *Living Echoes*.

The Influence of Romanticism

We mentioned above the fact that one of the sermons made favorable reference to Romantic poetry. What must be remembered is that Romanticism had broad appeal in society as a whole, and increasingly in the Southern Presbyterian Church from the late-nineteenth century onwards. There were many facets of Romanticism. They included observance of religious holy days and a church calendar; the use of liturgy; and choirs and musical instrumentation in public worship. Broadly speaking, Romanticism entailed an appeal to the senses in worship—a development that was decried by conservatives, while championed by the progressives.³⁸ Stained glass windows became prominent features at many prestigious churches. For example, Dr. Wood's congregation, Westminster Presbyterian in Atlanta, featured a large stained glass picture of Christ—art work which to this day is high above the pulpit in the congregation's present building, into which it moved in 1963. Atlanta's First Presbyterian Church in the early-twentieth century commissioned a number of stained glass windows depicting the advent, life and ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. In 1900, North Avenue Presbyterian Church constructed its Gothic-style edifice; among the stained-glass windows in the sanctuary are three depicting the ministry of Jesus. In 1940, Atlanta's Druid Hills Presbyterian Church, when the nation was still suffering from the Great Depression, planned a project of installing stained glass windows in its new Gothic building. These windows included depictions of Christ's life, ministry, and crucifixion, as

well as other things, such as the signs of the Zodiac in conjunction with the various months.³⁹

Romanticism is often affiliated with the church returning to a medievalism—the notion of worship that is ancient as well as sensualistic and symbolic. However, it is important to note that there is also a revivalistic aspect to Romanticism—the tent meetings of the early-nineteenth century paved the way for the more formal, liturgical worship.⁴⁰

One can see the multidimensional nature of

36. Zink, "Themes in Southern Presbyterian Preaching, 1920–1983," 132. The material being quoted is from Samuel S. Hill, Jr., et al., *Religion and the Solid South* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), 20.

37. One might also consult *The Wartime Sermons of Dr. Peter Marshall*, ed. Peter J. Marshall (Dallas, Tex.: Clarion Call Marketing, 2005). While a few of these sermons present the gospel, several others are devoid of the gospel. Other sermon collections during this time period are *Our Fighting Faith* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1944), written by J. Blanton Belk, pastor of St. Giles Presbyterian Church in Richmond, Virginia; and *Keep Your Faith* (New York/London/Edinburgh: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1943), written by Teunis E. Gouwens, D.D., pastor of Second Presbyterian Church, Louisville, Kentucky. Dr. Gouwens wrote: "there is no way of saving our souls, no way of redeeming our civilization from its evil and preserving its good, except the way of full surrender to Christ." He stated that his "purpose in these sermons is to submit certain facts, truths and arguments which commend our faith. My deep conviction is that the truth and power of Christianity will manifest themselves as the invincible bulwark of the individual soul and the hope of the world" (6–7). His approach could be described as being that of a warm-hearted evangelicalism.

38. See Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South*, 3, 343–61.

39. *The First Presbyterian Church of Atlanta 150th Anniversary* (N.p.: First Presbyterian Church of Atlanta, 1998); Mary-Elizabeth Ellard, *A Soft Radiant Light: The Stained Glass Windows of Druid Hills Presbyterian Church, Atlanta, Georgia* (N.p.: Druid Hills Presbyterian Church, 2008). According to Mrs. Ellard, "Druid Hills Presbyterian Church undertook to build a sanctuary inspired by the great French Gothic cathedrals, complete with stained glass windows" (7). Ironically, among the figures featured in the stained glass windows were John Calvin, John Knox, Francis Makemie, and James Henley Thornwell, who undoubtedly would have been aghast at this project. Three of North Avenue's stained-glass windows, constructed in 1961, depict Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Knox.

40. Julius Melton noted that Flavel Mines, a critic of Presbyterian worship, "observed that revivalism prepared churches for a romantic return to more liturgical worship." Melton stated: "One appeal revivalism originally had was its apparent spontaneity and reliance upon the Holy Spirit. But the new form of it seemed more and more to be just as much concerned with the 'outward and visible' aspect of services as liturgical worship had ever been. Rather than Presbyterians becoming steeped in spontaneous, Spirit-led worship by their contact with revivalism, by about 1840 they had found revivalism becoming more and more formalized. Some observers saw revivalism preparing Presbyterians for the more formal worship which was a part of the contemporary 'uneasy efforts' being made by much of Protestantism 'towards a churchly re-modeling.'" Melton, *Presbyterian Worship in America: Changing Patterns Since 1787* (1967; rpt. Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), 60.

