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STRENGTHEN WHAT REMAINS: THE RHETORICAL  
SITUATION OF JAMES MONTGOMERY BOICE

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
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Doctor of Philosophy

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by  
Evan Todd Fisher  
December 2018

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STRENGTHEN WHAT REMAINS: THE RHETORICAL  
SITUATION OF JAMES MONTGOMERY BOICE

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To the memory of James Montgomery Boice

A tireless champion for the Word of God

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## PREFACE

Ever since I graduated with my master's degree in 1996, I have longed to achieve a Ph.D. Four years ago, the opportunity was finally right in both my family and professional life to begin the journey toward a terminal degree. I was filled with both excitement and trepidation at the prospect of challenging myself in a program of such strong academic rigor which required a discipline of hard work I had not previously experienced. Now, as I near the completion of the Ph.D., I am struck with two emotions: amazement and gratitude. I am amazed at the amount of time and effort it took to finish the requirements of the degree and at the sense of fulfillment finishing such an arduous task has given me. I am grateful for the grace of God to see me through to completion of the Ph.D. journey, which has sharpened my skills as a scholar and pastor. In addition, I am both amazed at and thankful for the number of people who graciously helped me make the dream of achieving a Ph.D. become a reality. To this end, I would be remiss in failing to mention those to whom I am especially indebted for their service to me.

In the years leading up to beginning the Ph.D., I had the opportunity to serve on the board of trustees at Southern Seminary and got to know its president, Dr. Albert Mohler. During this time, I became deeply impressed with Southern's commitment to academic excellence and faithfulness to the Word of God and concluded that Southern should be the institution from which I would seek the Ph.D. I am grateful for the multiple occasions when Dr. Mohler talked with me about Dr. Boice, whom he knew, and his encouragement to me to begin the program. I am grateful to Dr. York and Dr. Vogel, who served as my preaching professors. I greatly enjoyed my time with them in seminars and colloquia. Both men are genuine models of a pastor-scholar and greatly assisted me in the development of my dissertation on Boice. In addition, I will always be thankful for

my classmates in the program who challenged and encouraged me and will be lifelong friends.

As I began to think through a topic for my dissertation, I quickly landed on James Montgomery Boice, whose sermons and books I had read since I first became a pastor in 1992. One of the greatest joys for me in the process of researching and writing the dissertation has been my interaction with Linda Boice, Dr. Boice's widow. Mrs. Boice welcomed me into her home in Philadelphia and answered my questions for hours on end. She then regularly emailed me and sent me documents pertaining to my research. Her assistance and guidance in accurately writing about the work of Dr. Boice was invaluable to me, and I will always cherish my newfound friendship with this gracious and godly woman. I also want to give special thanks to Dot Boersma, office manager at Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. Dot went above and beyond in helping me with my research, even to the point of crawling through the dusty attic of the church looking through its archives on my behalf.

Others to whom I owe a debt of gratitude for their substantial help is my administrative assistant, Kathy Bowlan. Kathy meticulously worked to make copies and helped me organize research documents. At the same time, she was a great encouragement to me to begin and finish the Ph.D. program. Sadly, just after I completed the dissertation, Kathy suddenly and unexpectedly passed away. I regret she will not get to see all the hard work she put toward this program come to its final fruition. Another person who helped me immeasurably on the dissertation and seminar research papers is my aunt Debbie Perry. Debbie, a veteran English teacher, spent countless hours proofing my work for grammar and format errors—a “labor of love” for which I will be forever grateful. I would also like to thank my sister-in-law, Laurie Taylor, who was one of my biggest cheerleaders throughout the Ph.D. process. She was always willing to go to the library at Southern to look something up for me and often brought me a Dr. Pepper and candy bar in seminars and comprehensive exams. Additionally, I want to acknowledge my

classmate Kevin Koslowsky, who helped me navigate the complexities of Presbyterian history and polity as well as Michael Pelter, who for a year helped me to study Latin in preparation for the proficiency exam.

My gratitude to the people of Immanuel Baptist Church is difficult to express. They have supported me and loved me through the entire Ph.D., giving me the time to study, research, and write. I cannot imagine a greater church family in which to serve, and I could not have achieved this degree without them. Finally, I want to thank my family. Our children, Zachary, Carly, and Anna, have had to bear the brunt of a father often preoccupied and busy with school. I so appreciate their patience and support of me. Most of all, my wife, Jamy, has been my rock all along. She encouraged me time and again when I was overwhelmed or ready to give up and lovingly, patiently allowed me to focus on school. I will never be able to thank you, Jamy, for your partnership and sacrifice in this journey. This degree is as much yours as it is mine.

My hope is that this dissertation might be of use to pastors and others who find themselves in a situation similar to Boice's. When one finds him or herself belonging to an organization that is jettisoning biblical orthodoxy and historical roots of confessionalism, the proper course of action is difficult to discern. There are times when departing the organization is necessary, but it also may well be that one should stay and work to "strengthen what remains." The decision is difficult, but action of some form must be taken. The ministry of James Boice provides a helpful example of how one can navigate such difficult times.

Todd Fisher

Shawnee, Oklahoma

December 2018

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

James Montgomery Boice (1938-2000) stands as an influential figure in the resurgence of orthodox theology, inerrancy, and expositional preaching among evangelicals in the latter half of the twentieth century. Boice's influence is manifested through his long-term tenure as a pastor-theologian, author, and leader in evangelical organizations promoting conservative views of the Bible and Christian thought. Boice served as senior pastor of the historic Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia for thirty-two years (1968 until his death in 2000), and wrote or contributed to over sixty books regarding the Bible and theology, including a systematic theology titled *Foundations of the Christian Faith*. Twenty-seven of these books are Boice's expositional commentaries, which serve as a collection of his expository sermons through various books in both the Old and New Testaments. Boice helped to found the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI), which adopted a ten-year mission to restore the church's confidence in the divine origin, inspiration, and authority of the Bible.<sup>1</sup> In its first summit in 1978, of which Boice served as chairman, the ICBI produced the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy.<sup>2</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Graham Ryken, Derek W. H. Thomas, and J. Ligon Duncan, eds., *Give Praise to God: A Vision for Reforming Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003), xi. The ICBI held three summits: Summit I (1978) produced the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (see Norman L. Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980]); Summit II (1982) produced the Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics (see Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus, eds., *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984]); Summit III (1986) produced the Chicago Statement on Biblical Application (see Kenneth S. Kantzer, ed., *Applying the Scriptures* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987]).

<sup>2</sup> Jay Grimstead, one of the organizers of the first ICBI summit, describes the Chicago Statement as  
a landmark church document . . . [created] by the then largest, broadest, group of evangelical protestant scholars that ever came together to create a common, theological document in the 20th century. It is probably the first systematically comprehensive, broadly based, scholarly, creed-like statement on the inspiration and authority of Scripture in the history of the church." ("Records of the

Chicago Statement serves today as the touchstone for the evangelical expression of the nature and authority of the Bible.<sup>3</sup> Boice began the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology in 1974, an annual meeting featuring notable pastors and speakers focusing on biblical doctrines from a Reformed perspective. In addition, Boice taught on “The Bible Study Hour,” an international radio broadcast. In 1994, he founded and served as president of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, an organization encouraging pastors to rediscover their roots in the Protestant Reformation.<sup>4</sup>

The influence of Boice is clearly marked by a ministry committed to espousing conservative theology and refuting liberal theology. This dissertation defines the term *conservative* in respect to its application to the field of theology and hermeneutics as adhering to a traditional view of biblical doctrines ascertained primarily through a grammatical-historical interpretation of biblical texts understood to be divinely inspired and inerrant.<sup>5</sup> The term *liberal* is understood to mean a generally modern approach to

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International Council on Biblical Inerrancy,” Mosher and Turpin Libraries at Dallas Theological Seminary, accessed June 12, 2017, <http://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI.shtml>)

<sup>3</sup> One example of the broad influence of the Chicago Statement on evangelicals as a whole can be seen in a statement by Paige Patterson, notable leader in the Southern Baptist Convention:

There is no doubt that the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy is a sophisticated document. What necessitated such a document? Simple biblicists, when confronted by those who believe there are errors in the Bible found it necessary to say, “The Bible is the Word of God and has no errors. Hence the Bible is not errant but inerrant.” Then when pressed as to what precisely inerrancy might mean, inerrantist scholars formulated a short statement and a more elaborate statement attempting to define their convictions. (Paige Patterson, review of *The Unfettered Word*, ed. Robison B. James, *Criswell Theological Review* 3 [Fall 1988]: 235)

<sup>4</sup> The first meeting of the ACE introduced the Cambridge Declaration: “A call to the evangelical church to turn away from the worldly methods it has come to embrace, and to recover the biblical doctrines of the Reformation . . . and adherence to the five ‘solos.’” The ACE is a rebranding of Evangelical Ministries, an organization founded in 1949, by Donald Grey Barnhouse, a former pastor of Tenth. Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, “What Is the Alliance?” accessed June 13, 2017, [www.alliancenet.org/what-is-the-alliance](http://www.alliancenet.org/what-is-the-alliance).

<sup>5</sup> The term *orthodox* is used interchangeably in the dissertation for the term *conservative*, where *orthodoxy* is understood to mean acceptance of and adherence to correct or accepted confessions by Christian organizations. In particular for Boice’s context, *orthodoxy* aligns with the traditionally accepted statement of faith of Presbyterianism, which is the Westminster Confession of Faith. Boice’s doctrinal positions align with the Westminster standards.

understanding the doctrines of Scripture based on a hermeneutic that seeks to adapt biblical interpretation to modern culture and modes of thinking by rejecting religious belief on the basis of exclusivistic authority in favor of humanistic tenets.<sup>6</sup> In his systematic theology, Boice's quote from J. I. Packer serves as a succinct statement revealing Boice's conservative perspective on the nature and authority of the Bible and how it should be interpreted:

The proper, natural sense of each passage (i.e. the intended sense of the writer) is to be taken as fundamental. Scripture statements must be interpreted in the light of the rules of grammar and discourse on the one hand, and of their own place in history on the other . . . Scripture is to be interpreted in its natural sense, and that theological or cultural preferences must not be allowed to obscure the fundamental meaning.<sup>7</sup>

Another example of Boice's faithfulness to orthodox doctrine can be seen in his view of the person and nature of Jesus Christ, particularly Christ's deity. In his sermon on John 1:1, 14, Boice notes, "We must not make the mistake of thinking of Jesus as being merely a divine man, or on the other hand, of being merely a human God. Jesus is the God-man; he is fully and uniquely God as well as being perfectly man."<sup>8</sup> Boice's preaching and writing often contain explicit references to liberal theology and theologians decrying the

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<sup>6</sup> R. V. Pierard, "Theological Liberalism," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 631-34. *Liberal* is often used as a term of opprobrium by conservatives. This dissertation seeks to avoid any pejorative use of *liberal* not to preclude disagreement, but rather contempt. *Liberal theology* is understood in this dissertation as an approach to Christianity, principally born from German theologians of the nineteenth century, that denies orthodox views of biblical doctrines. Liberal theology, according to James Richmond, is characterized by a belief that Christianity: is not distinctively unique, cannot violate the laws of nature, must coincide with contemporary philosophies, overlooks the "historic eventfulness" whereby God acted in history, and generally defines sin as man's lack of knowledge or insight and salvation as "the filling of this lack through inspiration, information, or education." James Richmond, "Liberal Protestantism, Liberal Theology, Liberalism," in *A Dictionary of Christian Theology*, ed. Alan Richardson (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 191-94.

<sup>7</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith: A Comprehensive and Readable Theology*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), 95-96.

<sup>8</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 1, *The Coming of the Light (John 1-4)* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 27-28.

departure of liberalism from orthodox faith in God and his Word, as well as its destructive effect on Christianity and culture as a whole.<sup>9</sup>

The impetus for this dissertation is to explore the seemingly odd combination of Boice's conservative theological convictions and widespread evangelical influence with his denominational affiliation in the liberal United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (UPCUSA) during the first twelve years of his pastorate at Tenth.<sup>10</sup> By the 1920s, the orthodox theological perspective of the great "Princeton Theologians," which had shaped Presbyterian belief and practice in the United States according to the Westminster Confession, had begun to erode.<sup>11</sup> Harry Emerson Fosdick's bombshell sermon, "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" in 1922, touched off a major feud known as the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy between conservatives and liberals within what was then known as the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA). The Auburn Affirmation of 1924, which was signed by nearly 1,300 Presbyterian ministers, sought to repeal the "Five Fundamentals" as a test of orthodoxy and ordination in the PCUSA, and within a decade had been accepted in toto by a majority of the denomination.<sup>12</sup> The conservatives were principally led by Princeton

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<sup>9</sup> Boice writes, Christians are arriving at faith on their own terms. . . . When the not-so-still small voice of self becomes the highest authority, religious belief requires commitment to no authority beyond oneself. . . . evangelicals are being swallowed up by today's secular culture, all because they have abandoned confidence in the power of God through the Bible to convert sinful, secular people. (James Montgomery Boice, *Two Cities, Two Loves* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996], 27-28)

<sup>10</sup> Northern mainline Presbyterianism was known as the Presbyterian Church United States of America (PCUSA) from 1758 to 1958, and the United Presbyterian Church United States of America (UPCUSA) from 1958 to 1983.

<sup>11</sup> The "Princeton Theologians" are generally regarded to be Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge, A. A. Hodge, and B. B. Warfield, who were all professors at Princeton Theological Seminary in the nineteenth century (some would place J. Gresham Machen in this group as well). Their Reformed, conservative views on theology are often referred to as "Princeton theology."

<sup>12</sup> Bradley J. Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy: Fundamentalists, Modernists, and Moderates* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 160. The "Five Fundamentals" are inerrancy of

Seminary professor J. Gresham Machen who adopted a militant approach to combating liberalism within his denomination. He asserted that the liberal brand of theology and hermeneutics was more than just erroneous; it was apostate. Thus, liberalism could not be considered Christianity because “it relinquished everything distinctive of Christianity,” resulting in a “sordid life of utilitarianism.”<sup>13</sup>

Despite the efforts of Machen and other conservatives to rescue the denomination from liberalism, the attempt failed. By the time Boice became pastor of Tenth in 1968, the denomination was entrenched in theological liberalism as expressed in its Confession of 1967.<sup>14</sup> In 1982, shortly after Tenth eventually withdrew from the UPCUSA, the General Assembly issued the following statement regarding the denomination’s view of Scripture:

The authority of the Bible is realized in its use, and apart from this interpretative use of it, its authority has no expression . . . thus the church needs always to remember that the use of Holy Scripture is more important than debates about its authority. Theories about authority of Scripture, which are not vindicated and validated in its use in Christian faith and life, become ends in themselves. All theories of the authority of Scripture are tested by the effectiveness and usefulness of the interpretation that they involve. On the other hand, the most serious denial of Holy Scripture is manifest not so much in doctrine, as in the failure to find a faithful and joyful employment of Scripture as the rule of faith and life. The authority of Holy Scripture is made real in human life when it is employed in reverence and hope and the word of God is heard and received.<sup>15</sup>

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Scripture, deity of Jesus, substitutionary atonement, bodily resurrection of Jesus, and authenticity of Jesus’ miracles. . Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy*, 78.

<sup>13</sup> J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, new ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 6, 13.

<sup>14</sup> In 1964, Princeton Seminary professor Hugh Kerr summarized the perspective of the UPCUSA regarding theology when he wrote,

The perspective of theology must be open enough to take in a multiplicity or pluralism of possibilities. . . . [Theology is] not so much a structure or content as . . . a way of thinking, [and] since we have begun to accept the pluralism of denominations, even of faiths, and perhaps someday of religions, why should it be so difficult to accept the plurality of theological expression at many levels? (Hugh Kerr , quoted in Milton J. Coalter, John M. Mulder, and Louis B. Weeks, *The Re-Forming Tradition: Presbyterians and Mainstream Protestantism* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992], 135-36)

<sup>15</sup> Office of Theology and Worship PCUSA, *Presbyterian Understanding and Use of Holy Scripture: 194th General Assembly* (Louisville: Office of the General Assembly, 1982), 3.



This statement reveals that the denomination regards Scripture as authoritative not in its own merit apart from human interpretation, but rather its authority is derived through interpretation, which makes the Bible relevant to everyday life. That is, the Bible does not draw its authority from God as its author, but from man as its interpreter.

The mainstream of northern Presbyterians had decidedly shifted to a platform of theological liberalism by the 1930s when Machen pulled ranks and founded a new denomination called the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, as well as the Westminster Theological Seminary. However, some within the mainline Presbyterian denomination continued to hold to biblical orthodoxy. Not all conservatives withdrew to other denominations that matched their theological convictions, but instead, some chose to stay within the denomination.<sup>16</sup> Why certain conservatives, particularly James Boice, chose to remain serves as the foundation for the thesis and research of this dissertation.

### **Thesis**

This dissertation argues that James Montgomery Boice, a theological conservative, chose to remain in the theologically liberal United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America in order hopefully to achieve a reclamation for orthodoxy within the denomination through his sizable influence as a pastor-treacher, author, and through his involvement in evangelical organizations—all of which correspond to the principal tenets of the rhetorical theory known as rhetorical situation. Two major questions that encapsulate the dilemma of Boice’s predicament are explored in the dissertation. Presumed answers to these questions are controverted in favor of the emergence of rhetorical situation as the more plausible explanation behind the focus and passion of Boice’s ministry during his first twelve years at Tenth.

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<sup>16</sup> A “family tree” of the various Presbyterian denominations in American history can be seen in appendix 1.

## First Question

Why did James Boice preach and write with great frequency against liberal theology and liberal theologians? Though it is outside the scope of this dissertation to construct a full quantitative analysis (i.e., did Boice preach about liberalism more than his notable conservative peers?), sufficient evidence exists that refuting liberal theology is an underlying theme in the corpus of Boice's work. Boice often demurred the liberal perspective on key doctrines of the Christian faith as an error of critical importance. Numerous examples from Boice's sermons are provided in this dissertation to demonstrate the veracity of this claim.

In addition to addressing specific biblical doctrines, Boice makes reference on many occasions to the damaging work of well-known, classical liberal theologians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who are generally credited as the founding fathers of modern theological liberalism.<sup>17</sup> He also references twentieth-century theologians who expanded on the liberal work of their predecessors.<sup>18</sup> Boice often cites the work of atheistic thinkers whose ideas and theories influenced theological liberalism and secularism.<sup>19</sup> He also routinely references doctrines and philosophies that stand in opposition to orthodox Christianity.<sup>20</sup> In a quantitative sense, of the 1,142 printed sermons in Boice's expositional

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<sup>17</sup> Examples of these theologians are Baur, Eichhorn, Hegel, Feuerbach, Kant, Kierkegaard, Rauschenbusch, Reimarus, Renan, Ritschl, Schleiermacher, Strauss, von Harnack, and Wellhausen. Boice's dedication to confronting theological liberalism can also be seen in the number of references to lesser-known liberal theologians of the nineteenth century, including Bauer, de Wette, Hitzig, Reuss, Schliemann, Steiner, and Vatke. See appendix 2.

<sup>18</sup> Examples of these theologians are Berkouwer, Bultmann, Cullmann, Deissmann, Dibelius, Niebuhr, Tillich, and Renan. Boice also references lesser-known liberal theologians of the twentieth century, such as Barr, Bauer, Cox, Kraeling, Pike, John A. T. Robinson, and Weatherhead. Neo-orthodox theologians like Barth and Brunner are also included in Boice's work, but are referenced with less antipathy than those previously mentioned. See appendix 2.

<sup>19</sup> These thinkers include Bacon, Darwin, Descartes, Fletcher, Freud, Huxley, Ingersoll, Marx, Nietzsche, Rousseau, Russell, Sagan, Sartre, Skinner, and Voltaire. See appendix 2.

<sup>20</sup> Examples of these doctrines/philosophies are evolution, higher criticism, humanism, inclusivism, mysticism, pluralism, rationalism, and universalism. See appendix 2.

commentaries, 695 (61 percent) contain references to liberal theology or theologians and/or secular philosophers or philosophies in regard to their opposition to orthodox Christianity.<sup>21</sup> In particular to the time frame of this thesis (1968-1980), Boice preached 560 sermons on Sunday mornings of which 411 (73 percent) contain the liberal referents.<sup>22</sup> The fact that Boice specifically and frequently names so many liberal theologians and doctrines is evidence of his penchant to combat theological liberalism and its harmful effects on the church and culture.

Defending against theological liberalism is certainly an important tenet of Boice's ministry, but the question looms as to why. First, one may argue that Boice's predilection for confronting liberal theology is merely a matter of his style rooted in a personal angst against liberalism (i.e., Boice has an "ax to grind," preaches from a "soapbox," or engages in a "witch hunt"). Although Boice is passionate about defending orthodox doctrine and at times uses stern language to that effect, his sermons and writings do not bare the evidence of a rigid ulterior motive or *idée fixe* regarding liberalism. He does name specific theologians, yet this is done to present and critique the liberal approach in general by addressing the works of the primogenitors or chief proponents of errant doctrines. The tone that Boice strikes is unselfish and charitable. Never does he call upon his congregation to attack liberals, but rather to concentrate on living their own lives in full obedience to Scripture. This excerpt from Boice's sermon on Habakkuk 3:1-2 reveals his heart in confronting liberalism:

We evangelicals tend to look at the liberal church and condemn it for its obvious departure from biblical truth. We say, "The liberal church no longer believes the Bible to be the authoritative and inerrant Word of God. It no longer believes in the virgin birth of Christ. It has doubts about the resurrection. It may even question the Lord's

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<sup>21</sup> This statistic is the result of analyzing Boice's sermons in digital format using individual name and key word searches.

<sup>22</sup> Boice preached through three books of the Bible at Tenth on Sunday mornings from 1968-1981: Philippians (1968-70), John (1971-78), and Genesis (1979-81). This information was provided by Dot Boersma, office manager/church historian at Tenth who reviewed past Sunday bulletins. Dot Boersma, email message to author, August 8, 2017.

divinity. Isn't that terrible? Isn't it good that we still believe these doctrines?" Well, it is terrible that a professedly Christian church should deny such doctrines, even in part. It is good that the evangelical church still holds to them. But if we approach God on the basis of that distinction, thinking that we therefore have some special claim upon God because of it and that he must answer our prayers because of it, we are repeating the error of the man who talked to Torrey. The only way we dare approach God is humbly, and the only way we can rightly present our petitions is with the utterance "God be merciful to me, a sinner."<sup>23</sup>

Boice's desire is not to condemn and destroy those who hold to theological liberalism, but rather to persuade them back to the truth. His preaching and writing indicate an awareness that the tactics of a bully pulpit are ineffective in redeeming those who have gone astray.

Second, one might argue that Boice was a staunch defender of conservative theology because of his educational background. In other words, his (presumably conservative) educational experience would have so shaped his thinking as to have produced a "closed-minded" approach on theology. Conventional thinking may anticipate that conservative institutions of higher learning in theological education will turn out conservative graduates and vice versa for liberal institutions. Granted, there are exceptions to that rule on both sides of the spectrum. The point, however, is that Boice's conservative viewpoints are not endemically or injudiciously tied to his education since all of his post-primary degrees are held from classically liberal institutions of higher learning.<sup>24</sup> Thus, Boice does not blindly "parrot" conservative theology, but instead his views are the product of his own critical thinking rooted in deep conviction. The fact that Boice's conservative

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<sup>23</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *The Minor Prophets*, vol. 2, *Micah-Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 421.

<sup>24</sup> Boice's educational resumé contains an A.B. in English from Harvard, a B.D. from Princeton Theological Seminary, and a Th.D. from the University of Basel in Switzerland. Boice did, however, have some influence in his education by notable theologians who would fall outside of the spectrum of liberal theology, such as Bruce Metzger at Princeton and his supervisor at Basel, Bo Reicke. Reicke's work on textual criticism does not wholly fall within the conservative mainstream (e.g., he believes the diversity of the Pauline corpus is attributable to Paul's "co-compositionists"), but neither does it comport to the typical outlook of theological liberalism regarding the biblical text. D. P. Moessner, "Bo Reicke," in *Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters*, ed. Donald McKim (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2007), 853-58. In addition, Mrs. Boice states that Oscar Cullman was a significant influence on Boice while at Basel. Linda M. Boice, interview by author, Philadelphia, February 9, 2017. While generally placed within the ranks of neo-orthodoxy, Cullman countered Bultmann's existential interpretation of Christian history by arguing his theory of *heilsgeschichte*, which stressed the objective basis of redemptive history.

perspective on Scripture remained intact through the course of an elite education steeped in theological liberalism adds to the intrigue of Boice's unique situation.<sup>25</sup>

## Second Question

Given the theological conservatism of Boice, why did he choose to lead Tenth to remain in a liberal denomination when there were conservative Presbyterian options available to join? For the first twelve years of Boice's pastorate (1968-1980), Tenth remained in the UPCUSA and the Presbytery of Philadelphia. However, in 1968, two conservative Presbyterian denominations existed that would have been viable options for Tenth to join—the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Reformed Presbyterian Church Evangelical Synod.<sup>26</sup> By 1973, a third conservative option came into existence—the Presbyterian Church in America.<sup>27</sup> One might assume that a pastor and church would

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<sup>25</sup> Many denominations, including my own (Southern Baptist Convention) are replete with examples of notable figures who held to orthodox theology, but were swayed away to heterodoxy through the influence of institutions of higher learning espousing liberal theology. For example, Crawford Toy, an early professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (1869-1879) teaching under its orthodox abstract of principles, became an adherent of Wellhausen's historical-critical method of interpretation after studying at the University of Berlin. This was a divergence from his earlier years when he was baptized by John Broadus and taught Hebrew by Basil Manly, Jr. See Phyllis R. Tippit and W. H. Bellinger, Jr., "Repeating History: Crawford Howell Toy," *Baptist History and Heritage* 38, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 19-35. Dale Moody, also a professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (1948-1984), grew up in a Landmark Baptist church and attended Chafer (now Dallas Theological) Seminary. However, his conservative views changed when he began to study under Tillich at Union Seminary in New York, and also under Brunner and Cullman. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, "Dale Moody," accessed June 6, 2017, <http://archives.sbts.edu/the-history-of-the-sbts/our-professors/dale-moody/>.

<sup>26</sup> The OPC was founded under the leadership of J. Gresham Machen in 1936, after the fallout from the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy as a conservative alternative to the PCUSA committed to adherence to the Westminster Confession of Faith. The RPCES was formed in 1965, with the merger of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, General Synod (a denomination formed by the "New Lights" from the 1833 controversy) and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (formed in 1956, as a split from the Bible Presbyterian Church over dictatorial leadership). For a complete timeline on the historical formation of Presbyterian denominations in the United States, see appendix 1.

<sup>27</sup> The PCA was formed in 1973, primarily as a conservative alternative to the Presbyterian Church in the United States (the mainline Presbyterian denomination in the southern United States), which had shifted toward theological liberalism and supposedly was on the brink of a "Plan of Union" with the northern UPCUSA that same year. D. G. Hart and John R. Muether, *Seeking a Better Country: 300 Years of American Presbyterianism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2007), 236-37.

identify themselves with like-minded constituents rather than remain associated with those in disagreement over a monumentally important issue such as biblical orthodoxy. Furthermore, numerous conservative churches within Presbyterianism have followed the dictum of withdrawal away from liberals given the history of Presbyterians in the twentieth century forming numerous conservative splinter denominations.<sup>28</sup> Yet, Boice remained with liberals rather than joining conservatives in his denominational affiliation.

One speculative reason for Boice's reluctance to secede from the UPCUSA is that the congregation at Tenth, like the majority of the UPCUSA, had become theologically liberal. Thus, Boice's failure to move to a different Presbyterian denomination could have resulted from the fact that he could not secure the vote of the membership, and when he finally did lead the congregation to withdraw, he did so after a war of attrition with those who did not support his leadership and conservative convictions. However, this is far from the case. Tenth has historically been an orthodox congregation from its inception. The church has a long, rich history of conservative pastors and adherence to the Westminster Confession.<sup>29</sup> One of Boice's predecessors, Donald Grey Barnhouse (pastor of Tenth from 1927-1960), a well-known evangelical with a vibrant radio ministry, made the theological position of Tenth clear when he censured the action of the Presbytery of Philadelphia serving communion at Tenth during one of its meetings:

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<sup>28</sup> A modern example of the ideology and process of a conservative Presbyterian congregation leaving its liberal denomination can be found in David J. Randall, *A Sad Departure: Why We Could Not Stay in the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2015). A contrary view, and one that influenced Boice, on why a conservative congregation should stay within a liberal denomination, was voiced by Presbyterian statesman John H. Gerstner in "John Calvin and Church Unity," *The United Presbyterian*, October 24 and 31, 1949, in *John H. Gerstner: The Early Writings*, vol. 2, ed. Don Kistler (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1998), 194-202.

<sup>29</sup> See Philip G. Ryken, ed., *Tenth Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia: 175 Years of Thinking and Acting Biblically* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2004). One of the earliest pastors of Tenth, Henry Augustus Boardman (served 1833-1876), was known for his preaching characterized by "unswerving allegiance to an authoritative and inerrant Bible." *Ibid.*, 58. Marcus Brownson, pastor from 1897-1924, stated of his church's position on Scripture: "We believe the Bible to be inspired of God, absolutely, and, therefore, inerrant, infallible, authoritative, with a dominant, a predominant influence upon our thinking and our manner of life." *Ibid.*, 68.

I know that this presbytery is certainly in no spiritual tone to take the communion of our Lord, the one with the other. . . . We are not at one as to whether Jesus Christ was supernaturally born. We are not at one as to whether Jesus Christ was eternally God. We are not at one as to whether the body of Jesus Christ was raised again on the third day.<sup>30</sup>

During Boice's tenure, Tenth remained a theologically conservative congregation as evidenced in the February 1980 letter of the Session (elder board) to the congregation explaining why it must finally withdraw from the UPCUSA.<sup>31</sup> The overwhelming vote of the church to follow the Session's recommendation (372 to 7) demonstrates the congregation's affiliation with orthodox theology.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, Boice's decision to delay withdrawing Tenth from the UPCUSA for the first twelve years of his ministry is not due to a faction of liberalism within the Tenth.<sup>33</sup>

Another possible reason for Boice's staying as long as he did within the liberal denomination is that the Presbytery of Philadelphia claimed ownership of Tenth's building and property. To secede from the denomination could likely mean the forfeiture of the property, or the amassment of a payment equal to its lucrative value in the heart of

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<sup>30</sup> Donald Grey Barnhouse, "Letter to Carl McIntire," February 6, 1937, box 6, folder 6, The Donald Grey Barnhouse papers, RG 480, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia. Of note is the fact that this statement reveals the Presbytery of Philadelphia to be predominantly a liberal entity before Boice became pastor of Tenth. Boice's lingering in the UPCUSA was not due to any camaraderie he experienced from being within a conservative presbytery; rather, he was at odds with both the presbytery and the denomination.

<sup>31</sup> James Montgomery Boice, "Letter from Session to Congregation," February 9, 1980, series 4, box 4, James Montgomery Boice Manuscript Collection, Princeton Theological Seminary. The letter affirms the congregation's adherence to the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms as well as "the centrality of the Scripture as the inerrant, infallible, ultimate authority of the church" throughout its 150-year history. Unless otherwise noted, all Boice correspondence in this dissertation, when referenced by series and box, are from James Montgomery Boice Manuscript Collection, Princeton Theological Seminary.

<sup>32</sup> James Montgomery Boice, "Letter to Walter and Lillian Phillips," April 4, 1980, series 4, box 4.

<sup>33</sup> In a letter to Al and Marion DeHoff on April 4, 1980, series 4, box 3, Boice notes that Tenth "has never been more united or more forward looking." In another letter to David George on April 10, 1980, series 4, box 3, Boice writes, "Undoubtedly the presbytery will continue to maneuver to create a minority [of the membership within Tenth] in whose name they can sue for the property." The fact that the presbytery was never able to organize a minority within Tenth which disagreed with the decision to withdraw is evidence that the church was unified on the matter.

downtown Philadelphia. This reason, however, is eclipsed by the fact that Tenth did eventually withdraw from the UPCUSA before the issue of the ownership of the property was settled. Thus, financial obligations were not a factor in Tenth's theological struggle with the Presbytery of Philadelphia. Boice's vision for Tenth was to reach the inner city of Philadelphia, and losing the property would have been a blow to that mission.<sup>34</sup>

However, Boice would not capitulate his faithfulness to orthodoxy in order to keep the building. Boice writes,

The property issue is not resolved, and we are simply depending upon God to defend us in this matter. The congregation is willing to lose the property, if that is God's will. But we want to retain it if possible in order to carry out our sense of mission to inner city Philadelphia.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, the pressure of financial obligations or the hardship of losing the property were not instrumental reasons for Tenth remaining within the UPCUSA as long as it did.

## **Solution**

Given the potential answers to the two posed questions which have been refuted, the solution regarding why Boice preached so frequently against liberal theology while at the same time remaining within a liberal denomination is apparent. He was attempting to serve as a corrective force to return the UPCUSA to orthodoxy.<sup>36</sup> Instead of abandoning the wayward denomination as many of his peers and forebears had done, Boice chose to remain and to fight for the theological conviction rooted in the Westminster Confession to which mainline Presbyterianism once held. Undoubtedly, Boice faced criticism that he was either in a league with the liberals or he was fighting a futile battle for remaining in

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<sup>34</sup> Philip Ryken, email to author, July 27, 2017.

<sup>35</sup> James Montgomery Boice, "Letter to Stewart J. Rankin," April 9, 1980, series 4, box 4.

<sup>36</sup> Mrs. Boice and three notable scholars, Ryken, Horton, and Phillips, all of whom worked closely with Boice, all confirmed in communications with me the veracity of this statement that Boice remained in the UPCUSA to change it back to orthodoxy. See p. 23 of this dissertation for more information on these men.



the UPCUSA. Boice's position on the matter is articulated clearly in a 1975 letter he wrote to a fellow Presbyterian pastor:

I simply will not tolerate the view that I, either directly or indirectly, agree with everything the UPC does just because I am a member of it. In other words, I hit that accusation head-on. It is not true, I argue, that anyone is ever in perfect accord with any group to which he belongs, that we do not leave America and become Englishmen just because a democracy is elected and we are republican. Moreover, I counter, by adding that it is within a church such as ours that evangelical men are most needed to present the biblical position.<sup>37</sup>

Boice disagreed with those who accused him of being a liberal simply by virtue of his remaining in the UPCUSA. Rather, he stayed in the denomination to work for its reform.

The letter from Tenth's session to the congregation regarding withdrawing from the UPCUSA reveals the church's position on why it had remained as long as it did in the denomination: "Tenth Presbyterian Church has elected to stay, thereby bearing witness to the unity of the church and in order to work for change within. Our text has been Revelation 3:2: 'Strengthen what remains and is about to die.'"<sup>38</sup> The text of Revelation 3:2 was in the aforementioned letter Barnhouse wrote to Carl McIntire about his refusal to leave mainline Presbyterianism and in turn was used by Boice as the succinct summary of his reasoning to remain within the UPCUSA—to "strengthen what remains and is about to die."<sup>39</sup> Although the majority of presbyteries within the UPCUSA by 1968 held to theological liberalism, enough conservative pastors and churches remained in the denomination that Boice believed together they could generate a resurgence toward orthodoxy.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> James Montgomery Boice, "Letter to G. J. Gerard," January 2, 1975, series 4, box 3.

<sup>38</sup> Boice, "Letter from Session to Congregation."

<sup>39</sup> Boice, interview. In this interview, Boice's widow affirms that he often relied on the text of Rev 3:2 to explain to those who questioned why he stayed in the UPCUSA. Thus, this text is included in the title of this dissertation.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* By the mid-1970s, these conservative, mainline Presbyterian pastors had formed groups such as Concerned United Presbyterians and Presbyterians United for Biblical Concerns, of which Boice

The ministry of Boice during his first twelve years at Tenth comports, to a degree, with the tenets of the rhetorical theory known as rhetorical situation. In 1968, University of Wisconsin-Madison professor Lloyd Bitzer wrote an article entitled “The Rhetorical Situation,” which serves as the seminal work establishing the theory. Bitzer defines rhetorical situation as

a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence.<sup>41</sup>

A principal feature of Bitzer’s argument is that all rhetoric is situational (i.e., utterances are meaningless apart from context) and never gives existence to the situation, but rather the situation brings rhetoric into existence. “So controlling is situation,” writes Bitzer, “we should consider it the very ground of rhetorical activity.”<sup>42</sup> Thus, rhetoric is shaped, or is given character, by the situation:

Rhetorical discourse does obtain its character-as-rhetorical from the situation which generates it. Rhetorical works belong to the class of things which obtain their character from the circumstances of the historic context in which they occur. . . . rhetoric is a response to a situation of a certain kind.<sup>43</sup>

Since the situation demands the rhetoric, according to Bitzer, rhetoric is not an instrument of reflection, but rather a mode of action. Therefore, rhetors must describe and prescribe a fitting response and course of action to the situation that has created the rhetoric.

Bitzer organizes his theory on rhetorical situation in a rubric of three constituent parts: exigence, audience, and constraints. The *exigence* is the imperfection of the situation that is marked by urgency and is able to be modified in whole or part by discourse.<sup>44</sup>

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was part of leadership in both, to organize and implement action to be taken to restore orthodoxy to the denomination. See Hart and Muether, *Seeking a Better Country*, 219.

<sup>41</sup> Lloyd Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 1 (1968): 5.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>44</sup> Exigencies unable to be modified are not rhetorical. Hart and Daughton agree with Bitzer in stating that rhetors believe something is wrong and are convinced the problem can be corrected within the

Bitzer specifies the nature of exigence: “In any rhetorical situation there will be at least one controlling exigence which functions as the organizing principle: it specifies the audience to be addressed and the change to be effected.”<sup>45</sup> The *audience* is the specific group of listeners being addressed by the rhetor that is “capable of serving as mediator of the change which the discourse functions to produce.”<sup>46</sup> *Constraints* are “persons, events, objects, and relations which are parts of the situation because they have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence.”<sup>47</sup> Constraints can consist of evidence, the quality of the argumentation, and the integrity and style of the rhetor. These three elements frame the rhetorical situation and reveal how the rhetor forms a fitting response to the situation and invites the audience to take action accordingly.

Bitzer’s theory of rhetorical situation serves as an effective model in understanding the nature of Boice’s work against theological liberalism and why he remained in the UPCUSA from 1968-1980. The exigence is clearly the problem of liberal theology—a problem within the denomination inherited by Boice when he became the pastor at Tenth and a problem that he did not create with his rhetoric, but instead sought to resolve. Boice’s audience is twofold—Boice’s congregation at Tenth as he attempts to keep it faithful to orthodoxy and the denomination as a whole which had fallen away from the Westminster standards. The sizable influence of Tenth and the larger, evangelical ministry of Boice were certainly capable of playing a significant part in “mediating the change” needed within the entire denomination. The constraints are the principal doctrines of the Bible as understood through a grammatical-historical hermeneutic historically

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audience they are addressing. Roderick P. Hart and Suzanne Daughton, *Modern Rhetorical Criticism*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Pearson Education, 2005), 41-42.

<sup>45</sup> Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation,” 7.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

received as orthodox and expressed through doctrinal statements such as the Westminster Confession. The rhetorical style of Boice (ethos, pathos, logos) is also a constraint.

In summary, Boice was the ardent opponent of theological liberalism to the degree he was, not because of personal angst against liberals or an intolerant commitment to conservative theological presuppositionalism, but because of the influence of his rhetorical situation. Bitzer's argument fits Boice in that Boice's particular situation called for recurrent statements against theological liberalism and that his rhetoric demanded remedial action that could be effectuated. However, caution must be employed in pressing Bitzer's theory too far in terms of *why* Boice preached against theological liberalism. A better use of the theory helps to understand *what* Boice did in his ministry—particularly the high frequency of references against liberalism in his sermons and writings and also his choice to remain in the UPCUSA.<sup>48</sup> Viewing Bitzer as the *explanation* of Boice's rhetoric begs the question as to whether another person in the same situation would have done what Boice did.<sup>49</sup> Instead, Bitzer's work provides a good *description* of Boice's rhetoric. The work of Scott Consigny, who modifies Bitzer's view, is posited in chapter 7 of this dissertation as an appropriate application of Bitzer's theory to Boice's specific situation.

Boice's ministry (the first twelve years at Tenth) as it relates to Bitzer should be viewed in terms of correlation, not causality. Boice chose initially to remain in the UPCUSA rather than withdraw from it, not because of internal strife within Tenth or for

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<sup>48</sup> Chap. 7 of this dissertation examines an opposing view to Bitzer's work on rhetorical situation by Richard Vatz, and a modified view by Scott Consigny.

<sup>49</sup> Bitzer would presumably disagree at this point, citing Boice's theological convictions and particular situation as the impetus behind Boice's defense of orthodoxy. Bitzer believes that situation creates rhetoric. However, that poses the question as to whether another pastor with the same theological convictions would have preached and written against theological liberalism with the same high frequency as Boice. Boice's situation called for greater frequency and intensity of rhetoric, but was not necessarily the progenitor of it. Furthermore, to argue Boice's situation as the creator of his rhetoric precludes the role of the Holy Spirit in leading Boice to the particular style of rhetoric he employed. In short, Boice was not a slave to his situation speaking as an automaton, but rather was obedient to the leadership of the Lord in his situation.

material reasons, but in hopes he could rectify the liberal theology of the denomination. He attempted this through the rhetorical use of expositional preaching and advocacy of conservative theology in various forms as the pastor of a significant Presbyterian church. Rhetorical situation best describes the context of Boice's early ministry at Tenth.

### **Background**

My interest in the topic of this dissertation began twenty-six years ago when I became a pastor and started reading Boice's commentaries. His ability to explicate a biblical text and to defend orthodox theology against opposing views has always impressed me and played an influential role in my own preaching and ministry. After I began the Ph.D. program in preaching at Southern, I started to consider the topic of my dissertation and naturally drifted toward the idea of writing on one of my favorite preachers. As I read more of Boice's sermons and his books, I was struck by the amount of material he dedicated to refuting theological liberalism and the detailed way in which he did it (i.e., addressing specific scholars, thinkers, and postulations). I also discovered more about Boice's tenure as pastor at Tenth and was immediately intrigued about the subject of this dissertation—why Boice remained as long as he did in the UPCUSA. However, I struggled to answer this question.

My own denominational tradition (Southern Baptist) and knowledge of the history of other denominations led me to the conclusion that pastors or churches that found themselves in disagreement with the majority of their denomination either formed a new denomination or joined an existing one that was like-minded. Yet, this was not the case with Boice. My assumption was that some compelling reason, probably related to finances, Presbyterian polity, or the mind-set of the congregation, forced Boice and Tenth to remain in the UPCUSA. However, none of these reasons served as a sufficient answer to the dilemma.

My initial research into the topic began to unveil the fact that Boice remained in the UPCUSA to be a change agent and hopefully to restore the denomination to its

faithfulness to the Westminster standards. The Canons of Criticism seminar in the Ph.D. program at SBTS and its section on Bitzer’s “Rhetorical Situation” helped me to formulate a better understanding of why Boice lingered in mainline Presbyterianism. Bitzer’s theory on rhetorical communication seemed to fit the first twelve years of Boice’s tenure at Tenth. Further research confirmed the application of rhetorical situation to Boice for this particular time frame in his ministry.<sup>50</sup> The amount and specificity of his disputation against liberal theology was not rooted in personal angst, educational background, or retribution. Rather, as Bitzer’s theory confirms, Boice found himself in a situation not of his own making that he genuinely thought he could positively correct. This, coupled with his conviction regarding the nature and proper interpretation of Scripture, helped to shape his rhetoric.

The significance of this dissertation is twofold. First, no substantial work has been written which explores the topic of this dissertation. Only one Ph.D. dissertation exists in which Boice is the major subject of consideration, and it is unrelated to the topic of this dissertation.<sup>51</sup> There are merely brief references regarding Boice’s relationship to the UPCUSA in the book on the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Tenth and in a very small number of articles and blog posts.<sup>52</sup> Oddly, for as influential and notable a figure as Boice was within evangelicalism, very little has been written about him in general in either academic or

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<sup>50</sup> Along with clear statements to support the application of Bitzer’s theory found in Boice’s personal correspondence, during this twelve-year period he preached through the books of John and Genesis, which have a high concentration of his refutations against liberal theology. Boice, interview. See also Richard Phillips, “In Memoriam, James Montgomery Boice,” *Reformation* 21, June 2010, accessed July 26, 2017, <http://www.reformation21.org/articles/in-memoriam-james-montgomery-boice-19382000.php>.

<sup>51</sup> This dissertation analyzes sermons Boice preached on a variety of genres of Scripture through a rubric created by Stephen Olford on what constitutes expositional preaching. Byron Brown, “An Analysis of James Montgomery Boice’s Expository Preaching through Selected Genres of Scripture” (Ph.D. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009).

<sup>52</sup> Ryken, *Tenth Presbyterian*. One article that specifically mentions Boice’s struggle with the UPCUSA is Phillips, “In Memoriam.”

popular literature.<sup>53</sup> This dissertation is a substantial contribution to the extant literature on Boice.

The second significance of this dissertation is its application to the modern context in which many pastors and churches find themselves today. As denominations continue to capitulate doctrinal orthodoxy, churches and their leaders are faced with the difficult dilemma of staying within that denomination or withdrawing.<sup>54</sup> The rhetorical situation of Boice helps to inform these pastors and churches regarding the complexity of the issue when they find themselves in doctrinal disagreement with their denomination. The line between discerning what is an allowable disagreement on a matter and what are grounds for discontinuing association with the denomination can be a blurry one. Of particular significance in the situation of Boice is that he did eventually lead Tenth to withdraw from the UPCUSA. This dissertation addresses the events that finally led Boice to the realization that remaining within the denomination was futile.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> A festschrift (Ryken, Thomas, and Duncan, *Give Praise to God*) in memory of Boice does contain biographical information and references to Boice as a defender of biblical inerrancy, but for the most part focuses on Boice's grave concerns about modern movements in worship. The articles relate to the identity, elements, and function of biblical worship.

<sup>54</sup> Randall, *A Sad Departure*. Scottish pastor David Randall documents the agonizing decision of his and other churches to part ways with the Church of Scotland principally over issues related to the General Assembly of the Kirk's sanction of homosexuality. In February 2017, two of the largest churches within the United Methodist Church started the process of withdrawing from the denomination over the debate regarding homosexuality. Heather Hahn, "Two Big Churches Seek Exit from Denomination," United Methodist News, February 9, 2017, accessed July 26, 2017, <http://www.umc.org/news-and-media/2-big-churches-seek-exit-from-denomination>. In 2014, Highland Park Presbyterian Church in Dallas, agreed to pay the Presbyterian Church (USA) nearly \$8 million for its building/property to withdraw from the denomination over its support of gay marriage and abortion on demand. Dustin Siggins, "Presbyterian Church Pays \$7.8 million to Leave Denomination That Backs Abortion, Gay 'Marriage,'" Life Site, September 17, 2014, accessed August 3, 2017, <https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/presbyterian-church-to-pay-7.8m-to-leave-liberal-denomination-that-supports>.

<sup>55</sup> The dissertation explains two key events that led to Boice's withdrawal from the UPCUSA. First, Overture L from the 1979 General Assembly (a response to what is commonly known as the "Wynn Kenyon case" in which Kenyon was denied ordination because he said he would refuse to ordain a woman as an elder) mandated that congregations elect women to serve as elders in their sessions. In light of this legislation, the Philadelphia Presbytery moved to defrock Boice as pastor and replace the session at Tenth, which refused to abide by the order. Philip Ryken, email message to author, July 26, 2017. Second, in

For Boice, a critical juncture in leaving the UPCUSA occurred when the denomination began issuing mandates requiring its conservative churches to take actions that violated their conscience—“If the church [UPCUSA] (wrongly, we believe) insists on conformity to something we in conscience cannot do, then we feel ourselves ejected and be forced to leave.”<sup>56</sup> Another critical point emerged when the denomination became more than just errant, but apostate—“It really is a tragedy how things have gone in the United Presbyterian Church. . . . The church [UPCUSA] is drawing very close to apostasy in an official way and is also effectively excluding people who disagree with it on procedural matters.”<sup>57</sup> Thus, Boice’s philosophy on relating to an errant denomination was to remain within it as a change agent for orthodoxy until the denomination forced the church to violate its conscience and/or became fully apostate. Though not all will fully agree with Boice’s philosophy, it does serve as a helpful reference or template to pastors and churches struggling today with the same situation as he faced.<sup>58</sup>

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1979, Washington, DC’s National Union Presbytery ordained Mansfield Kaseman to the ministry even though he denied the deity of Christ in the ordination process.

<sup>56</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Rev. Barry Downing,” February 20, 1980, series 4, box 3. This letter is a response to a Presbyterian pastor in New York regarding Overture L which, had Tenth stayed in the UPCUSA, would have required it to ordain women to the session.

<sup>57</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Mr. and Mrs. Kraftson,” April 4, 1980, series 4, box 3. This statement refers to the Mansfield Kaseman case. According to Linda Boice, the approval for ordination of a person denying the deity of Christ caused Boice to fear that the UPCUSA, in addition to requiring the ordination of women as elders, would also require the ordination of those denying the essential doctrines of the Christian faith. In addition, by the late 1970s, the Presbytery of Philadelphia had already “blackballed” Tenth from being able to receive any new graduate from Westminster as a member of the church staff (i.e., the Presbytery would only transfer to Tenth an existing minister from another church who was like-minded with the liberal Presbytery). The most significant issue with this reality is that if something happened to Boice, Tenth would be unable to call a Bible-believing pastor to replace him. This control of the Presbytery over the church to force it to violate its convictions was a key reason Tenth withdrew from the UPCUSA. Boice, interview.

<sup>58</sup> Consideration of how fellow pastors handle doctrinal and polity disagreements with the denomination is undoubtedly an influence in the decision making of a pastor. This was no exception with Boice, who was heavily influenced by conservative church leaders before him who chose to remain within mainline Presbyterianism for the sake of unity and orthodoxy. This dissertation briefly addresses the most influential of those pastors and leaders in Boice’s life, including Clarence Macartney (who disagreed with the schismatic approach of his peer Gresham Machen), Robert Lamont (pastored First Presbyterian Pittsburgh and officiated Boice’s wedding and ordination), Harold Ockenga (pastor of Park Street Church in Boston,



## Methodology

This dissertation seeks to examine in detail the two questions posed in the thesis section: (1) why did James Boice preach so frequently and with such detail against liberal theology? (2) why did Boice remain in the liberal UPCUSA for the first twelve years of his pastorate at Tenth? These questions are answered through a comparison of Boice's situation with the tenets of the rhetorical theory by Lloyd Bitzer, modified by Scott Consigny, known as rhetorical situation. The content of Boice's preaching is analyzed through his printed sermons with particular focus on sermons he delivered in the time period related to the thesis (1968-1980).<sup>59</sup> In addition, Boice's books and articles within the specified time frame of this dissertation, are examined to construct a framework of his theological views.<sup>60</sup>

Boice's relationship to the UPCUSA and his reason for remaining within the denomination until 1980 (as well as reasons for why he withdrew) are examined in this dissertation through several resources. A primary source of research for the topic is an interview I conducted with Linda Boice, James Boice's widow, in her home in Philadelphia on February 9, 2017. In the time since that interview, Mrs. Boice and I have exchanged numerous emails discussing matters related to the topic of the dissertation. Another resource is the Boice Manuscript Collection housed in the special collections department in the library at Princeton Theological Seminary. I spent a week in the library at Princeton working through Boice's papers pertinent to the subject of this dissertation. The collection

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where Boice attended while at Harvard and founder of the National Association of Evangelicals), John Gerstner (influential Presbyterian professor/author, who was an advocate of remaining within a denomination until it became fully apostate and did not leave the PC(USA) until 1990), and Donald Barnhouse (previous pastor at Tenth who desired to "strengthen what remained" in the denomination). Boice, interview.

<sup>59</sup> Mrs. Boice confirmed through examining church bulletins from 1968-1982 that Boice preached through the Gospel of John, Genesis, and Philippians during this time. Boice, interview.

<sup>60</sup> The books (not including commentaries) published by Boice from 1968-1982 include *Witness and Revelation in the Gospel of John* (1970); *How to Live the Christian Life* (1973); *Ordinary Men Called by God* (1974); *The Last and Future World* (1974); *Can You Run Away from God?* (1977); *Does Inerrancy Matter?* (1977); *Foundations of the Christian Faith* (1978).

contains many items of personal correspondence, original manuscripts of sermons and articles, and letters to the church that reveal Boice's struggle with the UPCUSA and his approach in attempting to resolve the problem. In addition, I was given access to the archives at Tenth where I examined documents related to Tenth's withdrawal from the UPCUSA.

While in Philadelphia, I spent two days in the Presbyterian Historical Society (PHS, the national archive of mainline Presbyterians) researching official documents from the UPCUSA chronicling the development of theological liberalism within the denomination as well as the events that triggered the ultimate withdrawal of Tenth. The PHS contains minutes from the meetings of Presbyterians United for Biblical Concern, a group Boice helped to form with other conservative pastors in the UPCUSA to organize and implement actions that might return the denomination back to orthodoxy. These minutes help to establish the gravity of the problem and the mind-set of these church leaders to address the issues they faced. In addition, I consulted several books, journal articles, and websites that provide important information about mainline Presbyterianism in general and the UPCUSA in particular, including mentors influential to Boice, and the evangelical organizations in which Boice was involved.

Finally, I conducted interviews with four key people who worked closely with Boice in ministry and knew him and the dilemma he faced with the UPCUSA well. These men are Philip Ryken (succeeded Boice as pastor of Tenth and is now President of Wheaton College); Richard Phillips (served on staff with Boice at Tenth from 1995 until Boice's death and is now pastor of Second Presbyterian Church in Greenville, South Carolina); Michael Horton (helped to form the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals with Boice and is now professor of theology and apologetics at Westminster Seminary in

Escondido, California); and Stephen Horn (who spent many Saturdays with Boice in sermon preparation).<sup>61</sup>

The primary resources for examining rhetorical situation are journal articles on the subject. The principal article is by Lloyd Bitzer, who is considered the primogenitor of the theory. The challenges to rhetorical situation presented by Vatz, Consigny, and others are briefly examined in this dissertation; this inclusion contributes to a better understanding of the nuance of the theory and how it might be misconstrued or misapplied, particularly in the situation of Boice. Other articles on rhetorical situation contain a wide array of discourse on the theory and give perspective on its application in various contexts. Books on rhetorical theory and communication as well as Ph.D. dissertations also provide useful information in understanding rhetorical situation and how it can be applied in particular to the act of preaching.

Limitations to this dissertation include the examination of Boice's printed sermons and do not include audio versions. The need to search for references to liberal theology within the sermons and the volume of these references necessitate that they be electronically searchable. To examine audio versions falls outside the scope of this dissertation and is unwarranted as the majority of Boice's audio sermons also exist in print format.<sup>62</sup> The messages in Boice's expositional commentaries are near exact transcripts of the audio versions.<sup>63</sup> The primary focus of Boice's sermons and writings

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<sup>61</sup> Other interviews were also conducted with staff members of Tenth who personally knew Boice and were able to recount information shared with them directly from Boice about his struggle with the UPCUSA. In addition, the dissertation references an interview conducted with Albert Mohler, who was a personal friend of Boice.

<sup>62</sup> A full list of Boice's sermons available in audio format can be found at <http://www.oneplace.com/ministries/the-bible-study-hour/series/>. Only the series in 1 and 2 Corinthians and James exist in audio and not printed format.

<sup>63</sup> That the print and audio versions of Boice's sermons are near identical is confirmed by comparing the sermon manuscripts in the Boice collection at Princeton (used by Boice when the audio versions were recorded) with the messages in the expositional commentaries.

are on his ministry from 1968-1980 as these years involve the problem the thesis seeks to answer. The history of mainline Presbyterianism is examined to provide background in demonstrating the situation Boice inherited when he became pastor of Tenth, but the majority of research focuses on Boice's particular denomination at the time—the UPCUSA.<sup>64</sup> Additionally, although Boice achieved prodigious work in evangelical organizations, this dissertation focuses on his role as pastor at Tenth in the time frame previously specified.

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the two questions and proposed solution of the thesis which the research demonstrates are viable and defensible assertions. The conclusion seeks to examine the success of Boice's defense against theological liberalism and how that success must be qualified. The significance of the dissertation is that it will add to the corpus of literature about Boice which is lacking given the influence he had at a critical juncture in the history of American evangelicalism. This dissertation is a constructive resource for church leaders whose present ministry situation matches that of Boice during his first twelve years at Tenth.

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<sup>64</sup> During Boice's tenure as pastor, Presbyterians were generally divided in a geographic sense by northern and southern traditions and in a smaller sense through various smaller denominations within those traditions.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE RISE OF LIBERALISM IN NORTHERN MAINLINE PRESBYTERIANISM

Mainline Presbyterianism took a decided shift toward liberal theology in the twentieth century. For some time, extending back to the latter part of the nineteenth century, Presbyterians struggled to make Christian faith relevant in the face of Darwinism, the increasing acceptance of historicism and higher criticism, and the rapid developments of industry and urbanization of the Gilded Age. The result was a movement away from historical Presbyterian theology rooted in the Westminster Confession and Scottish Common Sense Realism to an approach that was more inclusive of beliefs compatible with liberal theology.<sup>1</sup> No longer were the vast majority of Presbyterians taking the tenets of “Princeton Theology” at face value, but rather they began searching for new theological expressions that would render as acceptable those beliefs which in the past had been considered as heterodox.<sup>2</sup> The account of how mainline Presbyterianism embraced liberal theology is important to examine for this dissertation since it reveals the state of the denomination when Boice entered into it as a pastor. In addition, the way the

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<sup>1</sup> The progenitor of the Presbyterian movement toward liberal theology is considered by many to be Charles Augustus Briggs (1841-1913), professor at Union Seminary in New York. Briggs championed a hermeneutic based on the higher critical method and questioned the Princeton Theology affirmation of biblical inerrancy. He was acquitted of heresy by the New York presbytery in 1892, but was defrocked and excommunicated by the General Assembly in 1893. Nevertheless, Briggs cast the die for the advancement of liberal theology within mainline Presbyterianism in the decades to come. Lefferts A. Loetscher, *The Broadening Church* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1954), 60-61.

<sup>2</sup> “Princeton Theology” derived its theological beliefs from its conservative view of Scripture, summarized in the 1881 article on the inspiration of Scripture by Archibald Hodge and B. B. Warfield: “The Scriptures not only contain, but are, the Word of God, and hence that all their elements and all their affirmations are absolutely errorless and binding the faith and obedience of men.” Archibald Hodge and B. B. Warfield, quoted in George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 113.

story unfolds with some conservatives such as Gresham Machen taking a militant approach to protect biblical orthodoxy, and other conservatives such as Clarence Macartney employing a milder style, undoubtedly influenced Boice's own dealings with the UPCUSA.

### **Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy**

From 1922 to 1936, the Presbyterian Church in the USA (northern Presbyterians) endured a significant struggle for control of the denomination between conservatives (also referred to as fundamentalists) and liberals (also known as modernists or moderates). At stake was an orthodox adherence to the major doctrines of the Bible, as well as the Westminster Confession of Faith, and how the denomination would move forward amid a rapidly changing society. The struggle, known as the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy, established the liberal takeover of mainline Presbyterianism in the north.

### **The Liberals**

Liberal theology within mainline Presbyterianism began to find its full voice in 1922 when Harry Emerson Fosdick, a liberal Baptist minister preaching at First Presbyterian Church, New York City, delivered his bombshell sermon entitled, "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?"<sup>3</sup> In this sermon, Fosdick argued that the narrow-mindedness of conservative theology would be the death knell of the church as it would exclude the progressivism of the younger generation and society in general. He accused fundamentalists of rejecting science and critical thinking for "spoon-fed, predetermined conclusions" and that specific doctrines of the Christian faith were "tiddledywinks and

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<sup>3</sup> A significant reason for the widespread influence of Fosdick's sermon is the fact that John D. Rockefeller paid for a copy of the sermon to be mailed to every Protestant pastor in the United States. Robert M. Miller, "Harry Emerson Fosdick and John D. Rockefeller, Jr.: The Origins of an Enduring Association," *Foundations* 21, no. 4 (October-December 1978): 300.

peccadillos of religion” where “there is not a single thing at stake in the controversy on which depends the salvation of human souls.”<sup>4</sup>

Fosdick addressed three specific doctrines held by fundamentalists in which a rigid, traditional viewpoint of these doctrines is untenable with the mind-set of modernism: the virgin birth of Christ, inerrancy of Scripture, and literal Second Coming of Jesus. The modernism of the day, Fosdick argued, was akin to when mankind discovered “the universe that had been centered in this planet was centered in the sun around which the planets whirled.”<sup>5</sup> When such epochal shifts occur in society, Fosdick believed that “there has only been one way out: the new knowledge and the old faith had to be blended in a new combination.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, liberals believed that the choice facing Christianity in the early twentieth century was to accommodate biblical doctrine with secular ideologies or become completely irrelevant. Fosdick was not alone in adopting a theological strategy that would harmonize Christianity with modernist principles. Several other influential leaders within the northern Presbyterian Church sought to articulate Christian faith and its doctrines in new ways that would be compatible to the sensitivities of the modern mind.

Robert E. Speer was the longtime secretary of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions and played a pivotal role in the 1925 Special Commission that was the turning tide in the controversy in favor of the liberals. Speer noted that on the mission field, missionaries often had to reformulate traditional expressions of Christian faith in new ways to adapt it to the understanding of the hearers.<sup>7</sup> He believed his context was no different

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<sup>4</sup> Harry Emerson Fosdick, “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?” in *Sermons in American History: Selected Issues in the American Pulpit, 1630-1967*, ed. DeWitte Holland (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971), 346-47.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 340.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> W. Reginald Wheeler, *A Man Sent from God: A Biography of Robert E. Speer* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1956), 263.

in the early twentieth century of the United States. For Speer, unity within Christian ranks was of the greatest importance and had to be achieved at any price: “The one great need of the world today is unity. The central principal of Christianity is unity. The fundamental element of all life is unity.”<sup>8</sup> After World War I, many eschewed the idea of conflict in any arena and sought to avoid the hegemony that arose in the most catastrophic war the world had seen.<sup>9</sup> As a result, denominational leaders such as Speer were willing to capitulate the necessity of orthodox views of biblical doctrines in order to achieve not only unity within mainline Presbyterianism but also to flourish society in the challenge of the times. Referring to the adherence of strict orthodox doctrine as indispensable to Christianity, Speer noted, is “playing with details while men die.”<sup>10</sup>

Henry Sloane Coffin, who at the time of the controversy was an influential New York City pastor and professor at Union Seminary, was the leading figure for the liberal cause and worked tirelessly in organizing and motivating the effort to combat fundamentalism. Coffin took a similar tack as Fosdick and Speer. For him, religious experience supplanted the historical evidence of the Christian faith as well as a grammatical-historical hermeneutic regarding Scripture.<sup>11</sup> Reliance upon the subjectivity of experience allowed for a broader inclusion of what it meant to be Christian. Such ecumenism, Coffin believed, was essential to the future of the church and to human society.

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<sup>8</sup> Robert E. Speer, “Unity in the Mission Field,” in *The Problem of Christian Unity*, ed. Frederick Lynch (New York: Macmillan, 1921), 62-83.

<sup>9</sup> John F. Piper notes that Speer believed, “Christian unity was the great lesson of the war.” John F. Piper, Jr., *The American Churches in World War I* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1985), 182, quoted in Bradley J. Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy: Fundamentalists, Modernists, and Moderates* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 195.

<sup>10</sup> Robert E. Speer, *The Church and Missions* (New York: George H. Doran, 1926), 149.

<sup>11</sup> Henry Coffin notes, “Religion is experience.” Henry Sloane Coffin, *Some Christian Convictions: A Practical Restatement in Terms of Present-Day Thinking* (n.p.: CreateSpace Independent, 2015), 23. This is a similar approach that Schleiermacher (1768-1834) took in his attempt to reconcile Christian faith with the tenets of the Enlightenment.



Only a unified, worldwide church that was “supernational,” Coffin argued, could bring about the change in society so desperately needed after World War I.<sup>12</sup> Like Speer, Coffin championed unity at any price. Instead of teaching the doctrines of the Bible, Coffin advocated that in order to reshape society ministers must “develop Christians of enlightened and sensitive consciences”<sup>13</sup> who were able “to live together in God . . . in the earth-wide brotherhood of mankind.”<sup>14</sup>

With religious experience creating an ahistorical understanding of Christianity, Coffin argued in the context of the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy that the virgin birth “is not of primary importance” and that the Bible is not the final authority for Christians since Jesus alone is the Word of God.<sup>15</sup> In addition to differing with conservatives about doctrine, Coffin especially had a distaste for the style they had adopted to champion their cause. He complained that Machen, Macartney, and other conservatives had no scruples in knowing how to fight fairly and they had exhibited an abusive, intolerant behavior in contrast to the genteel approach of the liberals. Coffin wrote of the “fundamentalists and social radicals” that they “give no quarter in battle. Their gods are jealous gods, and liberals are their Canaanites to be exterminated.”<sup>16</sup> Such a vituperate approach is one that Boice would seek to avoid.

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<sup>12</sup> Henry Sloane Coffin, *In a Day of Social Rebuilding: Lectures on the Ministry of the Church* (Miami: HardPress, 2013), 26.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 111-12.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 162-63. Dorrien quotes Georgia Harkness in referencing the liberals’ views that they were not as de-Christianized as the conservatives claimed. Liberals did not deny the transcendence of God or sinfulness of man, but rather sought to understand religion through a dualistic perspective of the spiritual and natural: “To find God both in the Bible and in the world accessible to philosophy and science.” Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Idealism, Realism, and Modernity, 1900-1950* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 413.

<sup>15</sup> Coffin, *In a Day of Social Rebuilding*, 74-75, 113.

<sup>16</sup> Henry Sloan Coffin, “Can Liberalism Survive?” *Religion in Life* 4 (Spring 1935): 194, quoted in Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology*, 540-41.

Charles R. Erdman, professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, employed shrewd leadership in favor of the liberals as the moderator of the seminal 1925 General Assembly. Erdman described himself as a fundamentalist and affirmed key biblical doctrines, such as the virgin birth, but was reluctant to embrace biblical inerrancy and was a strong proponent of unity within the denomination.<sup>17</sup> Heavily influenced by the Keswick movement and the revivalism of D. L. Moody, Erdman believed the role of the Spirit in leading Christians to right living trumped all else, including adherence to orthodoxy in doctrine.<sup>18</sup> Erdman wrote, “A man may recite an orthodox creed and believe it and yet be self-deceived as to his relation to Christ. . . . On the other hand, a real believer follows Christ, obeys Christ, and reflects the character of Christ.”<sup>19</sup>

Erdman stood in contrast to the conservatives because he viewed the anchor point of the Christian faith to be living righteously and not merely defending doctrine: “The best defense of the truth is found in the influence of a holy life. . . . The way to ‘contend earnestly for the faith’ is not that of physical force or bitter denunciation or social ostracism, but that of consistent living.”<sup>20</sup> This approach placed Erdman in sharp relief against the approach of Machen. Longfield provides an excellent summary statement of what the liberals were trying to accomplish in the Fundamentalist-Modernist

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<sup>17</sup> Erdman described his position: “I have always been a Fundamentalist in my beliefs. . . . If any men of more liberal theological views desire to vote for me, it is, of course, their privilege to do so. The platform on which I stand, however, is that of old-fashioned orthodoxy and Christian spirit and constitutional procedure.” Charles R. Erdman, quoted in Loetscher, *The Broadening Church*, 126.

<sup>18</sup> The Keswick movement, which began in Great Britain in the 1870s, emphasized the role of the Holy Spirit in “filling” a Christian to be able to lead a holy life even to the point of perfection.

<sup>19</sup> Charles R. Erdman, *The Spirit of Christ: Devotional Studies in the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (New York: George H. Doran, 1926), 49, quoted in Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy*, 141.

<sup>20</sup> Charles R. Erdman, *The General Epistles: An Exposition* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 191), 28, quoted in Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy*, 141.

controversy: “By reinterpreting the faith in light of modern thought forms, liberals sought to preserve the core of the faith and maintain its vitality in the modern world.”<sup>21</sup>

### **The Conservatives**

The response by conservatives to the growing emergence of liberalism within mainline Presbyterianism was swift and strong. Just months after Fosdick preached his infamous sermon, Clarence Macartney, then pastor of Arch Street Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia and the most notable conservative Presbyterian pastor in the controversy, delivered a point by point rebuttal to Fosdick with a sermon entitled, “Shall Unbelief Win?” In this sermon, Macartney took umbrage with the tone struck by Fosdick that the fundamentalist mind-set is superannuated when he states, “More and more there is a tendency to brand as illiberal, medieval and narrow any man who differs from the current of popular religious thought, and declares it to be non-Christian in its tendencies.”<sup>22</sup> The conclusion of the sermon is an apt summary of Macartney’s perspective on liberal theology, which he labels a “rationalistic and modernist menace to Protestant Christianity”:

The movement is slowly secularizing the Church, and if permitted to go unchecked and unchallenged, will ere long produce in our churches a new kind of Christianity, a Christianity of opinions and principles and good purposes, but a Christianity without worship, without God, and without Jesus Christ.<sup>23</sup>

Macartney’s sermon was a rejoinder that the liberalism espoused by Fosdick would reduce Christian faith to mere subjectivism rather than objective doctrines and convictions rooted in the Word of God.

Macartney was a strong defender of orthodox doctrine and believed the Bible was the final authority of all Christian expression, unlike Coffin who placed greater

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<sup>21</sup> Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy*, 88.

<sup>22</sup> Clarence E. Macartney, “Shall Unbelief Win?,” in *Sermons in American History: Selected Issues in the American Pulpit, 1630-1977*, ed. DeWitte Holland (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971), 350.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 364.

emphasis on religious experience. “The Bible is true and credible,” Macartney writes, “The great acts and words of God therein recorded are true. This is a foundational belief of the Christian religion. Ultimately Christianity stands or falls with the truth or falsehood of the Bible.”<sup>24</sup> In addition to biblical inerrancy, Macartney believed that the virgin birth, bodily resurrection of Jesus, and substitutionary atonement, all doctrines under scrutiny by liberals, were climacteric to the Christian faith. The virgin birth, he asserted, is not only true because the Bible records it as fact, but also because the framework of Christianity rests upon it.<sup>25</sup> He noted a similar belief about the Resurrection—“the empty grave is the cradle of the church” and the atonement—“[the cross] is not a part of our salvation . . . but it is *the* gospel, without which there is no gospel.”<sup>26</sup> Macartney’s dispute with the liberals regarding the doctrine of the atonement reveals the nature of the conservatives’ grievance with the opposing side in the controversy. He writes,

They who now pride themselves as liberals and modernists will have great difficulty in persuading any one that they really accept and believe and preach the Christianity which must be defined as the “revelation of a way of salvation from sin through the incarnation and blood-shedding of the Son of God.” Their Christianity is a Christianity of ethics, of ideals, of development, of inspiration, of education; and not a Christianity which stands or falls with one grand redemptive act by Jesus Christ.<sup>27</sup>

Macartney took a pointed and outspoken approach in his opposition to liberalism within the denomination, but was leery of schism and was more conciliatory than his counterpart J. Gresham Machen—an approach that Boice would adopt in his own struggle with liberalism.

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<sup>24</sup> Clarence Macartney, *The Christian Faith and the Spirit of the Age* (New York: American Tract Society, 1940), 31, 24, quoted in Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 115.

<sup>25</sup> Clarence E. Macartney, “Another Gospel Which Is Not Another,” *Presbyterian* 23 (January 1930): 8.

<sup>26</sup> Clarence E. Macartney, *Twelve Great Questions about Christ* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1993), 112.

<sup>27</sup> Clarence E. Macartney, “The Great Defection,” 6, Clarence E. Macartney Papers, Geneva College, Beaver Falls, PA, quoted in Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 116.

Princeton Theological Seminary professor J. Gresham Machen was the most notable figure in the conservative effort to thwart the rising tide of liberalism within the denomination. He was a tireless and militant champion for orthodoxy inspired by his belief that if at any point in history theological liberalism ever became the norm within the church, then “Christianity would at last have perished from the earth and the gospel would have sounded forth for the last time.”<sup>28</sup> In 1923, he published his eponymous *Christianity and Liberalism* in which he argued that the beliefs of theological liberals constituted a faith wholly different from Christianity, thus rendering adherents to such faith non-Christian. Machen writes of the “supposed Christianity of the modern liberal church”:

The liberal attempt at reconciling Christianity with modern science has really relinquished everything distinctive of Christianity, so that what remains is in essentials only the same indefinite type of religious aspiration which was in the world before Christianity came on the scene. In trying to remove from Christianity everything that could possibly be objected to in the name of science . . . the apologist has really abandoned what he started out to defend.<sup>29</sup>

Machen argued that theological liberalism was its own unique religion that had “tailored its faith and practice to fit the prevailing temper of the age.”<sup>30</sup>

Machen’s primary dispute with liberalism was its indifference toward adhering to doctrine. William Jennings Bryan and other conservative Presbyterian leaders of the day rooted their argument against liberals in the denomination with rhetoric aimed at the liberals’ sympathies to Darwinism.<sup>31</sup> However, Machen focused on the critical problem

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<sup>28</sup> J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 7.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>30</sup> D. G. Hart, *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P and R, 1994), 9.

<sup>31</sup> At the same time, other conservatives were disillusioned with Bryan’s approach in making Darwinism the key issue in the fight between conservatives and liberals. To these conservatives, the crucial issue was doctrinal orthodoxy. Bryan also levied the ill effect of liberalism on social structures, namely the consumption of alcohol (Bryan was influential in the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment in 1920), as pivotal to his platform against liberalism. Interestingly, Machen opposed legislation that took away individual

of liberalism denying core biblical doctrines, which gave Christianity its distinctiveness, and if denied, removed its efficaciousness. Liberalism, Machen demurred, embraced modern forms of hermeneutics and historicism, thereby removing Christianity from its historical moorings and statements of faith making creeds “merely the changing expression of a unitary Christian experience” and thus are as “far removed as possible from the teachings of historic Christianity.”<sup>32</sup> For Machen, the repudiation of an orthodox understanding of biblical doctrines invalidated liberalism’s claim to be Christian.

William Jennings Bryan, who before the controversy had been nominated three times as the Democratic nominee for President of the United States and had served as Secretary of State under Woodrow Wilson, functioned in a leadership role on the conservative side, but to a lesser degree than Machen and Macartney. Bryan was an advocate of biblical orthodoxy, evidenced in his widely popular book *In His Image*, in which he defended key doctrines. However, the major issue proposed by Modernism, which Bryan execrated more than any other was naturalistic evolution—“the problem which underlies all others.”<sup>33</sup> Darwinism was guilty, claimed Bryan, of “putting man on a brute basis and ignoring spiritual values”<sup>34</sup> that reduced the Bible to a mere “storybook”<sup>35</sup>

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freedoms such as laws against gambling, Sabbath breaking, and even jaywalking. Machen was one of the very few Presbyterian leaders of his time to oppose Prohibition (Eighteenth Amendment). See Frances Fitzgerald, *The Evangelicals* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017), 123; and D. G. Hart and John Muether, *Seeking a Better Country: Three Hundred Years of American Presbyterianism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P and R, 1994), 193-94.

<sup>32</sup> Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 16. The majority of *Christianity and Liberalism* is Machen’s delineation of how the Christian and liberal understandings of key doctrines in the Bible are entirely different. He writes about five doctrines in this manner: God and man, the Bible, Christ, salvation, and the Church.

<sup>33</sup> William Jennings Bryan, *In His Image* (New York: Fleming H. Revel, 1922), 89.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

and denied the deity of Christ by giving Jesus “an ape for an ancestor on His mother’s side at least and, as many evolutionists believe, on His Father’s side also.”<sup>36</sup>

In addition, Bryan believed that evolutionary theory was at the heart of the world’s problems and a chief cause of World War I since its propagation fanned into flame Nietzscheism, German Nationalism, and the general moral malaise that comes from the crumbling of Judeo-Christian values.<sup>37</sup> As the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy intensified within the denomination, Bryan was irresolute to push the denomination to a schism. More than arguing about doctrine, the moral fiber of society was Bryan’s chief concern. The division of a denomination as large as northern mainline Presbyterianism could have devastating effects on the nation.<sup>38</sup> By 1925, Bryan largely disassociated himself from Machen and his militant tactics.

### **The Controversy**

Conservatives at the 1923 General Assembly under the leadership of William Jennings Bryan managed to lead the assembly to approve narrowly an overture censuring Fosdick and First Presbyterian Church of New York City, requiring the church to ensure “preaching and teaching to conform to the system of doctrines taught in the Confession of Faith.”<sup>39</sup> Although Bryan lost the election to become moderator of the General Assembly and also failed in the successful passage of an overture condemning Darwinism, he did

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<sup>36</sup>Bryan, *In His Image*, 117.

<sup>37</sup> Bryan was heavily influenced in this area of thought by two books: *Headquarters Nights* by Vernon Kellogg and *The Science of Power* by Benjamin Kidd. Both books traced the influence of Darwin on Nietzsche and consequently German nationalism, militarism, and materialism. See Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 68.

<sup>38</sup> Rather than schism, Bryan’s desire was for ministers who could not embrace an orthodox view of biblical doctrine to withdraw from the ministry altogether: “[Liberal ministers] should be honest enough to separate themselves from the ministry and not attempt to debase the religion which they profess.” William Jennings Bryan, “God and Evolution,” *New York Times*, February 26, 1922, 1.

<sup>39</sup> Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church in the USA, *Minutes of the General Assembly 1923* (Philadelphia: Office of the General Assembly, 1923), 2:253.

orchestrate the approval of an overture that reaffirmed the “five fundamentals of the faith” previously outlined and approved in the 1910 General Assembly.<sup>40</sup> However, in January 1924, progressive New York Presbyterians meeting in Auburn, New York, launched a counteroffensive with the publication of the “Auburn Affirmation.” This document, signed by 1,274 Presbyterian ministers, argued that the 1923 overture on the five fundamentals forced too rigid an interpretation of the five fundamentals and appealed to the denomination’s history of allowing differing interpretations of the Westminster Confession.<sup>41</sup>

The Auburn Affirmation described the signers’ personal assent of the five fundamentals, but also provided the concession that not all ministers within mainline Presbyterianism should be compelled to adhere to the doctrinal standards approved in the 1923 General Assembly:

Some of us regard the particular theories contained in the deliverance of the General Assembly of 1923 as satisfactory explanations of these facts and doctrines. But we are united in believing that these are not the only theories allowed by the Scriptures and our standards as explanations of these facts and doctrines of our religion, and that all who hold to these facts and doctrines, whatever theories they may employ to explain them, are worthy of all confidence and fellowship.<sup>42</sup>

The conflict between conservatives and liberals in the Presbyterian Church in the USA was now on a collision course where a compromise to preserve the unity of the denomination

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<sup>40</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Evangelicals*, 128. These same doctrines were affirmed again in the 1916 General Assembly. Even before these assemblies, Presbyterians formally endorsed orthodoxy; namely, the inerrancy of Scripture and the expectation that Presbyterian ministers hold to that conviction, in the “Portland Deliverance” of 1892—a statement in response to the teachings of Charles Augustus Briggs centered on higher criticism. For an analysis of how the Auburn Affirmation contradicts the five fundamentals in favor of Modernism, see Gary North, *Crossed Fingers: How the Liberals Captured the Presbyterian Church* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1996), 545-49.

<sup>41</sup> Hart, *Defending the Faith*, 116. Robert Hastings Nichols, professor at Auburn Theological Seminary and a principal author of the Auburn Affirmation, cited the Adopting Act of 1729, and the terms of reunion in 1869 and 1906 as precedent in the annals of Presbyterian history to allow for broader, more progressive interpretations of biblical doctrine within the denomination. See Hart and Muether, *Seeking a Better Country*, 193.

<sup>42</sup> This excerpt from the Auburn Affirmation quoted in Charles E. Quirk, “Origins of the Auburn Affirmation,” *Journal of Presbyterian History* 53 (Summer 1975): 126.



appeared to be impossible.

Throughout the controversy Macartney never shied away from voicing his disagreement with liberal theology—“Whether [Fosdick] is right, or whether the evangelical position is right, one thing all must now admit: both positions cannot be right; one MUST be wrong.”<sup>43</sup> However, Macartney was reticent to call for liberals to be ousted from the denomination through ecclesiastical trial. He explains his position in “Shall Unbelief Win?”:

Dr. Fosdick contends against a conspiracy on the part of those whom he calls “Fundamentalists,” to put out of the church all those who do not agree with them in every particular. . . . As for putting them out, that could easily be done. . . . But I am coming to think less and less of excision and excommunication as a means of preserving the Church from false teaching . . . because I am convinced that the far more useful course is to declare the whole counsel of God. . . . Dr. Fosdick and his companions may worry about processes of excision and ecclesiastical trial, and so being put out of the Church, the sad thing is that in the minds of thousands upon thousands of Christians they are already out of the Church, and no act of an ecclesiastical court could make the fact more real. Our duty is to pray that they may be brought back into the Church and help build up and adorn where hitherto they have only wounded the Church.<sup>44</sup>

Macartney’s desire to bring liberals back to orthodoxy is reflected in the ministry of Boice.

Even though Macartney eschewed a schism in the denomination, the publication of the Auburn Affirmation appears to have concretized Macartney’s disquiet that unity was unattainable and that the two sides of the conflict were differing and irreconcilable religions. In his 1924 sermon, “The Irrepressible Conflict,” Macartney proclaimed that the two sides “hold views as to Christ and the Scriptures so divergent and so irreconcilable as to constitute two different religions.”<sup>45</sup> Machen had already established the irreconcilable nature of the two sides in *Christianity and Liberalism* when he wrote,

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<sup>43</sup> Macartney, “Shall Unbelief Win?,” 352.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 363.

<sup>45</sup> Clarence Macartney, “The Irrepressible Conflict,” quoted in Hart and Meuther, *Seeking a Better Country*, 194.

It is at any rate perfectly clear that liberalism is not Christianity. And that being the case, it is highly undesirable that liberalism and Christianity should continue to be propagated within the bounds of the same organization. A separation between the two parties in the Church is the crying need for the hour.<sup>46</sup>

On the other side of the conflict, Henry Sloane Coffin and other liberal leaders also saw an inevitable schism and were prepared to lead a highly organized exodus of liberals from the denomination. These liberals were sure to receive retribution from conservatives in the 1924 General Assembly in response to the Auburn Affirmation.

Coffin's fears became reality in early 1924, as the Presbytery of Philadelphia approved an overture to the General Assembly recommending that anyone who could not affirm the five fundamentals not be allowed to "serve as a member or paid officer of any Board or the General Council of the Presbyterian Church."<sup>47</sup> Additionally, the Presbytery of Cincinnati passed an overture calling upon the General Assembly to censure the signers of the Auburn Affirmation. Also, conservatives in the New York Presbytery appealed to the Judicial Commission, the denomination's highest judicatory, to formally defrock Fosdick. When Macartney was elected moderator of the 1924 General Assembly, all appearances pointed to the expulsion of the liberals from the denomination or their voluntary withdrawal. Coffin wrote to his wife, "Personally, I now think that the church will be split. It may not; but only a miracle can save it."<sup>48</sup> Although Macartney appointed conservatives to lead every committee of the General Assembly, no action was taken against the Auburn Affirmation and its signers. In addition, no substantial action was taken against Fosdick; the issue regarding Fosdick's position was reduced to an administrative matter citing the problem was a Baptist preaching in a Presbyterian pulpit.

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<sup>46</sup> Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 135-36.

<sup>47</sup> North, *Crossed Fingers*, 495, 557.

<sup>48</sup> Henry Sloane Coffin, "Letter to Dorothy Coffin," May 26, 1924, Henry Sloane Coffin Papers, Burke Library, Union Theological Seminary, New York, quoted in Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy*, 125.

The conservative lapse at the 1924 General Assembly appears to be inexplicable. One possible reason they failed to act decisively against the liberals is that conservatives found comfort in their belief that they still comprised the strong majority of Presbyterian ministers and laymen.<sup>49</sup> This is also evidenced in the fact that liberals were so convinced one of their own could never be elected moderator of the General Assembly that they supported Charles Erdman (a conservative who supported unity within the denomination) to run against Macartney. Another possible reason is that conservatives feared a backlash if they took too strong a stance against the Auburn Affirmation and Fosdick. Coffin writes, “I believe the conservatives are frightened and that they shrink from extreme measures, but they have the Assembly in their power.”<sup>50</sup> Finally, the more accommodating approach of Macartney and Bryan, as opposed to Machen, may have set a tone to scale down decisive action against the liberals in hopes of preserving the unity of the denomination.<sup>51</sup> Longfield summarizes the 1924 General Assembly by stating, “Whatever the reason, an assembly with Machen, Macartney, and Bryan in attendance failed to address the liberals’ clearest and most aggressive declaration of faith [the Auburn Affirmation]. This failure would later come back to haunt the fundamentalist forces.”<sup>52</sup>

The 1925 General Assembly proved to be the turning tide in favor of the liberals to take control of mainline Presbyterianism in the north. Given the missed opportunity by the conservatives to take decisive action the previous year and the forthcoming decision of the Judicial Commission to allow the General Assembly to act on the New York Presbytery’s condoning of ordination for ministers refusing to affirm the five fundamentals,

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<sup>49</sup> Macartney states, “As for putting [the liberals] out, that could easily be done, for they are a small minority in the Church; although at present the vocal minority.” Macartney, “Shall Unbelief Win?”, 363.

<sup>50</sup> Coffin, “Letter to Dorothy Coffin.”

<sup>51</sup> In the 1923 General Assembly, Bryan worked for a compromise concerning action against Fosdick, and in 1924, voted to approve that no action be taken against the Auburn Affirmation or its signers.

<sup>52</sup> Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy*, 125.

liberals again prepared for the worst. Upon learning that Charles Erdman was again nominated to run for moderator of the Assembly, Coffin shrewdly began forming a friendship with Erdman in hopes that Erdman would win the election—an effort that would prove to have dividends for the liberals in the upcoming General Assembly.<sup>53</sup> The conservative build up to the General Assembly for 1925 backfired. Machen, disillusioned with the leadership of Macartney and Bryan in previous Assemblies, assumed a more active position and launched an aggressive campaign against Erdman setting out to demonstrate that he was the candidate of the liberals. Just before the General Assembly gathered at its annual meeting, Machen wrote an article in which he complained that Erdman represented

the Modernist and indifferentist party in the church [and that] there are many evangelical men who in the great crisis have not the appreciation of the danger in which the church stands . . . so it is with Dr. Erdman. A policy of palliation and of compromise will in a few years lead to the control of our church as has already happened in the case of many churches, by agnostic Modernism.<sup>54</sup>

Machen was willing to concede that Erdman had conservative beliefs, but attacked him for not being aggressive enough in defending doctrinal orthodoxy.<sup>55</sup>

In another article, Machen writes, “Dr. Erdman, despite his personal orthodoxy, had the plaudits of the enemies of the gospel” refusing to stand with those who had sacrificed “all personal considerations and stood for the defense of the Christian faith.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Erdman, replying to one of Coffin’s letters, wrote, “At least one very great compensation for passing through this experience of this present year is that I have come to know you so much better and that my affection for you has deepened.” Erdman also assured Coffin that, if elected, he would “do everything in my power to see that the affairs of the Church were carried on in accordance with constitutional processes.” Charles R. Erdman, “Letter to Henry Coffin,” May 5, 1925, Charles R. Erdman Papers, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, NJ, quoted in Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy*, 150.

<sup>54</sup> J. Gresham Machen, “The Present Situation in the Presbyterian Church,” *Presbyterian* 14 (May 1925): 7-8.

<sup>55</sup> Machen and Erdman were both professors at Princeton Theological Seminary and were known to personally dislike one another. In an effort to show that Machen’s concerns about Erdman were more than just interpersonal conflict, much of his attack on Erdman leading up to the 1925 General Assembly pointed to Erdman’s refusal to confront directly the doctrinal aberrations of the liberals.

<sup>56</sup> George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-*

By all estimation, Erdman was indeed a conservative who espoused premillennial eschatology, social conservatism, and even contributed to *The Fundamentals*.<sup>57</sup> Erdman defended his conservative beliefs to the media, stating, “I have always been a Fundamentalist in my beliefs. I refuse to be labeled as a Modernist or as a liberal.”<sup>58</sup> However, Erdman was a professor of practical theology at Princeton Theological Seminary and was heavily influenced by Dwight L. Moody. As a result, Erdman placed a higher emphasis on evangelism and righteous living rather than on defending doctrinal orthodoxy.<sup>59</sup> Thus, the conflict between Machen and Erdman centered on each man’s perspective about the true nature of the mission of the church. For Machen, the church’s mission was to preserve and defend doctrinal orthodoxy; for Erdman, its task was to bring people into a right relationship with God. Machen believed the church could best influence culture through the promulgation of correct dogma; Erdman believed that lives transformed by Christ could best order the movements of society.<sup>60</sup>

Machen’s attack on Erdman was perceived as impolitic since the latter was an affable, popular figure in Presbyterian life. The caustic derision aimed at Erdman came across as petulant and inappropriately taking public an interpersonal discord that should have remained private. In the end, the belligerent tactics of Machen may have resulted in

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*Century Evangelicalism, 1875-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 183.

<sup>57</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Evangelicals*, 130. *The Fundamentals* is a collection of ninety essays written by conservative authors representing a broad spectrum of Protestant denominations. First published from 1910-1915, *The Fundamentals* is a foundational work highlighting the theological perspective of Christian “fundamentalism” of the early twentieth century. The essays often espouse reformed theology and criticize theological liberalism. Erdman wrote two essays published in *The Fundamentals*: “The Coming of Christ” and “The Church and Socialism.” See R. A. Torrey, ed., *The Fundamentals: The Famous Sourcebook of Foundational Biblical Truths* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1990).

<sup>58</sup> Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy*, 149. This statement appeared in the *Trenton Times*.

<sup>59</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Evangelicals*, 130.

<sup>60</sup> North, *Crossed Fingers*, 577. Longfield adds a helpful commentary on the differences between Machen and Erdman: “For Machen, the truth of Christianity was primarily doctrinal; for Erdman, existential.” Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy*, 149.

the conservatives' demise.<sup>61</sup> Fitzgerald astutely notes that Erdman had a successful career as a pastor and routinely served on denominational boards that would have "accustomed him to the give-and-take of denominational politics and reinforced his proclivity to subordinate theoretical issues to practical concerns."<sup>62</sup> This would also have been the case with Macartney, a veteran pastor, and Bryan, a seasoned politician. Fitzgerald argues that Machen, on the other hand, spent his entire career in the seminary and never married, possibly having little experience in the need to make compromises, which may have contributed to his obdurate approach. That Erdman appeared to be the victim, Machen the aggressor, and the strong desire of most Presbyterian ministers and layman to avoid schism at almost any cost led to the events that transpired in the 1925 General Assembly. Boice was certainly familiar with the unsuccessful tactics of Machen, which he avoided in his opposition to liberalism.

As the 1925 General Assembly began, Erdman won the election to become moderator. He acted as anticipated by naming both conservatives and liberals to key positions on committees and boards. The polarizing issue was the action to be taken regarding the New York Presbytery ordaining men to the ministry who could not affirm the five fundamentals, particularly the virgin birth of Jesus.<sup>63</sup> The Judicial Commission ruled that, given overtures affirming the five fundamentals in previous assemblies, the men should not have been ordained. The Commission then returned the matter to the

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<sup>61</sup> By this time in 1925, Macartney and particularly Bryan were beginning to distance themselves from Machen due to his militant approach and his demand for secession from the denomination if the conservatives could not gain control. In a sermon published and distributed at his own expense, Machen stated that if the church resorted to paganism, the conservatives, like those in the Reformation, would be forced to withdraw. Bryan, whose spiritual background and familiarity resembled Erdman more than Machen, made his break from Machen's camp official at the 1925 General Assembly when he refused to endorse Machen's candidate for a different conservative (not Erdman). See Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy*, 149-50.

<sup>62</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Evangelicals*, 130-31.

<sup>63</sup> Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., *Minutes of the General Assembly 1925* (Philadelphia: Office of the General Assembly, 1925), 1:84-88.

New York Presbytery to take action in line with the ruling. Coffin immediately took the floor and offered his response that, on grounds of the denomination's constitution, the New York Presbytery would be forced to withdraw from the denomination. The implied response from other liberals is that they would follow suit.

Erdman then took a decisive action to avoid schism by surrendering the chair as moderator and recommending that a commission of fifteen members be formed "to study the present spiritual condition of our Church and the causes making for unrest, and to report to the next General Assembly, to the end that the purity, peace, unity and progress of the Church may be assured."<sup>64</sup> The motion to form such a committee was made, seconded by both Coffin and Bryan, and approved by a wide majority hoping to avoid splitting the denomination. Not surprisingly, Macartney was satisfied that the outcome of the 1925 General Assembly still held the conservatives' platform intact, but Machen denounced this outcome, stating, "The evangelical movement has been stopped and the Modernists are in complete control."<sup>65</sup>

The Special Commission of 1925 was comprised of those sympathetic to both factions, and according to Erdman, was created as a "friendly commission" with a "determination to avoid disunion."<sup>66</sup> The chairman of the commission was a conservative, but also a close associate of Bryan's who had clearly demonstrated his penchant to seek

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<sup>64</sup> Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2nd ed., 183-84.

<sup>65</sup> This statement by Machen appeared on the front page of the *New York Times*, May 27, 1925, quoted in Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy*, 153. It should be noted that just two months after the close of the 1925 General Assembly meeting, the infamous "Scopes 'Monkey' Trial" took place in which the agnostic attorney Clarence Darrow took on Bryan in a case about the legality of naturalistic evolution being taught in public schools. Although Scopes was found guilty, the ruling was overturned the following year, and the trial helped begin a new era of acceptance of the theory of evolution by the American public. The Scopes case also helped to turn sentiment against fundamentalists, both Presbyterian and Baptist, who were embroiled in their respective denominations against liberals over biblical orthodoxy. For a compelling account of the Scopes trial and its impact on the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy, see Fitzgerald, *The Evangelicals*, 133-42.

<sup>66</sup> Loetscher, *The Broadening Church*, 128.

efforts of compromise and unity. The leading liberal was Robert E. Speer, who would play a critical role not only in the Special Commission but in the missions controversy, which would soon be the final nail in the coffin of the conservatives. In the following year, the “Special Commission” met four times to hear testimonies from the opposing sides within the denomination. Machen naturally told the commission that the cause of division within the denomination was the loss of doctrinal orthodoxy that was “reducible to one great underlying cause . . . commonly called Modernism, which is diametrically opposed to the constitution of our church and to the Christian religion.”<sup>67</sup> Coffin offered an opposing view claiming that “the differences . . . are due to misapprehension” and then warned the commission of the dire consequences if the denomination were to suffer a schism which would

plunge the Church into calamitous litigation and hinder us from doing our work and building up the kingdom of God. When you face the perfectly dreadful condition of the world today, the moral breakdown in all cities, the people who are disaffected from the Church, it is ruinous to divide existing forces. We ought to work harmoniously together and emphasize those things in which we agree.<sup>68</sup>

Like Erdman and unlike Machen, Coffin valued the importance of evangelism leading to societal transformation over guarding the specifics of doctrinal integrity.

In the next two General Assemblies (1926 and 1927), the Special Commission presented resolutions serving fatal blows to the conservatives. The tenor of the commission’s report emphasized toleration for divergent views of doctrine. The commission stated,

The Church has flourished best and showed most clearly the good hand of God upon it, when it laid aside its tendencies to stress these [doctrinal] differences, and put the emphasis on its unity of spirit. . . . Presbyterianism is a great body of belief, but it is

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<sup>67</sup> J. Gresham Machen, “Statement to the Special Commission of 1925,” in *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, ed. D. G. Hart (Phillipsburg, NJ: P and R, 2004), 291. It is noteworthy that Macartney’s testimony to the commission cited the teaching of naturalistic evolution in the public schools as the cause of division in the denomination. On this issue Macartney and Machen disagreed. Machen certainly opposed materialism as the cause of the universe, but never campaigned against it as fervently as Macartney and Bryan.

<sup>68</sup> Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy*, 157.



more than a belief; it is also a tradition, a controlling sentiment. The ties which bind us to it are not of the mind only; they are ties of the heart as well.<sup>69</sup>

Thus, the commission defied Machen's stance on doctrine, and rather than censuring the tenets of the Auburn Affirmation, which declared adherence to the five fundamentals as nonbinding for Presbyterian ministers, it endorsed them. Without naming him, the commission repudiated the charge by Machen that two distinctive religions existed among northern Presbyterians. Rather than driving one side of the conflict out of the denomination, the commission advanced "the Christian principle of toleration" and was convinced "that the Assembly believed in its own evangelical unity and in the evangelical unity of our Church at large."<sup>70</sup> The commission also gave the presbyteries the full authority to ordain ministers as they pleased and restricted the General Assembly from making binding statements of faith that were not expressly stated in the Westminster Confession.<sup>71</sup>

In stripping the five fundamentals of any binding authority and shifting the right of ordination to the presbyteries, the Special Commission overrode the action of the Judicial Commission in 1925, as well as all of the overtures passed in previous assemblies that upheld the five fundamentals as compulsory. As Fitzgerald notes, "In sum, [the report of the Special Commission] gave the liberals exactly what they wanted and reversed every gain the fundamentalists had made since the Portland Deliverance of 1892."<sup>72</sup> At the close

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<sup>69</sup> Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., *Minutes of the General Assembly 1926* (Philadelphia: Office of the General Assembly, 1926), 1:79.