Romanticism by noting, first of all, the influence of gospel songs on the PCUS. In 1910, the denominational Presbyterian Committee of Publication released *Assembly Songs for Use in Evangelistic Services, Sabbath School, Young People Societies, Devotional Meeting, and the Home*. On the other hand, there were selections in denominational hymnals that reflected more of the appeal to antiquity, as reflected in the Oxford Movement within the Church of England. And let us not forget that one of the hymns featured in the 1927 hymnal was “In the Cross of Christ I Glory,” by the aforementioned John Bowring, a Unitarian Romanticist.⁴¹

The point here is that this branch of the church was already compromised with respect to worship, having capitulated its Calvinistic fortress to the hordes of Romanticism—an army with many divisions. Accordingly, one would not expect to hear thundering denunciations of pictures of Christ or staunch affirmations of the second commandment and the objective nature of worship practice. But that failure to maintain historic Presbyterian standards vis-à-vis Romanticism’s manifestations gives a clue as to why the preaching would be neutered. It is difficult to fly the flag of the Westminster Standards, when one is embarrassed by numerous of their provisions.

The Progressive Era

Starting in the late-nineteenth century and continuing into the early-twentieth century, a powerful movement called Progressivism impacted America. This movement has been described as being more a mindset rather than delineating a particular agenda. The ideology is that of making things better societally and globally, whether with regard to sexual morals (as in opposition to prostitution), alcohol (as in abstinence and prohibition), labor (as in the rights of workers and outlawing of child labor), and industrial relations (as in pacifism, disarmament, and international organizations such as the League of Nations).

The movement characteristically was white and middle-class. However, what has often been overlooked by historians is the religious dimension. Progressives, by and large, were Protestants. Or, to summarize,

Progressivism was largely “WASP-ish” (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant).

What has sometimes been missed, in the discussion of Progressivism, has been its connection with the Social Gospel movement. Part of the appeal of the Social Gospel in the nineteenth century and then into the twentieth century had to do with the abandonment of the doctrine of the substitutionary atonement within mainline denominations. Nevertheless, people still, instinctively, understood that they were guilty. The way of dealing with that innate sense of guilt was through external actions, particularly with regard to societal betterment. The Social Gospel and Progressivism played off of and fed each other. And although the Social Gospel was not as virulent a strain in the South as in the North, nonetheless, it did influence folks in Dixie, and therefore must also be considered as forming part of the Southern Presbyterian milieu in the 1940s.

Changing Role of Preacher and Church

As argued by John McClure,

By 1920, there were signs that the nature of the authority of the preacher was changing—a barely perceived shift in the role and identity of the preacher.... Preachers were becoming more concerned to be interesting, relevant, simple, and clear in their preaching. Weekly sermons were abandoning the promulgation of theological and social programs and focusing on “practical living” and the “lofty ideal of living.” ... There was a change from reliance upon the external authority of position and office to a more internal authority based upon the quality of the pastoral relationship between the preacher and the congregation.

One reason for this change was that congregations were looking for less in the way of knowledge and information from their preacher. The level of education and the quality of information available to the parishioner increased rapidly in the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, due partly to improvements in Christian education and public education and partly to wider exposure to religious issues in the mass media.⁴²

Though this phenomenon was more pronounced in the North than in the South, nevertheless, it was present in Dixie and among Southern Presbyterians.

The Influx of Leftist and Ecumenist Ideology

Historians customarily contrast the branches of mainline Presbyterianism, by noting that the Northern

41. Morgan F. Simmons, “Hymnody: Its Place in Twentieth-Century Presbyterianism,” in *The Confessional Mosaic*, 163–64, 168–69, 174–75; *The Presbyterian Hymnal* (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1927).