<sup>70</sup> Loetscher, *The Broadening Church*, 131.

<sup>71</sup> Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., *Report of the Special Commission of 1925 to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.* (Philadelphia: Office of the General Assembly, 1927), 20-21. Although the commission allowed presbyteries to ordain ministers without stricture, it was not until the Mansfield Kaseman case in 1979, that the first denomination-wide controversy arose over a presbytery ordaining a person who denied a cardinal doctrine. This affirmed what Boice and the session at Tenth once said in a letter regarding the actions of the denomination—for a long time "its practice has often been better than its policy." Letter from Session to Congregation, February 9, 1980, series 4, box 4.

<sup>72</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Evangelicals*, 132.

of the Special Commission's report to the 1926 General Assembly, the commission moved that the report be approved by the assembly to which, according to *Time* magazine, the assembly rose in applause for three minutes.<sup>73</sup> Macartney, however, objected to certain aspects of the commission's report; namely, the denial of the virgin birth by the New York Presbytery and the revision of certain constitutional elements. Unfortunately for the conservatives, the next speaker called upon after Macartney was Macartney's older and more liberal brother who endorsed the report "from cover to cover—not so much for what it says as the spirit that pervades it."<sup>74</sup> The elder Macartney's speech was met with thunderous applause, and the report of the Special Commission was approved almost unanimously.

The approval of the Special Commission's report now gave the liberals the solid upper hand in the controversy. No conservative would ever be elected again as the moderator of the General Assembly, and the boards and agencies of the denomination began to fill quickly with liberals.<sup>75</sup> The 1926 General Assembly, either in an apparent move of retribution or first step to taking over Princeton Seminary, voted not to promote Machen to the important chair of ethics and apologetics. Next, the 1929 General Assembly approved a reorganization of the seminary which brought on to its board signers of the Auburn Affirmation. Machen saw the writing on the wall that liberals would soon be in control of Princeton, and in the same year, he took three fellow professors and formed Westminster Theological Seminary "to continue the legacy of the old Princeton"<sup>76</sup> and to "carry on and perpetuate the policies and traditions of Princeton Theological Seminary,

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<sup>73</sup> Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy*, 160.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Hart and Meuther, *Seeking a Better Country*, 196.

<sup>76</sup> Edwin Rian, *The Presbyterian Conflict* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1940), 88.

as it existed prior to the reorganization thereof in the year 1929.”<sup>77</sup> Machen’s fears about Princeton soon became a reality. In 1937, John Mackay, a proponent of neo-orthodox theology was inaugurated president and began appointing professors who were theologically like-minded with himself. One historian noted, “During the late 1930s Princeton Theological Seminary . . . became the chief center of theological existentialism in the United States.”<sup>78</sup> The reign of Hodge and Warfield’s conservative, reformed “Princeton Theology” had come to an end.

The final battle in the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy was fought over the subject of foreign missions. In 1932, the Laymen’s Foreign Missions Inquiry conducted a study analyzing the effectiveness of foreign missions and produced a book of its findings called *Re-Thinking Missions*.<sup>79</sup> The book developed the argument that the Modernism of the times required missionaries to alter the message they proclaimed on the mission field from the doctrinally rigid “religion of fear” to a “religion of beneficence.”<sup>80</sup> Robert Speer, longtime head of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, moved to

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<sup>77</sup> Westminster Theological Seminary, *Charter and Constitution of Westminster Theological Seminary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Theological Seminary, 1930).

<sup>78</sup> Clifton Olmstead, *History of Religion in the United States* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1960), 574, quoted in Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy*, 180. An illustration of how the UPCUSA drifted into further extremes of liberalism from the time of Mackay’s presidency at Princeton to the time of Boice’s pastorate at Tenth beginning in 1968, is seen in Mackay’s opposition to the Confession of 1967. The fact that Mackay, a proponent of neo-orthodoxy, would publicly encourage the drafters of the Confession of 1967 to “take a stronger stand on the Bible,” reminding them that “the Bible has greater literary and theological dimensions than is attributed in the proposed Confession,” demonstrates that by the late 1960s, the UPCUSA had become more liberal than it was during the days of the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy. “John Mackay, A Confession in 1967?” *Christianity Today* (December 1967): 36-37.

<sup>79</sup> The study and book had a liberal agenda regarding missions. The work was chaired by William Ernest Hocking, an idealist philosopher who taught at Harvard and was funded by the liberal Baptist John D. Rockefeller, who had also paid for some 130,000 copies of Fosdick’s sermon, “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?” to be mailed to every Protestant minister in the United States. “Harry Emerson Fosdick: Liberalism’s Popularizer,” *Christianity Today*, accessed September 14, 2017, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/pastorsandpreachers/harry-emerson-fosdick.html>.

<sup>80</sup> William Ernest Hocking, ed., *Re-Thinking Missions: A Layman’s Inquiry After One Hundred Years* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1932), ix.

mitigate the findings of the study that were too extreme theologically for many Presbyterians who were moderate in their theology. Speer wrote a response to *Re-Thinking Missions* in which he stated that it was missing “the very essence of Christianity” and did not “vivify the missionary enterprise and supply it with new motive and power.”<sup>81</sup>

However, Macartney and Machen capitalized on the opportunity in much sharper, harsher terms believing that *Re-Thinking Missions* was such a degradation of the Christian message and biblical doctrine that it would wake the denomination up to the dangerous path of liberalism it had begun to trod. Macartney stated that the study had “torn off from the face of Modernism its mask and disguise.”<sup>82</sup> Machen directly attacked Speer for not emphatically condemning the Laymen’s Committee report with greater specificity and for not addressing the fact that two members of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions served on the Laymen’s Committee. Machen wrote an essay critical of Speer and in it threatened to form an independent missions board if Speer did not make changes to halt the liberalism on the Board of which he was head.<sup>83</sup> Speer defended himself and the board against Machen’s charges, which caused Machen to present an overture to the 1933 General Assembly censuring Speer. The overture met overwhelming defeat as Speer was a beloved denominational statesman, and the reputation of Machen was further besmirched as a belligerent who liked to pick fights.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Robert E. Speer, “*Re-Thinking Missions*” *Examined* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1933), 31, 33.

<sup>82</sup> Clarence Macartney, “Renouncing Missions or Modernism Unmasked,” *Christianity Today* 3 (January 1933): 6, quoted in Hart and Meuther, *Seeking a Better Country*, 197.

<sup>83</sup> J. Gresham Machen, “Can Evangelical Christians Support Our Foreign Board?” April 1929, 2-6, Speer Papers, quoted in Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy*, 182.

<sup>84</sup> According to Hart and Meuther, when Speer rose to speak against the accusations levied at him by Machen in the General Assembly, the crowd greeted him with a lengthy standing ovation. Hart and Meuther, *Seeking a Better Country*, 198.

Machen responded by forming the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions of which he was elected president. The board, true to its name, operated as a missions entity independent of any governance by the General Assembly. The 1934 General Assembly responded in turn with the “Mandate of 1934” in which all Presbyterian ministers who were on the Independent Board were forced to resign.<sup>85</sup> Macartney opposed the formation of the Independent Board because of his fear of an outright schism; nonetheless, he publicly criticized the mandate for being out of order with Presbyterian and biblical principles. Even Coffin opposed the mandate for being heavy-handed. After taking control of the denomination, liberals, who had vociferously championed the need for tolerance, forced conservatives to take an action that violated their consciences. William Childs Robinson, a southern Presbyterian theologian, captured the new repressive approach of the liberals by analogizing them with Nazi Germany:

Those who enjoy a bit of irony may notice that the same General Assembly of 1934, which laid its iron mandate to bind the conscience of Dr. Machen, passed a resolution commending the German Protestants for refusing to obey those actions of the Nazi church which contravene a minister’s exclusive allegiance to the Word of God. . . . With a much more vague and less adequate understanding of what the Word of God is, Karl Barth is indeed challenging the German church with the same issue that the Machen case has raised in the U.S.A. church. Is the voice of the church the ultimate; or is it only penultimate, with the Word of God ultimate? Is not the Word of God above the church judging her? . . . Shall we stand for the authority of the Word of God in Germany; and the authority of the voice of the Church in America?<sup>86</sup>

The 1934 Mandate is the precursor to the events that eventually led Boice to abandon the UPCUSA—when the authority of the denomination forces a church to violate its conscience regarding the authority of the Word of God.

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<sup>85</sup> Hart, *Defending the Faith*, 152. Liberal leaders at the 1934 General Assembly accused Machen of conducting administrative practices without sanction of the Assembly which, according to their claim, was a violation of Presbyterian law.

<sup>86</sup> William Childs Robinson, “Which Is the Rule of Faith and Life: The Word of God or the Voice of the Church?” *Christianity Today* 6, no. 1 (June 1935): 6, quoted in Hart and Meuther, *Seeking a Better Country*, 199.

The Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy came to a close when Machen refused to adhere to the demands of the 1934 Mandate. Machen's presbytery, the Presbytery of New Brunswick, tried and convicted him for his sedition, and the verdict was upheld in the 1936 General Assembly. Now defrocked as a minister in the Presbyterian Church in the USA, Machen formed a new denomination called the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC).<sup>87</sup> Some conservatives followed Machen to the OPC; some left Presbyterianism altogether for ecclesiastical independence, and others stayed in the PCUSA to continue to work for change from within the denomination.

### Conclusion

Loetscher has perhaps the most insightful explanation as to why the liberals won the battle for northern mainline Presbyterianism. In reality, not two, but three groups embroiled in the controversy—the conservatives characterized by Machen; the liberals characterized by the Auburn Affirmation; and a third group seeking out a middle ground unwilling to go to the “extremes” of the other two sides. Loetscher writes,

There was a third group composed of conservatives who would not go as far as the signers of the Auburn Affirmation in disparaging the theological differences between conservatives and liberals, but who nonetheless favored a policy of toleration. The theoretical basis of this group was more complex and less easily stated than that of the more extreme positions of Dr. Machen and the Auburn Affirmation. But it was this mediating group—essentially conservative in theology and temperament—that held the balance of power and eventually decided the issue.<sup>88</sup>

The thought of a schism was so repugnant to many clergy and laity that they were willing to capitulate biblical orthodoxy to save the unity of the denomination. As Albert Mohler,

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<sup>87</sup> Mark Noll notes that those who started the OPC fully understood the obvious enemy was a Modernism which undercut the historic Reformed confessionalism of American Presbyterians. Members of the new denomination in 1936 knew that they were united in opposition to this Modernism. None of the delegates to that First General Assembly had a particle of sympathy for the theological position of Harry Emerson Fosdick. (Mark A. Noll, “The Pea Beneath the Mattress: Orthodox Presbyterians in America,” *Reformed Journal* 36, no. 10 [October 1986]: 13) Noll continues, “The OPC's glory was its faithfulness to Scripture and the heart-moving, intellectually satisfying system of doctrine embodied in the Westminster standards.” *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>88</sup> Loetscher, *The Broadening Church*, 119.

Jr., noted regarding the controversy, “The liberals did not take the denomination. Rather, the moderates, because they loved the denomination more than orthodoxy, gave it to the liberals.”<sup>89</sup> The liberals emerged from the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy in control of the denomination and set it on a continued path of heterodoxy into the future.

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<sup>89</sup> R. Albert Mohler, Jr., interview by author, Louisville, June 12, 2017.

## CHAPTER 3

### STRENGTHENING WHAT REMAINS: BOICE'S STRUGGLE WITH THE UPCUSA

#### **The Rise of Neo-Orthodoxy in Mainline Presbyterianism**

After the final defeat of the conservatives in 1936, mainline Presbyterianism in the north continued the course away from its historic confessionalism to more progressive positions in theology and polity. The teachings of Karl Barth resonated with many Presbyterians seeking to find a middle ground from the extreme aspects of fundamentalism and liberalism. Barth believed that the liberalism articulated by nineteenth-century German theologians subordinated the gospel to human reason. On the other hand, neither did he agree with the traditional, conservative understanding of the nature of the Bible and numerous biblical doctrines. Barth understood the Bible to possess divine inspiration and thus hold a special position that transcends human value judgment; however, the Bible is not the only form of the Word of God—the true Word of God is Jesus Christ, and the Bible is subordinate/inferior to him.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the Bible is authoritative and in no way is dependent on the subjective experience of the individual as a proclamation of God's truth (contra liberalism). At the same time, however, given that Jesus supersedes Scripture and is the ultimate source of Christian theology, biblical inerrancy cannot exist, and the tenets of biblical higher criticism are reasonable in understanding the meaning of the text (contra

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<sup>1</sup> Richard A. Muller, "Karl Barth and the Path of Theology into the Twentieth Century: Historical Observations," *Westminster Theological Journal* 51, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 29. Barth wrote that Scripture is "a witness to divine revelation . . . a witness is not absolutely identical with that to which it witnesses . . . the witness as such is not itself revelation but only—and this is the limitation—the witness to it." Thus, Scripture is not necessarily propositional revelation, but the attestation to God's authority. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 1, pt. 2, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2004), 463.



conservatives).<sup>2</sup> Rather than stating that the Bible *is* the Word of God, Barth chose instead to see the Bible *becoming* the Word of God “when God condescends sovereignly and freely to reveal himself to people through the Bible.”<sup>3</sup>

Barth’s views were quickly termed “neo-orthodoxy” or “neo-Calvinist” (although many conservatives criticized Barth’s work as a new form of modernism).<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the label ascribed to Barth’s theology that best captured its appeal to Presbyterians in the 1930s is the term “dialectical.” The term refers to the dialogic nature of Barth’s work and his emphasis on the discontinuity between God and humanity requiring divine revelation to have a dialectical meeting of time and eternity in the person of Jesus Christ. Grenz and Miller describe the dialectical aspect of Barth’s views:

No human talk about God can ever be quite appropriate—it must inevitably fall short of its intent. Any theology, therefore, must involve a kind of crisscrossing of language with the purpose of coming closer and closer to its necessarily elusive object: First we say this and then we say that, recognizing that the truth lies in between.<sup>5</sup>

It was precisely the ideology of “the truth lies in between” that appealed so greatly to Presbyterians coming out of the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy. Most Presbyterians were looking for some form of middle ground that was cogently provided in Barth.

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<sup>2</sup> Roger E. Olson, *The Journey of Modern Theology: From Reconstruction to Deconstruction* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2013), 311-12.

<sup>3</sup> Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 95. See also Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 463.

<sup>4</sup> Among the conservative scholars critical of Barth was Westminster Seminary professor Cornelius Van Til, whose books *The New Modernism* and *Christianity and Barthianism* clearly articulate the conservatives’ views of Barth’s work as “nothing more than a new and more insidious variety of modernism.” Stanley N. Gundry and Alan F. Johnson, eds., *Tensions in Contemporary Theology* (Chicago: Moody, 1976), 450. Van Til wrote, “If the late J. Gresham Machen spoke of the necessity of making a choice between liberalism and Christianity, we should be doing scant justice to his memory if we did less today with respect to the new Modernism and Christianity.” Cornelius Van Til, *The New Modernism: An Appraisal of the Theology of Barth and Brunner* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Press, 1947), 376.

<sup>5</sup> Edward L. Miller and Stanley J. Grenz, *Introduction to Contemporary Theologies* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 15.

In 1936, Princeton Seminary appointed John Mackay as president (a position he held until 1959), who proved to be instrumental in establishing neo-orthodoxy as the normative theological position among northern Presbyterians.<sup>6</sup> In his memoirs written in 1960, Mackay described the “Presbyterian soul” as the “right and duty of a living church to restate and interpret its faith as occasion may require,” which it had successfully accomplished by following “the example of that great neo-Calvinist, Karl Barth.”<sup>7</sup> Although Barth’s theology appeared to provide a middle ground, it proved to be the gateway for theological liberalism that mainline Presbyterianism would pursue in the decades ahead.<sup>8</sup> Hart and Muether provide an accurate assessment, noting, “Although Barth may have chastised the zeal of liberalism in the Presbyterian Church, he was no obstacle for its progressive impulse.”<sup>9</sup>

### **Ecumenism and the Confession of 1967**

By the 1950s, neo-orthodoxy was the majority opinion of the faculties of Presbyterian seminaries and colleges and was firmly established as the prevailing theological mindset among northern Presbyterians.<sup>10</sup> American religion historian Martin Marty noted that mainline Presbyterianism in the 1950s had become “a very fervent faith

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<sup>6</sup> D. G. Hart and John R. Muether, *Seeking a Better Country: 300 Years of American Presbyterianism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2007), 209. A principal way Mackay led Presbyterians into neo-orthodoxy was through the hiring of neo-orthodox faculty at Princeton such as Emil Brunner and Elmer G. Homrighausen. Union Seminary in New York followed suit by hiring scholars such as Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich.

<sup>7</sup> John Mackay, *The Presbyterian Way of Life* (Englewood, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1960), 37, 43.

<sup>8</sup> Evidence for this claim is in the aforementioned reference to Mackay asking the framers of the Confession of 1967 to take a stronger stand on the Bible. The denomination had advanced in liberalism beyond even Mackay’s comfort level.

<sup>9</sup> Hart and Muether, *Seeking a Better Country*, 209.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

in a very vague religion.”<sup>11</sup> In 1958, the PCUSA united with a smaller Presbyterian branch known as the United Presbyterian Church of North America, and with this merger, mainline Presbyterianism in the north became known as the United Presbyterian Church in the USA (UPCUSA).<sup>12</sup> Around this time, the now broadly established progressive theology of the modernists and neo-orthodox began to be manifested in denominational polity. One of these manifestations that would become a particular problem for Boice and Tenth was the ordination of women as ministers.<sup>13</sup> Another outcropping of neo-orthodoxy within the denomination during the 1950s and 1960s was the strong push for ecumenism and laying aside theological distinctives of Presbyterianism.

An important figure in the ecumenical movement among Presbyterians was Eugene Carson Blake, stated clerk of the denomination from 1951-1966. In November of 1960, John F. Kennedy was elected as the United States’ first Roman Catholic president, which “prompted concern among the protestant mainline over whether the clock was ticking on their hegemony in American public life.”<sup>14</sup> Blake responded with a now famous sermon delivered the month after Kennedy’s election, entitled “A Proposal toward the Union of Christ’s Church.” In the sermon, he appealed for the four largest Protestant mainline denominations to merge lest they become irrelevant and face oblivion.<sup>15</sup> In the sermon, Carson explains his reasoning and urgency for the call to unification:

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<sup>11</sup> Martin E. Marty, *The New Shape of American Religion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), 79.

<sup>12</sup> This was the name of mainline Presbyterianism in the north during Boice’s tenure at Tenth until the church withdrew from the denomination. In 1982, the UPCUSA merged with the PCUS (mainline Presbyterianism in the south) to form the PC(USA) which is its current name.

<sup>13</sup> Presbyterian Church (U.S.A), “What Makes Us Unique?” accessed October 31, 2017, <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/what-we-believe/what-makes-us-unique/>.

<sup>14</sup> Hart and Muether, *Seeking a Better Country*, 215.

<sup>15</sup> The denominations were the UPCUSA, the United Methodist Church, the United Church of Christ, and the Protestant Episcopal Church.

Never before have so many Americans agreed that the Christian churches, divided as they are, cannot be trusted to bring the American people an objective and authentic word of God on a political issue. Americans more than ever see the churches of Jesus Christ as competing social groups pulling and hauling, propagandizing, and pressuring for their own organizational advantages.<sup>16</sup>

The flourishing of liberal theology, not only in the UPCUSA but in the other mainline denominations as well, gave Blake the platform to appeal for ecumenism. If the UPCUSA were to merge with other denominations, it would either have to abandon its theological distinctiveness, namely reformed theology and the Westminster Confession, or redefine it to such a degree that the merger could happen.

In response to Blake's impassioned plea, the 1961 General Assembly sent invitations to the other denominations to begin the work of seeking unification. Representatives from each denomination took part in the "Consultation on Church Union," but Blake's vision of unification was never achieved. However, the ecumenical effort did lead the UPCUSA to move forward with Blake's call to redefine the Presbyterian confession of faith. If the church were ever to unify into one body, denominations would have to remove doctrinally rigid and exclusivistic claims in their respective confessions of faith and attenuate biblical orthodoxy.<sup>17</sup>

Inspired by Blake's leadership, the UPCUSA formed a committee to begin work on modifying its statement of faith, which resulted in what is known as the Confession of 1967. Rather than abandoning their theological tradition, the revision committee sought

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<sup>16</sup> Eugene Carson Blake, "A Proposal toward the Union of Christ's Church," in Paul A. Crow, Jr., "Eugene Carson Blake: Apostle of Christian Unity," *Ecumenical Review* 38 no. 2 (April 1986): 233.

<sup>17</sup> The need to alter confessions of faith was of primary importance to the ecumenists in the 1960s as evidenced by the ecumenical adherent Gerald Moede. He wrote, Individual confessions have evolved in particular theological and cultural contexts, usually with the intent of at least correcting the one-sidedness or inadequacies of an "opposing version" of Christian doctrine. But the confessional separatism that has resulted has served to obscure the catholicity of the Church. When each different theological insight is made the basis of a separate ecclesiastical organization the result is merely the familiar struggle of rival groups which the Apostle Paul had to reprove in the Corinthian church. (Gerald F. Moede, "Church Union as a Model of Christian Unity," *Ecumenical Review* 26, no. 2 [April 1974]: 253)

to redefine Reformed theology in a way that would make it palatable to a broad spectrum of those claiming to be Christian:

The Confession of 1967 marked another milestone in the doctrinal life of the church, one that both reflected and made possible many of the liberalizing trends among northern Presbyterians [who] had largely abandoned efforts to arrive at confessional unity; they sought instead, in the words of one Presbyterian historian, “confessional decentralization.”<sup>18</sup>

A principal component of the Westminster Confession with which the committee dissented was the divine decree of the elect separated from the reprobate—“What the church needed to confess was not its separateness from the world but its mission of reconciliation in and for the world.”<sup>19</sup>

Under the Confession of 1967, neo-orthodoxy became the confession of northern mainline Presbyterians by formally subordinating the Bible to Christ (“the one sufficient revelation of God is Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate”), acknowledging the importance of biblical criticism with the meaning of the text becoming clear only through “the illumination of the Holy Spirit,” and understanding faith as moving beyond mere affirmation to demonstrate “a present witness to God’s grace on Jesus Christ” through a ministry of reconciliation.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, the Confession redefined the term “Reformed” to mean “a desire for ongoing reform, an egalitarian and democratic spirit that would reject all social inequalities, and commitment to diversity in religious faith and practice.”<sup>21</sup>

The Confession was framed around the concept of “reconciliation” and how

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<sup>18</sup> Randall Balmer and John R. Fitzmier, *The Presbyterians* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1993), 105-6.

<sup>19</sup> Hart and Meuther, *Seeking a Better Country*, 217.

<sup>20</sup> General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church USA, “The Confession of 1967,” Presbyterian Historical Society, accessed November 12, 2017, <https://www.history.pcusa.org/confession-1967>; and Balmer and Fitzmier, *The Presbyterians*, 106.

<sup>21</sup> Hart and Meuther, *Seeking a Better Country*, 216. The Confession of 1967 was neo-orthodox in that it subordinated the Bible, in Barthian fashion, to the incarnation of the Word and endorsed historical-critical methods of biblical interpretation. See John Wilkinson, “The Making of the Confession of 1967,” *Church and Society* 92, no. 5 (May-June 2002): 26-40.

the Presbyterian churches should carry the mission of reconciliation into the world namely through issues pertaining to social justice. Conservatives argued that “reconciliation” abandoned the gospel-centered idea of “redemption,” thus making the church’s mission merely aiding the world to peaceably coexist.<sup>22</sup> However, there can be no reconciliation in terms of social justice if people are not first redeemed by Jesus Christ. The Confession articulated that the mission of the denomination is the “doing” of anything that helped the church reconcile with the world. Thus, the church’s mission was now focused on a social gospel construct and not on the Great Commission of gospel evangelism and discipleship. John Fry notes that the UPCUSA was now dedicated to *being in* mission instead of *the* mission.<sup>23</sup>

The Confession of 1967 officially liberated the UPCUSA from its confessional, historic identity with the Westminster Divines. Though not entirely dismissed, the Westminster Confession was added to other confessions creating a “Book of Confessions.”<sup>24</sup> No singular confession of faith now served as the doctrinal guidepost of the denomination to better accommodate ecumenism. With the Confession, the UPCUSA changed the ordination vows for ministers and elders from affirming specific doctrinal guidelines to an allowance for more inclusivistic, subjective views of the interpretation of Scripture and mission.<sup>25</sup> The passage of the Confession and the new ordination vows

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<sup>22</sup> John R. Fry, *The Trivialization of The United Presbyterian Church* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 19.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>24</sup> These confessions include Nicene and Apostle’s Creeds; Scots, Westminster, and Second Helvetic Confessions; Heidelberg and Shorter Catechisms (dropping the Longer Catechism because of its rigidity); the Barmen Declaration and Confession of 1967.

<sup>25</sup> The Confession of 1967 changed the vows of ordination from, “Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of this Church as containing the system of doctrine taught in Holy Scripture?” to “Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confession of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do, and will you be instructed and led by those confessions as you lead the people of God?” General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church USA, “The Confession of 1967.”

allowed UPCUSA ministers to pursue as “mission” ventures moving beyond neo-orthodoxy to those in alignment with theological liberalism such as feminist, black, process, and liberation theologies.<sup>26</sup>

A sampling of what the Confession meant for UPCUSA churches that embraced it, and those who resisted it, can be seen in sociologist Stephen Warner’s article about his visits in 1978, to a conservative and a liberal UPCUSA church in the same city. From 1967-1978, the liberal church declined in membership from 900 to 350; the conservative church in that same time period increased its membership from 2,350 to 3,400.<sup>27</sup> The worship service at the conservative church had an “otherworldly” tone with a call to worship that reached upward to God whereas the liberal church’s service focused more on the needs of the congregation and society.<sup>28</sup> The sermon at the conservative church was an explication of a biblical text, while the pastor at the liberal church gave a topical essay. Again, Hart and Meuther provide an excellent summary demonstrating the theological state of the UPCUSA at the time Boice became pastor of Tenth:

Cornelius Van Til welcomed the Confession of 1967 as proof of his thirty-year claim that Barth had infiltrated the UPCUSA as the new modernism. Indeed, neo-orthodoxy proved to be more triumphant in the Presbyterian church than liberalism. All liberalism managed to do was minimize the church’s faith in the Westminster Standards, but it never succeeded in the church to the point of crafting a new confession. The triumph of neo-orthodoxy was the inevitability of the broadening church that could not protect historic Calvinism from modernism old or new. . . . The Confession of 1967, insofar as it was fathered by Barth, entailed the rejection, not only of the Westminster Standards, but of all that the historic Christian creeds

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<sup>26</sup> Fry, *The Trivialization of the United Presbyterian Church*, 38-44.

<sup>27</sup> R. Stephen Warner, “Research Note: Visits to a Growing Evangelical and a Declining Liberal Church in 1978,” *Sociological Analysis* 44, no. 3 (Fall 1983): 243. The precipitous decline of membership in mainline Presbyterianism in the second half of the twentieth century is well documented. See Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), and Wuthnow’s essay, “The Restructuring of American Presbyterianism: Turmoil in One Denomination,” in *The Presbyterian Predicament: Six Perspectives*, ed. Milton J. Coalter, John M. Mulder, and Louis B. Weeks (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990), 27-48.

<sup>28</sup> Warner, “Research Note,” 246, 248. Warner notes that the worship service of the liberal church is what he terms religious “monism,” or the formal property of religiosity that expresses continuity between the sacred and the secular in contrast to the “dualism” that separates them.

affirm. The Book of Confessions, consequently, was a book of Discord, a collection of mutually exclusive gospels.<sup>29</sup>

Commenting on the effects of the Confession of 1967, which eventually led to the formation of the PCA in 1973, one Presbyterian pastor and historian said of the UPCUSA, “She has departed from her original constitution [the Westminster Confession]. . . . She is distinctly unbiblical and heretical.”<sup>30</sup>

### **Boice Begins at Tenth and Disagrees with UPCUSA**

Boice earned a Th.D. in 1966, from Basel and came back to the United States to work with Carl Henry as an assistant editor at *Christianity Today*. However, the following year Henry announced his plans to leave as the editor of *Christianity Today*, and Boice sensed that this was “a turning point in his life.”<sup>31</sup> Boice sought advice about his career path from a mentor, Frank E. Gaebelin, who was the founding headmaster of the Stony Brook School (a preparatory school for boys which Boice attended from 8<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade) and co-editor of *Christianity Today* with Henry while Boice was employed at the magazine. Gaebelin asked Boice if he wanted to continue in Christian journalism, and Boice responded that he sensed God calling him to the pastorate.<sup>32</sup> Gaebelin had been preaching as interim at Tenth after the resignation of its pastor, Mariano DiGangi, and arranged for the search committee to hear Boice preach. The committee was impressed with Boice, and one of its notable members, C. Everett Koop, who would become the US Surgeon General under Ronald Reagan, remarked that Boice “sounds like Barnhouse”—

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<sup>29</sup> Hart and Meuther, *Seeking a Better Country*, 218-19.

<sup>30</sup> John Edwards Richards, *The Historical Birth of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Liberty Hill, SC: Liberty Press, 1987), 237.

<sup>31</sup> Linda M. Boice, “A Life in Ministry,” in *The Life of Dr. James Montgomery Boice, 1938-2000*, Tenth Presbyterian Church (Philadelphia: Gerald Stevens, 2001), 7.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*



the widely popular pastor of Tenth from 1927-1960.<sup>33</sup> Boice was installed as pastor at Tenth preaching his first sermon on Easter Sunday, 1968.

The question arises as to why the theologically conservative Boice would choose to become the pastor at Tenth in the first place, given its membership in the theologically liberal Presbytery of Philadelphia and United Presbyterian Church. The issue is further exacerbated by the adoption of the 1967 Confession by the UPCUSA just one year before Boice went to Tenth. In fact, Mrs. Boice notes that the reason for DiGangi's resignation in June of 1967, as pastor of Tenth was the formalization of liberal theology brought about by the Confession of 1967, which rendered him unable in good conscience to be a part of the UPCUSA.<sup>34</sup> Granted, Tenth was a conservative church well-suited to Boice's theological convictions, but before accepting the pastorate at Tenth Boice must have had an accurate picture of the theological condition of the UPCUSA as well as the challenges that awaited him leading Tenth from within the denomination.<sup>35</sup> In the late 1960s to early 1970s, Boice wrote multiple articles reporting on developments within the UPCUSA for *Christianity Today*, first as the assistant editor of the publication and then as the new pastor at Tenth.

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<sup>33</sup> Linda M. Boice, interview by author, Philadelphia, February 9, 2017.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. DiGangi made a principled stand for Reformed and confessional orthodoxy throughout his pastorate at Tenth, but left the church and the UPCUSA to join the Presbyterian Church in Canada (a better theological fit for his convictions) immediately after the passage of the Confession of 1967. For further information about DiGangi's life, ministry, and tenure at Tenth, see Chris Castaldo, "Thank God for Mentors: The Life of Mariano DiGangi," November 13, 2012, accessed December 13, 2017, <http://www.chriscastaldo.com/2012/11/23/thank-god-for-mentors-the-life-of-mariano-digangi/>.

<sup>35</sup> James Montgomery Boice, "Letter to Department of Ministerial Relations," January 26, 1968, series 4, box 1. Boice wrote to a denominational agency asking for the information sheet on Tenth. He received the requested sheet which stated one of the objectives of Tenth was to "uphold our tradition of strong expository preaching by skilled men of God from our center city location." The sheet went on to describe other objectives such as discipleship, missions, and evangelism described from a biblical perspective using multiple Scripture references.

## *Christianity Today* Articles

In his article describing the passage of the Confession of 1967, Boice observes that the UPCUSA had essentially done away with the denomination's "confessional standards of the last three centuries."<sup>36</sup> Of particular concern to Boice was the fact that the new Confession no longer required candidates for ordination to affirm "the doctrinal statements of the church" and instead, asked candidates to "promise to be zealous and faithful in studying the Scriptures."<sup>37</sup> Such developments, Boice writes, had left many mainline Presbyterians asking, "Where does the United Presbyterian Church go from here?" Boice answered the question by stating,

Today the answer is clear. The church is moving toward increasing involvement in social issues and a radical restructuring of its mission to "act" rather than "preach" the Gospel. . . . [Church] politics is [now] the vehicle through which the will of God is done in the world today.<sup>38</sup>

Boice viewed the Confession of 1967 as a continued furtherance of the abrogation of biblical doctrine within the UPCUSA begun in the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy.

In an article reporting on a series of meetings by the Consultation on Church Union (COCU), Eugene Carson Blake's liberal movement attempting to unite mainline denominations, Boice enumerated his concerns on what such a union would do for the prospects of orthodox theology in those denominations—particularly for the UPCUSA, which had representatives at the COCU meetings. After citing a number of statements taken from the COCU proposed statement of faith, Boice comments,

Not only is the proposed doctrinal basis of the united church uncertain; the authority upon which such doctrine is established is uncertain, too. . . . Apparently a tolerance of all the creeds held by participating denominations leading to a final goal of doctrinal unity [is] the ideal.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> James Montgomery Boice, "Presbyterian Assembly Ratifies Confessional Shift," *Christianity Today* 11, no. 17 (June 1967): 34.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>39</sup> James Montgomery Boice, "I Believe in COCU?" *Christianity Today* 11, no. 15 (March 1967): 3.

Such an ambiguous source of authority allowed the COCU, much to the consternation of Boice, to set the liturgies and traditions of the church on the same footing of authority as Scripture. Boice explains how doing so would have disastrous results:

These emphases are inadequate in the failure to make God's truth, embodied in Scripture . . . the measure of ethical action and of the church's worship. What is to correct the church's life and liturgy when these practices go astray, as they have repeatedly done in the past? What will be the measure of man's conduct? On what basis will the church teach Christian morals? Neglecting to acknowledge a scriptural or a doctrinal standard at this point is to cast the faith, worship, and practice of the church into the churning sea of subjectivity and to abandon the truth claims of the Christian faith and its moral imperatives to the sinful, inconsistent, and historically conditioned whims of men.<sup>40</sup>

In the conclusion of the article, Boice labels the COCU statement of faith "Tridentine theology" (a term referencing the Council of Trent and used by Boice in this context for placing Scripture on the same footing as church tradition), and appeals to leaders in the mainline denominations considering the Union to instead reclaim the doctrine of *sola scriptura* from the Reformation as the true source of authority.<sup>41</sup>

The manifestations that conservatives feared would emerge from the Confession of 1967 are apparent in Boice's article on the proceedings of the 1975 General Assembly—a meeting Boice called, "Overall, a bad week for conservatives."<sup>42</sup> The key issue in this meeting was the denomination failing to approve the ordination of Wynn Kenyon because of his refusal to participate in the ordination of a woman as a ruling elder. This issue eventually forced Boice and Tenth to leave the UPCUSA since the Kenyon case did not

permit those who felt as Kenyon did to remain within the denomination. Instead, the assembly moved to bar any mediating position. It also implied that not only new and aspiring ministers like Kenyon but also ministers, elders, and deacons of long standing who think like him are unwelcome.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Boice, "I Believe in COCU?," 4.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>42</sup> James Montgomery Boice, "United Presbyterians: A Clash of Polity and Doctrine," *Christianity Today* 19, no. 18 (June 1975): 43.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

The Kenyon decision placed conservatives within the UPCUSA in a precarious position, and Boice deftly noted the irony it produced:

The irony of the decision is that it is now possible to remain in the [UPCUSA] while denying the virgin birth, bodily resurrection, vicarious atonement, and personal return of Jesus Christ, and many other cardinal doctrines, but not if one believes that the Bible requires that women may not be ordained to the office of ruling or teaching elder. Does that mean the position of the church regarding women is more important than these other doctrines? Apparently.<sup>44</sup>

The denomination had reached a point where it inverted the importance of doctrines it valued.

Boice also described in this same General Assembly meeting that the pathway to condone homosexuality had been established. The Presbyterian Gay Caucus, under the leadership of David Sindt, a confessing homosexual, sought to be formally recognized by the denomination and thus win approval for homosexuality to be a condoned lifestyle for anyone in the UPCUSA. The motion failed, but by an extremely narrow margin, causing conservatives to come to the conclusion “that recognition of the Gay Caucus will be granted eventually, along with the right of homosexuals to be ordained within the denomination.”<sup>45</sup> Boice again noted the irony of this dilemma:

Those who felt most strongly about the Kenyon matter noted with dismay that no one seemed concerned about the sexual orientation of Sindt and other confessed homosexuals, although their life style is clearly in opposition to biblical norms while Kenyon’s is not.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Boice, “United Presbyterians: A Clash of Polity and Doctrine,” 43.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. Boice wrote in an article five years earlier about the effects of liberalism on sex and sexuality in the denomination. Reporting on the 1970 General Assembly, he notes that it approved a report calling for

laws making homosexual acts a felony ‘morally unsupportable,’ and that all laws against abortion be immediately dropped . . . and [if] couples engage in pre-marital intercourse, the church should not convey to them the impression that their decision is in conflict with their status as members of the body of Christ. (James Montgomery Boice, “United Presbyterians: Dropping the Traditional,” *Christianity Today* 14, no. 19 [June 1970], 3)

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

The imminent acceptance of homosexuality within the UPCUSA confirmed the conservatives' fear that rejecting doctrines core to the Christian faith would pave the way for further rejection of biblical teaching.

The Confession of 1967 and the sharper turn toward liberalism in the UPCUSA had not just theological ramifications, but practical ones as well. Boice's reports on the 1973 and 1974 General Assembly meetings include the precipitous decline in membership and financial giving in the denomination in response to the growing power and acceptance of liberalism—principally due to the number of conservative churches abandoning the UPCUSA and disillusioned laypeople in the churches.<sup>47</sup> From 1972-1973, the UPCUSA suffered a membership loss of 104,000—its largest one-year decline in the history of the denomination. The UPCUSA seminaries also experienced marked decline under the advancing shift of liberalism. Writing on the church's need to avoid secularism and be distinct from the world in its beliefs, Boice quotes a study enumerating the dwindling enrollments at the seminaries “where there is often no clear theology and most certainly not evangelical theology.”<sup>48</sup> Boice explains that students were now attending conservative seminaries in record numbers “because they know where they stand and, therefore, people know where they stand and turn to them,” a principle Boice notes applies to churches as well.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> The Presbyterian Lay Committee, begun in 1965, by lay people in the UPCUSA to voice dissent against the Confession of 1967, and the growing strength of liberalism in the denomination, was an active, well-funded organization that “refused to stand by idly and watch the Presbyterian Church disintegrate.” The Presbyterian Lay Committee took out full page ads in the *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and other publications criticizing the Confession of 1967 and the following year began their own publication, *The Layman*, censuring the advance of liberalism in the UPCUSA. Presbyterian Lay Committee, “The History of the Presbyterian Lay Committee,” *The Layman*, accessed January 20, 2018, <https://www.layman.org/about-us/the-history-of-the-presbyterian-lay-committee/>.

<sup>48</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith: A Comprehensive and Readable Theology*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), 682.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 683. Boice cites the work of Dean M. Kelley, *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972).

In addition to declining membership and enrollment, financial giving to General Assembly causes had decreased by two million dollars. Boice noted that when these statistics were read at the General Assembly, “many of the 750 commissioners sat in stunned silence.”<sup>50</sup> The following year, 1974, Boice reported that membership declined another 100,000 and “underlying nearly every action of this year’s assembly was a report of sharply declining giving to General Assembly causes, a trend that has already caused major cutbacks in denominational staff and may yet produce another 25 per cent cut for 1975.”<sup>51</sup> Boice points to the fact that in the year 1974, other denominations and charitable organizations were experiencing record high giving, indicating “a widespread lack of confidence in the denominational [UPCUSA] leadership, and that this was brought on by the controversial actions of some boards and agencies in recent years.”<sup>52</sup> Boice’s diagnosis of such pragmatic woes for the denomination can be seen in his quote of Presbyterian pastor Lloyd Ogilvie, who stated from the platform of the 1974 General Assembly, “We are facing a crisis of faith of the clergy, a crisis of accountability among church officers, and a crisis of agnosticism among the members of the church.” Boice added, “These conditions may be at the heart of the UPC troubles, but neither commissioners nor church staff did much to counter them.”<sup>53</sup>

### ***Tenth Journal Articles***

The depth of Boice’s awareness regarding the state of the UPCUSA at the time he became pastor of Tenth is perhaps most evident in an article entitled “The Secular

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<sup>50</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “United Presbyterians: Stunned Silence,” *Christianity Today* 17, no. 18 (June 1973): 38.

<sup>51</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “United Presbyterians: A Crisis of Confidence,” *Christianity Today* 18, no. 21 (July 1974): 34.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

Church,” which Boice wrote in 1976 and published in the church’s quarterly journal, *Tenth*. In the article, Boice argues that the infiltration of secularism and the desire of the UPCUSA to embrace the world’s wisdom, theology, agenda, and methods, as evidenced in the Confession of 1967, are the causes of rampant liberalism within the denomination.<sup>54</sup> Under the rubric of the Confession of 1967, Boice notes that a key departure from orthodoxy by the UPCUSA was the dilution of the biblical gospel through manipulation of the concept of “reconciliation.” Boice writes,

But what happened is that the Confession reduced the great scope of the gospel, as we find it in the Scriptures, to the one word “reconciliation” which, therefore, became a term that could be manipulated to justify anything the church wanted to do. Reconciliation, as found in 1 Corinthians, has to do with God reconciling the world to himself through Jesus Christ. . . . But in the hands of the [denomination] reconciliation simply became reconciliation on the human level and therefore a human activity. . . . So whatever the church wanted to do became God’s mission.<sup>55</sup>

Rather than the denomination’s mission being driven by the Bible, the denomination now sought to redefine the Bible.

The Confession of 1967 had driven the UPCUSA to abandon its orthodox confessionalism and, according to Boice, adopt the “theology of the world.”<sup>56</sup> What he meant by this was that the denomination had now sought to redefine the biblical definition of theological terms in ways more palatable to worldly sensitivities. For example, *sin* was no longer rebellion against God for which God would hold man accountable, but was now “ignorance or the kind of oppression that is supposed to reside in social structures.”<sup>57</sup> Thus, the way to overcome sin was not through the death of Jesus, but instead, *salvation* is attained by changing social structure and achieving liberation

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<sup>54</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “The Secular Church, Part I: The Liberal Churches,” *Tenth* (October 1976): 3.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

from its oppression. *Jesus* was no longer the incarnate God, but merely the highest example of how a person should live. *Evangelism* was no longer “carrying the gospel of Jesus to a perishing world, but rather working to overthrow injustice,” and *faith* was redefined as an “awareness of the situation as we see it” instead of “believing God and taking his Word at face value, because his Word is [no longer] believed or taken at face value.”<sup>58</sup>

In another article published in *Tenth*, Boice bemoans the influence of Rudolf Bultmann and the contribution of his work to the theological demise of the UPCUSA. Written in 1973, for *Tenth*’s quarterly journal, the article is Boice’s insightful rebuttal of Bultmann and offers, in an apparent attempt to encourage those battling for reform within the denomination, a prediction that theological liberalism to the degree advocated by Bultmann would eventually be rejected by a majority of Christian scholars.<sup>59</sup> Boice sketches out the main tenets of Bultmann’s views, in particular the influence of Martin Heidegger in Bultmann’s existentialist hermeneutic, that seek to “demythologize” the biblical text. Accounts of the supernatural in the Bible are merely myths that are a “witness to the biblical writers’ understanding of reality, but they are not themselves reality.”<sup>60</sup> Thus, for Bultmann, Scripture has “no absolute meaning to be found in the facts.” Therefore, “meaning is to be found only as man personally finds meaning for his own

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<sup>58</sup> Boice, “The Secular Church, Part I,” 7.

<sup>59</sup> Although Boice’s rebuttal of Bultmann is exemplary, his prediction that mainline theologians would eventually reject the existentialist hermeneutic of Bultmann did not materialize. Of note is that Boice quotes Clark Pinnock’s monograph, “A Defense of Biblical Infallibility” in the article as an example of theologians rejecting Bultmann. However, contra to Boice’s prediction, Pinnock later rejected his orthodox view of Scripture for a more liberal one. See Daniel Strange, “Clark Pinnock: The Evolution of an Evangelical,” in *Reconstructing Theology: A Critical Assessment of the Theology of Clark Pinnock*, ed. Tony Gray and Christopher Sinkinson (London: Paternoster, 2000), 1-18.

<sup>60</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “The Passing of an Era,” *Tenth* (October 1973): 4.



existence (existential interpretations). . . . It is this self-understanding that determines the work of interpretation.”<sup>61</sup>

Bultmann called for the modern student of the Bible to strip away the myths described by the biblical authors and find meaning in the text through existential means. Boice summarizes Bultmann’s view of the Bible:

Revelation is never communicated *objectively*, either in history or Scripture, but is always received *subjectively* by the individual in his own particular circumstance. In such a philosophical climate the Bible may provide the *themes* for theology, but it certainly does not provide its content. Nor does it exercise a control objectively over human understanding. . . . The tendency of the theologian is to define as revelation only what he himself brings to Scripture [Boice’s italics].<sup>62</sup>

Bultmann’s view of Scripture, according to Boice, had a profound impact on modern, liberal views of Scripture and consequently the view of the UPCUSA: “For years, Bultmann has dominated a vast area of New Testament scholarship, and his presuppositions have been felt in all areas of biblical scholarship and on many continents.”<sup>63</sup> Boice, however, sought to encourage fellow conservatives by predicting the demise of Bultmann’s influence in hopes that scholars would again turn to the historical and objective validity of the Scripture and Christian faith thus signaling “an important period of readjustment and a new era of opportunity for defenders of an objective revelation.”<sup>64</sup>

Another of Bultmann’s influences on the UPCUSA was the denomination’s position on the doctrine of Christ. Given Bultmann’s views on the mythology of Scripture, no historically accurate picture of Jesus exists in the Bible. Bultmann ascribed to the theory of the *Formgeschichte* school defined by Boice as a period of oral transmission

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<sup>61</sup> Boice, “The Passing of an Era,” 4-5.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

between the years of Christ's ministry and the actual recording of those events in the New Testament that served as the basis for the early church to creatively "superimpose its own world picture upon what it had received of the times and teachings of Jesus."<sup>65</sup>

Boice describes Bultmann's view of Christ as a rejection of

the literal preexistence of Christ, his virgin birth, his sinlessness and deity, the value of his atoning death, a literal ascension of Christ, and the future judgment of all men. His reinterpretation of these things in contemporary terms posits for man a new "possibility of existence." . . . To embrace this possibility brings inner release and overwhelming freedom, which is salvation.<sup>66</sup>

Boice certainly disagreed with Bultmann's views on Christ and the growing manifestations of those views within the UPCUSA. Just a few years after Boice wrote the article on Bultmann, the National Capitol Presbytery ordained Mansfield Kaseman as a minister even though he denied the deity of Jesus in his candidate interview.

Boice closed his article on Bultmann by stating that the Bultmannian era was coming to a close, which "calls for a new posture in biblical studies," and he was hopeful that "evangelical scholars could provide it. The time is ripe for a great evangelical offensive."<sup>67</sup> Obviously, Boice was attempting to rally the troops to the conservative cause within the denomination. He pleaded with them "in bold allegiance to historic Protestant theology and the Word of God" to take a stand on the following three theological issues:

The supreme importance of the historical facts of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Christianity is an historical faith and salvation depends upon an historical atonement. Present-day theology can only be rescued from a subjective rewriting of the faith by a full rehabilitation of the historical realities of the Gospel.

The reliability of the Bible, and particularly the reliability of the New Testament, for ascertaining the historical foundation of the gospel. The evangelical must state that the New Testament is not the product of the faith of the early church . . . but that the historical records do in fact represent what Jesus actually said and did.

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<sup>65</sup> Boice, "The Passing of an Era," 4. *Formgeschichte*, or form criticism, is defined by others as the attempt to trace each literary source used by biblical authors back to its original, oral form and "the specific life settings in which each originated." John Nolland, "Form Criticism and the NT," in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 232-33.

<sup>66</sup> Boice, "The Passing of an Era," 4.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

Evangelicals must also stress the total authority of the Bible as the only valid interpreter of biblical history. The Bible must be accepted as the only valid source of Christian doctrine. The Bible must judge the opinions of men; men must not be allowed to judge the Bible by their opinions.<sup>68</sup>

The growth of liberalism within the UPCUSA did not deter Boice's zeal for orthodoxy.