42. John McClure, “Changes in the Authority, Method, and Message of Presbyterian (UPCUSA) Preaching in the Twentieth Century,” in *The Confessional Mosaic*, 88. McClure also suggested that the “ideas of the social gospel movement also affected the status and authority of preaching in Presbyterian churches, though that impact did not occur until the social gospel movement had nearly run its course” (89).

branch went liberal much sooner than the Southern. That historiographical conclusion is certainly true—witness the fact that the major split in the North occurred in 1936 (leading to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church), while the major exodus in the South occurred in 1973 (leading to the Presbyterian Church in America). However, that fact should not obscure the reality that there was significant liberalism within the Southern Church by the early-twentieth century.

Two works help to demonstrate the infiltration of leftist ideas. One, by noted historian Dr. C. Gregg Singer, *The Unholy Alliance*, was an exposé of the National Council of Churches, and its predecessor body, the Federal Council of Churches. Dr. Singer clearly demonstrates the influence of socialist and communistic ideas on the ecumenical movement. The PCUS, though not as radical as many other denominations, was a member of these organizations.⁴³

The other book was penned by Matsu Crawford, a Southern Presbyterian missionary to China who with her husband had been forced to return to the United States during World War II. Her *My Head Is Bloody But Unbowed* tells the story of her personal experiences with radical churchmen and churchwomen in the Southern Presbyterian Church not only in the 1960s, but as far back as the 1940s.⁴⁴

The promotion of collectivist and Marxist ideas by church bureaucrats and other elites was real. And given that these notions were being circulated in the educational institutions and women's meetings and youth camps, they had to have had an effect on the church in softening it up and preparing the way for retreat from the true gospel and, ultimately, surrender of the truth. That reality is another piece of the puzzle in providing the context for these sermons.

Doctrinal Downgrade and Confessional Revisionism

But one must also take note of the doctrinal downgrade and confessional revisionism taking place in the PCUS. An elite Ad Interim Committee on Changes in the Confession of Faith and Catechisms, consisting of the systematic theology professors of the PCUS seminaries and the moderator of the 1935 General Assembly, recommended to the PCUS General Assembly in 1937 various modifications of the Westminster Standards. Many of those proposed changes were in 1938 sent down to the 88 presbyteries for advice and consent. Some of the modifications were relatively benign; others struck at the heart of the Calvinistic system.

Chapter III of the Confession of Faith was particularly targeted. Paragraphs III and IV, dealing with the

particular double predestination of men and angels (some to life and some to reprobation), would have been removed altogether. Other paragraphs would have been softened. In Paragraph VII, the phrase “whereby He extendeth or withholdeth mercy as He pleaseth, for the glory of His sovereign power over His creatures, to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonour and wrath for their sin,” would have been changed to read, “and in the exercise of His sovereign right, to pass by, and to leave them to the consequences of their sin.”

Similarly, Chapter V, Paragraph VI, would have removed, among other wording, the phrase about how God “exposeth them [i.e., “wicked and ungodly men”] to such objects as their corruption makes occasion of sin.” In Chapter VI, dealing with man's fall into sin, the word “wholly” would have disappeared from the phrase “wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body”; and “utterly” and “wholly” would have been removed from “we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil.”

Chapter X, Paragraph IV, would have changed the wording with regard to those who assert and maintain that men can only be saved through professing the Christian religion; no longer would such a position be “very pernicious, and to be detested,” but it would be “without warrant of the word of God.” Chapter XXV would have removed “synagogues of Satan” with respect to false churches; and also the reference to the Pope as being “that anti-Christ, that man of sin, and son of perdition.” Chapter XXIX, Paragraph II, would have changed “the popish sacrifice of the mass, as they call it, is most abominably injurious to Christ's one only sacrifice,” to “the sacrifice of the mass is most contradictory to Christ's one sacrifice.” And Paragraph VIII would have erased this sentence: “Wherefore all ignorant and ungodly persons, as they are unfit to enjoy communion with him, so are they unworthy of the Lord's table, and cannot, without great sin against Christ, while they remain such, partake of these Holy mysteries, or be admitted thereunto.”⁴⁵

Not all of these changes were enacted. The proposals regarding Chapter III, Paragraphs III and IV, barely failed to obtain the three-fourths supermajority in the

43. C. Gregg Singer, *The Unholy Alliance* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Arlington House, 1975).

44. Matsu Crawford, *My Head Is Bloody But Unbowed* (Manassas, Va.: Reformation Educational Foundation, 1983).

45. *Minutes of the Seventy-Eighth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States With an Appendix* (Austin, Tex.: Press of Von Boeckmann-Jones Co., 1938), 128ff.

presbyteries (the presbytery votes being 63–24 and 64–23). Furthermore, per recommendation of the Standing Committee on Bills and Overtures, the General Assembly declined to adopt the amending of Chapter III, Paragraph VII; Chapter V; and Chapter VI.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the fact that substantial majorities in the Assembly and among the presbyteries voted for these changes signals that there was substantial disapproval of the strong doctrine of the Westminster Assembly. At the same time, many in the church still did adhere to the old truths.

The sermons found in *Living Echoes* were not preached in a vacuum. They both reflected, and aided and abetted, this mishmash of doctrine.

GENERAL LACK OF SUBSTANCE

Some of us may remember the 1984 Democratic presidential primary debates, in which former Vice-President Walter Mondale skewered one of his rivals, Gary Hart, with the rhetorical question, “Where’s the beef?” The Minnesotan Mondale was challenging Senator Hart with regard to his lack of content. Of course, that question had been part of a TV ad campaign by Wendy’s, in which a little old lady looks disdainfully at a competitor’s hamburger that was mostly bun.

In our ruminating on the twelve sermons in *Living Echoes*, that question, “Where’s the beef?,” came to mind. There was not much content, not much exegesis, not much theology, and certainly not much gospel. But the question then arises, why didn’t the little old ladies on

the back pews challenge this type of preaching? Perhaps some did, but their protests, unlike that of Jenny Geddes as she cast her milking stool in St. Giles Cathedral in Edinburgh in 1637, have been lost to history. Perhaps godly saints just got overrun by the ecclesiastical establishment, as by a tank.

Actually, there is indication of at least one protest, which did get crushed. As documented in the official fiftieth-anniversary history of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church,

Westminster Presbyterian Church of Valdosta, Georgia, came into being on April 23, 1952. Forty-one members, including thirteen deacons and two ruling elders of the First Presbyterian Church (PCUS) of Valdosta, met in the Georgia Power and Light auditorium for the purpose of considering the advisability of withdrawing from that church and forming a new Presbyterian church. This meeting grew out of disciplinary action taken against the ruling elders and deacons of the church by the Presbytery of Southwest Georgia (PCUS) because the congregation’s official bodies had requested the removal of the pastor for his liberalism and advocacy of merger with the Presbyterian Church, USA.⁴⁷

That separation occurred during the tenure of Cecil Thompson’s successor, H. L. Laws, who pastored in Valdosta from 1947 to 1952. Though it did not occur in the 1940s, it does demonstrate the eventual theological reaction in that south Georgia city.⁴⁸

However, we think that, whatever protests and expressions of concern there may have been, the bigger story is that the majority of the people in many (though not all) of these congregations went right along with these messages. That, we believe, is very telling—it indicates that a hunger for the gospel and meaty messages was already absent among the very respectable suit and tie-clad men and hat and glove-bedecked women traveling in gas-rationed Chevrolets, Fords, Packards, and Cadillacs to Gothic church buildings. And that fact is a strong indication that the Southern Presbyterian Church was already doomed by the 1940s, and probably by the 1930s or even earlier. The inevitable demise of the PCUS was not merely a function of liberal professors at denominational colleges and seminaries, but was rather a manifestation of the phenomenon of much of the laity having lost spiritual discernment.

Commenting on the prior generation in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., J. Gresham Machen lamented the state of that largely Northern denomination. Writing of the 1915 General Assembly, he noted: “The Church is

46. *Minutes of the Seventy-Ninth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States With an Appendix* (Austin, Tex.: Press of Von Boeckmann-Jones Co., 1939), 68–69.

47. Charles D. Dennison, editor, *The Orthodox Presbyterian Church 1936–1986* (Philadelphia: Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1986), 265. Interestingly, “In response to a request to Columbia Theological Seminary, seminarian Morton H. Smith was sent to conduct Sunday services.”