### **Personal Correspondence**

The doctrinal commitments of Boice, particularly his views on the nature of Scripture and how those views stand in opposition to the prevailing sentiment within the UPCUSA, can also be seen in his personal correspondence. In a letter regarding a question over the difference between the terms "infallible" and "inerrant," Boice makes clear his conviction about the inerrancy of Scripture when he responded:

These [terms] are actually the same thing, though being two different words they do have slightly different emphases. Infallible means that the Bible does not fail us or let us down. Inerrant means that it is without error. But, of course, the reason the Bible does not fail us is that it is inerrant.<sup>69</sup>

In a letter asking Boice to clarify his view of inerrancy in light of textual variations within the Bible and what the apostle Paul would have thought of such variations, Boice replied,

I can best judge from what we have of Paul's thought in his New Testament writings that Paul did not seem to be discussing the matter of variation or errors at all. In other words, it just was not a big problem for him. Presumably no one was raising this as an issue. Like all the New Testament figures, including the Lord Jesus Christ himself, Paul obviously had the highest possible regard for the Bible as the written word of God. He never challenges anything it says. He accepts it as an absolute authority, recognizing it as the authority of God himself, who speaks in it. If someone had asked him, "But what about these variations in manuscripts?" I do not imagine that he would have said they make no difference, still less that the later varying copies are themselves inerrant. Would he not do what we do? Namely, recognize that it is the original document that is inspired and inerrant and that the copies reflect those qualities only to the extent (which is, however, a great extent) to the degree they correctly reflect the original?<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Boice, "The Passing of an Era," 14.

<sup>69</sup> James Montgomery Boice, "Letter to M. R. Geeves," March 11, 1980, series 4, box 3.

<sup>70</sup> James Montgomery Boice, "Letter to Rev. Glen Brooks," June 9, 1983, series 4, box 3.

In this statement, Boice mirrors the view articulated in the Chicago Statement on Inerrancy drafted by the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, which Boice chaired.<sup>71</sup>

Boice believed that the biblical autographs were inerrant, but not necessarily transmissions and translations of the text. However, this fact does not preclude the authority of the Bible as it exists today as Boice stated in a letter to someone challenging his views on the issue: “All translations, not being the product of special inspiration of the translators, are more or less accurate reflections of the originals.”<sup>72</sup> In the same letter, Boice explains his position in more detail:

I agree with you wholeheartedly that the God we worship is utterly omnipotent and entirely able to keep not only the original, autographed manuscripts of the Bible but all translations and all versions free of error. There is no difference between us on our assessment of God’s ability to do this or anything else he chooses to do. But that is not the question. The question is whether he has done that in the case of translations and, in particular, whether he has done that in the case of the King James Version. I see no reason to believe that he has. Certainly the KJV was a good one and has served the church well over centuries. It was certainly prepared by godly scholars. But that is not the same thing as saying God guided the translators to produce an error-free translation.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> The Chicago Statement reads,

Since God has nowhere promised an inerrant transmission of Scripture, it is necessary to affirm that only the autographic text of the original documents was inspired and to maintain the need for textual criticism as a means of detecting any slips that may have crept into the text in the course of its transmission. The verdict of this science, however, is that the Hebrew and Greek text appear to be amazingly well preserved, so that we are amply justified in affirming, with the Westminster Confession, a singular providence of God in this matter and in declaring that the authority of Scripture is in no way jeopardized by the fact that the copies we possess are not entirely error-free. (International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, “Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy,” Bible Research, accessed January 4, 2018, <http://www.bible-researcher.com/chicago1.html>)

<sup>72</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Dr. David Otis Fuller,” June 25, 1982, series 4, box 3.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. Boice goes on in this letter to explain how the Textus Receptus, the principal text from which the KJV was translated, contains errors (in particular, as noted by Boice, in Rom 8:1 and Dan 3:25). In another letter responding to a critic of his view of inerrancy existing only in the originals, Boice explained why he believes the *Textus Receptus* to be, in some degree, a spurious text:

The reason there are so many manuscripts in the textual tradition represented by the Textus Receptus is that these all came from the basic manuscripts used at Constantinople and spread out into the libraries of Europe. But these are all essentially copies of one or two ancient manuscripts used in Constantinople, and these manuscripts are not necessarily more reliable than the other comparable manuscripts that were used in such ancient church centers as Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Rome. The way to establish the original text is by careful comparison of these most ancient manuscripts, which is what the eclectic texts do. (James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Gary Turpin,” June 25, 1982, series 4, box 4)

Regarding the absolute authority of the Bible, Boice responded to one person who asked him about interpreting the Bible in light of science without allowing presuppositions or prejudices to interfere with proper interpretation:

I am not sure a simple answer to that problem can be given. Theologians have often rejected scientific truth on the basis of a false understanding of the Bible. On the other hand, it is more common today for people to reject Scripture on the basis of alleged scientific fact or theory. I think there must be a balance as long as the Christian bears in mind that the authority of the Bible rather than the authority of science is absolute. In other words, the difficulty is with our interpretation of the Bible, which may always be mistaken, and not with the teaching of the Bible itself.<sup>74</sup>

Boice's commitment to the inspiration, authority, and inerrancy of Scripture was unwavering and served as the foundation for all of his beliefs.

One incident that provides particular insight into Boice's view of Scripture and its proper interpretation is the controversy that occurred in the evangelical community regarding Robert H. Gundry's 1982 commentary on Matthew. In the commentary, Gundry makes use of redaction criticism, a discipline that seeks to ascertain the theological outlook of the editors (redactors) of the biblical material attempting to explain why they chose the specific source materials available to them.<sup>75</sup> Immediately after the commentary's publication, calls for Gundry's removal from membership in the Evangelical Theological Society began to be issued; among these protesters was Boice.<sup>76</sup> However, the Evangelical

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<sup>74</sup> James Montgomery Boice, "Letter to Roger George," March 12, 1980, series 4, box 3.

<sup>75</sup> Robert Gundry employs a Jewish hermeneutic popular in Second Temple Judaism known as "midrash," which allegorized and/or dehistoricized the historic content of the text. He writes, "Clearly, Matthew treats us to history mixed with elements that cannot be called historical in a modern sense. All history writing entails more or less editing of materials. But Matthew's editing often goes beyond acceptable bounds. . . . Matthew's subtractions, additions, and revisions of order and phraseology often show changes in substance, i.e. they represent developments of the dominical tradition that result in different meanings and departures from the actuality of events." (Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982], 623).

<sup>76</sup> The ETS was founded in 1949, by conservative scholars in wake of the minimizing of an orthodox view of the nature and interpretation of Scripture in the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy. The ETS "is devoted to the inerrancy and inspiration of the Scriptures and the gospel of Jesus Christ." The Evangelical Theological Society, "About," accessed January 5, 2018, <http://www.etsjets.org/about>.

Theological Society's (ETS) executive committee refused to remove Gundry from membership when Gundry affirmed his belief in inerrancy.<sup>77</sup> Writing in an official capacity as chairman of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, Boice reveals his commitment to inerrancy and a grammatical-historical hermeneutic when he appealed to the president of ETS to reconsider the decision refusing disciplinary action on Gundry:

The council was unanimous in asking me to convey its request to you and the executive committee to reconsider that decision [to retain Gundry's membership in the ETS] and hopefully rescind that action. Dr. Gundry's position is inconsistent with the stand that the Evangelical Theological Society has always maintained for biblical inerrancy. We believe this to be true in spite of the fact that Dr. Gundry wishes to maintain his commitment to inerrancy as well as the redaction criticism approach. Any approach to biblical interpretation and criticism which divorces the biblical report of the words of Jesus from his actual words runs counter to the clear intent of Scripture, the understanding of the church in all ages past, and opens the door to discounting the historical basis of virtually all the Old and New Testaments.<sup>78</sup>

In another letter, Boice again points to the inconsistency of Gundry in claiming his belief in inerrancy while at the same time employing redaction criticism:

I am sure that all of us [members of ICBI] have respect for Dr. Gundry's intentions. It is just that we do not believe you can say that the Bible is inerrant (or even truthful) when it presents incidents and sayings as having happened when, in fact, they did not happen but are actually the invention of Matthew for (sometimes hidden or even obscure) theological ends.<sup>79</sup>

This letter demonstrates Boice's respectful manner toward those with whom he disagreed while at the same time strongly standing for his theological convictions.

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<sup>77</sup> In the fall of the following year (1983), however, one of the original five founders of the ETS, Roger Nicole, read a statement asking Gundry to resign his membership "unless he retracts his position on the historical trustworthiness of Matthew's Gospel." In response, Gundry submitted his resignation. Leslie R. Keylock, "Evangelical Scholars Remove Robert Gundry for His Views," *Christianity Today* 28 (February 1984): 36-38.

<sup>78</sup> James Montgomery Boice, "Letter to Dr. Louis Goldberg," February 1, 1983, series 4, box 3.

<sup>79</sup> James Montgomery Boice, "Letter to William G. Alexander," April 19, 1983, series 4, box 3. Originally, Gundry's commentary was written to be a part of the *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, edited by Frank E. Gaebelin (headmaster of Boice's preparatory school Stony Brook) with associate editors Merrill C. Tenney and Boice. Gaebelin accepted Gundry's submission on Matthew, but Boice and Tenney rejected it as well as Gundry's revisions. Gundry then expanded the commentary, including a meticulous redaction-critical analysis of the Greek text of Matthew where he, surprisingly, claimed that Mark and "Q" were the only available sources to Matthew, and published it as a stand-alone commentary. Michael Strickland, "Evangelicals and the Synoptic Problem" (Ph.D. diss., University of Birmingham, 2011), 208-9.

An orthodox view of the nature of Scripture and the deity of Christ were paramount to Boice as these two doctrines were among the chief ones from which the UPCUSA had strayed into error. Boice appealed to his fellow conservatives to stand together in unison and resolve to stand against the liberal theology of the day: “In advancing this claim, evangelicals must call the Church to hear once again the voice of God in Scripture, superseding the voices of the theologians and calling men and women everywhere to their knees before the cross of Christ.”<sup>80</sup>

### **Working for Change from Within**

One can easily understand the importance of Boice being matched with a theologically like-minded church (and vice-versa), but fully understanding the challenges that awaited him in leading a church within the UPCUSA still causes one to question why Boice did not choose a different denomination.<sup>81</sup> He did have some experience of church life outside of mainline Presbyterianism, but selected a UPCUSA church as his first pastorate.<sup>82</sup> One reason Boice chose to affiliate with the UPCUSA as he began his pastoral career is that mainline Presbyterianism was the heritage of his family.<sup>83</sup> In an exchange of letters with a Presbyterian pastor, Boice refers to his Presbyterian “roots” and a sense

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<sup>80</sup> Boice, “The Passing of an Era,” 4.

<sup>81</sup> The challenges Boice could (and eventually would) face as a conservative in the UPCUSA had the potential of moving beyond merely an opposing theological or ideological framework from that of the denomination. Presbyterian polity allowed for the presbytery to have administrative control over a church, including whom it calls as ministers, whom it ordains as elders, and not the least of which who possesses ownership of the building and property.

<sup>82</sup> Boice’s family growing up was traditionally affiliated with mainline Presbyterianism. However, when Boice was a child, his family spent many years worshiping and serving at the Evangelical Free Church in McKeesport, PA, due to Boice’s parents being at theological odds with the Presbyterian church there. While at Harvard, Boice attended Park Street Church in Boston, a Congregational church pastored at the time by Harold Ockenga. Boice, interview.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. Boice speaks of his family’s Presbyterian heritage in a letter declining an offer to become a professor at a seminary. James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Murray J. Harris,” December 16, 1975, series 4, box 2.

of call to be in the UPCUSA.<sup>84</sup> In another letter declining an offer to submit his name to be considered as the pastor of First Presbyterian Church Knoxville, Tennessee (at the time affiliated with the PCUS, southern mainline Presbyterianism, and generally regarded as more conservative than the UPCUSA), Boice spoke of his calling to serve at Tenth and of his commitment to keep working for change in the UPCUSA: “God has called me into this ministry here and [I] have not sensed a release from this work. . . . There are some concerns in the work here that I feel greatly responsible for, and unless the Lord shows me very clearly otherwise, I need to remain here.”<sup>85</sup> This sense of “call” to Tenth and mainline Presbyterianism helps to explain why Boice chose to remain within the denomination as long as he did, and why he chose to begin his pastoral career there as well.

Undoubtedly, Boice’s sense of call to serve at Tenth and to work within the UPCUSA was centered in his desire to reclaim the denomination’s orthodoxy and biblical confessionalism. Boice writes,

If we talk of a goal which is all-embracing and all-encompassing, we have to confess that we have nothing less in mind than a reformation of the church [denomination] in our day. We believe that this is necessary. . . . It is quite easy for [the church] to be swept away by a liberal theology which is antithetical to that which Christians know and believe, because they do not realize that this is happening. . . . This is why we believe we need a reformation.<sup>86</sup>

Boice laments the “secularism” that pervaded “many of the mainline denominations,” which had “rejected the wisdom of the Word of God” leading to an “adoption of the

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<sup>84</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Paul T. Edwards,” February 5, 1980, series 4, box 3. In an additional letter turning down an invitation to serve as president of Biblical Theological Seminary, an interdenominational graduate school of theology, Boice refers to his “lifetime commitment” to Tenth and “many other fields of service” whereby he affirms his commitment to the pastorate and Presbyterianism. James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Dr. Allan A. MacRae,” September 23, 1982, series 4, box 4.

<sup>85</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Dr. Russell L. French,” October 26, 1977, series 4, box 2. In his letter to Dr. Harris declining a teaching position at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Boice again refers to his calling, stating that even in his eighth year as pastor at Tenth his “work is just beginning.” James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Dr. Murray J. Harris,” December 16, 1975, series 4, box 2.

<sup>86</sup> James Montgomery Boice, ed., *Our Savior God: Studies on Man, Christ, and the Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 12-13.



world's wisdom . . . that also ends up with the world's theology. . . . So we need a reformation in theology also."<sup>87</sup>

Even though he could have personally moved to another church within a like-minded denomination or could have moved Tenth into conservative, confessional Presbyterian denominations such as the Orthodox Presbyterian Church or Reformed Presbyterian Church Evangelical Synod (and in 1973 the Presbyterian Church in America), he chose to remain in the UPCUSA. As previously mentioned, Donald Barnhouse's approach to dealing with the liberal trends of the denomination during his tenure as pastor of Tenth was to adopt the words of Jesus to the church in Sardis recorded in Revelation 3:2: "Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die." Boice followed suit as evidenced in the letter from the Session to the congregation at Tenth regarding the church's struggle on whether to leave the denomination:

We believe that God has led some to depart [the UPCUSA], thereby bearing witness to the need for purity within the church. We believe he has led some to stay, thereby bearing witness to the need for a visible unity among all true believers. Tenth Presbyterian Church has elected to stay, thereby bearing witness to the unity of the church and in order to work for change within. Our text has been Revelation 3:2: "Strengthen what remains and is about to die."<sup>88</sup>

A follow-up letter to out of town members of Tenth informing them of the Session's aforementioned letter to the congregation describes the church's historic, and subsequently Boice's, approach to dealing with liberalism within the denomination in even more distinct terms:

At a time of crisis within the UPCUSA, Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse elected to remain in the denomination when others left. He believed that with other like-minded churches they could be a purifying influence from within and turn the denomination around to a more evangelical and Christ-honoring position.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Boice, *Our Savior God*, 12-13..

<sup>88</sup> James Montgomery Boice, "Letter from Session to Congregation, February 9, 1980," series 4, box 4.

<sup>89</sup> Manfred O. Garibotti, Chairman of Joint Committee on the Future of the Church, Tenth Presbyterian Church, "Letter to Members," February 22, 1980, series 4, box 4, James Montgomery Boice Manuscript Collection, Princeton Theological Seminary.

Boice possessed the conviction that staying within the UPCUSA was not a futile, misplaced use of his time and energy, but rather there existed positive opportunities to gain ground for the cause of biblical orthodoxy within the denomination.

Boice was certainly not the only conservative pastor in the UPCUSA and Tenth not the only conservative church within the denomination. Boice fought hard and with great passion to unite these pastors and churches into one voice that would prevent further advances of liberalism in the denomination and hopefully restore it to its confessional roots. In a letter to a fellow pastor questioning Boice's methodology in the conflict, he writes,

I think you grossly underestimate how seriously churches like Tenth have wanted to remain within the United Presbyterian Church and work for change. We have done it for decades. . . . It is my hope that Tenth might cause the Presbytery of Philadelphia to face up to those facts [its heterodoxy], make changes and thus deal creatively and in a more biblical fashion with those other churches which are sure to dissent in years to come.<sup>90</sup>

There is little doubt that Boice did not consider the UPCUSA a lost cause and saw within it a remnant of those holding to confessionalism that could hopefully convince the majority of the denomination of the shortcomings of liberal theology.

Boice saw glimmers of hope in the struggle against liberalism, such as the evangelistic crusade in West Germany which proclaimed the gospel and brought thousands to faith in Christ right in the heart of the birthplace of German liberalism. Boice, writing about this crusade, referred to those who were beginning to see that "Bultmann's existentialist theology . . . which caused many to lose faith in the ability of the Bible . . . is irrelevant, with its philosophical pre-commitments and heavy dosage of extreme biblical criticism."<sup>91</sup> If there were hope in Germany, there could be hope for the UPCUSA.

Boice's personal correspondence reveals his motivation for staying within the UPCUSA and his hopefulness that God would use the uniting of conservative churches to

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<sup>90</sup> James Montgomery Boice, "Letter to J. B. Adams, III," April 9, 1980, series 4, box 3.

<sup>91</sup> James Montgomery Boice, "German Groundswell," *Christianity Today* 9, no. 2 (October 1964): 41.

bring about change. In the decade of the 1970s, Boice frequently received letters from pastors and laypeople of Presbyterian churches voicing their concern about liberalism in the denomination and seeking Boice’s wisdom and guidance regarding how to respond to the crisis. Boice’s responses to these letters demonstrate his full commitment to mainstream Presbyterianism and his great passion to be a witness to an orthodox view of the Scripture where such a view had been abandoned by the denomination.

In response to one such letter, Boice writes, “It is really a tragedy how things have gone in the United Presbyterian Church. I have always thought, as you have, that we should identify with an evangelical church and work from that base toward reform.”<sup>92</sup> In another letter dated close to the time when Tenth eventually had to withdraw from the UPCUSA, Boice still exudes hopefulness that those conservative churches remaining in the denomination could have success in a reclamation for orthodoxy:

From a human point of view, the difficulties certainly seem extreme. But it may well be that under God these months will be a time of significant realignment and advance for the evangelical Presbyterian churches. Many are leaving the denomination, as you probably know, and others are on the verge of leaving. Perhaps there can be a significant pulling together here and certainly a time of upholding the gospel and a full commitment to Scripture in a new way.<sup>93</sup>

Boice encouraged a fellow UPCUSA pastor who was also struggling in theological disagreement with the denomination by sharing the approach of Tenth in the conflict:

We were staying only because it is where we had been placed historically and because we felt an obligation to bear an evangelical witness there as long as possible. . . . One should be salt if one can, and one certainly has an obligation to serve the church in which he is found faithfully.<sup>94</sup>

In response to a letter rescinding an invitation for Boice to speak at an event because of Tenth’s actions within the UPCUSA, Boice makes it clear that his approach is not

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<sup>92</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Mr. and Mrs. Harry Kraftson,” April 4, 1980, series 4, box 3. Note that Boice tends to use the term “evangelical” in place of “conservative” in referring to theologically orthodox churches.

<sup>93</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Townsend,” November 16, 1979, series 4, box 4.

<sup>94</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Rev. William J. Maxwell,” July 19, 1984, series 4, box 4.

impetuous or capricious, but rather a push for reform that is the culmination of “many years of careful work within the denomination and recent months of special pleading for its toleration of our more conservative position.”<sup>95</sup>

In an interview with Michael Horton, who worked closely with Boice during his struggle with the UPCUSA, Horton states that a principal reason for Boice staying within the UPCUSA and working for change was his great concern that if all the conservative churches left, then a major mainline denomination would suffer collapse and be wholly swallowed by heterodoxy.<sup>96</sup> Boice was convinced that his presence in the UPCUSA, as well as the presence of other conservatives, served as a preservative (i.e., being “salt and light” in Matt 5:13-16) for orthodoxy in the denomination. Even the secular media recognized the significance of Boice and Tenth for the conservative side in the UPCUSA as one article in the *Philadelphia Bulletin* noted, “[Tenth] is one of the most prominent Bible-oriented, evangelical churches in the denomination. If it leaves the denomination, it could have an effect on other conservative Presbyterian churches across the country.”<sup>97</sup> If too many conservatives left, Boice believed that mainline Presbyterianism would become so fragmented that it would have little impact for the kingdom of God.<sup>98</sup> Boice laments the departure of a fellow conservative pastor from the UPCUSA when he writes, “I am sorry to see you go just now and hope very much that the evangelical men will not just fade away one at a time.”<sup>99</sup> Instead of conservatives withdrawing from the

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<sup>95</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Dr. Leroy Brightup,” September 4, 1980, series 4, box 3.

<sup>96</sup> Michael Horton, telephone interview by author, August 1, 2017. Horton met Boice, who took Horton “under his wing” in mentorship at Tenth in 1976. Boice and Horton later formed the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, a ministry focusing on reviving Reformed theology within churches. Mrs. Boice also confirmed Horton’s statement.

<sup>97</sup> Paula Herbut, “Tenth Presbyterian Prepares to Secede,” *Philadelphia Bulletin*, March 7, 1980.

<sup>98</sup> Horton, interview.

<sup>99</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Rev. Richard E. Knodel, Jr.,” February 13, 1975, series 4, box 2.

denomination, Boice wanted to help unite them and thus strengthen their cause and voice within the UPCUSA. Boice writes in a letter, “At the moment we are attempting to give some solid leadership to the many highly dissatisfied evangelicals [in the UPCUSA].”<sup>100</sup>

Horton recalled in his conversations with Boice that Boice was keenly aware of how betrayed Gresham Machen felt when a number of his conservative colleagues at Princeton did not back his fight against liberalism: “Machen felt knifed.”<sup>101</sup> Thus, a seminal reason Boice stayed in the UPCUSA was not to betray his fellow conservatives as evidenced in his letter to a fellow pastor also struggling with his decision to remain in the denomination: “Although we have had the right to go (in my opinion), we have chosen to stay and work for reform year after year. . . . I feel that every departure of an evangelical makes it more difficult for those who remain.”<sup>102</sup> In this same letter, Boice refers to the “pressures” he experienced while working for change, and no doubt one of those pressures was encouraging and leading conservatives inside the UPCUSA. Boice notes the heaviness of having so many conservatives look to him for leadership as well as his desire for unity and reform when he writes to a pastor in New York:

You probably know that this is only one item [ordaining women as elders] among many that is causing a number of conservative churches to re-evaluate their relationship to the United Presbyterian Church. I have become a focal point for quite a number of [conservatives] and know of a dozen or so churches that have left or are in the process of leaving. It is really too bad. Our first choice would be to remain and work for renewal.<sup>103</sup>

Albert Mohler notes that Boice, given his pastorate at a flagship church and national notoriety, was something of a Moses to the conservatives in the denomination.<sup>104</sup> One

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<sup>100</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Dr. Marion D. Barnes,” June 27, 1975, series 4, box 2.

<sup>101</sup> Horton, interview.

<sup>102</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Dr. John N. DiGiacomo,” May 28, 1981, series 4, box 3.

<sup>103</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Dr. Barry H. Downing,” February 20, 1980, series 4, box 3.

<sup>104</sup> R. Albert Mohler, Jr., interview by author, June 12, 2017. In this interview, Mohler likened Boice’s role for northern Presbyterians in the crisis of conservative versus liberal theology to that of the

pastor wrote to Boice regarding Boice's potential withdrawal from the UPCUSA, stating, "I respect you [and] watching to see what will be your next move. . . . I would be interested in knowing what it is for my own consideration."<sup>105</sup>

In addition to fragmenting the effort of conservatives working for reform, Boice also thought that leaving the denomination was a waste of time and resources. Such a view, according to Horton, is something Boice learned from Barnhouse who thought the formation of Westminster Seminary as a response to the liberalism at Princeton Seminary was wrong.<sup>106</sup> Rather than investing time and money in a new school, resources should instead be invested in the existing school to work toward its reformation. Boice was also concerned about the witness a fragmented denomination portrayed to the secular world. If Christians were so divided and unable to be united, then they would find it difficult to convince the lost about the merits of the gospel. To this end, Boice was concerned about the number of denominations being formed in response to the liberalism in the UPCUSA:

I agree with you in my distress that so many northern Presbyterian churches are attempting to start a new denomination, and I really do not wish them success. I think it is entirely wrong to start a new denomination when there are so many existing Presbyterian churches. I think they should reconsider this matter and change. Perhaps those of us who are already good friends and are already working together can now work from both sides to pull these various bodies into one unified and forward-looking national Presbyterian witness.<sup>107</sup>

If at all possible, Boice strongly believed a church should stay within its denomination and vie for orthodoxy and a unified witness. To a pastor in Los Angeles, Boice writes, "The Concerned United Presbyterians [a special interest group mentioned below] are inclined to remain together in hopes of perhaps one day moving the United Presbyterian

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role of Adrian Rogers in the same crisis for the Southern Baptist Convention in the 1970s-1980s. Mohler commented, "Imagine how conservatives in the SBC would have felt if Rogers left them. The same was true for conservatives in the UPCUSA when Boice left."

<sup>105</sup> Spencer R. Frye, "Letter to Dr. James Boice," May 7, 1980, series 4, box 4.

<sup>106</sup> Horton, interview.

<sup>107</sup> James Montgomery Boice, "Letter to Rev. Donald E. Hoke," March 17, 1980, series 4, box 3.

Church back into its Reformed roots.”<sup>108</sup> Boice certainly conceded the fact that some situations rendered it impossible for a church to stay in an errant denomination, as would eventually be the case for Tenth and him, but withdrawal should always be a last case scenario after every effort to contend for the faith had been exhausted.

### **Involvement in PUBC and CUP**

An example of Boice’s commitment to do everything possible for reform within the UPCUSA was his leadership in two organizations that met on a regular basis to discuss strategy and to implement actions to bring the UPCUSA back to orthodoxy or at least keep it from further sliding away from its confessional roots.<sup>109</sup> These organizations were Presbyterians United for Biblical Concerns (PUBC) and Concerned United Presbyterians

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<sup>108</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Rev. Paul T. Edwards,” February 21, 1980, series 4, box 3.

<sup>109</sup> The fact that conservative special interest groups had formed and were functioning at such organized levels reveals the degree to which the UPCUSA had further shifted toward theological liberalism after the Confession of 1967. The existence of these groups also shows that conservatives, more than ever before, felt threatened that the growing liberalism would jeopardize their freedom to believe and act according to their convictions. Another conservative group named Concerned Presbyterians, Inc., was formed in the 1970s among southern mainline Presbyterians (Presbyterian Church in the United States) principally in response to the growing effort to unite both mainline denominations, UPCUSA (north) and PCUS (south), as described in the Plan of Union presented in the 1971 General Assembly. Concerned Presbyterians, Inc., published a pamphlet outlining the ten reasons why those in the PCUS should reject a merger with the UPCUSA. These reasons articulated the presence of liberalism in the UPCUSA and its negative impact on the denomination chiefly manifested in a precipitous decline in attendance and financial giving, theological error, and collapse of morality. The pamphlet stated,

Departures from established doctrine are far more prevalent in the UPCUSA. Not many ministers in our denomination dare to stand in their pulpits and openly deny the Virgin Birth and the validity of Christ’s death on the cross. The UPCUSA has not only condoned men who have done this but it has elected to its highest offices men who have publicly disavowed some of Christianity’s cardinal doctrines. . . . Before a minister, ruling elder or deacon is ordained in the PCUS (our Church) he is required to take a solemn vow that he sincerely receives and adopts the Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures. Prior to 1967, ministers, ruling elders and deacons in the UPCUSA were required to take a somewhat similar vow. But when that Church adopted its Book of Confessions in 1967, the subscription question was eliminated. We think this distinction is very important. A Church in which the officers and ministers no longer solemnly subscribe to a confession is not a confessional Church! (Kenneth S. Keyes, “10 Valid Reasons for Opposing Union with the United Presbyterian Church” [Miami: Concerned Presbyterians, 1972])

The pamphlet goes on to quote material used in UPCUSA youth curriculum that contains references to the illicit practice of sex and use of drugs.

(CUP). Conservatives within the UPCUSA attempted to organize themselves and their efforts for reform to achieve maximum effectiveness.<sup>110</sup> Boice played a role in both organizations and frequently corresponded with others regarding the work the groups were attempting to do, particularly in response to the UPCUSA's stance and actions regarding the nature of the Bible, the deity of Christ, the ordination of women as elders, and homosexuality.

One example is an exchange of letters with another pastor in which Boice speaks as the editor/publisher of the CUP newsletter dealing with an issue of the First Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh refusing to ordain women as elders in 1975. The newsletter quotes William Ruschaupt, head of the Pittsburgh Presbytery, giving his assent to the actions of the church. However, Ruschaupt vehemently denied that he gave his approval and sought legal action against CUP (this fact demonstrates the wide acceptance of women as elders by 1975, within the UPCUSA). Boice writes of Ruschaupt,

I offered to print a correction giving his [Ruschaupt] true position, if he would supply it. He declined to do that. I said that I was quite happy to set the matter right. . . . No matter if the quote be true and verifiable or not, we need utmost caution and forbearance in love lest such men be embarrassed beyond right and irreparable damage be done to God's erring children. . . . Granted, true colors must be shown before the Lord's people, but of course the issue must be the inspiration, authority, and inerrancy of Scripture.<sup>111</sup>

This quote exemplifies how Boice conducted himself in his effort to defend conservative beliefs. He managed to demonstrate fairness and charity, but at the same time, he remained unflinching in his commitment and stand for orthodoxy.

Boice remained active not only in articulating his position on various issues, but in mobilizing other conservatives in their struggle against the UPCUSA as well. In one instance, Boice authorized the release of \$250 of CUP funds to be sent to a group of

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<sup>110</sup> It is interesting that conservatives within the UPCUSA formed multiple groups instead of just one. This may, to some degree, speak to Boice's frustration about the lack of unity among conservatives in letters previously cited.

<sup>111</sup> James Montgomery Boice, "Letter to David Felts," December 16, 1975, series 4, box 2.



elders in one church to make an appeal to the Presbytery of Chicago concerning ordination of women as elders.<sup>112</sup> In another letter, Boice describes to a fellow pastor his efforts in leading a committee in a two-day CUP meeting on writing overtures to be presented at the 1980 General Assembly “pressing its [CUP] case for relief from the stipulations of Overture L on several fronts.”<sup>113</sup> In 1974, Boice organized and led a group of conservative pastors to the Office of the General Assembly in New York (headquarters of the UPCUSA) to personally present an overture called “Declaration and Call,” citing the group’s conviction that Scripture prohibited ordaining women as ruling elders in the church.<sup>114</sup>

In terms of the organization Presbyterians United for Biblical Concerns, Boice’s correspondence shows a lesser level of involvement on his part than in CUP. Nonetheless, Boice was a member of the PUBC board of directors and active in its meetings.<sup>115</sup> Whereas CUP was involved in lobbying presbyteries and the General Assembly on theological issues, PUBC focused more on the dissemination of information and working to keep conservatives within the UPCUSA apprised of the latest developments in the struggle against liberalism. In 1980, the PUBC board of directors hosted the moderator of the General Assembly to personally share their grievances and concerns regarding the state of the UPCUSA, which were fourfold: requiring churches to ordain women as ruling

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<sup>112</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to G. J. Gerard,” June 1, 1976, series 4, box 2.

<sup>113</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Rev. Carlton N. Baker,” February 6, 1980, series 4, box 3. Overture L was an amendment to the UPCUSA Form of Government approved in the 1979 General Assembly that mandated all UPCUSA churches ordain “men and women” as ruling elders. Office of the General Assembly, The United Presbyterian Church in the USA, *Minutes of the General Assembly 1979* (New York: Office of the General Assembly, November 1979), 1:29-30. Chap. 6 of this diss. contains more information about Overture L.

<sup>114</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Rev. Richard E. Knodel, Jr.,” December 12, 1974, series 4, box 2. The overture was a response to proceedings regarding the rejection of the ordination of Wynn Kenyon, who, in his candidate interview, said he would not ordain a woman as elder (see chap. 6 for more information). Unfortunately, I could not find a copy of “Declaration and Call.”

<sup>115</sup> Minutes of the Presbyterians United for Biblical Concerns, Annual Board of Directors Meeting, February 2-4, 1976, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia.

elders as a result of the passage of Overture L, lack of church discipline for ministers and church members promulgating heterodox theology, that the UPCUSA is “no longer a biblical people . . . in conformity with . . . and shaped by the Word of God,” and that “Presbyterians learn the limits of diversity.”<sup>116</sup> In this same meeting, the president of the PUBC expressed his desire for the organization “to avoid godless chatter . . . and stupid, senseless controversies” and to focus on “that which is entrusted to us [doctrinal standards].”<sup>117</sup>

One of the developments that concerned the PUBC was the growing debate in the UPCUSA regarding the acceptance of homosexuals as ministers and members of the church. In the 1975 General Assembly meeting, the Presbyterian Gay Caucus was denied official status, but its members were recognized as “Christian persons.”<sup>118</sup> Fearing it was merely a matter of time until the UPCUSA embraced homosexuality as acceptable, the PUBC worked to form a response as noted in Boice’s letter to a pastor in Wichita, Kansas: “I think you are on the right track in raising these concerns and in making the suggestion that PUBC form a committee to call consultation if necessary. . . . We are going to have a meeting on this subject [homosexuality] toward the end of November.”<sup>119</sup>

The PUBC accomplished the goal of informing conservatives of the latest developments in the UPCUSA principally through a newsletter, the purpose of which Boice described as “to publicize our position and give some background support for people facing the problem [liberalism] on a local level. The PUBC will review the

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<sup>116</sup> Minutes of the Presbyterians United for Biblical Concerns, Annual Board of Directors Meeting, February 4-6, 1980, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> George Dugan, “Presbyterians Vote against Accepting Homosexual Group,” *New York Times*, May 19, 1975, accessed March 10, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/1975/05/19/archives/presbyterians-vote-against-accepting-homosexual-group.html>.

<sup>119</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Dr. Frank Kik,” October 19, 1977, series 4, box 3.

situation on ordaining women as elders, explore the homosexuality issue, and form strategy in several areas.”<sup>120</sup> In addition to the newsletter, the PUBC held occasional conferences, which Boice helped to organize, on specific topics in order to equip conservatives to build a stronger defense against liberalism. One such conference was a “Consultation on Homosexuality,” held in Pittsburgh in 1977, where Richard Lovelace, Gordon-Conwell professor and friend of Boice’s, presented a paper entitled, “Active Homosexual Lifestyle and the Church.”<sup>121</sup> The paper reviewed the church’s theological and historical stance on homosexuality and how leaders in churches in modern times should respond to the issue, which was becoming a growing problem in the denomination. Boice writes to a pastor who attended one of the conferences which seemed to have a positive impact for the cause of the conservatives: “It was a joy to me that the PUBC meeting went well, and I am encouraged to know that so many others thought so also. I trust that PUBC will continue to be an even greater encouragement to those who are in it for years to come.”<sup>122</sup>

## **PCRT**

Another avenue in which Boice hoped to bring about reform in the UPCUSA as well as other denominations that had embraced theological liberalism was the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology (PCRT). The annual conference was created in 1974, by Boice with the help and encouragement of R. C. Sproul, who not long before had begun a similar type of conference at his Ligonier Valley Study Center.<sup>123</sup> The PCRT was

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<sup>120</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Rev. G. J. Gerard,” October 17, 1975, series 4, box 2.

<sup>121</sup> Richard F. Lovelace, “Active Homosexual Lifestyle and the Church,” *Church and Society* 67, no. 5 (May-June 1977): 24-39.

<sup>122</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Rev. Louis P. Long,” February 4, 1976, series 4, box 4.

<sup>123</sup> Boice, interview. Sproul began his conferences in 1971, which he modeled after Francis Schaeffer’s L’Abri Institute in Switzerland. See Jack Rowley, “The Ligonier Valley Study Center Early Years,” Ligonier Ministries, accessed January 24, 2018, <https://www.ligonier.org/blog/ligonier-valley-study-center-early-years/>.

originally hosted at Tenth and featured evangelical speakers who were notable proponents of orthodox theology, such as J. I. Packer, John R. W. Stott, John Gerstner, R. C. Sproul, Roger Nicole, Edmund Clowney, and Boice.<sup>124</sup> In the years of the conference's existence, which fall under the scope of this dissertation (1974-1980), speakers spoke on topics and doctrines related to the struggle against liberal theology, including addresses with titles such as "Images of Man in Contemporary Culture," "The Unchanging Christ," "The Language of the Battlefield," "The Problem of Knowledge in the World of Men," and "The World and the Word."<sup>125</sup>

The goal of the PCRT was not simply to promote Reformed theology, but to be a means by which spiritual and theological renewal could be experienced in individuals and churches. Reformed theology was a part of the PCRT platform, not so much because Boice was an adherent of Reformed theology, but because he believed

there is an undeniable connection between these [Reformed] doctrines and the periods of greatest advance for Christianity in the western world. Wherever one turns [in history], it is the doctrines of grace that underlie spiritual awakening and which indeed give birth to it by the power of the Spirit of God. . . . It was the fearless proclamation of the whole counsels of God, including the distinct doctrines of the Reformed Faith, which God used to turn millions to Christ in their centuries.<sup>126</sup>

The amount of personal investment of time and energy Boice put into the PCRT, as evidenced in his personal correspondence, demonstrates his passion to confront the growth of liberalism and promote biblical confessionalism.

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<sup>124</sup> In its later years, PCRT conferences were held in locations in addition to Tenth.

<sup>125</sup> A complete list of PCRT Conferences, speakers, and addresses can be found at Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, "Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology," accessed January 24, 2018, <http://www.alliancenet.org/pcrt>.

<sup>126</sup> James Montgomery Boice, "The Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology: Opening Remarks," *Tenth* (July 1975): 3. To be clear, Boice was not so narrow-minded as to believe that the only legitimate means to follow Christ or spearhead a renewal for orthodoxy in the church was through Reformed theology. He did believe the Reformed tradition was the best and most powerful means to do so, but he never disparaged orthodox evangelicals who did not share his Reformed views.

At the beginning of each PCRT, Boice would typically enumerate the three-fold purpose of the conference that reveals, at least in part, a desire to countermand the growth of theological liberalism and promote the merits of orthodoxy. The purpose of the PCRT is to (1) awaken a new interest in biblical theology and give greater visibility to the doctrines of grace through the church generally; (2) establish a forum at which men and women in the Reformed tradition (from all denominations) might meet and be encouraged by others of like mind; and (3) marshal resources to the end that believers might propagate the faith more effectively and thus “establish, strengthen, and settle” the Church upon the firm foundation of the doctrines of the apostles.<sup>127</sup> These emphases demonstrate one of the aims of the PCRT as encouraging conservatives within a variety of denominations to hold fast to their orthodox beliefs and be witnesses of their truthfulness to those who believed otherwise.

In the opening remarks of the first PCRT in 1974, Boice made abundantly clear that a principal reason he started a conference on Reformed theology was to bring about a reformation of the liberal church:

But if we talk of a goal which is all-embracing and all-encompassing, we have to confess that we have nothing less in mind than a reformation of the church in our day. We believe that this is necessary. . . . Much of what goes on in [the church] America today is shallow. And the danger is that when there is shallowness in the church, it is quite easy to be swept away by a liberal theology which is antithetical to that which Christians know and believe, because they do not realize that this is happening.<sup>128</sup>

Boice went on in his remarks to narrow his focus of why a conference like the PCRT is needed—to confront the error into which mainline denominations had descended. In doing so, Boice offered a succinct analysis of what he believed to be wrong with liberalism and how it had crept into many denominations:

What we have today in many of the mainline denominations is “secularism,” or “worldy-ism.” It means that the church is being like the world in its wisdom, theology, agenda, and methods. The wisdom of the church is the wisdom of the

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<sup>127</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “The Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology: Opening Remarks,” *Tenth* (July 1974): 3-4.

<sup>128</sup> Boice, *Our Savior God*, 12.

Word of God. Christian people, though they may and indeed do differ on their interpretation of the teachings in the Word of God, nevertheless confess that this is their standard regardless of how they might fail in understanding it. They come to the Word, recognizing that in themselves they do not have spiritual wisdom. . . . But today the Word of God is widely rejected in large segments of the church. What has come to take the place of the wisdom of the Word of God is “the wisdom of consensus”—that is, the authority of the 51 percent vote. This is disastrous for the church. This is why we believe that we need a reformation in this area.<sup>129</sup>

Boice diagnosed that the “wisdom of consensus,” in steering away from the Bible as the source of authority, had now skewed theology, which needed to be corrected:

From an adoption of the world’s wisdom, it follows that the church also ends up with the world’s theology, not the theology of the Word. The world’s theology says that although men and women are not as good as they could be, they are certainly not as bad as the Bible declares them to be. What people need is a little encouragement and instruction, perhaps the administration of the sacraments. They certainly do not need a divine Savior. They can achieve salvation by themselves. But they cannot—this is the tragedy. So we need a reformation in theology also.<sup>130</sup>

Much of the driving force in Boice’s ministry was to call his denomination back to the theology of the Word and away from the theology of the world.

In the conclusion of the remarks, Boice outlined the solution for the theological malaise and his hope that the PCRT could play a part in the much needed reformation of the modern church. He gives a closing appeal to Christians to “infuse” their churches with orthodox theology and stand against liberalism:

We need a recovery of the church’s true agenda (its true priorities) and a reactivation of biblical methods for spiritual advancement, both of which have been forfeited. We need a reformation in which Christians are once again gripped by the dynamic of the Word of God and begin to infuse our churches with the kind of strength which is able to stand up against the secularism of our day and transform our culture as God blesses. This is the goal of the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology.<sup>131</sup>

The formation of the PCRT was yet another way Boice committed himself to reforming his denomination rather than removing himself from it.

Boice viewed part of his calling and role as pastor of Tenth to side with those who chose to remain in the denomination and help unite them in stemming the rising tide

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<sup>129</sup> Boice, *Our Savior God*, 12.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-13.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

of liberalism and to produce a witness of unity among those who still held to confessionalism in the UPCUSA. Liberal theology in the denomination was, for Boice, not the signal for departure but the opportunity to stay and “strengthen what remains.” His commitment to stand for truth in a context where many had abandoned it is perhaps best seen in a letter Boice wrote to Howard McPhee, the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of Eastern Canada. McPhee wrote to Boice criticizing him for speaking at a church that was a member of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, which in McPhee’s opinion had become apostate. Boice replied,

You continue to have a concern that I not continue to participate in the Knox Summer Fellowship. If that is the central conviction behind your letter, I must in honesty say that it is one in which I cannot concur. Even if the Presbyterian Church in Canada is apostate, which I myself would not affirm, I would still feel myself free and would even rejoice in the opportunity to preach in a church of that denomination. I would preach anywhere that the door is open to me—in a bar, on the street corner, in a Roman cathedral, or anywhere else for that matter. The idea that some people have that a preacher endorses another work by his presence has always seemed foreign and erroneous to me.<sup>132</sup>

Boice did not see his participation in a liberal denomination as something to be viewed in terms of “guilt by association,” but rather as an excellent platform to be a beacon of light in an organization that had theologically lost its way. Boice formed this approach through his own convictions regarding the Word of God and its proper interpretation, his heritage in mainline Presbyterianism, and the influence of powerful mentors and models who took a similar approach.

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<sup>132</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Rev. Howard McPhee,” November 29, 1983, series 4, box 4.

CHAPTER 4  
MENTORS THAT SHAPED THE LIFE AND  
MINISTRY OF JAMES BOICE

In my interview with Mrs. Boice, she stressed the importance of mentors in Boice's life, principally Donald Barnhouse, Harold Ockenga, Robert Lamont, and John Gerstner.<sup>1</sup> The influence of these men, according to Mrs. Boice, primarily accomplished two things in Boice's career. First, their example and influence helped Boice retain his orthodoxy while attending institutions of higher learning that espoused liberal theology. Boice himself refers to this in a letter answering questions about his life and ministry:

It is a very good question you ask about how a conservative goes through liberal training unscathed. I know the ultimate answer is the grace of God. However, there are undoubtedly human factors involved. . . . Probably the single most effective item in keeping me on course was the example of godly preachers whom I had known and who had taken a special interest in me even before I went to seminary.<sup>2</sup>

Second, these mentors were a major factor in Boice's commitment to remain in the UPCUSA and work for change as this is what he had seen modeled in their careers. Mrs. Boice recalled,

These men showed Jim that being a conservative did not necessarily mean being a revolutionary and that leaving a denomination is not always a productive thing. . . . They believed the mainline denomination was not necessarily a lost cause and that they should save something [in the denomination] if there was something left to save.<sup>3</sup>

The pattern of Boice's ministry unquestionably embodied the influence and pattern of his mentors.

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<sup>1</sup> Linda M. Boice, interview by author, Philadelphia, February 9, 2017. Two other men who influenced Boice are Frank Gaebelien, the headmaster at Stony Brook, where Boice attended school, and Carl F. H. Henry, the editor of *Christianity Today* when Boice worked there.

<sup>2</sup> James Montgomery Boice, "Letter to Terry Daniels," November 10, 1980, series 4, box 3.

<sup>3</sup> Boice, interview.



## Donald Grey Barnhouse

Perhaps no other person had a stronger influence on the life and ministry of Boice than Donald Grey Barnhouse (1895-1960).<sup>4</sup> Boice's life intersected with Barnhouse from the beginning of his days. When Boice's father, a physician, was doing residency in Philadelphia, they attended Tenth when Boice was a baby. One Sunday night, Boice's mother, with baby Jim in her arms, went to Tenth to attend a Christmas event. She found the church dark, but she knocked on the door. To her surprise, Barnhouse opened it and informed her the event was the following Sunday night. Noticing the baby in her arms, Barnhouse took Boice and prayed over him, then said to his mother while gesturing toward the front of the sanctuary, "Perhaps he'll preach in that pulpit someday."<sup>5</sup> After the senior Dr. Boice finished his residency, he moved the family to McKeesport, a suburb of Pittsburgh, where Boice grew up. Barnhouse would often visit the Boices in their home when he had a speaking engagement in Pittsburgh. On one of these occasions, Barnhouse asked Dr. and Mrs. Boice about their education plans for Jim, who at the time was in the eighth grade. Barnhouse mentioned Stony Brook, and when the parents seemed amenable to the idea, Barnhouse looked at Boice and asked, "Do you want to go to Stony Brook, Jimmy?" When Boice said yes, Barnhouse got up from the table, walked to the phone and called the Stony Brook headmaster, Frank Gaebelein, to make the arrangements.<sup>6</sup>

Aside from the long-standing familial connection, Barnhouse influenced Boice by virtue of his prominence within the UPCUSA and evangelical community, not to mention that Barnhouse pastored Tenth from 1927 until his death in 1960.<sup>7</sup> After the

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<sup>4</sup> Boice, interview.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> One of the conditions of Barnhouse's going to Tenth in 1927 as pastor was for the church to launch a radio ministry for him. Barnhouse became the first evangelical in the United States with a coast-to-coast radio ministry. Randall Balmer and John R. Fitzmier, *The Presbyterians* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1993), 125.

seven-year tenure of DiGangi who replaced Barnhouse, Boice became the next pastor at Tenth with a lengthy tenure. Evidence of Barnhouse's influence can be seen in the 1980 letter to the congregation at Tenth about separating from the UPCUSA wherein Boice stated that his approach in working with the denomination had been the same that Barnhouse employed—to stay and strengthen what remains.<sup>8</sup> Further evidence of influence is revealed in the fact that Boice quotes or makes reference to Barnhouse in 361 of the 1,142 printed sermons in Boice's expositional commentary set—a staggering 32 percent.<sup>9</sup> As with Boice's other mentors, Barnhouse modeled an approach of strongly defending orthodox theology while at the same time refusing to break away from the denomination regardless of its similitude to theological liberalism.