48. The view of those who stayed with First Presbyterian, as is to be expected, differed considerably from the OPC perspective. In a history of the congregation penned by a man who served as pastor after the controversy, he alleged that “the blot” apparently was caused by two elements: a “rigid fundamentalist group which stressed Dispensationalism (a doctrine contrary to Presbyterian belief); and an overbearing coterie of church officers (mostly deacons) who violated their vows” of office, including “the vow of promising ‘to study the peace, unity, edification, and purity of the church.’” He also suggests a third element, viz., “a clash of personalities between certain officers and the pastor.” Frank C. King, Sr., *Pilgrims Perseverant: The Ongoing Journey of First Presbyterian Church, Valdosta, Georgia, 1864–1989* (Valdosta: First Presbyterian Church, 1989), 38. If those who left the downtown congregation had affiliated with, say, the Bible Presbyterian Church, then the charge of Dispensationalism would be credible; but given that the group affiliated with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, that charge lacks credibility.

still fundamentally evangelical—but sadly indifferent to the big questions.” The next year, he wrote:

Dreadful things seem to be going on at the General Assembly, the “liberal” candidate for moderator having been elected by a large majority. Of course a good many brethren did not know how bad he is. He posed as a “moderate conservative.” But I fear the Union Seminary men, with their deceitful phrases, and their contempt for the Christian faith, will go quite unmolested.... The mass of the Church here [i.e., in the North, in contrast to the Southern Presbyterian Church] is still conservative—but conservative in an ignorant, non-polemic, sweetness-and-light kind of way which is just meat for the wolves.⁴⁹

Machen was laying the blame primarily on the deceptive churchmen and professors. But on the other hand, he himself recognized that the laity were naive. What we are suggesting is that by being naive and spiritually immature and theologically incompetent, the people in the pew also bore responsibility. In this regard, two aphorisms that one sees in the civil realm are being mirrored. One, the people usually get the rulers—in this case, the preachers—that they deserve. Two, change in law—in this case, modification of the confessional standards—is a trailing indicator of the direction of the body. In other words, the ethos changes long before the ethics officially do. The standards of a society, including the society of a church, merely reflect its culture. And the culture of the PCUS, by and large, as reflected in the sermons presented in *Living Echoes*, had already been overrun by a new theological orientation.

FAULTS OF THE EDITOR

In the early days of World War II, Winston Churchill referred to the action of Russia as being “a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma.” That quote could be applied to the action of Ferguson Wood in editing this collection. If he was so committed to conservative Southern Presbyterian theology, why did he include sermons with such obvious problems and deficiencies?

Dr. Wood either did not discern the problems with these sermons, or, having discerned them, he did not object to them.⁵⁰ In either case, his support, for whatever reason, of these sermons is telling—it demonstrates the weakness of the “conservative” position in the Southern Presbyterian Church in the mid-twentieth century. Indeed, when the time came for ecclesiastical separation in the 1970s, Dr. Wood declined to depart the PCUS.

In our estimation, the key to unlocking the enigma of Dr. Wood’s action is that the so-called conservatism within the PCUS by the 1940s was, for the most part, not a genuine commitment to the theology of the Westminster Assembly, but to vague traditional values, including social mores such as abstinence from alcohol and even Sabbath observance. Or, we could frame the matter this way: if this 1943 collection of sermons is truly representative of the Southern Presbyterian pulpit at that time, then it is obvious that there were many Southern Presbyterian ministers who had very little inclination to emphasize solid doctrine and Reformed theology.

This conclusion is bolstered by the observations of E. T. Thompson. In 1943, he delivered the Stone Lectures at Princeton Theological Seminary, dealing with changing emphases in American preaching. In considering Horace Bushnell, the progenitor of American liberalism, Professor Thompson wrote:

In presenting this theory [of the atonement], Bushnell sedulously avoids any thought of legal satisfaction. In direct contrast with the traditional method, he endeavors “to interpret all that is prepared and suffered in the propitiation of God and justification of men by a reference to the moral pronouncements of human nature and society; assuming that nothing can be true of God, or of Christ, which is true in some sense *more humano*, and is not made intelligible by human analogies. We cannot interpret God,” he insists, “except by what we find in our own personal instincts and ideas.”

In spite of the inadequacies, the one-sidedness, the forced interpretation of Scripture texts to be found in *The Vicarious Sacrifice*, Bushnell had in fact rendered great service to our understanding of the work of Christ. For one thing he made it clear that the atonement is too large, too transcendent in its relation to the infinite and the eternal, to be illustrated by any one analogy, or to be comprehended and carried about in any single formula.