Barnhouse was “a staunch evangelical and a powerful defender of the faith,” according to another of Boice's mentors, Harold John Ockenga.<sup>10</sup> Barnhouse affirmed the divine nature of Christ and his exclusivity in salvation:

One of the most important claims of Christ, if not the most important, was that He was truth and that nothing else was truth. He taught, beyond question, that no one could be saved except through belief in Himself. . . . Truth is exclusive, it denies and shuts out its opposite. . . . The uniqueness of the claims of Christ can be held without the slightest intolerance, but they must be held without any compromise.<sup>11</sup>

The inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture as “the absolute authority of the Word of God” was a core doctrine to which Barnhouse steadfastly held.<sup>12</sup> Barnhouse writes, “Any man preaching or teaching religious truth who does not have the utmost confidence in the Word

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<sup>8</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Letter from Session to Congregation,” February 1980, series 4, box 4.

<sup>9</sup> This statistic was derived by electronically searching Boice's complete commentary set in digital form.

<sup>10</sup> Harold John Ockenga, “Letter to the Members of Tenth Presbyterian Church and Friends of Dr. Barnhouse,” October 1, 1952, box 1, folder 10, Donald Grey Barnhouse Papers, Presbyterian Historical Society.

<sup>11</sup> Donald Grey Barnhouse, “Editorial: Exclusive Finality,” *Revelation*, December 1948, 541.

<sup>12</sup> Donald Grey Barnhouse, “Thoughts,” *Eternity* 10 (April 1959): 19.

of God as perfect, supreme, and final, is forced into a position where he must rely on his own judgment as to what is true and what is not true.”<sup>13</sup> Barnhouse was not shy about publicly proclaiming his conservative beliefs, nor was he reserved in criticizing liberals within his denomination as Allen Guelzo notes, “Barnhouse’s radio broadcasts, his pulpit manner, even his conversations had marked him as a danger to liberals in the Philadelphia Presbytery.”<sup>14</sup> Barnhouse would publicly label by name Presbyterian pastors he deemed as heretics, stating one pastor in particular “as more fit for a Unitarian than a Presbyterian church” and another time proclaiming, “Within the sound of my voice there are two Presbyterian ministers who are treasonably disloyal to the gospel of Jesus Christ.”<sup>15</sup>

As staunch and brusque a defender of theological conservatism as Barnhouse could be, he was intentional not to label himself as part of the fundamentalist camp. A colleague of Barnhouse’s noted that he “disliked being called a fundamentalist but always insisted he was faithful to ‘the fundamentals.’ He was offended by the legalism and obscurantism of many conservative believers. And although he was a fiery defender of the faith, he was not a separatist.”<sup>16</sup> Another of Barnhouse’s colleagues recalls that Barnhouse preferred the term *evangelical* instead of *fundamentalist* as an effort to

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<sup>13</sup> Donald Grey Barnhouse, “Editorial: On What Authority,” *Eternity* 7 (May 1956): 11. See also Barnhouse, “How Is the Bible Inspired?” *Eternity* 10 (April 1959): 25; and Barnhouse and Ralph L. Keiper, *How to Study Your Bible* (Philadelphia: The Bible Study Hour, 1961), 7.

<sup>14</sup> Allen C. Guelzo, “Barnhouse,” in *Tenth Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia: 175 Years of Thinking and Acting Biblically*, ed. Philip G. Ryken (Phillipsburg, NJ: P and R, 2004), 82.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 82-83. Barnhouse’s criticism of liberals became such an issue that he was placed on ecclesiastical trial in the synod of Pennsylvania and was eventually convicted in 1932 for violating the ninth commandment.

<sup>16</sup> Russell T. Hitt, “Barnhouse of Philadelphia,” *Eternity* (April 1985): 40. Barnhouse was not the only evangelical who took this approach. Harry Ironside, pastor of the Moody Church in Chicago, once wrote to Barnhouse, stating, “I thoroughly believe in separation from iniquity, either in the form of moral evil or false doctrine, but I do not believe in the labeling of whole groups of people as apostate.” H. A. Ironside, “Letter to Dr. Donald G. Barnhouse,” May 9, 1938, box 6, folder 6, Donald Grey Barnhouse Papers, Presbyterian Historical Society.

distance himself from the schismatic persona fundamentalism had developed.<sup>17</sup> Barnhouse stated, “Intolerance on the part of fundamentalists is just as bad as intolerance on the part of modernists.”<sup>18</sup> Therefore, Barnhouse refused to abandon mainline Presbyterianism as evidenced in his previously mentioned letter responding to separatist Carl McIntire wherein his choice was to stay and strengthen what remains:

I believe that God needs missionaries in the midst of our church today as much as he needs them in Africa. We believe that some of us who hold to the full doctrine of the Reformed faith as the expression of the truth taught in the Scriptures constitute the true Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. denomination.<sup>19</sup>

Barnhouse strongly believed in the importance of staying in the denomination to be a voice for its historical, Presbyterian confessionalism.

Barnhouse’s refusal to join the Independent Mission Board in the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy further delineated his stance as a conservative, but not as a separatist. When conservatives tried to woo Barnhouse to join the Board, he responded,

We have a sincere difference of opinion as to what is right. I honestly believe the following. The first great wrong is the modernism in the Presbyterian Church. I see it and have done what I believe the Lord wants me to do against it so that no one can honestly question my position. I believe, however, that the second great wrong was the creation of the Independent Board.<sup>20</sup>

As Kevin Koslowsky, an authority on Barnhouse, notes, this statement represents Barnhouse’s commitment “to walk the line between the modernism of his denomination

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<sup>17</sup> Paul A. Hopkins, “Letter to C. Allyn Russell,” July 29, 1981, box 14, Unnumbered “Biographical Bits” Folder, Donald Grey Barnhouse Papers, Presbyterian Historical Society.

<sup>18</sup> Donald Grey Barnhouse, “Editorial: Intolerance,” *Revelation*, September 1936, 365.

<sup>19</sup> Donald Grey Barnhouse, “Letter to Carl McIntire,” February 6, 1937, box 12, folder 17, Donald Grey Barnhouse Papers, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia.

<sup>20</sup> Donald Grey Barnhouse, “Letter to Rev. Charles J. Woodbridge,” March 16, 1937, box 8, folder 8, Donald Grey Barnhouse Papers, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia.

and the fundamentals of the faith.”<sup>21</sup> For Barnhouse, liberalism constituted the first and greatest error facing the denomination, and separatism represented the second.

By the mid-1940s, Barnhouse appears to have reached a point of exasperation with both conservatives and liberals in the denomination. In a 1946 meeting of conservatives, Barnhouse rebuked strict separatist pastors in Philadelphia by stating there are “good and godly ministers in this city whose names would strike terror to the lambs of the flock simply because they do not hold the same interpretation of the meaning of ‘Come out from among them and be ye separate.’”<sup>22</sup> Barnhouse emphatically believed that he could work among liberals in Presbyterianism, but not be one of them. Another key factor for Barnhouse in the mid-1940s was a tour he took of medical missions in Africa. When he returned home to the separatist bickerings of conservatives in Philadelphia, he lamented that he felt

like a doctor who, having worked day and night in a plague center, returns to a satiated clientele who wish to discuss operations for face-lifting. Millions lie dying without the gospel and yet Christians in the city of brotherly love sit and bicker and gossip and backbite while the world perishes. God help us.<sup>23</sup>

At this point in his ministry, Barnhouse “was willing to declare a pox on both the liberal and fundamentalist houses and go his own way.”<sup>24</sup> Though Barnhouse distanced himself from the denomination, he never left it for a more conservative alternative.

In many ways, Boice took the mantle from Barnhouse in leading Tenth and in dealing with liberalism in the UPCUSA. Like Barnhouse, Boice was not afraid to speak out against liberalism and liberals, even by name. At the same time, Boice was willing to temper his approach to conservatism to avoid being too militant or schismatic, a skill he

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<sup>21</sup> Kevin Koslowsky, email message to author, January 18, 2018.

<sup>22</sup> Guelzo, “Barnhouse,” 87.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. Barnhouse had little to do with the denomination at this point in his life until the early 1950s, when he saw the opportunity for television ministry, an opportunity that required him to make amends with the Presbytery of Philadelphia and the denomination.

no doubt observed and learned from Barnhouse. Boice's reluctance to view whole groups of people as "apostate" and unacceptable for fellowship is another trait shared with Barnhouse as well as the desire to be a missionary to one's own errant denomination. Boice saw himself as an "evangelical" more than a "fundamentalist" who, rather than needing to leave the liberals in his midst, must stay and faithfully work for the faith that was once and for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3). In this sense, Boice carried out the legacy of his mentor Barnhouse.

### **Harold John Ockenga**

Harold John Ockenga (1905-1985) served as the pastor of historic Park Street Church in Boston from 1937 to 1969, and was a major figure in the rise of evangelicalism in the twentieth century. He played instrumental roles in the founding of the National Association of Evangelicals (1942), Fuller Theological Seminary (1947), and *Christianity Today* (1956). Aside from being a nationally known proponent of conservative theology, Ockenga's direct influence on Boice comes from the fact that Boice attended Park Street and regularly listened to Ockenga preach while Boice was a student at Harvard.<sup>25</sup> Ockenga, a student of J. Gresham Machen at Princeton Theological Seminary, left the school in his final year to follow Machen, who had just founded Westminster Theological Seminary.

As a student at Westminster, Ockenga was noticed by Clarence Macartney, with whom he served as the pastoral assistant at First Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh. Machen and Macartney both preached at Ockenga's ordination and installation when he was called to another church as senior pastor. Machen's words at Ockenga's pastoral installation serve as something of a manifesto of Ockenga's ministry: "Preach fearlessly. Don't be afraid of controversy. Center your ministry on Christ. Know your Bible

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<sup>25</sup> Boice, interview.

thoroughly. Open yourself to science, literature, philosophy, and art. Be confident that you are in the hands of the sovereign God.”<sup>26</sup>

Macartney was Ockenga’s father in the ministry and had an incalculable influence on him.<sup>27</sup> The approach of Ockenga’s ministry reflected a greater influence by Macartney than Machen. This influence is evidenced in Ockenga’s ministry in at least two ways in which Ockenga, in turn, influenced Boice. First, Macartney’s commitment to orthodox theology and outspoken criticism of liberal theology (as described in chapter 2) was observed and practiced by Ockenga. At the 1942 meeting of the National Conference for United Action among Evangelicals (a group that would become the National Association of Evangelicals), Ockenga referred to the growing movement away from conservatism as the “terrible octopus of liberalism, which spreads itself throughout our Protestant Church . . . [which has] dominated innumerable organizations, pulpits, and publications, as well as seminaries and other schools.”<sup>28</sup>

In his presidential address to the 1944 Convention of the NAE, Ockenga delivered a detailed message enumerating the definition of liberal theology and its dangers to the church and society. The following statement from that address summarizes his perspective on liberal theology:

Liberalism is an attempt to accommodate Christianity to modern scientific naturalism. Wherever scientific objections may arise from the details of the Christian religion, liberalism abandons to modern culture the inspiration of the Bible, the unique deity of the person of Christ, the atonement for sin and a personal resurrection. On the other hand, liberalism retains the general principles of Christianity in “the good life,” “the aspirations of the soul,” and “the struggle for a better world.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Garth M. Rosell, *The Surprising Work of God: Harold John Ockenga, Billy Graham, and the Rebirth of Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 69.

<sup>27</sup> Harold Lindsell, *Park Street Prophet: A Life of Harold John Ockenga* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1951), 58; and Margaret Lamberts Bendroth, *Fundamentalists in the City: Conflict and Division in Boston’s Churches, 1855-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 170.

<sup>28</sup> Rosell, *The Surprising Work of God*, 97.

<sup>29</sup> James Deforest Murch, *Co-Operation without Compromise: A History of the National*

Conversely, Ockenga embraced orthodox theology. The themes on which Ockenga built his ministry at Park Street and to the larger evangelical community in his accomplished career were the hallmarks of evangelical Christian faith: the centrality of the cross, the church, the authority of the Bible, the necessity of conversion, the importance of spiritual renewal, and the task of worldwide evangelization.<sup>30</sup>

The second influence of Macartney on Ockenga and thus on Boice was a willingness to openly confront liberalism, but at the same time show a reluctance to leave the denomination. Ockenga did not have the familial legacy of mainline Presbyterianism like Macartney and Boice, but he always sought to “identify with the historical stream” of the denomination he was serving, refusing to be a negative “come outer” by creating denominational “side eddies.”<sup>31</sup> Reform and unity, Ockenga believed, could be accomplished if constructed around the orthodox doctrines of the Word of God.<sup>32</sup>

Ockenga was not a strict separatist and avoided schism within a denomination if at all possible—something he learned from his mentor, Macartney.<sup>33</sup> Ockenga helped to form the NAE and Fuller Seminary as a means to bring evangelicals from many

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*Association of Evangelicals* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 23.

<sup>30</sup> Rosell, *The Surprising Work of God*, 80.

<sup>31</sup> Lindsell, *Park Street Prophet*, 124. Ockenga grew up in the Methodist-Episcopal tradition, was ordained and served as pastor in mainline Presbyterianism, and pastored Park Street, which was a Congregational congregation. Ockenga had a deep appreciation for the history of Park Street and Congregationalism, which led him to be cautious about leading the church to withdraw from the denomination when it started to become liberal. See Bendroth, *Fundamentalists in the City*, 174.

<sup>32</sup> Ockenga did not believe in an organic union of churches, which was the sentiment of the ecumenism being propounded in his day. He believed instead that unity should certainly be desired, but not at the cost of orthodoxy. See Lindsell, *Park Street Prophet*, 83.

<sup>33</sup> George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 69. An example of Ockenga’s reluctance to be a separatist is his departure (with Macartney and Barnhouse) from Machen in the creation of an independent mission board in the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy. Ockenga was sympathetic with the conservative protesters, but would not break from the denomination’s board. See George M. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 42.



denominations under a wider umbrella and thus strengthen the voice of theological conservatives to bring about reform in their respective denominations. Ockenga approved leaving a denomination only when it became apostate—something he defined as rejecting an orthodox understanding of key Christian doctrines and in turn coercing others to follow the errant view in violation of the conscience.<sup>34</sup> Unlike many of his fellow conservatives who were schismatic, Ockenga was not convinced that all churches and individuals in a denomination that had been labeled “apostate” were actually guilty of that charge.<sup>35</sup> Ockenga’s commitment to theological conservatism was unquestioned, but his tolerance and openness to work alongside liberals in an attempt to bring them back to orthodoxy was greater than a number of his contemporaries (Ockenga’s approach to conservatism, which differed from many fundamentalists’ militant approach and isolation from culture, is commonly labeled “neo-evangelicalism”).

The tagline for the NAE had become “cooperation without compromise.”<sup>36</sup> An excellent example of his tolerance was his public dispute with Carl McIntire (with whom Barnhouse sparred regarding Tenth’s refusal to leave the PCUSA and wrote that the church had chosen to stay and “strengthen what remains”), when McIntire accused Ockenga of creating too wide an umbrella in the NAE by accepting Pentecostals and others whose

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<sup>34</sup> Lindsell, *Park Street Prophet*, 122-23. Ockenga eventually led Park Street out of mainline Congregationalism when the Congregational Christian Churches (of which Park Street was a member) merged with the Evangelical and Reformed Church in 1957, creating a denomination that formally embraced liberalism in which Ockenga and the congregation at Park Street could not in good conscience participate.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 122-23.

<sup>36</sup> Rosell, *The Surprising Work of God*, 174. Ockenga thought Machen’s brand of opposing liberalism was too narrow and sought to move evangelical Christianity away from its pre-World War II identification with Princeton theology to a broader, national movement in the NAE that would serve as an alternative to the liberal Federal Council of Churches. D. G. Hart, *Between the Times: The Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Transition, 1945-1990* (Willow Grove, PA: Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2011), 24-25, 283.

commitment to biblical inerrancy was suspect. Ockenga criticized McIntire's "come-outism."<sup>37</sup> McIntire in turn branded Ockenga as one "who attacks separatists."<sup>38</sup>

Ockenga's motivation to work for reform within mainline denominations is multi-faceted. Evangelism and world missions were particular passions for Ockenga, who helped launch the crusade ministry of Billy Graham by hosting the evangelist at Park Street and by facilitating Graham's crusades in New England in 1950. At Westminster Seminary, particular emphasis was ingrained in students that orthodox pastors were essential "to hold the churches at home" or there would soon be no missionaries on the field.<sup>39</sup> Ockenga was persuaded by Macartney and others that the state of foreign missions was a projection of the state of churches at home.<sup>40</sup> Thus, Ockenga not only entered pastoral work, but did so in part with the aim of reforming modernism in the churches to better enable missions abroad.

Another motivation for Ockenga to reform the church was his conviction that liberalism was threatening the fiber of Western civilization. In the first convocation at Fuller in 1947, Ockenga stated that evangelical theology was the only adequate theology to maintain a "Christian culture in the West" and only hope from preventing the collapse of

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<sup>37</sup> Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 146.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 65. See also Rosell, *The Surprising Work of God*, 95. Carl McIntire was a staunch supporter of J. Gresham Machen and was appointed by Machen to the Independent Board of Foreign Missions in the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy. He followed Machen in the formation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, but soon left it, forming his own Bible Presbyterian Church over disagreements with Machen on issues such as eschatology, political involvement, and abstinence of alcohol and tobacco. In protest to Ockenga's and the NAE's not being restrictive enough in its theological assertions, McIntire formed a counterpart organization known as the American Council of Christian Churches. See Markku Ruotsila, *Fighting Fundamentalism: Carl McIntire and the Politicization of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); and John Fea, "Carl McIntire: From Fundamentalist Presbyterian to Presbyterian Fundamentalist," *American Presbyterian* 72, no. 4 (Winter 1994): 253-68.

<sup>39</sup> Lindsell, *Park Street Prophet*, 98-99.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

Western civilization.<sup>41</sup> Thus, for Ockenga, the task of Fuller Seminary and evangelicalism as a whole was more than just theological, but cultural as well. Because of these motivations, Ockenga saw liberals as his mission field. Rather than separate from them, Ockenga believed if at all possible he should work in their midst with the hope of bringing them to orthodoxy. Lindsell writes,

Ockenga speaks plainly that he will preach the gospel of Christ any place he is permitted to do so. And he believes the evangelistic opportunity is greater where he speaks in a liberal church than at a Youth for Christ meeting. In the latter case most of the audience will be Christian. In liberal churches they need to hear the gospel and the fish are there to be caught. . . . Before God and his conscience Ockenga knows that he is justified in his efforts to reach liberals.<sup>42</sup>

Rather than building a wall between himself and liberals, Ockenga sought to work within the liberal camp to be a steadfast voice for the gospel in order to reclaim liberals back to orthodoxy.

Ockenga's influence on Boice, as Mrs. Boice noted, is abundantly clear. Boice was not schismatic, isolationist, or militant in his conservatism. Boice longed to reach out to the liberals in his denomination in hopes to convince them of the importance and merits of orthodoxy. Boice agreed with Ockenga in the approach of neo-evangelicalism as distinct from liberalism and more tempered than fundamentalism. Boice writes,

[As] with Dr. Ockenga . . . the new evangelicalism is distinct from neo-orthodoxy in its complete acceptance of the inspiration and authority of the Bible, from modernism by its embrace of the full orthodox system of doctrine, and from contemporary fundamentalism by its belief that biblical doctrine and ethics must be applied to the social scene as well as to the individual man.<sup>43</sup>

Like Ockenga, Boice would preach anywhere to proclaim the gospel, especially in settings where theological liberalism was espoused.<sup>44</sup> Both men pastored historic churches in

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<sup>41</sup> Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 62.

<sup>42</sup> Lindsell, *Park Street Prophet*, 92.

<sup>43</sup> James Montgomery Boice, "The New Evangelicalism," *Christianity Today* 17, no. 24 (September 1963): 41.

<sup>44</sup> See James Montgomery Boice, "Letter to Rev. Howard McPhee," November 29, 1983, series 4, box 4.

historic denominations where the “historical stream” was not to be taken lightly nor severed from quickly. In Ockenga, Boice saw modeled an approach that he in turn emulated, which was a reticence to brand people “apostate” until sufficient time and evidence warranted such a claim. The “line in the sand” Ockenga had drawn regarding when to stay and when to leave a denomination in relationship to the conscience was one that Boice himself would choose to follow in 1980. Ockenga’s influence can also be found in Boice’s later career when Boice turned his focus on the revitalization of the broader evangelical community (forming the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals) because of its significance in the well-being of culture and society. Thus, in many respects, Harold Ockenga was a formative influence on Boice.

### **Robert J. Lamont**

Robert J. Lamont (1920-2012) was the pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh from 1953-1973, and a founding board member of *Christianity Today*. Boice and Lamont had a close relationship, and in fact, he officiated at the Boices’ wedding.<sup>45</sup> Lamont also arranged for and gave the charge at Boice’s ordination held at First Presbyterian Pittsburgh.<sup>46</sup> Much like Ockenga, the influence of Macartney appears readily apparent in the ministry of Lamont who succeeded Macartney as pastor of First Presbyterian in Pittsburgh. Lamont unapologetically sought to hold to orthodox theology while at the same time to differ from Machen’s old-line fundamentalism with a warm, relational approach in uniting conservatives in the neo-evangelical movement of post-World War II.<sup>47</sup> In addition, rather than leave mainline Presbyterianism for a more

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<sup>45</sup> Boice, interview.

<sup>46</sup> Boice, interview; and Linda M. Boice, “A Life in Ministry,” in *The Life of Dr. James Montgomery Boice 1938-2000*, Tenth Presbyterian Church (Philadelphia: Gerald Stevens, 2001), 7.

<sup>47</sup> Frederick W. Jordan, “At Arm’s Length: The First Presbyterian Church of Pittsburgh and Katherine Kuhlman,” in *Pentecostal Currents in American Protestantism*, ed. Edith Waldvogel Blumhofer, Russell P. Spittler, and Grant Wacker (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 192.

friendly theological environment, Lamont chose to stay in the denomination to work for reform toward orthodoxy. A prime example was Lamont's work regarding the controversy of the Confession of 1967, described by Frederick Jordan as follows:

[The debate] was a bruising denominational battle concerning the wording of the 1967 Confession. With conservatives and liberals ready to fight over the document, Lamont carved out the middle ground and found room for compromise. Rather than being hailed for his efforts, however, he was excoriated from both sides: the liberals saw him as a thoroughgoing fundamentalist, while the conservatives felt that he had deserted the evangelical cause. As a result, Lamont [was] the unappreciated savior of denominational unity.<sup>48</sup>

Leaders such as Lamont, who attempt to bridge the gap between factious parties, often do so at great personal cost.

As a new pastor at Tenth, Boice was still writing articles for *Christianity Today*, reporting on the proceedings of the UPCUSA General Assembly's annual meetings, and he wrote about Lamont's work as an intermediary to bring reconciliation between both sides in the difficult General Assembly meeting of 1969.<sup>49</sup> Lamont led his church with "bedrock integrity" and sought to accomplish his objectives "with as much unity as possible. Strife was abhorrent to him, and civil war within First Presbyterian was unthinkable. . . . Unity was his goal."<sup>50</sup> An isolationist, schismatic approach to ministry and toward the defense of orthodox theology was not Lamont's style.

Lamont's willingness to work with those with whom he disagreed and to engage in the effort to broaden evangelical unity is demonstrated in his work with Pentecostals in the 1960s. At the 1966 Berlin Congress on Evangelism, Lamont, true to his ministry approach and convictions, led a break-out session entitled, "Doctrinal Unbelief and

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<sup>48</sup> Jordan, "At Arm's Length," 199. This statement is from an interview Frederick Jordan conducted with Robert B. Letsinger, a ministry colleague of Lamont who served on the staff of First Presbyterian Pittsburgh.

<sup>49</sup> James Montgomery Boice, "United Presbyterians: Shakedown in San Antonio," *Christianity Today* 13, no. 18 (June 1969): 40-41. In this meeting, liberals pushed for strong wording in a document on social issues that was tempered to a more moderate stance through an amendment offered by Lamont.

<sup>50</sup> Jordan, "At Arm's Length," 198.

Heresy.” However, one of the sessions he attended was led by the popular, charismatic evangelist Oral Roberts. Lamont and Roberts developed an unlikely friendship, and though Lamont was not in complete agreement with Roberts, he was impressed with him and invited Roberts to preach at First Presbyterian. Roberts accepted the invitation, and seventy-five people made decisions for salvation in the service.<sup>51</sup> In turn, Roberts invited Lamont to speak at Oral Roberts University. Shortly after meeting Oral Roberts, Lamont had another encounter with a prominent Pentecostal—Kathryn Kuhlman.

Kuhlman was widely known as a pioneer in the charismatic movement and conducted “miracle services” from her home base in Pittsburgh.<sup>52</sup> Kuhlman lost her lease to use Carnegie Hall in 1967, and needed a building to house her healing services. Perhaps encouraged by Lamont’s new connection with Oral Roberts, Kuhlman reached out to Lamont to inquire about using the building at First Presbyterian. Lamont was skeptical given the fact that Kuhlman was “not a mainline—a main denominational type.”<sup>53</sup> Although he could find no logistical reason or disapproval from the church membership to bar Kuhlman from use of the building, Lamont was certain that the Pittsburgh Presbytery would not grant Kuhlman a lease. However, the year was 1967, and the Presbytery was enmeshed with the proceedings of the Confession of 1967. Thus, nothing was ever said about Kuhlman by the Presbytery, and the charismatic evangelist began an unlikely, but harmonious, relationship with Lamont and First Presbyterian for the next ten years.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> David Edwin Herrell, Jr., *Oral Roberts: An American Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 1987), 291.

<sup>52</sup> For more on the life and ministry of Kathryn Kuhlman, see Jamie Buckingham, *Daughter of Destiny: Kathryn Kuhlman* (Alachua, FL: Bridge-Logos, 1999).

<sup>53</sup> Jordan, “At Arm’s Length,” 195. This statement is from an interview Jordan conducted with Lamont.

<sup>54</sup> Jordan’s interview of Lamont includes the story that at a banquet in 1972, celebrating Kuhlman’s twenty-fifth anniversary in the ministry, Lamont recalled, “At a dramatic point in the banquet”

Lamont's working relationship with Kuhlman possibly influenced Boice's views toward Pentecostals and a willingness to work alongside those who did not share his identical beliefs but adhered to orthodoxy. In a letter to a pastor asking Boice about Pentecostals visiting his church, Boice writes,

I find myself unable to deny their [Pentecostals] faith, or even the validity of their experience. . . . There are some false teachings associated with Pentecostalism [baptism in the Spirit, miraculous gifts as evidence of a much deeper level of spirituality] . . . but many [Pentecostal churches] preach a good gospel message. So long as that is taking place, I rejoice in their ministry and am happy to support it. . . . I feel quite happy working with Pentecostals. I do not endorse everything they say, but I recognize in them many evidences of God's grace and am happy to join with them in common cause.<sup>55</sup>

Boice's perspective toward Pentecostalism is a prime example of his willingness to overlook theological matters he deemed as tertiary.

Lamont's work on the Confession of 1967 and his relationship with prominent Pentecostals demonstrate that he was no isolationist or schismatic in his approach to ministry. His willingness to hold to biblical orthodoxy while at the same time reach across the aisle to those with whom he disagreed was an influence on Boice. In addition, Lamont's pulpit ministry, characterized by his successor at First Presbyterian, "trained [the congregation] in cognitive thought theology and biblical preaching."<sup>56</sup> Boice's preaching reflects the same style. He was unafraid to refer to Greek philosophers, theologians, and the great thinkers of past and present in his expository preaching of a

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Kuhlman came to the stage with an array of flowers "that would have been the envy of a Tournament of Roses queen" and shared that when

she left home as a young girl to start her evangelistic career, her father gave her two five-dollar gold pieces and told her to keep them as long as she lived until she found somebody that she really cared about and wanted to give them to. She said, "I've kept them all these years," and then called Edna [Lamont's wife] up and presented her with the flowers and then she called me up and presented them [the two gold coins] to me. (Jordan, "At Arm's Length," 200)

<sup>55</sup> Boice, "Letter to Rev. Stephen Sietsema," March 18, 1981, series 4, box 4.

<sup>56</sup> Michael Dudit, "A Preaching Interview with John A. Huffman, Jr.," Preaching.com, accessed January 19, 2018, <https://www.preaching.com/articles/a-preaching-interview-with-john-a-huffman-jr/>.

biblical text. There is no doubt, therefore, as to why Mrs. Boice identifies Robert Lamont as an influential figure in Boice's life.

### **John Gerstner**

John Gerstner (1914-1996) was a church history professor at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and an authority on Jonathan Edwards. Throughout his career, he was a notable proponent of conservative and Reformed theology and a leading figure in the protest against the growth of liberal theology in northern mainline Presbyterianism: "Is there any reason to doubt that John Calvin, were he alive today, would believe that the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation is still more necessary in the 20<sup>th</sup> century?"<sup>57</sup> In the view of many, Gerstner took the mantle from Machen as the champion for orthodoxy in mainline Presbyterianism in matching Machen's approach to confronting liberalism. This comparison to Machen emerges in the styles of the two men. Jeffrey McDonald explains that Gerstner was "a combative scholar with gruff manner and forceful style."<sup>58</sup> Gerstner, like Machen, also viewed liberalism as something wholly other than true Christianity in its denial of key biblical doctrines. He writes,

[Liberalism] reinterprets all of the traditional doctrines of Christianity in such a way to de-supernaturalize them. . . . [In liberalism] supernatural revelation is denied; the fall of man is rejected; the deity of Christ is abandoned; the traditional views of the atonement disappear. Salvation becomes a natural process and resurrection is transformed into a continuance of spirit.<sup>59</sup>

Gerstner became the most visible Presbyterian seminary professor to oppose the Confession of 1967 and viewed it as "the greatest doctrinal disaster in the history of

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<sup>57</sup> John Gerstner, "On the Necessity of Reforming the Church," in *John H. Gerstner: The Early Writings*, ed. Don Kistler (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publishers, 1998), 2:35.

<sup>58</sup> Jeffrey S. McDonald, *John Gerstner and the Renewal of Presbyterian and Reformed Evangelicalism in Modern America* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2017), 109.

<sup>59</sup> John Gerstner, *Theology of the Major Sects* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1960), 53.



Presbyterianism.”<sup>60</sup> He was also critical of Barth and the theological positions of neo-orthodoxy that reduced the Bible to “a solely human book filled with pre-scientific errors and historical inaccuracies” which leads to “the Christian’s understanding of Christ [being] harmed.”<sup>61</sup>

Though Gerstner in many way resembled Machen, his refusal to leave mainline Presbyterianism resembled Macartney. Thus, Gerstner’s militant style combined with a lack of being schismatic often caused him to be misunderstood by many. One of Gerstner’s most well-known students, R. C. Sproul, writes, “Perhaps John Gerstner was the most vilified theologian of his generation. Yet, I never met a more humble or self-effacing human being.”<sup>62</sup> Another of Gerstner’s students described him as a theologian who courageously declared the whole counsel of God and was “uncompromising, therefore loving. . . . Avoiding controversy or watering down the truth of God was not [his] style. His unwillingness to back down from the truth was a most loving thing to do.”<sup>63</sup>

The conviction to unflinchingly defend confessionalism, even when doing so brought about personal criticisms and isolation, is something Boice shared with Gerstner. Gerstner’s influence on Boice was strong because of Gerstner’s notoriety in the denomination and his geographical proximity to Boice. In his monograph on Gerstner, McDonald summarizes the theologian’s career:

Gerstner was a driven person who sought to pass on his evangelical faith to his students, to the wider church, and to the world. His energy and tireless defense of evangelical convictions made him a force to be reckoned with in various ecclesiastical and academic environments. He was unafraid to engage other scholars and welcomed intellectual exchange. His strategy was to oppose theological

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<sup>60</sup> McDonald, *John Gerstner*, 96-97.

<sup>61</sup> John Gerstner, “A Church Historian Warns: Presbyterians Are Demoting the Bible,” *Christianity Today* 10 (December 1965): 11.

<sup>62</sup> R. C. Sproul, “John Gerstner,” *Tabletalk* 21, no. 10 (October 1997): 7.

<sup>63</sup> Dale Lindser, “Preaching the Whole Counsel,” *Tabletalk* 21, no. 10 (October 1997): 55.

liberalism, promote Reformed theology within evangelicalism and the UPCUSA. . . . Gerstner was, indeed, an evangelical dynamo.<sup>64</sup>

McDonald's statement, in a variety of ways, could serve as a summary of Boice's career.

Gerstner certainly influenced Boice in defending orthodox Christianity against liberalism. As Michael Horton notes, "Boice was a disciple of Gerstner."<sup>65</sup> Another principal way Boice followed the example of Gerstner was by staying within the errant denomination to strengthen what remains. Gerstner believed that even though the UPCUSA had veered into theological liberalism, a vestige of orthodoxy remained that was worth his effort to stay and work for reform. He was convinced that many in the denomination who had led it into liberalism did so only because of the pressures of modern science and intellectualism.

In reality, Gerstner surmised that many liberals actually wanted to adhere to orthodoxy but abandoned it in the face of the obstacles of modernism. For example, Gerstner recalls a quote by a chief liberal leader in the Fundamentalist-Modernist debate, Henry Sloane Coffin, and then writes, "Although the traditional foundations of religious faith have been badly damaged in the minds of many, they have gone on believing . . . [and] have an irrepressible desire to believe even when one thinks the intellectual obstacles are insurmountable."<sup>66</sup> Gerstner believed if he could help liberals within the denomination overcome these intellectual obstacles of modernism, the denomination could be reclaimed for confessionalism. Thus, a sizable portion of Gerstner's career was "an effort to carry on a rational apologetic tradition that had been severely weakened

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<sup>64</sup> McDonald, *John Gerstner*, 106.

<sup>65</sup> Michael Horton, telephone interview by author, August 1, 2017.

<sup>66</sup> John Gerstner, *Reasons for Faith* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960), 10. Gerstner authored a number of books on the discipline of apologetics, including *Classical Apologetics*, *Reasons for Faith*, *Silencing the Devil*, and a *Primer on Apologetics*. He also wrote many books apologetically defending theologically conservative views of specific doctrines including justification by faith, inerrancy, heaven and hell, theodicy, and eschatology.

within northern mainline Presbyterianism.”<sup>67</sup> Gerstner also regularly and publicly debated adherents of liberal theology.

Another reason Gerstner remained in the UPCUSA rather than leaving for a more conservative option was his belief that the true church was the “invisible church”: “We must remember that the true church, the saved church, the church in vital communion with Christ, is the invisible church.”<sup>68</sup> What he meant by this statement was that the true church was not to be seen in the visible leadership that had led the denomination into error, but rather in the throngs of laypeople in the UPCUSA who still held to orthodoxy. Gerstner writes, “The neo-orthodox theologians are in the majority—or rather, in the positions of influence and power—as have been the orthodox down through the centuries.”<sup>69</sup> Gerstner’s book *Theology for Everyman* (from which the previous quote is taken) served as a reminder that all laypeople are theologians and represented his attempt to train them in the basics of Christian theology. In this regard, Gerstner believed that something of a grassroots campaign emphasizing conservative theology could be the key in reclaiming the denomination for orthodoxy. Gerstner was skilled at writing and speaking to laypeople in a way that could be easily understood, and he took time in his teaching, preaching, and correspondence to help the laity and his students to rebut the arguments of liberal theology.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> McDonald, *John Gerstner*, 88. Gerstner was not the only conservative who attempted to remedy the growth of theological liberalism in mainline Presbyterianism through the use of apologetics in this era. One of the most notable of these was Cornelius Van Til, who used presuppositional apologetics in his defense of the faith. See Cornelius Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology* (Nutley, NJ: P and R, 1969); and Van Til, *Christian Apologetics* (Nutley, NJ: P and R, 1975). Gerstner and Van Til disagreed on the proper apologetic approach, but each respected the other’s commitment to orthodoxy. See the correspondence between them in McDonald, *John Gerstner*, 88-89.

<sup>68</sup> John Gerstner, *Theology for Everyman* (Chicago: Moody, 1965), 106.

<sup>69</sup> John Gerstner, “Neo-Orthodoxy,” in Kistler, *John H. Gerstner*, 80.

<sup>70</sup> McDonald, *John Gerstner*, 90, 101.

Gerstner's conviction to remain within the denomination despite its theological liberalism was one he did not hold privately. Gerstner "hammered anyone who left the denomination."<sup>71</sup> He sharply criticized fellow conservatives who abandoned the UPCUSA (such as his colleague at Pittsburgh Seminary, Addison Leitch) and censured them when he believed that their work "failed to rally the troops to the conservative cause."<sup>72</sup> Conservative leaders in the UPCUSA who were not vocal in their defense of orthodoxy and criticisms of liberalism were charged by Gerstner for "suppressing the doctrinal issues on the controversy [and] ignoring them."<sup>73</sup> Professors who began showing signs of drifting toward liberalism were guilty, in Gerstner's mind, of a "refusal to draw lines [theologically] because they make divisions, [which] is an offense to Truth, which is by its very nature divisive."<sup>74</sup> When Fuller Theological Seminary professor Jack Rogers began to waver on his commitment to the inerrancy of the Bible in the 1970s, Gerstner responded by stating,

May God deliver us from evangelicals who follow the liberal practice of "flying at a low level of visibility." Evangelicals are already beginning to speak of errant inerrancy. But let the position not be confused with the historic consensus of inerrancy meaning "without error," PERIOD.<sup>75</sup>

Gerstner's writings make it abundantly clear that he took exception to any conservative who left the denomination or chose to "fly at low visibility" in the battle for orthodoxy in the UPCUSA.

Boice, as a disciple of Gerstner, was no doubt influenced by Gerstner's strong

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<sup>71</sup> Horton, interview.

<sup>72</sup> John Gerstner, review of *The Incomparable James Henry Snowden*, ed. W.W. McKinney, *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 45 (1962): 70, quoted in McDonald, *John Gerstner*, 93.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Addison Leitch, *Winds of Doctrine* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1966), 39. This quote is one with which Gerstner agreed. McDonald, *John Gerstner*, 92.

<sup>75</sup> John Gerstner, "The Church's Doctrine of Biblical Inspiration," in *The Foundations of Biblical Authority*, ed. James Montgomery Boice (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 52.

conviction that conservatives who found themselves in the theologically liberal malaise of the UPCUSA, should not abandon the denomination but rather stay within it to contend for the orthodoxy of the faith. Boice recounted a conversation he once had with Gerstner who told him, “The [UPCUSA] is sick, but this is the very time you don’t want to abandon her. By all means, stay as long as you can.”<sup>76</sup> Gerstner’s involvement in the PUBC encouraged Boice to be an active participant in the organization as well.<sup>77</sup> In addition, Gerstner teamed with Sproul in creating the Ligonier Valley Study Center, which conducted conferences on conservative and Reformed theology (e.g., the 1973 conference was titled, “Conference on the Inspiration and Authority of Scripture”). These conferences inspired Boice to create his own series of conferences, known as the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology. In many ways, therefore, John Gerstner served as an important influence in the career of Boice and his struggle on behalf of orthodoxy in the UPCUSA.

### **Conclusion**

Boice’s strong commitment to defend orthodoxy and to criticize liberal theology while remaining within a denomination where such views were in the minority comports to the examples laid before him by his mentors. Boice did not strike the tone of schism and isolation, but was willing to be “salt and light” for reform, even when doing so cost him a great deal. In an undated and untitled manuscript in Boice’s collection of personal papers, he articulates his desire to engage, rather alienate his opponents: “As a rule, I do not like controversy. I do not enjoy it, and I think it usually hardens one’s opponents in

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<sup>76</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Statement on Leaving the United Presbyterian Church,” March 2, 1980, series 3, box 2.

<sup>77</sup> Frank E. Heinze, “PUBC Meets in Chicago to Discuss Confession,” *Presbyterian Life* (January 1966): 26-27.

their wrong positions rather than winning them over to right views.”<sup>78</sup> However, there are times when contending for the truth calls for controversy, and Boice was willing to engage in the struggle if needed. In the same undated and untitled manuscript, Boice writes, “I do not like controversy. But if controversy over the necessity of commitment to the lordship of Jesus Christ in salvation leads even one empty professor from a false faith to a true faith, I welcome it.”<sup>79</sup> Not only do the actions of Boice and his personal correspondence reveal his desire to stay and “strengthen what remains” in the UPCUSA, but the corpus of his sermons and published writings potently demonstrates this deeply held commitment as well.

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<sup>78</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Untitled manuscript,” n.d., series 4, box 2.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER 5

### PROCLAMATION FOR REFORMATION: SERMONS AND WRITINGS OF JAMES BOICE

In his tireless effort to be a champion of conservative theology and a biblical worldview, James Boice did much more than write correspondence and attend denominational and special focus group meetings during the time period in which he labored for reform in the UPCUSA. Boice used his platform as an influential pastor and author to preach and to write in eloquent defense of orthodoxy. The corpus of Boice's sermons and writings reveals an overall tone that is apologetic, academic, and to some degree evangelistic. Boice's preaching style was expositional wherein his explication of biblical texts frequently focused on defending biblical Christianity against theological liberalism and the secularism of the culture. The books authored by Boice exhibit a similar approach and in general include much of the same material as his sermons. Therefore, this chapter will focus on sermon excerpts rather than published writings as evidence of Boice's labor for reform.<sup>1</sup> Given Boice's commitment to and activism for conservative theology, it is little wonder that his sermons and books bespeak his desire to reclaim those who had theologically gone astray and to encourage those who remained orthodox in their beliefs to remain that way.

#### **Strategic Sermons**

The preponderance of evidence in examining Boice's sermons irrefutably points to his dedication to invalidating liberal theology and upholding orthodoxy in both volume and specificity. It would be unfair to suggest that Boice's sermons during his struggle

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpts from Boice's writings published during the time frame particular to this dissertation will be included to a limited degree where those writings provide additional material to the sermon excerpt.

with the UPCUSA focused solely on his attempt to renounce or to defeat theological liberalism. Boice was faithful to preach the text and did not sacrifice exposition to be subsumed with a myopic agenda against liberalism or denominational politics. However, Boice's sermons give evidence that he often used the teaching of a biblical text and its application to show the error of liberalism.

As mentioned in chapter 1, of the 1,142 printed sermons in Boice's expositional commentaries, 695 (61 percent) contain references to liberal theology and/or secular philosophies in regard to their opposition to orthodox Christianity.<sup>2</sup> In the time frame germane to this dissertation, Boice preached through three books of the Bible on Sunday mornings: Philippians (1969-70), the Gospel of John (1971-78), and Genesis (1979-83).<sup>3</sup> In these three books, Boice preached 560 sermons of which 411 (73 percent) contain referents to liberalism. The high percentage of references to theological liberalism in his sermons from this time period demonstrates Boice's commitment to addressing the issue from the pulpit at Tenth.

This commitment is brought into even sharper relief by comparing Boice's sermons with sermons of his notable peers who were also known as strong defenders of orthodoxy and/or faced a similar challenge as Boice from theological liberalism in their own denomination. These peers are John MacArthur, Billy Graham, W. A. Criswell, and Adrian Rogers.<sup>4</sup> Comparing the overall percentages of references to liberal theology in

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<sup>2</sup> This statistic is the result of analyzing Boice's sermons in digital format using individual name and key word searches. See appendix 2 for a complete list of names, topics, and terms from the analysis of the sermons.

<sup>3</sup> Dot Boersma, email message to author, February 10, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> MacArthur, Criswell, and Rogers were chosen because of their notoriety and well-known defense of orthodox theology. Criswell and Rogers were facing the issue of theological liberalism in their denomination (Southern Baptist Convention) at the same time as Boice. Graham was chosen because of his widespread acceptance by most as the leading representative of the "new evangelicalism." Each of these peers was also chosen because a large, searchable sermon database exists for each preacher. The sermons are available at John MacArthur, "Sermons," Grace to You, accessed February 2, 2018, <https://www.gty.org/library/resources/sermons-library>; Billy Graham, "Sermons of Billy Graham," Wheaton College, accessed February 2, 2018, <https://www.wheaton.edu/academics/academic-centers/billy->



the sermons of Boice's peers (i.e., did their sermons contain a higher percentage of references to refuting liberal theology than Boice's sermons?) is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, comparing references to top liberal theologians by Boice and the peers is noteworthy. In thirty books on modern theology and/or notable theologians in which each book contained a full chapter on a particular liberal theologian, a list of the thirty most referenced individuals was compiled.<sup>5</sup> MacArthur references nineteen of these thirty theologians in 3,220 sermons; Graham references fifteen in over 3,700 sermons; Criswell references fourteen in over 4,100 sermons; Rogers references five in 1,925 sermons. Comparatively, Boice references twenty-five of the theologians in only 1,142 sermons.<sup>6</sup> Thus, Boice references the most liberal theologians from the list in far fewer sermons than the peers. These statistics are not without their limits in what they seek to prove, but do serve as evidentiary means in supporting the claim that Boice specifically, intentionally, and voluminously sought to defend theological orthodoxy against liberalism in his sermons.

A sampling of sermon excerpts from Boice helps to substantiate further the argument presented in this dissertation that Boice sought to point out the errors of liberalism and how these errors did not purport to an orthodox understanding of the nature of Scripture and its proper interpretations. Two limitations in the following sermon excerpts should be noted. First, only excerpts from Boice's sermon series through the books of Genesis, John, and Philippians are provided. Boice preached these sermons on Sunday mornings at Tenth during the time frame related to this dissertation (1968-

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[graham-center/resources/recommended-resources-for-evangelism/billy-graham-center-archives/sermons-of-billy-graham/](http://www.billygrahamcenter.com/resources/recommended-resources-for-evangelism/billy-graham-center-archives/sermons-of-billy-graham/); W. A. Criswell, "Home," W. A. Criswell Sermon Library, accessed February 2, 2018, <https://www.wacriswell.com>; Adrian Rogers, *Adrian Rogers Sermon Archive* (Signal Hill, CA: Rogers Family Trust, 2017), Logos Bible software.

<sup>5</sup> A list of these thirty theologians is in appendix 3. A list of the thirty books is in appendix 4.

<sup>6</sup> A table marking which preacher referenced which theologian is in appendix 5.

1980). The Sunday morning sermons would have had the largest audience both in person at Tenth and later for his national radio broadcast.<sup>7</sup> Second, excerpts will focus on Boice's objections to liberalism more than on his advocacy of orthodoxy. The latter is understood and, in most instances, comes after Boice's criticisms of liberalism in the sermons.

### Genesis

In his sermons from Genesis, Boice focuses much of his criticism of theological liberalism on its errant view of the nature of the Bible and how such views produce relativism and secularism in society. Boice is particularly concerned with the liberal handling of the first eleven chapters of Genesis since these chapters do so much to lay out the framework of the most important Christian doctrines. In one of his sermons on Genesis 3:1-6, Boice states,

When I was in the beginning stages of my study of Genesis, someone chided me for beginning a book that was so long and had so little real doctrine in it. But . . . nothing could be farther from the case. Genesis is literally crammed with doctrine—the deep doctrines of the Word of God.<sup>8</sup>

Boice then quotes Arthur Pink to demonstrate the doctrinal significance of Genesis: “It [the first few chapters of Genesis] is the seed plot of the Bible. Here are the foundations upon which rest many of the cardinal doctrines of our faith.”<sup>9</sup> The opening chapters of Genesis are an essential target for attacks from liberalism because they possess such doctrinal significance. Boice's assessment is that

there has been a concerted effort to dismiss the first chapters of Genesis. . . . It is for this [their doctrinal content] that so many have been strong in their attacks upon it . . . and for this it has been subject to the sharp and continuing attacks of those who do not like these teachings. . . . It is offensive to the carnal mind.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Dot Boersma, email to author, February 15, 2018. Evangelical Ministries, which later became the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, edited recorded sermons from Boice and Barnhouse for national broadcast.

<sup>8</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis*, vol. 1, *Creation and Fall (Genesis 1-11)* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 158.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

Genesis is a logical book to examine when defending the basic doctrines of Christianity.

### **Historicity of Christianity/Scripture**

One of the principal ways liberals attack the book of Genesis and thereby orthodox views of Christian doctrine is to deem the first chapters of the book as mythological rather than historically literal. In the same sermon from Genesis 3:1-6, Boice states,

It has been popular to regard much of the Bible as myth. Myth is a little harder to define than either fable or legend, and this is probably one reason why it has become so popular with some liberal theologians. Broadly stated, a myth is a story meant to tell a religious truth. What is essential is that it is not to be taken literally. That is the point of the liberal scholars.<sup>11</sup>

Viewing Genesis as mythology enables a subjective hermeneutic that in turn renders the great doctrines of the Bible to be relativistically understood in a man-centered approach rather than a God-centered, objective approach, as Boice explained in his sermon on Genesis 14:1-17:

The higher criticism of the late nineteenth century, associated with the name of Julius Wellhausen, argued that Genesis gives, not historical information of this period, but only information from later times projected backward into unknown centuries. According to Wellhausen, the narratives concerning Abram and the other patriarchs are mythology.<sup>12</sup>

In his systematic theology book, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, Boice points to the error of those who view Christianity as an existential, rather than historical religion: “To existential theologians, historical considerations are irrelevant for faith. It makes no

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<sup>11</sup> Boice, *Genesis*, 1:160.

<sup>12</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis*, vol. 2, *A New Beginning (Genesis 12-36)* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 494. Boice often gives specific examples of liberal, higher criticism not understanding a particular text in a literal way. In the sermon on Gen 10:1-5, Boice states of the Table of Nations in that text, “A generation ago, it was common for higher critical scholars to decry its worth.” He also quotes scholar S. R. Driver as saying, “The Table of Nations contains no scientific classification of the races of mankind [and] no historically true account of the origin of races.” Boice, *Genesis*, 1:401. In the sermon on the fall of Noah from Gen 9:18-29, Boice discusses what the unidentified evil act Ham did to his father Noah may have been. He includes the approach of higher critical scholars when he states, “One answer, favored by certain liberal scholars, is that Ham did nothing—that two separate stories have been pieced together by a redactor and that Canaan was the true violator of his father’s father.” Boice, *Genesis*, 1:397.

difference whether God actually created the world . . . or whether Jesus actually died for sin or rose from the dead.”<sup>13</sup> Existentialism, Boice observes, attempts to dichotomize truth into that which is historical and verifiable and that which is ahistorical and unverifiable. The problem is that “true Christianity knows nothing of that dichotomy. It insists that the events of its history are as real as any other events and as equally subject to historical verification.”<sup>14</sup>

Boice preached a number of sermons on Genesis 1:1, and in one of these, he begins to unpack how and why liberals desire to view Genesis existentially as myth:

The inspiration of Genesis does not settle everything concerning whether it is fact or fiction, for God can inspire fiction as well as he can inspire historical narration. Still, the inspiration of Genesis is not without bearing on the matter at hand in that it at least tells us that the book is the revelation of God to men and not the gropings of any single man or men after the meaning of God or creation. When liberals talk of myth, fable, or fiction it is the latter conception they have in mind. They are putting Genesis on a level with any other document that may have come down to us from ancient times. But it is not like any other document if it is truly given to us by revelation. . . . If it is a revelation from God then we should believe that it is historical, that is, that it actually took place, because God has so spoken.<sup>15</sup>

The motive as to why liberals want to view Genesis 1-11 as mythological is plain to Boice: “As we have seen, the [Genesis] narratives purport to be history. The reason is that these accounts have been attacked by others as being fictitious because, as I believe, they do not want to face the truths they are teaching.”<sup>16</sup> Boice further elaborates this argument in his sermon on Genesis 2:8-17:

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<sup>13</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Foundations for the Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1986), 704. This volume combines into one book the original four-volume work published from 1978-1981 by InterVarsity. It is significant that Boice published a systematic theology during the time of his conflict with the UPCUSA. He did this in order to make known his own doctrinal commitments and to emphasize to his fellow conservatives within the denomination the importance of orthodoxy to biblical Christianity. Additionally, these volumes helped conservatives articulate orthodoxy in their own situations with churches and presbyteries.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Boice, *Genesis*, 1:21.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 1:158.

[Christianity] is not a religion of mere metaphysical concepts and ideas, as many of the non-Christian religions are. It deals with real people who lived in real places and who experienced the very real redemptive acts of God in history. . . . For [liberals] Eden was no more real than fairyland. Is this then the Christian view? Many would like it to be, because if Eden is not real, then the fall is not real and we can all entertain the comfortable secular notions that there really is not much wrong with the human race.<sup>17</sup>

Viewing Genesis 1-11 as mythological absolves mankind from the burden of sin and the need for redemption, which is only achievable outside of human effort, wrought exclusively through the work of Christ on the cross.

In multiple sermons from Genesis, Boice refers to the original theory from liberals that provided, in their view, the evidence that Genesis should not be understood as historical. The theory is known as the JEPD Theory. Simply stated, the theory argues that Moses is not the single author of the Pentateuch, but rather editors after the time of Moses compiled various documents to create the books. In a sermon on Genesis 20:1-18, Boice says of the JEPD theory,

If you know anything about such criticism, you know what they do. Whenever there are two similar accounts, as here, they regard them as variants of one original account and then compare both to try to get back to what they regard as the earliest tradition. . . . Not only is this critical approach bad scholarship, it is also bad literary criticism.<sup>18</sup>

Such a view makes Genesis, and the entire Old Testament, merely the product of the mind of man rather than the mind of God.

In his sermon on Genesis 7:1-16 in which Noah loads the ark with animals and God closes the door of the ark, the entire sermon is devoted to refuting the JEPD theory. Regarding Genesis 7, Boice states,

Few chapters of the Old Testament have received such hard treatment from the hands of the so-called higher critics. The chapter has been broken into parts, discredited as history, and generally relegated to the realm of pious mythology—all in the name of scholarship.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Boice, *Genesis*, 1:123.

<sup>18</sup> Boice, *Genesis*, 2:650-51.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:341.

Boice traces the historical development of the JEPD theory starting with the published work of Jean Astruc on the literary sources of Genesis.<sup>20</sup> He then explains,

At first Astruc's work received little notice. Yet within years it was picked up mostly by German scholars and was expanded to include the whole of the Old Testament. Johann Eichorn applied Astruc's approach to the Pentateuch, while Wilhelm De Wette and Edouard Reuss attempted to bring the results into line with Jewish history, Reuss concluding that in the correct historical sequence the prophets are earlier than the law, and the psalms later than both. The most popular and, in some sense, the culminating work in this field was the *Prolegomena* by Julius Wellhausen published in 1878. This work widely disseminated the four-stage documentary hypothesis known as JEPD. It dated the writing of the law after the Babylonian exile and placed only the Book of the Covenant and the most ancient editing of the J and E narratives prior to the eighth century BC.<sup>21</sup>

Boice goes on in the sermon to describe how liberal scholars lauded the work of Wellhausen, quoting E. C. Blackman, who said the theory made possible "the understanding of the Old Testament in terms of progressive revelation . . . a real liberation," and Emil G. Kraeling, who noted that the work of Wellhausen "marked the beginning of a completely secular and evolutionistic study of the Old Testament sources."<sup>22</sup>

The handling of Genesis by liberals, and the Scripture in general, through a perspective of higher criticism and reader-response criticism was deeply disturbing to Boice since it attacked the most fundamental tenets of doctrine upon which the Christian faith must stand. In addition, Boice notes that the JEPD theory appears to ignore Jesus' view of the singular authorship of the Pentateuch by Moses as well as centuries of church

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<sup>20</sup> Astruc argued that Genesis contains two names for God, Elohim and Jehovah, and in ancient Jewish literature the names for God are never intermixed as they are in Genesis. Thus, if Moses were the author of Genesis, he committed a grave error. Rather, an editor or editors drawing from different sources using different names for God wove the documents together into one. Thus, Genesis is the product of a brilliant editor rather than inspiration from God.

<sup>21</sup> Boice, *Genesis*, 1:341. The acrostic JEPD stands for J- Jehovah source, E- Elohim source, P- priestly documents and code, D- the later editorial work of the Deuteronomist or Deuteronomic school. See Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (Atlanta: Scholar Press, 1994).

<sup>22</sup> Boice, *Genesis*, 1:342.

history that affirmed that view.<sup>23</sup> In his sermon on Genesis 2:4-6 on the two creation accounts in Genesis, Boice states, “For many years, liberal scholars have argued that Genesis 1 and 2 represent different and even contradictory accounts of creation. . . . Are there two accounts of creation? Was Christ naïve, or are we mistaken in thinking that he held to one authorship?”<sup>24</sup> Boice then questions, if a redactor compiled Genesis, then why did he put two conflicting accounts of creation next to each other? Boice concludes,

The problem should encourage a person to take a closer look at the two accounts to see if there is not a good reason, perhaps several reasons, why they exist in the form we find them. Indeed, we should be encouraged when we realize that until the rise of modern critical scholarship no one seemed to have noticed that these two accounts were “conflicting.”<sup>25</sup>

Viewing the narratives in Genesis as mythical compilations of editors long after the time of Moses is, according to Boice, an act of biased interpretation that chooses to ignore what these texts plainly present.

In one of the sermons on Genesis 1:1, Boice states,

What is involved here [the narratives in Genesis]? Obviously a view of history and of God’s specific acts in history according to which there is natural continuity between the acts of God in creation and the events of the present day. This means that the Genesis account is to be taken as history.<sup>26</sup>

He goes on to say that claiming the narratives to be mythological rather than historical is an error at best or intellectually dishonest at worst:

A person may still say, “I believe that Genesis is put forth in the Bible as if it were history, but I do not believe its account.” This would be an honest person holding to convictions. But what we cannot say is, “I believe that the Genesis account is profoundly and spiritually true and that the Bible teaches this; it is poetry.” The one who says that is either dishonest or else is a faulty interpreter of the Bible’s teaching.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> For passages that appear to affirm the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, see Matt 8:4, Luke 24:44, and John 5:46.

<sup>24</sup> Boice, *Genesis*, 1:108.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:109.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:23.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:23.

Thus, for Boice, the liberal interpretation of Genesis is not the product of superior scholarship, as liberals claim, but the effort by some to be liberated from the notion that God, and not man, determines what is truth which is what an objective, historical interpretation provides.

Boice surmises that at the heart of liberal hermeneutics is the issue of pride. Not only do many reject the idea that God establishes absolute truth and makes exacting demands of his followers, but they also believe that their intellectual prowess rescues the Scripture from the regressive hermeneutic of emphasizing supernatural inspiration, authority, and authorial intent. In other words, the erudition of man has brought about a right understanding of the nature of Scripture and the way it should be interpreted. Boice makes this claim clear in the sermon refuting the JEPD theory:

“The section on the flood (Genesis 6:5-9:17) is, as has often been observed, the first example in Genesis of a truly composite narrative,” that is, one in which the supposed editor has carefully woven together the various strands of J and, in this case, P material to produce a narrative so brilliantly consistent that only an even more brilliant scholar can untangle it. This is what the scholars claim to have done. The scholar from whom I have just quoted [John Skinner] pats himself as well as others on the back, saying, “The resolution of the compound narrative into its constituent elements in this case is justly reckoned amongst the most brilliant achievements of purely literary criticism.”<sup>28</sup>

Theological liberalism maintains that the Bible is merely the work of shrewd ancient scholars that can only properly be understood by even more astute scholars of modern times. However, Boice argues that correct interpretation will only come “as soon as we lay aside our pride as scholars and begin to search the text on its own terms to discern what it is teaching.”<sup>29</sup> Boice sees such a liberal view as a blatant and somewhat ridiculous rejection of a common-sense interpretation of what the biblical text clearly presents:

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<sup>28</sup> Boice, *Genesis*, 343. John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, 2nd ed., The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1956), 147.

<sup>29</sup> Boice, *Genesis*, 2:651.



“Critics who do not know how to read adult books should be careful how they comment on them.”<sup>30</sup>

### **Authority of Scripture**

Boice’s sermons in Genesis reveal his belief that the greatest casualty of liberal higher biblical criticism is the loss of biblical authority. Rather than God establishing truth through the revelation of his Word, man chooses to become the arbiter of truth through his own faulty wisdom. In a sermon on the theory of theistic evolution from Genesis 1:1-2, Boice refers to Pierre de Chardin, the seminal proponent of the theory, who believed “without question that evolution on the grandest scale had taken place” and that “if our understanding of Scripture seems to be in conflict with evolutionary views, it is our views of Scripture or even Scripture itself that must give way before science.”<sup>31</sup>

Boice quotes de Chardin who wrote that evolution was more than a theory, but rather “is a general condition to which all theories, all hypotheses, all systems must bow and which they must satisfy henceforward if they are to be thinkable and true. Evolution is a light illuminating all facts, a curve that all lines must follow.”<sup>32</sup> Boice responds to the thought that the Bible might be placed in an inferior position by saying,

Biblical religion must by its very definition start with the Bible and make all other theories subordinate to that. In de Chardin’s case, everything has become subject to evolution, and an ability to hear the reforming, correcting Word of God in Scripture has been lost. We must ask whether such a tendency is not present in all theistic evolution. What should a Christian’s response be? An openness to all truth certainly, but not the kind of openness that allows scientific theory or any other theory to sit in

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<sup>30</sup> Boice, *Genesis*, 1:197. This comment is made in the sermon on Gen 3:9-14 in reference to God telling the serpent it will “eat dust.” Liberals contend that this statement is proof the Bible contains errors since snakes do not eat dust. Boice shows that the statement is clearly a metaphor for experiencing defeat and adds the rejoinder: “This is the answer to those ignorant readers of Genesis who imagine the Bible to be in error here.” *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:54.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

judgment on the truthfulness of God's written Word. Actually, the Christian's task is the opposite: to bring every thought into subjection to the written Word.<sup>33</sup>

Elsewhere, Boice affirms that the authors of the New Testament identified the Old Testament with the living voice of God so that "God and the Scriptures are brought into such conjunction as to show that in point of directness of authority no distinction was made between them."<sup>34</sup>

In another sermon on Genesis 21:8-21, Boice references the liberal scholar James Barr who, in his book *The Scope and Authority of the Bible*, refers to theological conservatives as "closed-minded, ignorant, [and] refusing to accept the truth."<sup>35</sup> One of Barr's evidences in his book for the fallibility of the Bible is a phrase in Genesis 21:14 which Boice lucidly demonstrates to be a misinterpretation so egregious that he states, "I would be inclined to say that any fool could see [it] but, as a matter of fact, it is the fools who fail to see it, in my judgment."<sup>36</sup> In keeping with his desire to help reform his own denomination and to prevent anyone else from being influenced by theological liberalism, Boice turns his attention to students and uses the work of Barr as a lesson to warn against the appeal of liberalism's faulty hermeneutic and disparagement of biblical authority:

This needs to be heard by scholars, seminarians, ministers, and many others who are pursuing academic questions concerning the Word of God. . . . When we turn to the Scriptures, there is much that we do not understand; and just because we do not understand it, does not mean that it cannot be understood. There may be other people who have understood it, and there may be depths of meaning that we can also discover if we read their writings. But there is a destructive scholarship in our day that often traps students. Sometimes Bible students have the best motives, but they get caught up in scholarship and soon begin to put man's word before God's Word. If you have done that, you need to learn that the words of mere men and women,

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<sup>33</sup>Boice, *Genesis*, 1:54.

<sup>34</sup> Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, 39-40. This quote is cited by Boice from Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, ed. Samuel G. Craig (London: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, 1959), 132.

<sup>35</sup> Boice, *Genesis*, 2:666. James Barr, *The Scope and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980), 78.

<sup>36</sup> Boice, *Genesis*, 2:666.

however good they may be in themselves, are nothing compared to God's best. The challenge I give you is to choose that best, to listen to what God has spoken.<sup>37</sup>

Boice keenly understood that a significant part of the battleground between liberal and conservative theology was in the university and seminary classroom.

An important aspect of biblical authority for Boice is the inerrancy of the Bible. Throughout Boice's sermons in which a particular text contains a well-known "error," he regularly points out the deficiency of the argument against inerrancy. His sermons in Genesis hold true to this concept. In his sermon on Genesis 41:1-40, Boice makes note that a reference to Pharaoh's birthday in the text is commonly used by critics of the Bible to express that Genesis was compiled much later than conservatives believe since the recognition of birthdays are commonly considered to be a Persian tradition, not Egyptian. Boice explains how claiming the Bible to be in error through the use of specific proof-texts such as this is erroneous and dangerous:

How easy to attack the Bible in this fashion! There are always things mentioned in the Bible for which we do not have independent corroboration, and if one is inclined to put every other source of information above the Bible, it is easy to conclude that the Bible is in error at this point. How dangerous! In this case archaeologists discovered the Rosetta Stone, by which scholars learned to read Egyptian hieroglyphics, and one of the sections of the Rosetta Stone was a decree on the occasion of the celebration of the birthday of a pharaoh. So that argument against the reliability of Genesis died.<sup>38</sup>

Boice summarizes his confident belief in the authority of the Bible as the supreme source of knowing truth in one of his sermons on evolution from Genesis 1:1-2: "We are to know and know we know—by the Word of God and by that limited but nevertheless extensive and extremely wonderful revelation of God in nature, perceived and understood by reason."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Boice, *Genesis*, 2:666.

<sup>38</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis*, vol. 3, *Living by Faith (Genesis 37-50)* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 965. Another example of Boice adroitly correcting claims of errors in the Bible can be found in his sermon on Gen 46:8-27 on the discrepancy of the number of Jacob's descendants listed as seventy in the Genesis text, but as seventy-five by Stephen in Acts 7:14. Boice explains the discrepancy in the two texts through an examination of the Septuagint. *Ibid.*, 3:1107.

<sup>39</sup> Boice, *Genesis*, 1:71.

## Doctrine

An additional result that evolved from liberal hermeneutics and the loss of biblical authority was the corruption of doctrine. Boice often disagreed with leading liberal scholars when a specific doctrine arose from the text he was preaching. In his sermon on Genesis 3:1-6, Boice takes umbrage with liberal theologian Emil Brunner's view of the doctrine of sin. He quotes Brunner who wrote that man "has to be described as that which is 'not yet good,' or is 'not yet reached the plane of spirit.'"<sup>40</sup> Boice, however, disagrees with Brunner, stating, "The biblical view reverses the matter, replacing the 'not yet' by 'no longer.' God created all things perfect. But man rebelled against God and perfection, and so fell away from that sublime destiny God had for him."<sup>41</sup> Boice considered liberalism's failure to view the depravity of man as a hallmark of "adopt[ing] the theology of our culture" and a failure to live by the tenet, "Let God be true and every man a liar."<sup>42</sup> The remedy, in his mind, was "to articulate the great biblical doctrines. . . . We need to speak of human depravity, of men and women in rebellion against God, so much so that there is no hope for them apart from God's grace."<sup>43</sup>

Regarding the doctrine of creation, Boice disagrees with James Orr whom he quotes as stating, " 'Evolution,' in short, is coming to be recognized as but a new name for 'creation,' only that the creative power now works within, instead of, as in the old conception, in an external, plastic fashion."<sup>44</sup> Boice does not adhere to Orr's embracement of theistic evolution arguing that the fossil record "is at best incomplete and may actually

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<sup>40</sup> Boice, *Genesis*, 1:168. Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption: Dogmatics*, trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1952), 2:91.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, 682-83.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Boice, *Genesis*, 1:51. James Orr, "Science and Christian Faith," in *The Fundamentals: The Famous Sourcebook of Foundational Biblical Truths*, ed. R. A. Torrey and updated by Charles L. Feinberg (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1990), 133-34.

provide better evidence for the creationist's view than for the evolutionist's."<sup>45</sup>

Additionally, Boice does not believe that evolution matches the biblical picture of God's nature:

According to [evolutionists], evolution is a long, slow, wasteful, crude, inefficient, and mistake-ridden process. The God of the Bible hardly fits those categories. If evolution is made to conform to his nature—efficient, wise, good, and error-free—it is hardly evolution, and the theistic evolutionist who is really a biblical theist has become a creationist though he does not actually describe himself by that word.<sup>46</sup>

Nor does Boice agree with theistic evolution concerning the importance of the singularity and historicity of Adam. Citing the comparison of Adam with Jesus in Romans 5:12-21 and 1 Corinthians 15:22-23 and 45, Boice notes, "It is basic to this comparison that Adam was an individual whose act affected his progeny. Does this fit in with evolutionary theory? In evolution the basic unit is population, not an individual. At what point did Adam appear? Or did he appear?"<sup>47</sup> In essence, Boice believed that "evolution eliminates God. If all things can be explained as the natural outworking or development of previous causes, then God may be safely banished or even eliminated altogether, as many, even so-called theologians, have done."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Boice, *Genesis*, 1:52.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:53.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* Related to the issue of the historicity of Adam, Boice disagrees with the eminent paleoanthropologists Richard and Mary Leakey and their discoveries of finding ancient human remains: "The discoveries of Richard and Mary Leakey in Africa, while frequently referred to as evidences of ancient men in the secular press, are at best prehuman creatures, even by the Leakeys' own judgments. . . . The general impression of the skulls is that they represent extinct apelike rather than manlike forms." *Ibid.*, 1:89.

<sup>48</sup> Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, 665. Boice provides his apologetic against the theory of evolution in general and the work of Darwin in particular in his sermon on Gen 1:1-2, "Views of Creation: Evolution" (Boice, *Genesis*, 1: 41-48) and in the chapter, "Nature" in *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, 159-66. Of note is that Boice roundly rejected a "young earth" view and did not believe God created the earth in six, twenty-four hour successive days. See the sermon, "Views of Creation: Six-Day Creationism, Boice, *Genesis*, 1:63-71. Rather, he adhered to a theory of process creation that allowed for the earth to be millions of years old. See the sermon, "Views of Creation: Progressive Creationism, Boice, *Genesis*, 1:72-79. In a letter from a seminary professor challenging Boice's denial of a young earth, Boice defends his view by claiming scientific data demonstrates an old age of the earth and solar system, the "appearance of old age" of the earth is a philosophical reason to believe in its old age, and the fossil record is best understood through a time frame of millions of years. James Montgomery Boice, "Letter to Dr. John G. Whitcomb," February 22, 1980, series 4, box 4. Boice's belief regarding the creation of the universe is significant because

Boice found it important to defend other fundamental Christian doctrines such as justification from the malaise of liberalism. Boice quotes Puritan Thomas Watson to make his point about protecting an orthodox view of justification in his sermon on Genesis 15:6: “Justification is the very hinge and pillar of Christianity. An error about justification is dangerous, like a defect in a foundation. Justification by Christ is a spring of the water of life. To have the poison of corrupt doctrine cast into this spring is damnable.”<sup>49</sup>

On rare occasion, Boice would directly confront the work of liberalism specifically within the UPCUSA itself; this is to his credit since he did not turn the pulpit at Tenth into a forum for denominational politics. Rather, Boice chose to carefully teach the Word of God and let Scripture speak for itself as to the veracity of the orthodox position. That said, one example in the Genesis sermons when he did directly take on liberals in the UPCUSA is in the sermon from Genesis 1:3-23 on the first five days of creation. As mentioned earlier in this dissertation, the Confession of 1967 deemed the doing of acts of social ministry as “missions” rather than the promulgation of the gospel. Boice used the occasion of God speaking creation into existence to demonstrate the importance of God’s Word over man’s deed:

God brought the universe into existence by speaking. This shows the importance of verbal or propositional revelation. There has been a tendency in some contemporary theological circles to deny the importance of words on the basis that what is really important are acts [a clear reference to the Confession of 1967]. . . . In such a scheme the very words of the Bible lose importance . . . because the emphasis falls on what God is doing rather than on what God has commanded. . . . Which came first, the word or the deed? Many today say, “Deed.” But this is a distortion, as Genesis shows. God’s acts are of great importance. . . . But it is wrong to say the deed comes first. Rather the word comes first, followed by the deed, followed by a further

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he did not brashly dismiss science, a point of contention liberals often have against conservatives, but rather he sought to view the validity of science and reason within the boundaries of biblical revelation.

<sup>49</sup> Boice, *Genesis*, 2:540. See also Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity* (London: Banner of Truth, 1970), 226.

revelation in words to interpret the deed spiritually. This means that a hearty emphasis on the Word of God is both biblical and mandatory.<sup>50</sup>

Boice makes the same argument concerning word over deed in an article he wrote about preachers and the Word of God:

Which comes first, the word or the deed? The most common answer is the deed, which the word is then seen to interpret. But this is a distortion of the biblical picture. . . . It is inaccurate to say that the deeds come first. Rather, the Word comes first, then the deeds, then a further interpretation of the deeds scripturally.<sup>51</sup>

The Bible is not to obey man, but rather man is to obey the Bible.

### **Man-Centered Philosophies**

Boice continues to unpack the consequences of a low view of Scripture in his sermons from Genesis by describing how such a view leads to philosophical theories embodied in secularism, humanism, and relativism: “We have abandoned belief in one truth and so seek truth in a plurality of forms.”<sup>52</sup> He also states, “If ever there was a day in which civilization was attempting to form itself without God, it is the day in which we live. But never has the restlessness of the ungodly been more evident.”<sup>53</sup> In his sermon on Genesis 4:25-26, Boice traces the history of how society ventured away from adhering to the absoluteness of truth found in God and his Word to the morass of relativism and humanism:

Its origins [begin with] Rene Descartes, who based his philosophy on himself and his own self-awareness: “I think, therefore I am.” Its modern course [is] through such figures as Jean-Jacque Rousseau, with his romanticization of nature; Immanuel Kant, who split the knowledge of things and the knowledge of ideals into two parts; Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, who relativized all truth and knowledge; and Soren Kierkegaard, who invented “the leap of faith” as the only means of knowing the transcendent. But in this later development, as [Francis] Schaeffer shows, God

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<sup>50</sup> Boice, *Genesis*, 1:82-83.

<sup>51</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “The Preacher and God’s Word,” in *The Foundation of Biblical Authority*, ed. James Montgomery Boice (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 127. This quote, compared to the previous quote from the sermon in Gen 1:3-23, is exemplary of the interchange between Boice’s sermons and writings.

<sup>52</sup> Boice, *Genesis*, 1:406.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:264.

increasingly slips out of reach and eventually becomes the “nothing” existentialism perceives him to be. . . . Modern culture, like the culture before the flood . . . has no shepherd and shows it by its lost and increasingly degenerate condition.<sup>54</sup>

Boice believed that secularism, rooted in an abandonment of the doctrines of the Bible, was the cause of much of society’s ills.

Preaching on the downward spiral of man’s fall evidenced in Cain and Lamech in Genesis 4:17-24, Boice finds the root of this philosophy in the rejection of this text’s teaching on the depravity of man:

Unfortunately, secular and even many Christian scholars ignore this chapter and instead devise an imaginary account that tends to glorify man and minimize his depravity. . . . Having cast off the only reliable account of man’s first deeds and achievements, practically all writers of the present then proceed to draw very largely upon their imagination, which happens to be cast into the thought patterns of evolutionistic conceptions. Then they misread the available archaeological hints—for actual archaeological evidence for earliest man is not available—and the result is a highly fantastic and entirely incorrect story of man’s development. . . . This pseudoscience ignores [man’s] true degradation. The chapter before us, being strictly historical and entirely correct, serves to set the student of the history of mankind right; and at the same time it gives to all men a clear account as to how man progressed and how sin grew.<sup>55</sup>

Humanist philosophies, having rejected the Bible’s teaching about the depravity of mankind, cause people to establish their independence from God in favor of self-reliance.

Boice regularly bemoaned the outright secularism that affected society throughout his Genesis sermons. Heavily influenced by Augustine’s *City of God*, Boice often referred to the “secular city” that stood in opposition to a Christian worldview.<sup>56</sup> Making reference to the Tower of Babel and comparing it to modern culture, Boice states, “The beginning of chapter 11 is an open door into the mind of the secular city. It shows

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<sup>54</sup> Boice, *Genesis*, 1:273. In his systematic theology, Boice points to the Romantic philosophy of religion espoused by Friedrich Schleiermacher as the originator of viewing the Scripture in humanistic terms. For Schleiermacher, “the real subject matter of theology is not divinely revealed truths, but human religious experience. . . . Within this framework the Bible is only a record of human reflection and action in the field of religion.” Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, 84. See also Boice, *The Foundation of Biblical Authority*, 136.

<sup>55</sup> Boice, *Genesis*, 1:263.

<sup>56</sup> Boice wrote *Foundations of God’s City: Christians in a Crumbling Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), which was a modern-day adaptation of Augustine’s classic *City of God*.



men and women functioning without God, setting about to make a name for themselves without God and his help.”<sup>57</sup> He makes a similar comparison with the city of Nimrod in Genesis 10:6-20: “Here we have a great city . . . in defiance of God. This is man’s city, the secular city. It is of man, by man, and for man’s glory.”<sup>58</sup> Of particular concern to Boice is what he considered “Christian secularization,” where those claiming to be followers of Christ viewed the secular city as not only positive, but also in accord with the Judeo-Christian tradition.<sup>59</sup> Boice undoubtedly viewed the developments in the UPCUSA in the 1960s and 1970s as a form of Christian secularization in which “values or moral norms are made relative” and “for all practical purposes God is banished.”<sup>60</sup> In the preface to the publication of addresses given at the PCRT from 1977-1979, Boice writes,

What we have today in many of the mainline denominations is “secularism,” or “worldlyism.” It means that the church is being like the world in its wisdom, theology, agenda, and methods. The [inherent] wisdom of the church is the wisdom of God. . . . But today the Word of God is widely rejected in large segments of the church. What has come to take the place of the wisdom of the Word of God is “the wisdom of consensus”—that is, the authority of the 51 percent vote. This is disastrous for the church.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Boice, *Genesis*, 2:444.

<sup>58</sup> Boice, *Genesis*, 1:411.

<sup>59</sup> Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, 669-70. Boice identifies Harvey Cox and his book *The Secular City* as the leading example of Christian secularization. After detailing Cox’s argument for “biblical desacralization,” that Scripture and secularism are actually in harmony, Boice notes, “Cox believes that modern man in his technology, urbanity, and pragmatism is the product of biblical faith.” *Ibid.*, 671. The reason many in the church embraced Cox’s ideas, Boice argues, is that the church had already become too secular by “exchanging the ancient wisdom of the church (embodied in Scripture) for the world’s wisdom.” *Ibid.*, 671.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 671.

<sup>61</sup> James Montgomery Boice, ed., *Our Savior God: Studies on Man, Christ, and the Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 12-13. The “consensus of the 51 percent vote” is a theme that appears in multiple places in Boice’s writings and correspondence. He obviously believed the denomination had capitulated to the demands of the majority who clamored for liberalism/secularism rather than having a willingness to pay the cost of standing for orthodoxy as the minority.

Christian secularism, argues Boice, is an attempt to liberate people from the superannuated and restrictive propositions of the Bible.<sup>62</sup>

Secularism, according to Boice, has rendered mankind incapable of successfully grappling with some of the most fundamental issues of human existence. Death represents one of these issues. In his sermon on Genesis 50:1-13, Boice gives an insightful analysis on the impact secularism has on a proper understanding of death and the hope that can be found beyond it:

This [Christian] worldview has evaporated as Western man has rejected God and religion. [Richard W.] Doss writes, “The twentieth century has seen a virtual abolition of the traditional Christian framework with no new proposal to take its place. Secularization has separated modern man from an older understanding of man and society, and in so doing has separated death from the means by which it had been explained for so many years. As a result, death has been isolated and denuded. With no meaningful framework for understanding death, our culture has adopted a style of denial avoidance.”<sup>63</sup>

Secularism robs humanity of any semblance of the eternal and thus skews a right understanding of how life is to be lived in the present.

Another fundamental issue wrecked by the sophistry of man is the identity of man, as Boice explains in his sermon on Genesis 2:7 regarding the creation of Adam:

Alexander Pope was not being particularly biblical when he wrote, “The chief study of mankind is man . . .” We want to know who we are, why we are here, and where we are going. Unfortunately, it is impossible to answer these questions apart from biblical revelation. The reason is that we see parts of the answer, but only parts, and are therefore constantly distorting the picture. Zoologists, like Desmond Morris, who calls man “the naked ape,” tells us that man is essentially an animal. Karl Marx says that the essence of man is in his labor, what he does. Existentialists tell us that man is essentially volitional. That is, his uniqueness is found in his will. Hugh Hefner tells us that we are sensuous creatures and are therefore to be understood largely in terms of our passions or sexual performance. Common today is the view that man is essentially a machine, a large computer. . . . Each of these attempts to define man has elements of truth. But in the final analysis each fails because it is reductionistic. Consequently, in this age as in previous ages of human history man is “his own

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<sup>62</sup> Boice, *Our Savior God*, 12-13.

<sup>63</sup> Boice, *Genesis*, 3:1239. See Richard W. Doss, *The Last Enemy: A Christian Understanding of Death* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).

most vexing problem,” as Reinhold Niebuhr reminds us. What are we to do? The only wise course is to ask who we are from God.<sup>64</sup>

Boice argued that humanist philosophies dissolve the belief that mankind is created in the image of God, which disastrously affects one’s understanding of self and others.

Boice appeals to his listeners to resist the plea of liberalism to deny the historicity and authority of the Scripture in favor of a man-centered, philosophical approach. Instead, he issues a call for obedience to the Word in an orthodox understanding and does so by using a quote from a well-known liberal thinker, Friedrich Nietzsche, and flipping it on its end: “The essential thing ‘in heaven and earth’ is . . . that there should be long obedience in the same direction; thereby results, and has always resulted in the long run, something which has made life worth living.”<sup>65</sup> Nietzsche, of course, meant that one should have a steadfast obedience toward atheism. Boice, however, uses the concept of “long obedience” in the sense of a Christian worldview, stating, “This is an element of obedience particularly needed by Christians living in our twentieth-century culture.”<sup>66</sup> In his sermon on Genesis 21:22-31, Boice makes a clarion call for Christians to live in a manner different from the “secular city”:

The church must be different from the world. It must be in the world, for Christ put it there. It must identify with many of the world’s interests, for it shares these interests. Still, it will not be of the world. Its values will not be of the world’s values, nor will its priorities be the world’s priorities. The true church must always strive to be what it is in fact, namely, the community of the people of God. . . . We are to be different, as Abraham was. We are to be sources of divine illumination for the world around us. Being a lighthouse will not change the rocky contours of the coast. But the light can reveal the dangers, encourage the fainting hearts of this world’s mariners, and guide the ship of state through the dark waters of the secular world.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Boice, *Genesis*, 1:115.

<sup>65</sup> Boice, *Genesis*, 2:704. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Marianne Cowan (Washington, DC: Gateway/Henry Regnery, 1955), 94-6.

<sup>66</sup> Boice, *Genesis*, 2:704.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:674.

## The “New Morality”

Finally, Boice traces the effect of liberalism as supplanting the standards of morality expressed in Scripture for a “new” morality plaguing today’s society. In his introductory sermon in the Genesis series, Boice sketches out how the new morality was birthed from the denial of a literal, historical understanding of Scripture:

When the secularists came along in the middle of the last century and cut the society of their day off from any sense of history, the deed was greeted with cries of joyous appreciation and great glee. To be freed from the past, particularly from the biblical past with its God of moral standards and threats of judgment, seemed to be true liberation. Man was free! And if he was free, he could do as he pleased. . . . But now man [is] adrift on a great sea of nothingness. . . . No wonder that contemporary man is empty, miserable, frustrated. . . . He gained freedom (so-called) but at the loss of value, meaning, and true dignity.<sup>68</sup>

The “new” morality is nothing more than “rampant hedonism of our age,” which is actually an old form of degeneracy “being accepted as never before” and has sadly infiltrated the ranks of the Christian church.<sup>69</sup>

Boice elaborates on the new morality in his sermon on God creating the institution of marriage in Genesis 2:22-24:

In a strange way, this new hedonism has been supported by so-called Christian theologians through what has come to be called the “new morality,” though it is actually no more new than old hedonism. The new morality has been popularized by such well-known churchmen as Bishop John A. T. Robinson, Joseph Fletcher, Harvey Cox, and others. It says that there are no ethical norms except for the one rather vague norm of love. Anything goes. Anything is permissible “as long as it does not hurt the other person.” Whether it will or not is to be determined solely from the situation.<sup>70</sup>

Without the Word of God as an authoritative and exclusive source as absolute truth, the new morality paves the way for a situational ethic that releases a person from any moral responsibility. This is the observation of Boice in his sermon on the sixth day of creation in Genesis 1:28-31:

Today in the Western world there is a tendency to deny man’s moral responsibility on the basis of some kind of determinism. It usually takes one of two forms. It may

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<sup>68</sup> Boice, *Genesis*, 1:19.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:137.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

be physical, mechanical determinism (“man is the product of his genes and body chemistry”), or it may be a psychological determinism (“man is the product of his environment and the earlier things that have happened to him”). In either case the individual is excused from responsibility for what he or she does. Thus, we have gone through a period in which criminal behavior was termed sickness and the criminal was regarded more as a victim of his environment than a victimizer. Less blatant but nevertheless morally reprehensible acts are excused with, “I suppose he just couldn’t help it.”<sup>71</sup>

The loss of biblical authority, Boice argued, untethered humanity from the moral foundation of behavior and the consequences that arise from such behavior.

The new morality took aim at specific moral topics and established a stance decidedly at odds with the teaching of Scripture. One of these topics is sexual promiscuity. Boice, in his sermon on Genesis 39:6-12, cites noted anthropologist Margaret Mead and her work among a Samoan tribe where she discovered an unabated attitude toward sexual activity among the adolescents of the tribe: “Mead was convinced that the terrible teenage years were not a problem in Samoa, and she credited this to the island’s supposed sexual permissiveness. ‘Free love promotes nonviolence,’ was her conclusion.”<sup>72</sup> Boice not only disagreed with Mead’s conclusions, but he cast plausible doubt on the veracity of her research. Nonetheless, Boice laments that Mead’s work “was what many people back in the United States wanted to hear and as a result her book was soon hailed as a classic. Mead’s conclusions were frequently cited by such prominent scholars as Bertrand Russell and Havelock Ellis.”<sup>73</sup>

Another topic impacted by the tenets of the new morality is gender. If mankind is not created uniquely in the image of God apart from the rest of creation and is the product of random evolutionary chance, then differences of gender in humans is

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<sup>71</sup> Boice, *Genesis*, 1:95.

<sup>72</sup> Boice, *Genesis*, 3:920-21. Boice is referring to Margaret Mead’s *Coming of Age in Samoa* (New York: William Morrow, 1928). At the time Boice referenced the book (early 1980s), he states that it was the greatest selling anthropology book in history.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

unimportant. In the sermon on Genesis 1:28-31, Boice disagrees with the new morality regarding gender:

In our day many say that there are no essential differences between men and women, or that whatever differences there are, are accidental. This is understandable from those who think that mindless evolution is the means by which we have become what we are. But it is entirely incomprehensible from the standpoint of the Bible, which tells us nothing is an accident and that sexuality in particular is the result of the creative act of God. . . . Let a woman try to be a man or a man try to be a woman, and you have a monstrosity.<sup>74</sup>

Boice's statement is prophetic given the chaos that has beset culture regarding gender issues in the years since Boice's death.

Related to gender and sexuality is the topic of homosexuality, which engenders great support from the new morality. Homosexuality was a rising issue in the UPCUSA, and many in the denomination were embracing it as non-contradictory with Scripture.<sup>75</sup>

However, for Boice, denying the biblical teaching about homosexuality is at insurmountable odds with the Christian faith. Boice makes this argument in his sermon on Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19:1-17:

You cannot pretend to be a "Christian" homosexual and live with that [Christian] outlook. So in recent years there have been many attempts to reinterpret the biblical material. . . . When lesbianism and the women's liberation movement have joined forces, the distortions have become even more grotesque and the rhetoric even more shrill. Here's an example: "The faith that lesbians/women have lived and the devotion we have given to Father-Son-Holy Ghost and to our 'fellow man' are being questioned by a source that seems as ancient and good as we have believed god himself to be. . . . We have neglected the woman-god, however she is named, who speaks not from outside but from within us. . . . We cannot look upward again to the

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<sup>74</sup> Boice, *Genesis*, 1:96.

<sup>75</sup> In January of 1978, a UPCUSA task force released a study that recommended open homosexuals should not be prevented from ordination or other leadership roles in the church. The study also stated that homosexual relationships were capable of being "ethically sound." United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, *The Church and Homosexuality* (Louisville: Office of the General Assembly, 1978). The 1978 General Assembly rejected the recommendation of the report allowing ordination of homosexuals, but "strongly endorsed" gay civil rights and allowed homosexuals to be members of the church. Kenneth A. Briggs, "Presbyterians Reject the Ordination of Homosexuals," *New York Times*, May 23, 1978, accessed March 10, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/1978/05/23/archives/presbyterians-reject-the-ordination-of-homosexuals-applause-follows.html>.

towering father-god or accept his death-dealing commandments . . . we are too full of our own insurgent life to nurture him any longer.”<sup>76</sup>

Such a strong statement against the Bible and Christianity greatly concerns Boice, who deems the practice of homosexuality and its defiance of Scripture as idolatry:

I admit as I read those last statements that I am greatly distressed and afraid, not merely for those who think like this, but for our society as a whole. For this is blatant idolatry—man (or woman) substituting himself (or herself) for God. It is an example of the direction we go when we try to adjust the Bible to fit our debased standards of living.<sup>77</sup>

For Boice, the new morality was an extension of man’s desire to supplant the authority of God with the authority of man.

In addition to his sermons, Boice on more than one occasion responded to letters he had received regarding the issue of homosexuality. Responding to a man who sought to justify his homosexual lifestyle as being allowed by Scripture, Boice responds,

Either you will have to follow Christ, be born again and give up any homosexual practice. Or you will have to go in the other direction and give up Christ. . . . It is true that Jesus Christ does not speak explicitly about homosexuality . . . but no one should take comfort from that. [Jesus] endorsed the Old Testament fully, including necessarily its condemnation of homosexuality and other sexual sins. He also said that God would lead his disciples to record his teachings scripturally. Paul was one, and he reiterates the Old Testament views in the book of Romans as well as other places.<sup>78</sup>

Boice correctly analyzes and denounces any attempt to use the Bible in a way that justifies morality or behavior it clearly condemns.

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<sup>76</sup> Boice, *Genesis*, 2:622-23. In this section of the sermon, one of the examples Boice provides of attempting to reinterpret the Bible to accommodate homosexuality is D. Sherwin Bailey’s *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (London: Longmans, Green, 1955). Boice cites Bailey as claiming “the real sin of Sodom was its violation of the duty of hospitality to strangers” and not the practice of homosexuality. Bailey suggests that “the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was probably due to ground fires that caused the explosive gases in the area.” The quote embedded within Boice’s quote is from Sally Gearhart and William R. Johnson, eds., *Loving Men/Loving Women: Gay Liberation and the Church* (San Francisco: Glide, 1974), 129-30, 140, 149-50.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Kenneth Bandaruk,” March 21, 1980, series 4, box 3. Of note in this letter is Boice’s distinction of a “homosexual inclination” and a “homosexual lifestyle,” which speaks to those who claim to be born with a proclivity to homosexuality and are unable to cease acting upon it. Boice states in the letter that a homosexual lifestyle is contradictory to “being a born again Christian. You will have to come down on one side or the other.”

In conclusion, Boice makes a poignant argument regarding the most fundamental reason behind why liberals reject the authority and historicity of God's Word and instead choose to distort biblical doctrines in favor of human philosophies. The reason for the liberals' rejection of orthodoxy, insists Boice in his sermon on Methuselah from Genesis 5:25-27, involves sinful desire rather than an academic objection:

Why do they [liberals] do this [reject orthodoxy]? Peter does not hesitate to say it is so they can follow "their own evil desires" (2 Peter 3:3). Like the people of Methuselah's day, they reject warnings of judgment in order to continue on their own evil way. Most people do not admit this, of course. They invent intellectual reasons for their unbelief. But from time to time a person will acknowledge this quite openly.<sup>79</sup>

Thus, the rejection of orthodoxy by those claiming to be Christians is a proclamation of liberation not merely from oppressive social structures, but from the sovereignty of God himself—what Sproul called "an act of cosmic treason."<sup>80</sup> Boice, in the sermon on Methuselah, provides an example of a skeptic, Aldous Huxley, who does admit that his rejection of orthodox Christianity is not rooted in academic protestations, but rather his sensual desire:

[Huxley] once freely admitted that his rejection of Christianity stemmed from his desire to sin. He wrote, "I had motives for not wanting the world to have a meaning; consequently assumed that it had not; and was able without any difficulty to find satisfying reasons for this assumption. The philosopher who finds no meaning for this world is not concerned exclusively with the problem of pure metaphysics; he is also concerned to prove that there is no valid reason why he personally should not do as he wants to. . . . For myself . . . the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation, sexual and political."<sup>81</sup>

Boice's argument is reminiscent of the parable Jesus told about the wicked servants who said of their master, "We do not want this man to reign over us" (Luke 19:14).

The growing popularity of theological liberalism and human philosophies over orthodoxy did not cause Boice to have a defeatist attitude. Instead, he challenged his

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<sup>79</sup> Boice, *Genesis*, 1:296.

<sup>80</sup> Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, 120. See R. C. Sproul, *The Psychology of Atheism* (Grand Rapids: Bethany Fellowship, 1974), 139.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* The quote is from Aldous Huxley, *End and Means* (New York: Garland, 1938), 270, 273.



listeners to continue on in the truth regardless of the price they had to pay to do so and the persecution they may receive from adherents of liberalism. Boice believed that through steadfast and faithful adherence to God's Word, genuine and fruitful growth in the Christian church would one day come as he explains in his sermon on Genesis 47:27:

God said that we [the Christian church] are to be in the world but not of it. Instead, we are very much of the world and not even in it to a meaningful degree. What will happen? I suggest that God will allow hard times to come upon the American church. We will be attacked and harassed—as we already are in some matters. We will be forced out of the mainstream of society. We will be made to pay a price for our faith so that it becomes costly rather than beneficial to follow Jesus. That is not bad. Like the church in China, it will be in such circumstances that the strength of true Christian commitment will be seen and the church will begin to be fruitful again.<sup>82</sup>

### **The Gospel of John**

As with his sermons in Genesis, Boice routinely took on the views of liberal theologians in his extensive sermon series through the Gospel of John (270 sermons). In regard to the New Testament, the theological liberalism launched in the nineteenth century sought to discredit the authority and historicity of the Bible by discrediting the deity and historicity of Jesus. However, to do so would liberate mankind from the claims of Christ as the source of truth and put man in place of Christ as the supreme sovereign. Liberal scholars in particular sought to attack weaknesses they perceived about the Gospel of John as evidence of their claims, as Boice explains in the opening sermon of the series from John 1:1:

It is probably because John is so different (and so spiritual) that some scholars have attacked this book so strongly. It seems strange that this Gospel . . . should become the outstanding example among the New Testament books of what a section of God's Word can suffer at the hands of the higher critics of the Scriptures. Instead there had been a generation of scholarship (not so many years ago) that thought that John was not at all reliable. In this period all but the most conservative scholars said that the Gospel must have been written at least 150 or even 200 years after Christ's death. Many placed it in a literary category of its own as being something very much like theological fiction.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Boice, *Genesis*, 3:1138.

<sup>83</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 1, *The Coming of the Light (John 1-4)* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 15.

The doctrinal importance of John's Gospel is paramount in defending orthodoxy.

### **Historicity of the New Testament and Quest for Historical Jesus**

Boice gives an excellent overview of the liberal approach regarding Jesus and the New Testament in one of his sermons on the man born blind from John 9. In it, he notes how the Pharisees sought to “uncover the ‘true’ story behind the healing and so do away with the miracle” in order to “avoid the force of Christ's claims.”<sup>84</sup> The attempts of the Pharisees to discredit Jesus are consonant with the modern liberal approaches to do the same. Boice argues,

In the nineteenth century, rationalists, who had become rationalists as a result of their secular educations, confronted the obviously supernatural element in the biblical narratives. These men called themselves Christians, which meant that they had to have some well-thought-out relationship to the Bible. But here were books, claiming to be eyewitnesses of the events of biblical history, in which the supernatural was prominent. What were they to do? The only thing to do was to attempt to discredit the miracles.<sup>85</sup>

Boice then outlines in the sermon the various theories posited to discredit the miracles of Jesus, such as walking on water and feeding the five thousand. He also examines the work of scholars to decipher and process through the fabled stories of Jesus' supernatural ability in order to arrive at the identity of the true, historical Jesus.<sup>86</sup>

The problem with working through such theories and “fables” about Jesus is that the scholars, according to Boice, found the effort “more like an onion than a walnut. What happens when you take away the outer layer of an onion? You find another layer

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<sup>84</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 3, *Those Who Received Him (John 9-12)* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 718.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:719.