Then again he emphasized the fact, sometimes forgotten, that the end of the atonement, according to the

49. Quoted in Ned B. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir* (Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia: Westminster Theological Seminary, 1978), 221. The Union Seminary to which Machen was referring was the institution in New York City.

50. Perhaps he was operating under the burden of his youth— even though he was obviously an accomplished pastor (otherwise, he would not have been the minister of a prestigious church), he was only thirty-three when the volume was published.

usual Scripture text, is reconciliation of men to God rather than reconciliation of God to man (as in II Cor. 5:19), the renovation of character here on earth rather than a forensic transaction in heaven. As Peter puts it: Christ “bare our sins in his body upon the tree, *that* we, having died unto sins, might live unto righteousness” (I Peter 2:24).

In addition, Bushnell took the atonement out of the region of legalism, which had become dry scholasticism, and laid it straight down upon life itself. “It is singular,” one acute critic remarked at the time in a letter to a friend, “that men who, like Bushnell and Robertson, reject the full import of the death of Christ, should make Christ a far more living and effective power than the majority of those who receive it. It is singular, yet it must be confessed it is true.”⁵¹

At best, the PCUS ministry, as a whole, was committed to a bland evangelicalism, but not the sturdy truths of the Westminster Standards, while there were some ministers that were beginning to drift ever leftward on issues such as Scripture and atonement. Oh, yes, there were still many Southern Presbyterian ministers, especially those of an older generation, who were adhering to the old-fashioned message of the church—men like

51. Ernest Trice Thompson, *Changing Emphases in America Preaching: The Stone Lectures for 1943* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1943), 41–42 (emphasis in original).

52. Westminster Presbyterian Church in Atlanta was the site of the Convocation of Sessions in May 1973, which called for ecclesiastical separation, leading to the formation of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA); the Westminster congregation itself did eventually join the PCA, but not until July 1985. First Presbyterian Church of Thomasville joined the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in October 2013. A majority of First Presbyterian Church of Columbus voted to withdraw from the PC(USA) in 2015, but the attempt was thwarted as it failed, barely, to obtain the mandated supermajority (64.56% rather than the necessary two-thirds); a group subsequently left First Pres to form a new congregation affiliated with ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians. One must also note that at least two other of these congregations had ministry that tended in an evangelical, even conservative, direction. For example, North Avenue’s pastor from 1950 to 1954, Dr. McFerran Crowe, left the Atlanta pulpit in order to become President of Belhaven College, where “he made sure every member of his faculty was not only Presbyterian but also Calvinist”; see Elizabeth Blackshear Flinn, *With Feet of Clay: A History of the North Avenue Presbyterian Church, Atlanta, Georgia, 1889–1990* (N.p. [Atlanta]: n.p. [North Avenue Presbyterian Church], n.d. [1990?]), 62. First Presbyterian of Marietta has through the years sought to maintain a witness in favor of traditional morality and marriage, and in opposition to abortion; see *God at Work: A History of the First Presbyterian Church of Marietta, Georgia, 1835–2000* (N.p.: [Marietta, Ga.]; The First Presbyterian Church of Marietta, Georgia, Church History Committee, 2000), 175–77.

J. E. Flow of Concord, North Carolina. But his sermon collection was self-published, not published by John Knox Press, the official publishing arm of the PCUS. On the other hand, the up-and-coming generation of preachers was represented by this group of sermons which, taken as a whole, appealed to oh-so-respectable laity. There may have been a faint echo of traditional Reformed theology, but there was no clarion trumpeting of the truth.

CONCLUSION

What was “echoed” in *Living Echoes* was a confused message and a cacophony of voices, rather than a reveille which would reverberate throughout Georgia. This was no bugler’s wake-up call, but rather a toleration of complacency and appeasement. Moreover, the toleration was not only on the part of the ministry and eldership, but on the part of people in the pew.

The presence of such phenomena in any denomination in any age is a tell-tale indication that the ship, having already been torpedoed, is sinking. This is not to say that lifeboats will not be launched—and in point of fact, we can be thankful that at least two of the eleven congregations featured in *Living Echoes* did ultimately separate from apostasy.⁵² Nevertheless, denominationally speaking, the lack of consistently solid doctrinal and gospel preaching as evident in this little volume was a harbinger that the long theological war which dragged on for more than a generation within the Southern Presbyterian Church, was already lost by 1943. ■