<sup>86</sup> Boice is alluding here to the work of Adolf von Harnack, who believed that modern scholars must work through the unreliable portions of the gospels' accounts of Jesus (the “husk” of church history) in order to get to the essential “kernel” of Christianity. For a helpful summary of the beliefs and works of Harnack, see Derek Michaud, ed., “Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930),” Boston Collaborative Encyclopedia of Western Theology, accessed February 20, 2018, <http://people.bu.edu/wwildman/bce/harnack.htm>.

inside. By the time all the layers are removed there is nothing left.”<sup>87</sup> The metaphor of the onion, for Boice, is a fitting picture of what liberal scholarship attempted to do with orthodox understandings of Christianity and the Scripture:

This is precisely what happened in biblical scholarship. The supernatural was removed, but there was nothing left—at least nothing that was even vaguely reminiscent of Christianity. To summarize: the scholarship of the nineteenth century resulted in this, either a supernatural Bible with a supernatural Christ or no Bible and no Christ at all.<sup>88</sup>

Boice asserts that just as the Pharisees failed to deny the miracle Jesus had performed for the blind man, so too did the liberal theologians of the nineteenth century fail in their efforts to discredit the supernatural aspect of the person and work of Christ.<sup>89</sup>

Boice explains how liberals, after their failure to deny the historicity of the supernatural in the gospel accounts, attempted to do what the Pharisees did next in John 9. The Pharisees could not deny that the miracle had occurred (the blind man could see), so they sought to separate Jesus from the miracle. Boice notes that this is precisely what liberal theologians endeavored to accomplish as well:

Following their failure in the nineteenth century to discredit the miraculous, scholars tried to . . . separate Christianity from Christ . . . to divorce the so-called heart of Christianity from anything objective; that is, to divorce Christian experience from the actual life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It is not so much what Jesus

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<sup>87</sup> Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 3:719.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Boice is referring to the movement of liberal scholars to deny the deity of Christ most commonly known as the “quest for the historical Jesus.” One of the progenitors of the movement is Hermann Reimarus who, in a manuscript he wrote and published posthumously by Gotthold Lessing, accused the biblical authors of fraud in their accounts of Jesus whom he claimed was merely a political figure who failed in his attempt to win Jewish independence. David Strauss, in his 1835 book *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined*, trans. George Elliot, Cambridge Library Collection (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2010), viewed all of the miraculous accounts of Jesus in the Gospels as myth. William Wrede, in his 1901 book *The Messianic Secret*, trans. J. G. C. Greig (Cambridge: James Clarke and Co., 1971), claimed the use of the “messianic secret” in Mark’s gospel was a literary device used by the early church demonstrating that Jesus never claimed to be divine. However, Albert Schweitzer’s 1906 book, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, trans. W. Montgomery (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2005), debunked the work of the aforementioned scholars claiming their methods were too subjective and that they merely transferred their own predilections about Jesus onto the gospel accounts.

actually said and did that is important, we were told, but rather what Jesus means to Christians today.<sup>90</sup>

The problem, Boice explains, is that if the gospel accounts of Jesus are not historically accurate, then there can be no Christian experience:

There would be nothing to continue, for Christianity would have been forgotten about and buried long ago. No one can successfully separate cause from effect. So if there is a genuine Christian experience, there must be a genuine Christ, the Christ of the Gospels, to account for it. Without this cause there is no valid experience and no Christianity.<sup>91</sup>

Boice rightly asserted that if the historicity of Jesus, as presented in the gospel accounts, were denied, then the structure of Christianity and all its doctrines crumble.

Boice concludes this sermon on John 9 by appealing to those who may be tempted to side with the approach of liberalism instead of believing in the objective, historical accounts of Jesus. Some may know people who became Christians only because they were pressured to do so, and thus, they seek to separate Christian experience from Jesus. Others may object to the miraculous accounts in the Gospels that explain “why those popular books that seek to explain the ‘true’ origins of Christianity appeal so strongly to you.”<sup>92</sup> Boice urges both conservatives and liberals in his listening audience “to refuse to listen any longer” to the tenets of liberalism, but instead “open your ears [and] hear the voice of Christ. Believe him . . . throw yourself upon him.”<sup>93</sup>

Boice offers another perspective in his variance with theological liberalism in an entire sermon titled “The Misuse of the Scriptures,” on John 5:39-44. This sermon is dedicated to Boice’s argument that one of the goals of theological liberalism is “to pervert the Bible by considering it an end in itself in our day.”<sup>94</sup> What Boice meant by this

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<sup>90</sup> Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 3:719.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 3:722.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 2, *Christ and Judaism (John 5-8)*

statement is that liberalism, in denying the inspiration and historicity of Scripture, effectually renders Scripture and orthodox Christianity as unavailing for modern audiences. Going as far back as the work of liberal German theologian Hermann Reimarus and the beginning of the “quest for the historical Jesus,” Boice shows how liberalism sought to “distinguish between the historical Jesus, who actually lived, and the Jesus of the New Testament, who was largely a product either of the faith or imagination of his followers.”<sup>95</sup> Reimarus chose the Jesus of history who is stripped of any supernatural characteristics and died a disillusioned revolutionary. Boice observes that “Reimarus thought that Christianity was the product of the disciples who stole the corpse, proclaimed a bodily resurrection, and gathered followers.”<sup>96</sup> The work of Reimarus, Boice notes in the sermon, “set the pattern for a whole century of historical-Jesus research” demonstrated by the work of “Davis Friedrich Strauss [who] rejected most of the gospel as mythology,” and “Bruno Bauer [who] ended his quest by denying that there ever was a historical Jesus. Bauer explained all the stories about Jesus as the products of the imagination of the primitive Christian community.”<sup>97</sup>

Boice refers to the work of Albert Schweitzer, who functionally ended the “quest for the historical Jesus,” by arguing that “each scholar only succeeded in producing a Jesus in his own image.”<sup>98</sup> However, the work of Reimarus and others had set the course for much of the future of theological scholarship, at least in mainline denominations, to venture away from traditional perspectives of embracing the Bible as accurately historical:

One can hardly fail to be impressed even today at the immense energy and talent that German scholars poured into this so-called “quest” for the historical Jesus, but the

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(Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 429.

<sup>95</sup> Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 2:429.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

results were meager and wrong. Scholarship had made the Gospels an end to themselves, so that the Bible became a book to be weighed and manipulated rather than believed and obeyed. . . . The result was that the Jesus produced was neither the historical Jesus nor the Christ of Scripture. Christ was the casualty. Here, then, was the error of Judaism, repeated on western soil and in recent history.<sup>99</sup>

In essence, the Christ of Scripture was being scrutinized out of existence by liberals.

A principal way, according to Boice, in which liberal scholars after the nineteenth century “historical quest” discredited the historicity of Jesus was to move beyond the notion that the Gospels were the errant accounts of eyewitnesses of Jesus, and argue instead that they were the product of the early church that came after the time of Jesus. A key proponent of this theory was Rudolf Bultmann, whom Boice called “the father of form criticism” and whose “energy was expended on stripping away what he felt to be the ‘mythology’ of the New Testament writers.”<sup>100</sup> Bultmann believed the church was “creative” in its telling of the story of Jesus, which was based not on historical accounts, but “by its experience with the risen Lord.”<sup>101</sup>

Boice referred to Bultmann’s views as “an existential approach to Christianity in which the event of revelation is localized entirely in personal encounter . . . [and] has dislodged the doctrine of revelation from a setting entirely within the sphere of systematic theology.”<sup>102</sup> As a result, Bultmann argued that “nothing may be known about Jesus in terms of pure history except the fact that he existed. . . . [Bultmann] states, ‘We can know

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<sup>99</sup> Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 2:429.

<sup>100</sup> Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, 82.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. See Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1934).

<sup>102</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Witness and Revelation in the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 13. This book is Boice’s doctoral dissertation in which he argues that those bearing “witness” in John’s Gospel, namely Jesus, John, and John the Baptist, are in fact providing revelation from God. In essence, the dissertation is an apology against the work of Bultmann, whom Boice frequently cites in this work, who claimed that in John’s Gospel “there is no content to Christ’s revelation of the Father . . . neither is there specific content to Christ’s revelation of himself. That is to say that Christ’s words have no revelational content at all.” Ibid., 56-57.

almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus.”<sup>103</sup> Boice challenged the views of Bultmann in his final sermon in the series on John:

For Bultmann and his followers the New Testament in no sense comes from eyewitnesses. Instead, Bultmann envisions a period in which stories of Christ circulated in the church and in which they were formed and embellished (even invented) on the basis of the church’s current needs and its understanding of the significance of Jesus. The New Testament is therefore the product of the church and not of the apostles. . . . On this basis Bultmann says we can merely affirm that Jesus existed but denies we can have any certain historical information about him.<sup>104</sup>

Since the New Testament is the product of the church after the time of Jesus, according to Bultmann, Boice says that “he writes volumes of theological exposition but denies that Christian revelation possesses propositional content.”<sup>105</sup> Boice disagrees with Bultmann and chooses to take the text of the sermon (John 21:24-25) at face value as the testimony of what an eyewitness of Jesus “led by the Holy Spirit considered necessary for us to know concerning him. It follows that we can read these words with the confidence that this is the case, and that Jesus was indeed as they describe him.”<sup>106</sup>

### **Authority and Inerrancy of Scripture**

Boice expresses his belief that the liberal view of Scripture is wrong first and foremost because it contradicts Jesus’ view of Scripture as authoritative and inerrant. In his sermon on John 10:35, Boice states,

Christians of an earlier century had a high view of the Bible because the Bible has a high view of itself. Or, to put it in other language, Christians regarded the Bible as the infallible Word of God because the Lord Jesus Christ himself so regarded it. . . . For when Jesus Christ said, somewhat as an aside, “the Scripture cannot be broken,” he was saying (at the very least) that the Scripture cannot be “broken into” or

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<sup>103</sup> Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, 82.

<sup>104</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 5, *Triumph through Tragedy (John 18-21)* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 1662-63.

<sup>105</sup> Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, 72.

<sup>106</sup> Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 5:1663.

“faulted.” That is, Scripture cannot be wrong. . . . It means that Scripture cannot be emptied of its force by being shown to be erroneous.<sup>107</sup>

Jesus’ claim that no “iota” or “dot” would pass away from Scripture and that he had come to fulfill Scripture rather than abolish it (Matt 5:17-18) is also evidence for Boice that Jesus espoused the infallibility of the Bible.<sup>108</sup> In addition, the church for most of its history held the same regard for the Bible’s authority and inerrancy as Jesus—an argument Boice made in multiple sermons in John exemplified in the sermon on John 5:37-38:

The low view of Scripture that prevails in our day is a fairly recent development in light of the broad flow of church history. It goes back no more than two hundred years. A student of church history knows that up to the time of the Reformation almost no one within the church doubted that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are uniquely the Word of God. Even heretics accepted this principle. Thus, all who claimed to be Christians recognized that the Bible is a divine authority binding upon all men and that it contains objective truths that transcend human understanding.<sup>109</sup>

Against the claims of liberal scholarship, the teaching of Jesus and the vast majority of Christian history declared the Bible to be the Word of God.

Again in his sermon on John 10:35, Boice notes the long-standing opinion of the majority of Christians throughout church history that the Bible was infallible and authoritative:

It was the glory of the church that in its first sixteen or seventeen centuries all Christians in every place, despite their differences of opinion on theology . . . exhibited at least their mental allegiance to the Bible as the supreme authority for the Christian in all matters. . . . It was the only infallible rule of faith and practice.<sup>110</sup>

Boice saw the higher criticism of the Bible, not as a credible and time-tested discipline,

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<sup>107</sup> Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 3:797.

<sup>108</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Does Inerrancy Matter?* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1980), 16-17. Boice also argues that Jesus’ high view of the Old Testament is evident in how he frequently appealed to its infallibility when he cited Deuteronomy three times in the wilderness while being tempted by the devil (Matt 4:1-11); answered the Pharisees regarding marriage in heaven and the reality of the resurrection (Luke 20:27-40); defended his cleansing of the temple (Mark 11:15-17); and claimed to be fulfilling prophecy of Scripture when he read from the Isaiah scroll (Isa 61:1-2) at the synagogue in Nazareth in Luke 4:18-19.

<sup>109</sup> Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 2:416.

<sup>110</sup> Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 3:797.



but rather as a new invention steeped in modern, man-centered philosophy:

In the nineteenth century a critical appraisal of the Scriptures, backed by a naturalistic rationalism, succeeded in dislodging the Bible from the place it had previously held. For the church of the age of rationalism the Bible became man's word about God rather than God's word to man. And when people rejected the unique, divine character of the Bible, they rejected its authority also.<sup>111</sup>

Boice demurs scholars who approach their study of the Scripture from a hermeneutic of skepticism, looking only for what is in error or is not credible. In regard to liberal scholarship's view of the Bible, Boice puts forth the axiom, "Higher criticism does not make the highest possible view of the Scripture untenable. On the contrary, higher criticism must be judged and corrected by the biblical revelation."<sup>112</sup>

Boice elucidates in the sermons on John the important argument that those who reject the divine inspiration of Scripture also reject its authority. The loss of the Bible's authority in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is due to the rejection of its unique, divine character—namely its inerrancy and infallibility.<sup>113</sup> Boice's argument might be rendered: if the Bible is not objectively and historically true, then it cannot be inerrant; thus, it has no binding authority over man. For Boice, inerrancy of the Scripture is inseparable from its authority. The sermon on John 21:17 expresses this argument:

Inerrancy and authority go together, for it is not that those who abandon inerrancy as a premise on which to approach the Scriptures necessarily abandon a belief in their authority. On the contrary, they often speak of the authority of the Bible most loudly precisely when they are abandoning the inerrancy position. It is rather that,

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<sup>111</sup> Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 2:416.

<sup>112</sup> Boice, *Foundation of Biblical Authority*, 138-39.

<sup>113</sup> Boice generally uses the terms *inerrancy* and *infallibility* as they apply to the nature of the Bible in an interchangeable manner. However, other scholars seek to distinguish the terms. Justin Taylor notes that generally *inerrancy* means "without error" and carries an idea of precision, while *infallible* is a stronger term meaning "incapable of error." Justin Taylor, "Inerrancy and Infallibility: Truth Claims and Precision," The Gospel Coalition, September 16, 2011, accessed February 23, 2018, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/inerrancy-and-infallibility-truth-claims-and-precision/>. John Frame argues more for Boice's usage of the terms in an interchangeable way in that *inerrancy* should not be taken to lexically mean *precision* (i.e., if an author said he wrote a 400-page book that was actually 398 pages, he would still be telling the truth). Frame states, "Inerrancy, therefore, means that the Bible is true, not that it is maximally precise. To the extent that precision is necessary for truth, the Bible is sufficiently precise." John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P and R, 2010), 171.

lacking the conviction that the Bible is without error in the whole and in its parts, these scholars and preachers inevitably approach the Bible differently from inerrantists, whatever may be said verbally. In their work the Bible is searched for whatever light it may shed on the world . . . not as binding and overpowering revelation that tells us what to think about the world and life and even formulate the questions we should be asking them.<sup>114</sup>

In other words, liberals may claim the Bible is authoritative, but that claim is misplaced if at the same time its inerrancy is rejected. What makes the Bible truly authoritative, to embrace its objective and propositional truth, is to hold to its inerrancy. Denying the inerrancy of Scripture and claiming its authority is intellectually disingenuous, says Boice, which results in a brand of authority that is weak and untenable:

It is hard to miss the connection between belief in the authority and inerrancy of Scripture issuing in a commitment to expound it faithfully, on the one hand, and a loss of this belief coupled to a neglect of Scripture and inability to give forth a certain sound, on the other.<sup>115</sup>

Boice observes that “the overthrow of biblical infallibility is a *fait accompli*” given the “scientific development of the last century has rendered untenable the whole conception of the Bible as a verbally inspired book to which we can appeal with absolute certainty.”<sup>116</sup>

In keeping with his approach to encourage conservatives to remain conservative regarding their view of the Bible and hopefully for liberals to abandon their heterodox views, Boice teaches his audience that to adhere to a high view of Scripture can be costly in modern times, but is crucially important:

In such a time there is a challenge for those who still adhere to the view of Scripture that the Lord Jesus Christ taught and who boldly exalt the Word as the final revelation of the Father and the final arbiter of human thought and conduct. . . . The Christian need never fear to stand upon the Word of God, recognizing its full authority, as the Lord Jesus Christ did. At times there will be critical theories that run against it. The arguments may seem unanswerable . . . but the Christian who will stand upon Scripture will find even within his lifetime that, as the “so-called assured results” begin to crumble about the scholars, the view of the Bible held by the Lord Jesus Christ, the historical view of the church, will prevail.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 5:1645.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, 71.

<sup>117</sup> Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 2: 417, 420. This quote is an important insight into the fact that

As liberalism became the mainstream within the UPCUSA, Boice understood the cost conservatives would have to pay to stand for orthodoxy.

The desire of Boice is for the church (and his denomination) “to push back to its original position” on inerrancy, but he laments that “this does not seem to be happening . . . some evangelicals . . . seem to be moving in a more liberal direction, displaying an increasingly ambivalent attitude toward infallibility.”<sup>118</sup> Boice adds a moral element in his argument for the authority of Scripture in hopes to persuade his audience to submit their lives to the authority of the Bible:

Let us be clear about the fact that we live in a day when men and women have grown unhappy with this book and have therefore thrown it off. Let us also note that they have done so because they do not like what it says, not because it has been shown to be untrustworthy. The standard view is that modern biblical criticism has shown that the Bible contains errors. . . . But the fact that this is not the major reason why the Bible is neglected is seen in the truth that most people who neglect the Bible cannot . . . prove it to be in error. So it is not the supposed errors that have turned them off, but the Bible’s teaching. It is that the Bible reveals men and women to be in need of a Savior.<sup>119</sup>

In light of the modern mind-set, the Bible has become an increasingly unpopular book, but Boice urges submission to the Word of God because of its divine and inerrant nature.

As he did in the series on Genesis, Boice also demonstrates in the series on John that the foundational issue people actually have against the Bible is not intellectual in nature, but rather a rejection of the claims of the Bible that all must come under the authority of Christ and his Word. A quote from the sermon on John 11:27 serves as an excellent summary to those sermons and parts of sermons in the series on John that sought to contend for the authority of God’s Word:

The scientific development of the last century has rendered untenable the whole conception of the Bible as a verbally inspired book, to which we can appeal with

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Boice genuinely thought the stronghold of liberalism would be discredited sooner than later and partially explains why he held out as long as he did in the UPCUSA hopefully to see such a revival of orthodoxy come to fruition in his own denomination.

<sup>118</sup> Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, 70-71.

<sup>119</sup> Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 3:857.

absolute certainty for infallible guidance in all matters of faith and conduct. . . . What shall we do then? Shall we also throw off the Bible and with it the words of Christ? How can we? If we were to do that, we would be abandoning the only source of spiritual knowledge available to fallen man, and we would be rendering an answer to the question, “Do you believe this?” impossible. . . . Indeed, all is uncertain and there are no answers to the great spiritual questions that confront us. On the other hand, with the Bible as a base we can go on to sure knowledge and expanding faith.<sup>120</sup>

Boice notes, “Without a sure word from God we cannot believe anything.”<sup>121</sup>

## Doctrines

As noted in the sermons on Genesis, a departure from adhering to the Word of God as historical and authoritative leads to a corruption of orthodox thinking concerning the great doctrines of the Bible, which are foundational to Christianity. Boice enumerates a number of these doctrines throughout the series on John and seeks to defend against modern, liberal extrapolations of interpreting the doctrines in favor of historic, conservative views. Boice warns against such “new” interpretations of Christian doctrine in his sermon on John 14:25-26:

We have a tendency, especially in America and in our age, always to be inventing theology. Churchmen speak about “process theology” today. It means “evolving” theology. But this is not the outlook of the Scriptures. Some of our contemporaries seem always to be searching the Bible in the light of newspapers and popular books in order to come up with something that no one has ever heard before. . . . This is the nature of *The Passover Plot* and other popular religious books. . . . The Holy Spirit does not give us new doctrines. Rather, he brings old truths to our remembrance.<sup>122</sup>

One of the hallmarks of liberal theology, Boice argued, was to create new doctrinal standards that meshed with the trends of popular culture, rather than standing for orthodox views when such views were despised by the culture.

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<sup>120</sup> Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 3:857.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 4:1150. *The Passover Plot: A New Interpretation of the Life and Death of Jesus* (New York: Bantam, 1965) was a popular book written by Hugh Schonfield that argued Jesus was merely a religious man and messianic imposter who hatched a scheme with colleagues to feign death on the cross, revive in the tomb, and then fool his followers to believe he had risen from the dead (the plot failed when the Roman soldier stuck a spear in Jesus’ side).

Boice provides numerous examples in multiple sermons in John indicating how liberal scholars have invented new ways to understand doctrine. In regard to the resurrection of Jesus, Boice refers to “a well-known French critic of the Gospels, Ernest Renan, [who] argues that Christian faith in the resurrection was the result of the rumors spread by Mary Magdalene, who had suffered a hallucination, thinking she had seen Jesus.”<sup>123</sup> In a letter responding to a question regarding the exact time the resurrection occurred, Boice states that more important than ascertaining the exact moment of Jesus’ resurrection is the fact that the gospel accounts affirm his bodily resurrection.<sup>124</sup> Soteriology, under liberal scholarship, has become “nothing but a sellout to a watered-down doctrine of universalism that will make the Christian religion popular.”<sup>125</sup> Consequently, this view has created “a day when men and women are won over to ego-tickling dogmas of universalism, the idea that all will be saved. But there is nothing in the Word of God to justify that conclusion.”<sup>126</sup> Concerning the deity of Jesus, Boice bemoans that “the weight of secular opinion, steeped as it is in skepticism, is against the conclusion that Jesus is God.”<sup>127</sup>

Sufficient evidence from Boice’s sermons in John have already been provided regarding the doctrine of Scripture, but the following quote from his sermon on John 5:39

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<sup>123</sup> Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 5:1564.

<sup>124</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Myron Horst,” April 15, 1975, series 4, box 3. An interesting side note in this letter is Boice’s view regarding the activity of Jesus between his death and resurrection. Boice writes, “It is my conviction that Jesus entered the abode of the righteous in sheol during the time between his death and resurrection and that he proclaimed deliverance to them and, indeed, delivered them from sheol, taking them with him into glory. As a result, those who die in the Lord today go not to sheol but into the presence of God.”

<sup>125</sup> Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 1:293.

<sup>126</sup> Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 2:627.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:573.

reveals why he deemed it necessary to speak often about the nature of the Bible and its misuse:

It is not unusual in our day for men and women to have a low view of the Bible. Many persons, including professors of theology and ministers, feel that the Bible is man's word about God rather than God's word about man and so devalue it. Therefore, it is necessary to speak as Christ did, stressing the divine origin of the Bible and pointing out its supernatural characteristics. At the same time, possessing a low view of Scripture is not the only error embraced by people today. Many misunderstand it. . . . As a result of this it is necessary also to speak of its purpose, which is, above all else, to reveal Christ Jesus.<sup>128</sup>

The reference to theology professors and ministers in that quote is no doubt addressing the issues Boice was facing in the UPCUSA. A final example of the turpitude of liberal theology on key doctrines, according to Boice, is missions and evangelism. Concerning this doctrine, Boice decries that liberals have converted missions and evangelism to social work divorced from sharing the gospel of Christ:

We have allowed unbelieving churchmen to drive a wedge between evangelism and social service and then push us into only one half. Moreover, we have convinced ourselves that we are fully obeying the Lord by doing it . . . [but] we must evangelize. This too is a command of Christ, and if liberal churchmen will not do it, then we have an even greater burden to carry the gospel to all who have not heard it.<sup>129</sup>

This quote reveals not only Boice's commitment to sharing the biblical gospel with the lost, but also his conviction for staying in the UPCUSA. If liberals within the denomination were not sharing the gospel, then conservatives needed to stay and do the work of evangelism.

### **Man-Centered Philosophies**

The philosophy that began the modern theological liberal movement, according to Boice, is rationalism. The loss of biblical authority and its absolute truth within the church (and Boice's own denomination) begins with man believing his wisdom is greater

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<sup>128</sup> Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 2:421.

<sup>129</sup> Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 3:943. This quote presumably is a reference to the Confession of 1967, which focused more on social work than the gospel in missions.

than that which is recorded in Scripture. Boice explains this premise in his sermon on John 2:18-22:

Some persons think they can know God by means of their own human reason. But reason is a blind alley spiritually. It has always been the great minds exercising their powers apart from the Word of God who have produced the great heresies. . . . I believe that we can state categorically that there is no knowledge of God apart from Jesus Christ and that there is no knowledge of Jesus Christ apart from a knowledge of the Bible.<sup>130</sup>

In the sermon on John 10:40-42, Boice issues a similar warning about the dangers of rationalism placing the wisdom of man in superior position over the wisdom of the Bible. He calls for the growing trend of rationalism, which he observed in the UPCUSA and the church at large, to be reversed:

How shall we avoid [this] error [of rationalism]? There is only one way: by a diligent study of God's Word and a faithful adherence to it. We must not trust our own understanding. Our reasoning must be judged by this book. There is much of human opinion in Christianity in our century. God grant that such a trend might be changed, and that we might be in the vanguard of those who change it.<sup>131</sup>

Boice certainly sought to be a leader in that vanguard, which would reclaim his own denomination for faithfulness and confessionalism in its beliefs and practice of Christianity.

Boice highlights the philosophies that develop the foundation of rationalism in a similar way as he did in the sermons in Genesis. One of the first consequences of rejecting Scripture as a source of absolute truth is relativism. In the sermon on John 18:37-38, Boice provides a brief sketch of the work of W. F. Hegel, generally considered the father of relativism:

Hegel was a German professor who, in a series of brilliant books, advanced the proposition that truth is not an absolute but rather is something that is always evolving. . . . In Hegel's view . . . every fact, theory, or "truth" may be called a thesis, which by its very existence produces an antithesis. At first these appear as opposites, but in time they come together to form a synthesis. According to this system truth is relative. It depends upon whom you are asking and of what period

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<sup>130</sup> Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 1:175.

<sup>131</sup> Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 3:805.

you are asking. . . . Or again, it may be true for me but not for you. This is Hegel's heritage for the modern world.<sup>132</sup>

A linchpin in liberal theology was a Hegelian understanding of truth.

In the sermon on John 1:14, Boice makes plain what Hegel's work did to destroy the foundation of absolute truth in favor of relative truth:

People no longer believe in truth. They did believe in truth before the impact of the philosophy of Hegel. In that day, if one fact was true, the opposite fact was believed to be true or false. . . . After Hegel, the idea grew that reality was to be represented not by what is true as opposed to false but rather by what is true now or, worse yet, by what is true only for the individual. Under this system my truth is not necessarily your truth, and what is true for me now may not be true for me tomorrow.<sup>133</sup>

The triumph of relativism in modern society paved the way for liberal scholars to apply its tenets to the Christian faith and its doctrines: "We have entered a period of history in which truth is supposed to be relative and in which no system of ideas is recognized by the majority of all men to be binding."<sup>134</sup> If Scripture is not absolute truth, then it is not propositional or binding, and the Bible can mean what any individual wants it to mean.

This is not how the Scripture presents itself, as Boice explains:

Today, even in books of theology, we are presented with the idea that Christian doctrine is not so much true as it is helpful. . . . This is diabolical. It is not the philosophical basis of Christianity. Instead, when you come to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, you come to a specific declaration that certain things are really true for all time, whatever they may mean to you personally. . . . The answer is that we are dealing with truth, real truth, when we present the claims of Jesus Christ and Christianity.<sup>135</sup>

Boice summarized relativism in this same sermon when he noted that upon being presented with something as truth, "You can take it or leave it, sift it or drop it, all according to its practical value to you personally."<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 5:1442.

<sup>133</sup> Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 1:95.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*



Humanism represents another philosophy that arises from a rejection of the authority of Scripture. In his sermon on John 17:14-17, Boice states, “A rejection of the Scriptures as the wisdom of God has serious consequences. . . . Men and women cannot operate without authority. . . . If you reject the authority of God, human authority will emerge.”<sup>137</sup> Exchanging the authority of God for the authority of man results in what Boice terms “the world’s theology,” which is defined by a view that “man is basically good, that no one is really lost, and that belief in Jesus is not necessary for salvation.”<sup>138</sup> This view was growing in acceptance in the UPCUSA, and Boice warned that the denomination, by embracing the Confession of 1967 and the “world’s theology,” had redefined the historical definition of theological terms:

One consequence [of the Confession of 1967 and the world’s theology] is that the theological terms that we have always used and which the church continues to use are redefined. . . . Having adopted the world’s theology, they no longer mean by these terms what evangelicals mean when they speak biblically. [Therefore], “sin” means . . . oppression that is supposed to reside in social structures. . . . “Jesus” becomes, not the incarnate God who came to die for our salvation, but the pattern for creative living. . . . “Salvation” is liberation from the oppression of this world’s structures. “Faith” is no longer believing God and taking his Word at face value, because his Word is not believed and taken at face value, but rather awareness of the situation as we see it.<sup>139</sup>

One of the ways liberal theology functions outside of the confines of orthodoxy while at the same time maintaining the veneer of true Christianity, Boice observed, is to redefine the terminology used within the confines of orthodoxy.

A negative consequence of the humanistic theology of the world was that it led to the church’s loss of influence resulting ultimately in its irrelevance. Boice quotes Peter Berger to describe how such irrelevance occurs:

If there is going to be a renaissance of religion, its bearers will not be people who have been falling all over each other to be “relevant to modern man.” . . . Strong eruptions of religious faith have always been marked by the appearance of people

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<sup>137</sup> Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 4:1302.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:1302-3.

with firm, unapologetic, often uncompromising convictions—that is, by types that are the very opposite from those presently engaged in the various “relevance” operations. Put simply: Ages of faith are not marked by “dialogue” but by proclamation.<sup>140</sup>

Boice declares that the antidote to the church’s loss of relevance and influence is to avoid man-centered theology and instead turn to “regular, disciplined, and practical study of the Bible” without which “the church will always be secular.”<sup>141</sup> Boice proclaims in the sermon that a true, biblical church will always believe and act in an opposite way from a worldly church that has abandoned the Bible’s authority: “If the secular church employs the world’s wisdom, the world’s theology, the world’s agenda, and the world’s methods, the true church will invert it.”<sup>142</sup>

### Healthy Unity

In the series on John, a few sermons contain rare occurrences of Boice directly calling out leaders and events occurring in the UPCUSA with which he disagreed. As can easily be ascertained from the content and number of sermon quotes to this point, Boice was active in his preaching ministry in refuting liberal theology and defending orthodoxy. Yet, Boice rarely shared his objections concerning the UPCUSA with specificity. This is because he was trying to be an agent of change for the denomination and sought to avoid building a disputatious and captious reputation that would damage his efforts at working for reform. Boice, instead, sought to address the problem of liberalism and its enmity with orthodox theology (which he did do with specificity) without deviating into denominational politics and *ad hominem* attacks. Boice was

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<sup>140</sup> Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 4:1302. The quote by Berger, oddly enough, was made in a speech Berger gave at a meeting regarding the Consultation on Church Union, a liberal movement spearheaded by Eugene Carson Blake to unite the largest mainline denominations in the United States. See Peter L. Berger, “Needed: Authority,” *Christian Century* 88, no. 43 (October 1971): 10.

<sup>141</sup> Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 4:1304.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

undoubtedly dedicated and steadfast in his mission against liberalism, but his tempered approach is best illustrated in two sermons.

One of these sermons is on John 10:11-18, when he applied the characteristics of Jesus as the Good Shepherd in confronting liberals:

We need to be patient . . . sheep are sheep and they need to be dealt with patiently. Some regard people as anything but sheep and are always [saying] to “Go, get the liberals.” Some go too fast . . . others go too slow. We need to be patient. . . . In this as in other matters we need to learn from the Chief Shepherd.<sup>143</sup>

The second sermon is on John 16:1-4, which demonstrates that Boice’s criticisms of liberalism were not pejorative, as evidenced in the fact that he was willing to criticize evangelicals for the same reasons he criticized liberals:

Many times in my ministry I have had occasion to speak of the liberal church as “the secular church.” But to be perfectly honest, I must point out that there are areas in which the evangelical church is also secular. One of these is in some forms of evangelism. By this I mean that we are inclined to present the gospel in such a favorable light that the disadvantages (from a human point of view) of following Christ are forgotten.<sup>144</sup>

Boice’s prudent approach demonstrates his refutation of liberal theology was not one grounded merely in emotion or errant presuppositionalism, but instead was a reasoned, thoughtful approach founded in his conviction of the nature of the Bible.

There were rare occasions when Boice did mention specific examples of happenings within the UPCUSA. In the sermon on John 3:7-8, Boice refers to the Consultation on Church Union and its founders—a movement he viewed as an egregious shift toward liberalism and something that would be the demise of mainline Presbyterianism.<sup>145</sup> In the sermon, he mentions “Episcopal Bishop James Pike, who rose to national fame through his controversial opinions and frequent denials of church doctrines” who together with “the man who was Stated Clerk of the United Presbyterian

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<sup>143</sup> Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 3:762.

<sup>144</sup> Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 4:1201.

<sup>145</sup> See James Montgomery Boice, “I Believe in COCU,” *Christianity Today* 11, no. 15 (March 1967): 3-6.

Church, Eugene Carson Blake, launched the proposal for a gigantic merger of Protestant denominations (later known as the Consultation on Church Union).”<sup>146</sup> Both Pike and Blake’s “ecclesiastical rise was accompanied with an increasing decline of commitment to biblical doctrines.”<sup>147</sup> For Boice, a merger of the nation’s largest mainline denominations under the rubric of avowed theological liberalism would only add to “the impact of the organized churches in America declining” and to the fact that “Americans feel that religion is losing its influence in this country.”<sup>148</sup>

In his sermon on John 17:20-23, in which Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane for the unity of his followers, Boice notes that the kind of unity Jesus is asking for in this text is not conformity. He names the COCU as an example:

Another type of unity that we do not need is conformity, that is, an approach to the church that would make everyone alike. . . . The liberal church for the most part strives for an organizational unity—through the various councils of churches, the Consultation on Church Union, denominational mergers, and so forth.<sup>149</sup>

Boice, however, also includes “the error of the evangelical church” along the same line of unity when it “seems to strive for an identical pattern of looks and behavior among its members. This is not what Jesus is looking for in this prayer.”<sup>150</sup> Therefore, a unity that calls all participants to be rallied around errant theology or demands them to submit to a cookie-cutter uniformity is a negative unity.

In another sermon on John 10:16, 19-21, Boice strongly argues for a positive unity that avoids such uniformity: “Different denominations . . . do not bother me; for people are different, and there is no reason at all why there ought not to be different organizations within different forms of service and church government to express those

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<sup>146</sup> Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 1:212.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 4:1328.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

differences.”<sup>151</sup> Therefore, Boice believed Christians could and should have differences among themselves as long as those differences fell within the framework of sound, biblical theology. In his call for theological reformation within his denomination, Boice was by no means calling upon everyone to think and to act exactly like him. Conversely, he was calling them to biblical orthodoxy. Of note in this sermon on John 10:16, 19-21 is a penetrating quote that reveals Boice’s personal anguish brought on by those who accused him of being a liberal because he chose to stay in the UPCUSA:

The problem . . . is that believers within one denomination refuse to cooperate with believers in another denomination, justifying this on grounds that the other Christian is somehow contaminated by his associations, or is disobeying the Lord by remaining in his church, or is not actually (which is sometimes said) a Christian.<sup>152</sup>

Boice decried that there were those who were so rigid in their concept of unity that there was no room for other like-minded, but to some degree different, Christians; they could not make space for someone like Boice to remain in a liberal denomination to work for theological reform.

A final observation from the sermons in John’s Gospel is that several messages seek to give encouragement to his fellow evangelical laborers struggling for orthodoxy against the rising tide, and at times even persecution, of liberalism within the UPCUSA. In the sermon on John 9:34, Boice connects the excommunication of the man born blind at the hands of the Pharisees to the experience some conservatives were having in the UPCUSA:

It was an honor to him [man born blind] to be ejected from the company of those who would not have Jesus. So it is today. Believe me when I say that it is an honor to be thrown out of some churches. . . . The worst that can happen is that you will be rejected, but that is not bad if at the same time you are received by Jesus. So do not hesitate to be identified with Jesus.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 3:768.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:769.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:720, 722.

Boice reminds his listeners in the sermon on John 16:1-4 that Jesus warned his disciples that future persecution would come, not just from the secular world, but from religious people as well. He then applies this to the situation in the UPCUSA:

The unique thing is that, according to Christ, the persecution was to come from religious people. . . . This is worth noting, for it is the fact that persecution comes from our religious superiors that makes it so emotionally devastating. Persecution can also be bad if it comes from the secular world, but it does not strike us at the same point. It is external. When it comes from the religious authorities, it strikes inwardly, for the argument is always that they, not we, are the true church and have true religion. It is the persecuted one that is always called a heretic.<sup>154</sup>

Once again, Boice reminds conservatives of the price they must pay to defend orthodoxy.

### **Philippians**

One may only surmise why Boice chose to preach through Philippians during the time of his struggle with the UPCUSA. Genesis and John seem to be clear choices because of their rich doctrinal content and affirmation of the historicity of Scripture as well as the person and work of Jesus Christ. Perhaps Philippians was chosen by Boice for two themes that appear in the book that he developed in multiple sermons in the series.<sup>155</sup> The first theme is the deity of Christ anchored in the great kenosis passage of Philippians 2:5-11. The second theme concerns unity within the church, working together for the good of the kingdom of God as seen in Philippians 2:1-4, and the issue of the disagreement between church leaders Euodia and Syntyche. Both themes were significant issues for Boice in the battle he was waging against the UPCUSA. The doctrines of Scripture and the deity of Christ were at the forefront of those doctrines being demeaned by many in the denomination. The issue of unity gained importance in that Boice lobbied for tolerance from liberals in the UPCUSA not to force conservatives

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<sup>154</sup> Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 4:1202-3.

<sup>155</sup> Of note is that in the first sermon in the series on Philippians (1:1), Boice cites how Paul's letter to this church refutes "higher critics of the New Testament" who discredit the Pastoral Epistles because they speak of offices in the church yet to be developed at the time Paul supposedly wrote the letters. However, Philippians refers to these same offices and is "a book that only the most foolhardy of scholars would deny to be written by Paul and one that even by the most critical rating must be dated before the year A.D. 65." James Montgomery Boice, *Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1971), 21.

to act against their consciences. He also was working at this time to unite conservatives to join together in working for reform rather than abandoning the denomination.

### **Deity of Christ**

In the sermon on Philippians 2:6, Boice provides a rigorous defense of the deity of Christ, which had come under substantial attack by the liberalism of the nineteenth century manifested in both the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy and in the UPCUSA at the time Boice preached the sermon.<sup>156</sup> Boice points to Paul's usage of two Greek words in Philippians 2:6 that expresses the apostle's belief in the deity of Christ. The first word is *morphe*, expressed in the phrase "being in very nature God." Boice notes, "This word points both outward to the shape of an object and inward to ask about things that cannot be detected on the surface," and thus, Jesus "possessed inwardly and displayed outwardly the very nature of God himself."<sup>157</sup> The second word is *isos*, expressed in the phrase "equality with God." The word *isos* means "equal," and Boice points to its usage in English words such as "isomorph" (having the same form) and "isometric" (having the same measure). Boice simply states, "In Philippians 2:6 the word *isos* teaches that Jesus is God's equal."<sup>158</sup>

Boice was concerned with many in his day who did not embrace the deity of Christ and particularly with those who were not reticent to use the term "divine" pertaining to Jesus, but did so in such a nuanced manner that the definition of the word

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<sup>156</sup> In his systematic theology, Boice traces the denial of Christ's deity all the way back to the work of Sabellius, who viewed the Trinity as three different modes or aspects of God rather than three distinct persons, and to Arius who believed that Jesus was begotten by God at a point in time and thus "used the term 'divine' to describe them [Jesus and Holy Spirit] in some lesser sense than when applying it to the Father." Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, 114.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

was maligned. Such usage of “divine” stripped Jesus of his deity in any historical, confessional sense of the term. Boice explains,

How quickly these two phrases [*morphe* and *isos*] cut across the lesser confessions of Christ’s deity. Many will admit that Jesus Christ was divine in the sense, so they say, that all people are divine. Many will call him the Son of God in the sense that we are all children of God. The late theologian Paul Tillich can speak of Christ’s “permanent unity with God” in the sense that we all should attain such unity. But this is not the teaching of Scripture. When Christians speak of the person of the Lord Jesus Christ they are not speaking about any such divinity. They are speaking of the eternal and unique Godhead of the Lord Jesus Christ. And they maintain that he exists eternally as the second person of the Godhead and as such is equal with God the Father.<sup>159</sup>

Boice summarizes plainly his interpretation of Philippians 2 regarding the deity of Christ: “Everything that God Almighty is to me, so also is the Lord Jesus Christ. . . . That is the teaching of the Bible. There is no real knowledge of the Father apart from a knowledge of the Son.”<sup>160</sup>

### **Working Together**

In his sermon on Philippians 4:2-5 regarding the dispute in the church between Euodia and Syntyche, Boice talks about the importance of healthy cooperation in forming unity that is beneficial to the church and the advance of Christianity. He stresses that Paul is not teaching in this text “that Christians are to be compromising in their doctrinal beliefs. Paul is not talking about doctrine here. . . . He is not talking about compromise with the world’s standards of conduct either.”<sup>161</sup> Boice understands Paul’s admonition in Philippians 4:2-5 to stand firm on doctrinal truth, but at the same time adopt a charitable attitude that seeks to work with others when possible and avoid a rigidity that makes unity nonviable. Boice states,

[Paul] is saying that those who profess the name of Christ should be a bit bending in their attitudes, especially where other Christians are concerned. Neither are we to

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<sup>159</sup> Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, 116.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> Boice, *Philippians*, 236.



have a personality so inflexible that people bounce off it like a tennis ball bouncing off a stone wall. We are to listen to them, even tolerate their errors for a time, in order that God in his time might use us better to encourage them in their walk with the Lord.<sup>162</sup>

The previous quote is a seminal statement regarding the thesis of this dissertation. In it, Boice is clearly signaling to liberals that they should be patient and pliant in their approach to conservatives in the UPCUSA and vice versa. Boice also reveals in the last sentence of that statement his commitment to stay in the UPCUSA to work for reform and to encourage others to do so as well.

An objective for Boice remaining in the denomination was to marshal conservatives to band together in the work for reform. He articulates this desire in the preface to the publication of the first meetings of the PCRT when he calls conservatives to emulate the example of the Puritans who fought for reform in England and Scotland: “The Puritans knew one another, prayed for one another, assisted one another, loved one another. That is, they worked together in the great task of confronting their age with the gospel.”<sup>163</sup> In a letter to an Anglican bishop in Canada, Boice reveals his desire not only for the UPCUSA to experience reform, but also for other mainline denominations to do so as well. Conservatives everywhere needed to band together:

Those who believe in the Scriptures and are willing to stand by their teaching must also stand together across denominational lines if we are to be effective in resisting the secularism and dehumanizing influences of our culture. These are certainly difficult times. They would be difficult even if the church was strong, but they are immeasurably more difficult because of the weaknesses of the major denominations.<sup>164</sup>

Theological orthodoxy, for Boice, was not confined to one or a few denominations. Neither were conservatives required to agree on all issues pertaining to theology and

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<sup>162</sup> Boice, *Philippians*, 236.

<sup>163</sup> James Montgomery Boice, ed., *Our Sovereign God: Addresses from The Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology 1974-1976* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 12-13.

<sup>164</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Right Rev. Carmino de Catanzaro,” September 8, 1980, series 4, box 2.

polity. Instead, Boice called for Christians to adhere in unanimity to the core doctrines of the Christian faith while at the same time celebrating their differences.

In the sermon on Philippians 2:1-2 in which Paul encourages the church members to have tenderness, compassion, and like-mindedness, Boice gives a lengthy illustration highlighting the importance of unity and love.<sup>165</sup> The story is one told to Boice by an elderly gentleman named Speiser while Boice was doing doctoral work in Switzerland. During World War II, Speiser was assigned to a military unit where he worked alongside eminent Swiss theologian Karl Barth. Over the course of time the two men, who were from vastly different backgrounds in every sense, became close friends and came to use the most familiar, intimate form of address in the German language with one another: *Du*. Boice tells the story to illustrate Paul's teaching on the importance of unity and close relationships among believers:

Paul knew that Christians are hard to get along with. But he also knew that Christians have a duty to see more than another Christian's faults. Christians must also see the person, and they must love him or her with a love patterned on the love with which God the Father loves us.<sup>166</sup>

Boice is clearly not telling this story to encourage capitulation on biblical doctrine in order to have unity. However, the story is Boice's attempt to encourage forbearance on both sides of the liberal/conservative debate. Granted, Boice believes he is on the correct side as a conservative, and Scripture backs his position, but Boice is correct in asserting that no one will be won over to biblical orthodoxy through speech and conduct that is reviling toward others.

### **The Authority of Scripture and Doctrine**

As with the sermons in Genesis and John, Boice defends a high view of Scripture and orthodox views of Christian doctrines in his sermons on Philippians. In the

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<sup>165</sup> Boice, *Philippians*, 97-98.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

sermon on Philippians 1:20, Boice states, “The Bible is free of error and God has chosen to honor it as he will honor no human words.”<sup>167</sup> Elsewhere, Boice writes, “The Bible carries absolute authority as to the factualness of the narratives, and whenever God speaks either directly or through one of the prophets there is not only perfect accuracy but absolute authority as well.”<sup>168</sup> In response to what many in the UPCUSA had done with doctrine to suit self-serving desires, Boice quotes Handley Moule in reference to the *kenosis* passage in Philippians 2:5-11:

What a comment is this upon that fallacy of religious thought which would dismiss Christian doctrine to the region of theorists and dreamers, in favor of Christian “life!” Christian doctrine, rightly so called, is simply the articulate statement, according to the Scriptures, of eternal and vital facts, that we may live by them. The passage before us is charged to the brim with the doctrine of the person and natures of Christ. And why? It is in order that the Christian, tempted to [live a] self-asserting life . . . look unto Jesus risen and reigning.<sup>169</sup>

The authority of the Bible as superior to human self-reliance was an ongoing theme in the ministry of Boice.

Boice speaks of the authority of Scripture in the Philippians series in terms of its primal and exclusive role in the spiritual well-being of a Christian exemplified in his sermon on Philippians 3:16-19. Boice likens the Christian life to a ship that does not take orders from the ship next to it, but from the admiral on the flagship. Similarly, Christians must take their orders from Jesus, which “will not come through a mystical experience. It will come only through a knowledge of God’s Word . . . [which] contains unshakable facts and great principles, and through these God teaches us that certain things are his will for us and other things are not.”<sup>170</sup> For Boice, a relationship with Christ was not merely a

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<sup>167</sup> Boice, *Philippians*, 69.

<sup>168</sup> Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, 39.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 112-13. The quote is from H. C. G. Moule, *Philippian Studies* (Glasgow: Pickering and Inglis, n.d.), 71, 78.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

mystical experience, but was concretized by the role of Scripture in a believer's life. In this sense, Boice disagreed with neo-orthodoxy that had taken a strong foothold in the UPCUSA. "Karl Barth," writes Boice, "denied that the Bible was the Word of God, calling it only man's witness to the Word of God," and those who adhered to neo-orthodoxy "wondered if anything could honestly be termed a revelation" since "Barth stressed the transcendence or hiddenness of God."<sup>171</sup> Given the indispensable role of the Scripture in a believer's life, Boice issues the following warning,

Christians often seek holiness anywhere but by God's Word. . . . If you are to experience the divine life, you must experience it in the only way it can come—through the Bible as the Holy Spirit penetrates your heart through Scripture. . . . The Word of God is the primary means by which God reveals his will to us . . . for it is by a study of the Bible and fellowship with God that we are made increasingly as he would have us to be.<sup>172</sup>

So much of Boice's ministry centered on defending the Bible and its doctrines because of the critical role it played in a person's relationship to Christ and to the fabric of society as a whole.

Boice laments scholars who deny the historical interpretation of essential doctrines. In particular, Robert Ingersoll and Ernest Renan "used great intellect to deny the resurrection of Jesus." They claimed that belief in Christ's resurrection "arose from the passion of an hallucinating woman [Mary Magdalene]" who "was in love with Jesus and deluded herself into thinking she had seen him alive."<sup>173</sup> Boice calls distortions of biblical doctrine as exemplified in the work of Renan and Ingersoll "preposterous."<sup>174</sup> Those who deny an orthodox approach to the Bible and doctrine often accuse conservatives

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<sup>171</sup> Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, 673.

<sup>172</sup> Boice, *Philippians*, 212.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

of a lack of intellectual rigor.<sup>175</sup> However, this is far from the case for Boice, as he demonstrates in his sermon on Philippians 2:25-30:

We need to work hard in the intellectual areas. It is distressing to scout the shelves of modern-day works on theology, biblical exegesis, literature, and social criticism, and find that the overwhelming proportion of the space is taken up by the works of those who deny the fundamental doctrines of Christianity. We need clear thinkers, winsome writers, and persuasive apologists who can reverse the trends we see around us and can publish works of lasting value that will in time trickle down through the professors, seminaries, and pastors to the churches and to society at large.<sup>176</sup>

For Boice, defending orthodox views of biblical doctrine was not a vapid exercise divorced from reason. Boice expressed the hope that confessionalism would one day make a resurgence in his denomination if it could be embraced again by those in the academy and leaders of churches. As with Genesis and John, and all of the biblical books Boice preached through in a sermon series, he regularly takes time to elucidate in his teaching of various texts the unquestioned authority of Scripture.

## **Humanism**

Of the various philosophies critiqued by Boice in the sermons on Philippians, humanism emerges as the one that draws the most attention. One can easily see how he links the distortion of both the nature of the Bible and doctrine with people's desires not to want God or his Word to be the authority over them when he states in the sermon on Philippians 2:14-16: "God says, 'I want you to do this,' and we are silent because a dialogue is going on inside us. We are saying, 'Does God really mean that, or can I do it some other way?'"<sup>177</sup> Boice believed that any alteration of God's Word, regardless of how academic or consummate it may seem, always leads to error: "Even the best of [men] are contaminated by sin. . . . That is why the noblest ideals and most sublime ideologies of

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<sup>175</sup> See Rod Dreher, "Religion and Stupidity," *The American Conservative*, December 3, 2016, accessed March 2, 2018, <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/religion-and-stupidity/>.

<sup>176</sup> Boice, *Philippians*, 159.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

human beings lead away from God.”<sup>178</sup> Boice further expounds on the problem of humanism in the sermon on Philippians 2:9-11:

If you glorify human beings, you dishonor God. You do so if . . . you exalt human wisdom as that which is ultimately able to solve the world’s problems, or place your hopes for the future in psychiatry, science, systems of world government, or whatever it may be. If you exalt the ability of mankind, you dishonor God, who declares that all of our works are tainted by sin and that we will never solve our own problems . . . except by turning to Christ.<sup>179</sup>

Humanism, in leading people away from God, becomes a fatal substitute that dishonors God by supplanting his truth for man’s philosophies.

Boice provides an adept illustration in the sermon on Philippians 3:9 that a humanistic approach to the Bible and Christianity is like trying to use Monopoly money at a store. People enjoy playing the game and collecting the colorful money which is appealing to the eye, “but only a fool would take Monopoly money and go into town to buy groceries. A different kind of currency is used in the real world. It is the same spiritually.”<sup>180</sup> Just as play money has no value in a store, man-centered approaches to Christianity have “no value in heaven . . . exposing our spiritual illness and indicating why human remedies will not heal the soul.”<sup>181</sup> Boice uses the same illustration of Monopoly money in one of his books on discipleship: “God tells us that we must leave the play currency to deal in his currency.”<sup>182</sup> In the same sermon on Philippians 3:9, Boice unpacks further the futility of humanism as an attempt to supplant God’s truth with man’s truth:

No one who turns to his own reason instead of to God’s truth says, “I am living only by my depraved human reasoning and my foolish heart is darkened.” He says, “I am becoming wise. It is the believers in Jesus Christ who are foolish.” This is acute self-deception. . . . If a person will not allow Jesus Christ to begin to make him like God through grace, that person will attempt to make God like human beings. If a

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<sup>178</sup> Boice, *Philippians*, 169. Sermon on Phil 3:4-8.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>182</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *How to Live the Christian Life* (Chicago: Moody, 1973), 13.

person will not worship the true God, he will construct something else in God's place.<sup>183</sup>

The fatal error of humanism is its attempt to redefine God as no greater than man.

The litany of citations from Boice's sermons and writings demonstrates his strong commitment to refute liberal theology and to defend orthodox theology in the context of the developments within the UPCUSA and mainline denominations as a whole. The specificity and quantity of Boice's statements in which he describes doctrines, ideologies, proponents, and their applications for Christian theology and life reveal Boice's desire to see reform brought to the church that had lost its way in denying the nature and authority of Scripture in favor of man-centered ideologies. Boice's description of the purpose of the PCRT serves as an appropriate description, in part, of his preaching and writing:

The first objective is to awaken a new interest in biblical theology and to give greater visibility to the doctrines of grace through the Church generally . . . [and] to marshal resources to the end that believers might propagate the faith more effectively and thus "establish, strengthen, and settle" the Church upon the firm foundation of the doctrines of the Apostles.<sup>184</sup>

Boice's desire to reform his denomination is undisputed. The high volume of pointed refutations against liberal theology were given by Boice to achieve the goal of reformation. The question remains, however, as to whether Boice was successful in his attempt to reclaim the UPCUSA for orthodoxy.

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<sup>183</sup> Boice, *How to Live the Christian Life*, 174.

<sup>184</sup> Boice, *Our Sovereign God*, 12-13.

## CHAPTER 6

### A DIFFICULT DEPARTURE

Since Boice became pastor of Tenth in 1968, he faithfully contended for orthodoxy against the UPCUSA. However, in the early months of 1980, Boice and the congregation at Tenth concluded that they could no longer remain in the denomination “to strengthen what remains.” The church officially severed its ties to the UPCUSA on March 9, 1980, when it voted 372-7 in favor of a recommendation from its session to withdraw from the Presbytery of Philadelphia and the UPCUSA.<sup>1</sup> For Boice and the leadership at Tenth, the denomination had reached a point where any effort for theological reform had become unavailing: “The future of evangelicals within the UPCUSA is certainly . . . bleak.”<sup>2</sup> As much as Boice did not want to leave the UPCUSA in order to work for reform, he also acknowledged that staying in a denomination that had crossed any threshold of being capable of reform “would be to make a god of the denomination.”<sup>3</sup> The dissolution of the relationship between Tenth and the Presbytery of Philadelphia was acrimonious. Despite the abundance of evidence provided to this point revealing the work of Boice’s appeals for years to the UPCUSA for consideration of his theological views,

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<sup>1</sup> Records from the March 9, 1980, meeting at Tenth record the resolution that was approved by the church that “expresses its desire and intention to terminate its relationship with the Presbytery of Philadelphia and the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.; and by this action does so terminate that relationship.” *Minutes of Tenth Presbyterian Church*, Philadelphia, March 9, 1980. Responding to an April 21, 1980, letter from the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of Philadelphia, Boice writes, “It is the position of our Congregation and Corporation that they have lawfully terminated their association with the Presbytery of Philadelphia and the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. on March 9, 1980.” James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Rev. John Franklin McCleary,” n.d., series 4, box 4.

<sup>2</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Rev. Richard A. Todd,” November 10, 1980, series 4, box 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*



the presbytery stated publicly, “Dr. Boice never showed the slightest indication of a desire for reconciliation” and that he and the elders were “individualists.”<sup>4</sup>

Two principal reasons caused Boice to arrive at the conclusion that Tenth could no longer remain in the UPCUSA. The first, and most pressing reason, is that the UPCUSA passed legislation (Overture L) forcing Tenth to violate its conscience by requiring it to ordain women as ruling elders—evident in the case of Wynn Kenyon who was denied his own ordination because he would not participate in the ordination of a woman as elder. This action by the UPCUSA is something Bernard Ramm, in a letter to Boice, called “dirty pool.”<sup>5</sup> The second reason is that the UPCUSA had, in Boice’s estimation, become officially apostate in its theological positions and practices—evident in the case of the denomination allowing the ordination of Mansfield Kaseman, who denied the deity of Christ. Both reasons, along with other pertinent information on why the church finally left the denomination, are outlined in the February 1980 letter from Tenth’s session recommending that the church withdraw.

### **Letter from Session**

On February 9, 1980, Boice and the session (ruling elders) issued a letter outlining its grievances with the UPCUSA and the specific reasons that they were recommending the church sever its relationship with the denomination. The letter begins by stating that Tenth had for one hundred and fifty years (its entire history to that point) enthusiastically functioned as a local congregation of the largest Presbyterian denomination in the United States. The reason for this long loyalty to the UPCUSA is that the church “has believed that Presbyterianism comes closest to that system of belief and government

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<sup>4</sup> Paula Herbut, “Pastors, Elders Called,” *Philadelphia Bulletin*, March 12, 1980, and “Presbytery Votes to Oust Pastor, Elders,” *Philadelphia Bulletin*, March 15, 1980.

<sup>5</sup> Bernard Ramm, “Letter to James Boice,” May 20, 1980, series 4, box 4.

outlined in the pages of the New Testament.”<sup>6</sup> The basic elements of that system are delineated in the letter as threefold:<sup>7</sup>

The centrality of Scripture as the inerrant, infallible, ultimate authority of the church.

The Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms as containing that system of doctrine taught in Scripture.

The authority of the congregation, led by the Session, as the basic unit of church government.

However, the letter states that “each of those elements has been lost, and the UPCUSA has become Presbyterian in name only.”<sup>8</sup>

First, the UPCUSA had abandoned its heritage of orthodox belief in the nature of Scripture and its interpretation. For years, those who “do not believe the Bible to be the authoritative Word of God” were allowed to be pastors, teach in seminaries, and hold office in the denominational hierarchy.<sup>9</sup> The letter laments the adoption of the Confession of 1967, and in particular its amendment to the vows taken by clergy and church officers in ordination or installation from believing Scripture as “the Word of God” to accepting it as “God’s word to you.”<sup>10</sup> Thus, many church officials within the denomination believe that “the Holy Spirit speaks subjectively in today’s church, even in ways contrary to what the Bible teaches,” making “Scripture no longer function as the ultimate authority within the UPCUSA. The authority is the human majority, the authority of the fifty-one percent vote.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Letter from Session to Congregation, February 9, 1980, series 4, box 4. The letter also appears as appendix 5 in Philip Ryken, ed., *Tenth Presbyterian Church: 175 Years of Thinking and Acting Biblically* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2004), 181-89.

<sup>7</sup> Letter from Session to Congregation, February 9, 1980.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. The reference, “authority of the fifty-one percent vote,” shows the imprint of Boice on

Second, the letter views the Confession of 1967 as the document that cemented the doctrinal drift into liberalism of the UPCUSA. The Confession of 1967 undermined the Westminster Confession and the Shorter Catechism (dropping the Larger Catechism) and made them two among nine confessions to which the denomination adhered. In addition, it changed ordination and installation vows so that the candidate merely promises to be “instructed” by all the confessions rather than “sincerely receive and adopt” the Westminster standards that were previously required.<sup>12</sup> The letter describes the negative impact the Confession of 1967 had on the denomination:

These changes are not inconsequential. In practice they mean that it is virtually impossible to purify the denomination’s pastoral or administrative leadership. No one can be removed for denying the basic tenets of the Christian faith, because no one is officially required to believe them. Unfortunately, the only thing one can be removed for is refusing to follow each particular of the denomination’s Constitution or Book of Order, for the vows of ordination and installation now require one to “endorse” these while being asked to merely “accept” the Scriptures and be “instructed” by the confessions.<sup>13</sup>

A major cause of concern for Boice and the leadership at Tenth was the weakening of ordination vows to allow ministers to serve in the UPCUSA who rejected orthodox theology.

Third, the letter describes that the UPCUSA had abandoned its roots in Presbyterian church polity and governance. Presbyterianism (*presbyteros*, Greek for “elder” or “presbyter”) functions as a system of rule by elders. In contrast, bishops rule in Episcopalianism, and the democracy of Congregationalism allows each member an equal vote. However, the letter states, “Over the years the hierarchy of the church has built up power at the expense of the local congregation. Presbyteries have become stronger than local congregations, the General Assembly stronger than the presbyteries.”<sup>14</sup>

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this letter as he previously used that term on multiple occasions in sermons and correspondence.

<sup>12</sup> Letter from Session to Congregation, February 9, 1980.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. The letter from the session proved to be prophetic on the issue of overbearing

In addition, local congregations could not call their own ministers or sell its own property without consent of the presbytery. In summary, the essential tenets of Presbyterianism had been abandoned by the UPCUSA at the time of the Session's letter:

The authority of Scripture has been replaced by the authority of the fifty-one percent vote. The Westminster Standards have been replaced by our current, amendable Constitution. The authority of the local congregation, through its Session, has been replaced by a system of church courts which place ultimate power in the hands of the hierarchy.<sup>15</sup>

In the estimation of Boice and the elders of Tenth, the UPCUSA had "become a secular institution so far as its official documents and structures are concerned." The UPCUSA had become like those whom Paul had warned Timothy against, "having a form of godliness but denying its power" (2 Tim 3:5). As a result, the time had come for Boice and Tenth "to test the spirits" (1 John 4:1-2) and to explore whether Tenth could remain in the UPCUSA.

Boice and the Session unpack the difference between the questions, "When *may* one leave a denomination?" and "When *must* one leave a denomination?" Up to this point, the leadership of Tenth "elected to stay [in the UPCUSA], thereby bearing witness to the unity of the church and in order to work for change within. Our text has been Revelation 3:2, 'Strengthen what remains and is about to die.'"<sup>16</sup> The session's letter states, "There are many believing people within [the UPCUSA]" and that for a long time "its practice has often been better than its policy."<sup>17</sup> However, the time had come when

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denominational governance. Two weeks after the letter was distributed to the congregation, the Presbytery of Philadelphia wrote a letter to Boice and the session at Tenth demanding the session appear before the presbytery "to show cause why it should not be replaced by an Administrative Commission with full powers of session." It also demanded Boice appear before the presbytery "to show cause why the pastoral relationship between himself and Tenth should not be dissolved." Presbytery of Philadelphia, "Letter to James Boice and Session at Tenth," February 27, 1980, series 4, box 4.

<sup>15</sup> Letter from Session to Congregation, February 9, 1980.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

the church could no longer remain in the denomination for two reasons: (1) “when the denomination requires an individual or local congregation to do something the individual or local congregation judges to be unbiblical;” (2) “when the denomination becomes apostate.”<sup>18</sup> Apostasy is defined in the letter as a denial of a cardinal truth of Christianity, such as the deity of Christ, the vicarious atonement, the necessity for new birth, and other similar doctrines. The leadership of Tenth states that either of the two reasons is sufficient warrant for a church to leave its denomination and that “in the last few years each of these conditions has suddenly come upon us.”<sup>19</sup>

In the matter of requiring the congregation to do something that is unbiblical, the letter refers to Overture L, a mandate approved by the General Assembly requiring churches in the UPCUSA to ordain women as ruling elders. Overture L came about from a decision by the denomination’s highest ruling body, the Permanent Judicial Commission (PJC), in a case regarding a young ordinand named Wynn Kenyon, who refused to participate in the ordination of a woman as elder. Boice and the elders explain that even though the ordination of women as ruling elders in the denomination had been occurring for years, the Kenyon case negatively “prejudiced the status of all who think like Kenyon” in the UPCUSA.<sup>20</sup> Tenth’s leadership “believed it right to stay and work for any possible alleviation,”<sup>21</sup> however, “overture L changed that. Now ordination of women to the session is required, and since this takes place through election by the congregation, the members of the congregation and not just ministers and other officers are likewise affected.”<sup>22</sup> Thus, Overture L required both ministers and members of a

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<sup>18</sup> Letter from Session to Congregation, February 9, 1980.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

congregation to vote against their consciences if they believed it biblically wrong for a woman to serve as a ruling elder.

The letter provides ample detail on Tenth's position regarding women as elders as something that is clearly derived from the teaching of Scripture. The issue between Boice and Tenth ultimately was not about women being ordained as elders, but concentrated more on the authority of Scripture. The moderator of the UPCUSA at the time, Howard L. Rice, acknowledged that this was the case when he stated, "Women's ordination is the issue that's on the surface, but that's not the issue, it is differences over the authority of the Bible."<sup>23</sup> For Boice and Tenth, "The issue here is not merely *where* we stand but *why* we stand where we do. We stand where we do because of Scripture. We cannot do otherwise. We cannot ordain women to the office of teaching or ruling elder because we believe that God does not permit it."<sup>24</sup> The UPCUSA demanded that Tenth either "actively concur" or "passively submit" to Overture L, but since the church had formed its position on Scripture, it had no choice but to "peaceably withdraw."<sup>25</sup>

In addition to the UPCUSA forcing Tenth to violate its conscience, the denomination placed other constrictive practices on Tenth, prompting its necessity to withdraw. By 1980, the Presbytery of Philadelphia disallowed any seminarian from Tenth to serve in the denomination. Neither would it allow graduates from Westminster Theological Seminary to serve at Tenth, nor would it approve a transfer to a different

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<sup>23</sup> Religion News Service, "UPCUSA Moderator Says Scripture Is Issue," *Presbyterian Journal* 38, no. 30 (November 1979): 5.

<sup>24</sup>Letter from Session to Congregation, February 9, 1980. Tenth was not alone in seeing the central issue with the liberalism in the denomination as an abrogation of the authority of Scripture. A portion of a pamphlet in Boice's manuscript collection issued by a conservative group in the Albany Presbytery (New York) cites the Confession of 1967, ordination of women, and a growing acceptance of homosexuality all as symptoms of "a growing problem that is getting out of hand. . . . The primary issue, per se . . . is the fact that our denomination is away from the Bible as the supreme standard of belief and accepting the word of man as a higher authority." The Free Presbyterian, "Albany Free Presbytery," n.d., 2.

<sup>25</sup> Letter from Session to Congregation, February 9, 1980.

church by any existing minister who held the conviction that women should not serve as elders. These practices, Boice and the session conclude, “mean that if something happens to our present pastor, we will be unable to find another of like convictions able to transfer to our church. . . . We believe that in the future it will be almost impossible to find faithful, Bible-believing men to fill Tenth’s pulpit.”<sup>26</sup> In essence, the UPCUSA and the Presbytery of Philadelphia had blackballed Tenth from being able to continue in perpetuity with its current theological convictions.

In the matter of the denomination becoming apostate, Boice and the elders cite the case of Mansfield Kaseman ordained to the ministry by the National Union Presbytery of Washington, DC. Kaseman was asked, “Do you believe Jesus Christ to be the Son of God?” to which he replied, “No!”<sup>27</sup> The letter concedes that others in the denomination also denied the deity of Christ, but Kaseman is unique in that he is a duly authorized minister publicly denying a cardinal doctrine of the Christian faith. The sanctioned action of the National Union Presbytery officially made it possible for a person to be an ordained minister in the UPCUSA while denying Jesus as the Son of God. The letter, in turn, posits the question, “How can that be anything other than apostasy at the highest possible level of our denomination?”<sup>28</sup>

The letter concludes with the final recommendation from Boice and the session that the church vote to withdraw from the UPCUSA. After years of working for reform with other conservatives in the denomination, the leadership at Tenth concluded that they “have discerned no disposition in the UPCUSA to legitimate, let alone endorse, our position. On the contrary, the trend has consistently been the other way.”<sup>29</sup> By 1980,

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<sup>26</sup> Letter from Session to Congregation, February 9, 1980.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

numerous conservative churches had already left the UPCUSA or had been removed by action of a presbytery. Given the circumstance, the only thing left for Tenth to do was to follow suit with these churches:

What is there to hold us within a denomination no longer distinctly Presbyterian or even conciliatory toward those believers who disagree with it in matters such as those we delineated? We urge the congregation to consider whether it is not now time for us to “peaceably withdraw” from the fellowship of the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. and seek alignments more in line with historic Presbyterianism and the dictates of our own conscience as informed by the Scripture.<sup>30</sup>

At this point, to Boice, separation from the denomination seemed inevitable.

### **Statement on Leaving the UPCUSA**

On Sunday morning March 2, 1980, one week before the congregation of Tenth would vote on the recommendation to leave the UPCUSA, Boice interrupted his series on Genesis and spoke on the session’s recommendation to withdraw from the denomination. Boice states that he chose to say something from the pulpit the week before the vote, rather than the day of the vote, “in order that nobody can say I tried to rouse the congregation by some kind of emotional appeal.”<sup>31</sup> The message essentially reiterates the same points as the February 9, letter to the church from the session. Boice explains how the UPCUSA had abandoned the traditional Presbyterian stance on the authority, inerrancy, and infallibility of Scripture, the Westminster standards, and the authority of the local congregation as the basic unit of church government:

If you no longer have that standard [authority of Scripture] then another standard comes in, and I pointed out many times that what happens is that the good authority goes out and the authority of the fifty-one percent vote comes in. So, the majority becomes absolute and the Scriptures become secondary. This is without a doubt the position of the denomination today.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Letter from Session to Congregation, February 9, 1980.

<sup>31</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Statement on Leaving the United Presbyterian Church,” March 2, 1980, series 3, box 2.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.



The Confession of 1967, Boice argues, so watered down the church's confessional stance that "it is impossible to have anything like discipline in the UPCUSA on doctrinal matters . . . because nobody is required to believe anything."<sup>33</sup> Boice gives a gentle rejoinder to those who would desire to remain in the UPCUSA using the argument, "I'm a Presbyterian and I've always been a Presbyterian . . . "the Presbyterian church [denomination] has changed so radically that it is no longer Presbyterian."<sup>34</sup> Therefore, the only option for someone who desires to be Presbyterian "is to join with a body that is really Presbyterian in commitment to Scripture, the Westminster standards, and the authority of the local congregation."<sup>35</sup>

In his statement, Boice casts the issue of Wynn Kenyon and Overture L as a significant matter of religious liberty. He is careful to note that he is not advocating for license to do or believe anything, but for the freedom of "a body of Christian people within a congregation, guided by the Holy Spirit through the written Scriptures, to be free to worship God as they believe the Scripture teaches."<sup>36</sup> No church seeking to obey the Scripture should be threatened with the loss of their property "if they fail to conform to a denominational dictate . . . [this] is what anybody in his right mind would call tyranny."<sup>37</sup> Boice references the presbytery barring Westminster graduates or conservative ministers from being transferred to Tenth and the inability of any man from Tenth called to ministry to be ordained:

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<sup>33</sup> Boice, "Statement on Leaving the United Presbyterian Church."

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. In the statement, Boice describes a phone call he had with John Gerstner who described Overture L and the Presbytery of Philadelphia's move to replace Boice and the session at Tenth after the vote to withdraw as "nothing less than ecclesiastical tyranny and the only recourse a church has under those circumstances is to declare a termination of the relationship."

It is no longer possible for us to get the young men of our congregation ordained in the UPCUSA . . . [and] if something should happen to me tomorrow, it really would not be possible for [the church] anymore to find within the UPCUSA the kind of men that we would like to have in the pulpit.<sup>38</sup>

Boice and Tenth were now experiencing punitive actions from the denomination and presbytery for failing to adhere to the dictates of the UPCUSA.

In the years that Boice was pastor of Tenth and leading up to 1980, he contended in his correspondence that the “guilt by association” argument was not valid. Boice viewed this argument as one that had been levied against Tenth since the 1930s, and especially since the 1960s. The presence of Tenth in a liberal denomination did not make them liberal by default. Thus, Boice and Tenth were justified to remain in the denomination to work for reform. However, in his statement to the church, Boice reverses his position:

There is an accumulation of things here [in the UPCUSA] and it has gotten to the point where our association with the denomination is, whether we like it or not, at least acquiescing in the wrong, and perhaps in some indirect way giving support to it. . . . This is a criticism that has been made about Tenth . . . but we have said, “No, it seems to us that we ought not to leave . . . we ought to stay and work for improvement as long as we can.” And that is what we’ve tried to do. But now we have reached a point where we can’t do it any longer, and a continuation at this point really would be an endorsement of the very things we oppose.<sup>39</sup>

Boice continues in his statement to explain his reasoning for why he now believes remaining in the association does in fact produce guilt by association. The first reason is the Mansfield Kaseman incident. The trials regarding Kaseman revealed to Boice that the UPCUSA had come to a place in its policy in which heresy could not be dealt with either procedurally or theologically. Boice states, “Continuing in a [denomination] like that becomes a matter of acquiescing in what is not simply a question of deviation in an

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<sup>38</sup> Boice, “Statement on Leaving the United Presbyterian Church.” Boice describes how four men called to ministry in their church during the time of the Wynn Kenyon decision all left for other denominations because they could not get ordained by a UPCUSA presbytery.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

area we might consider unimportant, but a denial of something as essential to Christianity as Christ's deity."<sup>40</sup>

The second reason Boice believed "a continuation in the UPCUSA is an endorsement or acquiesce in the wrong" involved the way in which "our denomination has treated those who have dissented."<sup>41</sup> Boice described what happened to Dale Schlafer, pastor of South Presbyterian Church in Denver, who refused to ordain women as ruling elders and led his church to sever its relationship with the UPCUSA. While the presbytery meeting to determine what action to take against the church was still in progress, armed guards arrived to change the locks on the doors to keep Schlafer and the congregation out. Boice comments on this incident: "It was a horror that this sort of thing could happen in a church. By continuing in the [UPCUSA], by not protesting in the only way that's left to us, isn't it the case that we actually acquiesce in that kind of wrongdoing?"<sup>42</sup> Boice concludes his statement to the church reiterating his concern for the need for reform in the UPCUSA. He talks about how he has worked for reform for many years, "which is very difficult to do when you're a minority, but keep getting voted down." His final appeal is this:

May I suggest that the single most effective way that evangelicals in the UPCUSA could bring about the reform of this denomination at this particular moment in history would be to leave en masse. That would bring the machinery of the denomination, which is the essential problem, to an absolute standstill for lack of funds. And there would be a shakeup in the denomination that it might be possible under God to reorganize into something that's truly Presbyterian in its commitment to Scripture and the theology of the Westminster standards.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Boice, "Statement on Leaving the United Presbyterian Church."

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. On March 16, 1980, one week after Tenth voted to leave the UPCUSA, Boice preached a second sermon referencing the departure entitled "Pressing On" from Phil 3:12-14. The theme was for the church to carry on and to move forward in its evangelical vision and mission. James Montgomery Boice, "Pressing On," series 3, box 2. This sermon, along with the statement on leaving the UPCUSA, can also be found in James Montgomery Boice, "Two Sermons on Leaving the United Presbyterian Church," *Tenth* (January 1981): 16.

As difficult as these words must have been for Boice to deliver, they succinctly expressed the gravity of Tenth's situation.

Following Boice's statement on leaving the UPCUSA, Tenth elder Linward Crowe delivered a similar statement on behalf of the session. Crowe assured the church: "This is not a hasty decision that we are calling you to make. The session has spent fully two years in consideration of these issues. . . . We have been praying before the Lord for a long time."<sup>44</sup> Crowe briefly reiterates the reasons stated in the letter as to why the recommendation was being made to sever membership within the UPCUSA. He then explains why the session is calling for the congregation to vote just one month after the letter was issued.

On Tuesday, February 26, 1980, Tenth allowed representatives from the Philadelphia Presbytery to attend the regularly scheduled meeting of the session. The representatives wanted to know why the session was recommending that the church withdraw from the UPCUSA. In response, Crowe stated that the session

spent a great deal of time explaining those things. We were very frank and very open about why we feel compelled to move as we do. We gave them all the specifics in terms of what we plan to do. . . . We had what we thought was a very friendly and gentlemanly discussion.<sup>45</sup>

However, the session was "stunned to find the following day [February 27] a letter in the mail which was a call to the entire Presbytery of Philadelphia to come to a special meeting on March 7."<sup>46</sup> Crowe then read part of the letter Tenth received from the presbytery stating that it planned to remove the session and replace it with an administrative committee as well as defrock and remove Boice as pastor of the church.<sup>47</sup> Crowe reiterated

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<sup>44</sup> Linward Crowe, "Statement on Leaving the United Presbyterian Church," March 2, 1980, series 4, box 3.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Presbytery of Philadelphia, "Letter to James Boice and Session at Tenth," February 27, 1980, series 4, box 4.

the session's shock at receiving such a harsh letter after their meeting and then provided the presumed motive of the presbytery for doing so: "We assumed that the presbytery would wait until our congregation spoke. But they apparently do not want to give the congregation the freedom to speak. At least, they may want to influence that vote and try to determine what will happen."<sup>48</sup>

A more detailed examination of the mitigating factors that led Tenth to withdraw from the UPCUSA and the response of the denomination to Tenth's action, particularly regarding the physical property of Tenth, are helpful in understanding more clearly why Boice eventually was obliged to abandon his efforts toward reform.

### **Wynn Kenyon and Overture L**

As mentioned in the 1980 letter to the session, the case of Wynn Kenyon and the issue of ordaining women as ruling elders in the church became a pivotal reason why Tenth eventually left the UPCUSA. In 1974, a student at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary named Walter Wynn Kenyon informed the Pittsburgh Presbytery during his ordination that he would not personally participate in the ordination of a woman as a ruling elder. The presbytery approved Kenyon for ordination by a narrow margin, but its ruling was quickly challenged by a Presbyterian pastor named Jack Martin Maxwell, who filed a complaint with the Judicial Commission of the Synod of Pennsylvania-West Virginia.<sup>49</sup> The case eventually made its way to the Permanent Judicial Commission (PJC), the highest court in the UPCUSA. In the PJC interview of Kenyon, Kenyon was asked if he would ordain women if they were elected by his church to its session. He answered, "No," and stated that he believed ordaining women as elders was contrary to the teaching of biblical

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<sup>48</sup> Crowe, "Statement on Leaving."

<sup>49</sup> Permanent Judicial Commission of the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, *The Rev. Jack Martin Maxwell v. The Pittsburgh Presbytery*, November 18, 1974.

passages such as 1 Timothy 2:12.<sup>50</sup> When Kenyon was asked by one commissioner, “If your nominating committee presented the name of a lady for elder, would you be willing to call in another minister to then ordain her?”<sup>51</sup> Kenyon answered, “Yes.” The fact that Kenyon was denied ordination after he stated he would not interfere with the ordination of a woman as elder (and merely declared his personal conviction of his interpretation of Scripture on the issue) was especially odious to conservatives in the denomination.

The PJC overruled the decision of the Pittsburgh Presbytery, citing articles in the UPCUSA Constitution barring discrimination against women in general and to the office of ruling elder in particular.<sup>52</sup> The PJC also declared in its decision that the power of a presbytery to ordain an individual is subservient to the PJC: “Neither synod nor the General Assembly has any power to allow a presbytery to grant an exception to an explicit constitutional provision.”<sup>53</sup> Conservatives demurred the PJC ruling in two principal ways. First, Kenyon made clear that he would not interfere with the UPCUSA Constitution regarding women serving as elders when he stated he would not prohibit a woman being ordained in his church. Kenyon was not seeking to bind the denomination from abiding by its constitution through his interpretation of Scripture; rather, he sought to refrain from violating his own conscience. Nevertheless, the PJC was asking a man to violate his

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<sup>50</sup> PJC, *Maxwell v. Pittsburgh Presbytery*.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*. The PJC cited, among others in the constitution of the UPCUSA, chapter IX, section I (39.01): “The office of ruling elder shall be open to all members regardless of race, ethnic origin, sex, or marital status,” and chapter XVII, section I (47.01): “Every congregation shall elect persons . . . giving attention to a fair representation of both male and female constituency of that congregation, to the office of ruling elder and deacon.”

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* The PJC in this case cites a previous PJC ruling in 1934, which, in its estimation, gave the PJC the authority to vest greater power with the General Assembly rather than the presbytery. The ruling states,

The principle of the Constitution is that a presbytery, in conformity to constitutional requirements, is the sole judge regarding licensure. . . . At the same time, a presbytery should ever remember that it has entered into a solemn contract with the [denomination] to see that the constitutional requirements are fully complied with. (PJC, *Maxwell v. Pittsburgh Presbytery*)

conscience based on Scripture and the Westminster standards. Second, conservatives opposed the power the PJC ruling gave to itself over the presbytery. Both the issue of violating the conscience and the loss of power traditionally vested with congregations and the presbytery are mentioned in the letter to the session at Tenth authored by Boice and its elders. The PJC ruling concluded,

The issue of equal treatment and leadership opportunity for all (particularly without regard to considerations of race and sex) is a paramount concern of our Church. . . . It is the decision of the PJC that the action of the Pittsburgh Presbytery in voting to ordain Kenyon was not in conformity with the requirements of the Form of Government.<sup>54</sup>

Boice and Tenth's elders were watching the autonomy of their church disintegrate through the actions of the presbytery.

In the 1975 General Assembly immediately following the hearing of the Maxwell (Kenyon) case, a host of overtures were presented in the meeting challenging or asking for clarification of the PJC ruling.<sup>55</sup> These overtures include requests for the Book of Church Discipline to restore the right of final judgment in judicial cases to the General Assembly and not the PJC (Overture 29 from the Presbytery of Philadelphia and Overture 30 from the Birmingham Presbytery); requests for authority to be reinstated to the presbyteries to grant exceptions to explicit constitutional provisions (Overture 8 from the Pittsburgh Presbytery, Overture 57 from the Boston Presbytery, and Overture 61 from the Cincinnati Presbytery); and reaffirming the principle of religious liberty of conscience and the right of presbyteries to exempt ministers and members from conforming to particular church laws to which they are conscientiously opposed (Overture 16 from the Shenango Presbytery).<sup>56</sup> Each of these overtures voiced concern asking the PJC for

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<sup>54</sup> PJC, *Maxwell v. Pittsburgh Presbytery*.

<sup>55</sup> An overture is an official communication from a lower governing body to a higher governing body requesting the latter to take action on a particular statement or resolution. See Joan S. Gray and Joyce C. Tucker, *Presbyterian Polity for Church Leaders*, 4th ed. (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2012), 9.

<sup>56</sup> Office of the General Assembly, The United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., *Minutes of the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America*, pt. 1, November

clarification of its ruling or outright opposition asking the PJC to reverse or amend it. Despite the numerous voices of protest against the PJC, the UPCUSA even took additional steps to separate itself from its historic Presbyterianism and from adherence to the *Westminster Confession* by deepening its commitment to an agenda that would further alienate conservatives within the denomination.

In the General Assembly of 1978, Overture L was presented to the denomination, which would require all churches in the UPCUSA to ordain women as elders and was placed before the 1979 General Assembly for a vote on its ratification. Whereas the Maxwell (Kenyon) case required ministers to participate in the ordination of women, Overture L would now require all congregations to do the same. Overture L changed the wording in the UPCUSA Constitution regarding the election of elders to strengthen and to clarify its position that women can and must be ordained as elders. The overture changed the wording in sections under Form of Government to state that “every congregation shall elect *persons . . .*” to read instead, “Every congregation shall elect *men and women . . .*”<sup>57</sup> In another section, the statement “The office of ruling elder shall be open to *all members*.” was changed to “the office of ruling elder shall be open to *men and women*.”<sup>58</sup> The 1979 General Assembly approved Overture L and made a provision for churches not electing women as elders to apply for a waiver from its presbytery that lasted for three years.<sup>59</sup> However, the congregation had to demonstrate that it was making significant progress toward compliance of Overture L.

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1975 (New York: Office of the General Assembly, 1975), 182-222.

<sup>57</sup> Office of the General Assembly, *Minutes of the General Assembly*, pt. 1, 29-30.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> D. G. Hart and John Meuther, *Seeking a Better Country: Three Hundred Years of American Presbyterianism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P and R, 2007), 239.



The issue of Wynn Kenyon and Overture L certainly disturbed Boice as he struggled with the nature of Tenth's and his relationship to the UPCUSA. In one letter to a fellow Presbyterian pastor, Boice describes the climate for conservatives in the denomination following the PJC ruling on Kenyon as "a generally dismal situation."<sup>60</sup> He references a case involving a Birmingham, Alabama, church whose presbytery was requiring it to ordain women as elders. Boice was hopeful the church, which had appealed the presbytery's decision to the PJC, might be victorious, "but the PJC ruled that the clear intent of the constitution is that there shall be women elders."<sup>61</sup> This ruling was a precursor to Overture L, which would be approved three years later. Boice voiced his frustration and struggle with what he should do should the denomination force him to violate his conscience: "[We] do not know what to do. Failure to elect [women as elders], is, I suppose, defiance of the mandate of the decision, although it is not a direct order [but would soon become so under Overture L]. In conscience, I do not see how they can."<sup>62</sup>

Conservatives in the UPCUSA looked to Boice for direction regarding the issue of women as elders. One California pastor wrote to Boice immediately after the PJC ruling on Kenyon, asking,

My question which prompts this letter is how have you resolved in your own mind a denominationally fixed authority that you must ordain women to be both teaching and ruling elders? If you cannot, the PJC invites you to find another denomination to serve in which your conscience is not assaulted.<sup>63</sup>

Boice replied,

If I remained convinced that the ordination is not biblical, I would certainly refuse to comply, in which case the burden would be upon the denomination to take

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<sup>60</sup> James Montgomery Boice, "Letter to Rev. G. J. Gerard," December 9, 1976, series 4, box 3.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Robert A. Pitman, "Letter to James Boice," December 9, 1974, series 4, box 4.

disciplinary action. . . . I cannot convince myself that ordinations [of women] to the office of ruling elder is permitted.<sup>64</sup>

Boice makes two comments in this letter that are important in understanding his approach to the issue of ordaining women as elders.

First, he writes, “I prefer to avoid confrontations on such issues,” and in other letters states that the issue of ordaining women is not one he would leave the denomination over unless he is forced to participate in those ordinations.<sup>65</sup> Boice, then, was not an insurrectionist looking to pick a fight, nor was he one who enjoyed fighting and controversy. In a separate letter, Boice states,

Tenth and other conservative churches have not been “squabbling” over this issue. On the contrary, it is the denomination which has made an issue of it. Women have had the right to be ordained within the UPC for many years. The difficulty has come recently as the result of denominational pressure upon conservative churches to conform at this point or get out.<sup>66</sup>

Boice genuinely wanted to remain in the denomination as long as he could do so without his conscience being violated.

Second, Boice states in the letter, “I should say that I do not believe the evangelical church has been entirely fair to women or given them the place in the church they should have.”<sup>67</sup> Boice was not a misogynist who had a predilection against women serving in leadership capacities in the church.<sup>68</sup> Boice’s quarrel with the ordination of women as elders was strictly on the grounds that he believed the Bible did not allow it: “It

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<sup>64</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Robert A. Pitman,” December 17, 1974, series 4, box 4.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Miss Faith E. Quick,” June 18, 1980, series 4, box 4.

<sup>67</sup> Boice, “Letter to Robert A. Pitman.”

<sup>68</sup> In 1982, Boice hired Cora Hogue as a pastoral assistant focusing on adult education, counseling, and organizing small groups. In response to the charge that Boice was a misogynist, Hogue stated, “Nothing could be further from the truth. [Boice’s] understanding was that women could not serve as elders or preach from the pulpit. Beyond that, Jim was very supportive of women serving the Lord. It was Jim’s idea to have a woman serve on the pastoral staff and to have a board of deaconesses.” Ryken, *Tenth Presbyterian Church*, 127.

is our conviction and that of others who are opposed to the ordination of women as elders that the New Testament's restrictions at this point are not cultural but are timeless . . . being given for the direction of the church in all ages."<sup>69</sup>

The passage of Overture L in the summer of 1979 persuaded Boice that his efforts to remain in the UPCUSA to work for reform would have to come to an end. Nonetheless, Boice continued to fight Overture L right up to the time of Tenth's departure from the denomination in March of 1980. His correspondence reveals that he was still working to organize and to fund CUP as well as attending meetings with other leaders to think through options and strategy for conservative churches in the wake of Overture L.<sup>70</sup> Boice did not desire to leave the UPCUSA, but he believed Overture L was ejecting conservative congregations from the denomination:

As I hope I have made clear, the matter of the ordination of women is not something any of us would willingly leave a church [denomination] over. However, if the church (wrongly, we believe) insists on conformity to something we in conscience cannot do, then we will feel ourselves ejected and be forced to leave. . . . It is really too bad. Our first choice would be to remain and work for renewal.<sup>71</sup>

In another letter, Boice again expressed his belief that Tenth was being ejected from the UPCUSA by its demand that conservative churches violate their consciences:

Unless there are specific changes in the Book of Order regarding the provisions of Overture L, we are going to feel ourselves ejected from the denomination and be forced to withdraw from its fellowship. Personally, I do not have any hope at all that those changes will be forthcoming, so I expect that our church and others will be withdrawing.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Boice, "Letter to Miss Faith E. Quick."

<sup>70</sup> James Montgomery Boice, "Letter to Rev. Jim Dennison," December 21, 1978, series 4, box 2. James Montgomery Boice, "Letter to Rev. Paul T. Edwards," February 21, 1980, series 4, box 2. In this latter letter, Boice suggests that the members of CUP were considering remaining together "in hopes of perhaps one day moving back into a Reformed United Presbyterian Church."

<sup>71</sup> James Montgomery Boice, "Letter to Dr. Barry H. Downing," February 20, 1980, series 4, box 3.

<sup>72</sup> James Montgomery Boice, "Letter to Dr. Albert J. Lindsey," November 16, 1979, series 4, box 2.

By the close of 1979, Boice had little hope that the harmful policy enacted by Overture L could be reversed.

Perhaps the most important document revealing Boice's position on Overture L and the ordination of women as elders and just how personally difficult the issue was for him is a letter he wrote to a woman accusing him of being closed-minded on the issue and failing to listen to the other side. She also complains that Boice is leading organizations such as CUP against the actions of the UPCUSA. The letter, one of the longest in his collection, reveals Boice's deep commitment to the teaching of Scripture as his highest priority and is an example of one of the occasions in which Boice's ardor for orthodox theology shines through. Boice begins by thanking the woman for writing to him and then explains,

I share your concern for openness in discussing issues and certainly for honesty in presenting both sides. I wonder, however, if you really understand the problem facing those of us who conscientiously believe that the Bible opposes the ordination of women to the office of teaching or ruling elder.<sup>73</sup>

Boice responds in a somewhat trenchant manner to the accusation of failing to be open-minded about ordaining women when he states,

I do not see how you could accuse us of a lack of openness, knowing the circumstances. Those who oppose the ordination of women have certainly been open to the other point of view in that we have served for many years in a denomination that not only permits it, but encourages it. We have not seen fit to campaign against women's ordination though we believe those who practice it err and that churches do suffer when they depart from the biblical pattern.<sup>74</sup>

To his credit, Boice is careful to frame his argument on Scripture and avoids a pejorative tone.

Boice then turns the table on the woman's complaint arguing that it is the denomination, in fact, which is guilty of her charges in the intolerant way it has treated its conservative constituents: "By contrast it is the denomination itself that has been closed-

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<sup>73</sup> James Montgomery Boice, "Letter to Mrs. Frank H. McPherson," September 28, 1979, series 4, box 3.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

minded and intolerant. Not content to have established the right of women to serve, the denomination (through Overture L) has now insisted that we conform to the majority practice or get out.”<sup>75</sup> The letter reveals the anguish Boice experiences, not only over the issue of Overture L, but at the prospect of being forced to leave the denomination he has served and been a part of for so long:

This is the issue we face. Our “liberal denomination” is destroying our careers and threatening our churches. So, under the circumstances, you can well understand why we are meeting . . . to consider together what we are to do. Are we to be pushed out by one? Should we capitulate? Shall we leave together? Our [denomination] has certainly made our options hard ones.<sup>76</sup>

Boice addresses the woman’s accusation that conservatives have not thought through the issue of women’s ordination deeply enough when he poignantly argues,

We re-evaluate [our position] because we have everything to lose. We must be sure we really believe Scripture teaches what it does before we will sacrifice for it. Again, let me say that in all the discussion of this issue at the presbytery level and at General Assembly I have never heard anyone holding your position seriously attempt to deal with the Scripture specifically to this issue. No one has tried to show why 1 Timothy 2:12, for example, does not mean what it apparently seems to mean.<sup>77</sup>

Boice concludes the letter asking the woman whether she is truly asking the right question and accusing the right party on the issue:

So, do not accuse us of being one-sided or closed-minded. Rather, ask whether our denomination has been fair and biblical in dealing with us and whether you think imposing women’s ordination on the many who stand opposed to it is really worth the schism it is likely to cause.<sup>78</sup>

No doubt the issue of ordaining women as teaching or ruling elders and the provisions of Overture L forcing conservative churches and ministers to violate their conscience shaped by the teaching of Scripture was a major cause in Boice’s decision to eventually abandon his efforts to work for reform in the UPCUSA.

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<sup>75</sup> Boice, “Letter to Mrs. Frank H. McPherson.”

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

## Mansfield Kaseman

For many conservatives still remaining in the UPCUSA, the controversy surrounding the ordination of Mansfield Kaseman marked the denomination's official decline into apostasy. In March of 1979, Mansfield Kaseman, already ordained in the United Church of Christ, was called to co-pastor a UPCUSA church in Rockville, Maryland. Denominational rules required Kaseman also to be ordained as a UPCUSA minister. In the ordination interview conducted by the National Capital Union Presbytery, Mansfield denied four essential doctrines regarding the nature and work of Jesus Christ: his deity, sinlessness, bodily resurrection, and vicarious atonement.<sup>79</sup> When Kaseman was asked, "Do you believe Jesus is God?" he replied, "No, God is God."<sup>80</sup> The presbytery overwhelmingly approved Kaseman for ordination, but the decision was appealed to the synod, which in turn upheld the presbytery's decision by a three to one margin.<sup>81</sup> Further appeal was made to the PJC (*Rankin v. National Capital Union Presbytery*), which ruled on January 26, 1981, that Kaseman's beliefs were within the "acceptable range of interpretation" of the UPCUSA confessions which the Commission affirmed as embracing "the full deity and full humanity of Christ."<sup>82</sup> When pressed about his beliefs on the deity of Christ, Kaseman responded, "Jesus is one with God is a better way of saying it, but I,

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<sup>79</sup> Office of the General Assembly, United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., *Minutes of the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America*, pt. 1, November 1980 (New York: Office of the General Assembly, 1980), 116. See also John H. Gerstner, "The Apostasy of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America," Presbyterian Church in America Historical Center, St. Louis, February 19, 1981.

<sup>80</sup> Marjorie Hyer, "Highest Presbyterian Court Upholds Minister in 'Is Jesus God?' Controversy," *Washington Post*, February 6, 1981, accessed April 11, 2018, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1981/02/06/highest-prsbyterian-court-upholds-minister-in-is-jesus-god-controversy/b8175dd3-a13d-4407-a3a4-16516c2235a0/?utm\\_term=.a32659d9d99b](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1981/02/06/highest-prsbyterian-court-upholds-minister-in-is-jesus-god-controversy/b8175dd3-a13d-4407-a3a4-16516c2235a0/?utm_term=.a32659d9d99b).

<sup>81</sup> Office of the General Assembly, *Minutes of the General Assembly*, pt. 1, November 1980, 95. See also, Hyer, "Highest Presbyterian Court Upholds Minister."

<sup>82</sup> Office of the General Assembly, *Minutes of the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America*, pt. 1, 1981, 116. See also Rodney Clapp, "The Presbyterian Permanent Judicial Commission: Kaseman's Beliefs Ruled 'Within Acceptable Range,'" *Christianity Today* 25 (March 1981): 53-54.

too, am one with God.”<sup>83</sup> Those in favor of Kaseman being ordained argued that the whole affair was a matter of semantics and that Kaseman was merely phrasing traditional theological values in contemporary terms. The PJC agreed with this assessment, stating that “after examinations of unprecedented length” they found the “difference apparent in [Kaseman’s] personal wording of his answers were not denials of the doctrines.”<sup>84</sup>

The PJC action in the Kaseman case was a landmark ruling that tested the theological boundaries of the Confession of 1967: “While the ruling correctly understood Kaseman’s obligation as limited to seeking guidance from the church’s standards, the failure of those standards to uphold a doctrine so basic as the deity of Christ confirmed the worst fears of evangelicals.”<sup>85</sup> Indeed, the PJC ruling placed a greater emphasis on the denomination’s numerous, and mostly liberal, confessions rather than on biblical doctrines as the benchmark for qualification of ordination:

We believe there are implications that a different focus for candidates’ examinations may be appropriate. Whereas, formerly, the candidates’ examination sought to determine if the candidate could subscribe to the system of doctrine and the propositional statements that were a part of the Westminster Confession, by which the candidate’s theology was judged. Now the Constitution places the primary focus of the candidate’s examination not on his or her conformity with theological prescriptions but rather on the candidate’s willingness and commitment to be instructed by the Confessions of our church.<sup>86</sup>

The Kaseman controversy also seemed to emphasize the importance of ecclesiastical authority over theology in the UPCUSA. The PJC ruling considered “the inherent powers of the presbytery” as the heart of the issue, and thus, in failing to deal with Kaseman’s

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<sup>83</sup> Parker T. Williamson, “Believing Anything (or Nothing) in PCUSA,” *The Layman*, August 21, 2011, accessed April 11, 2018, <https://www.layman.org/news2f3a-2/>.

<sup>84</sup> Office of the General Assembly, *Minutes of the General Assembly*, pt. 1, 1981, 116.

<sup>85</sup> Hart and Meuther, *Seeking a Better Country*, 240.

<sup>86</sup> Office of the General Assembly, *Minutes of the General Assembly*, pt. 1, November 1981, 115.

heresy, it was more concerned with the presbytery's right to ordain Kaseman than whether it was right to ordain him at all.<sup>87</sup>

The incident involving Kaseman's ordination sparked an exodus of some fifty congregations from the UPCUSA.<sup>88</sup> It was also the final breaking point for John Gerstner, who had for so many years remained within mainline Presbyterianism working for reform and greatly influencing Boice to do the same. Gerstner believed that the failure of the PJC to repudiate the heresy of Kaseman regarding "indispensable Christian doctrine" made the entire denomination apostate by producing "the legal and constitutional apostasy of the UPCUSA denomination."<sup>89</sup> He further argued that since the General Assembly did not censure the PJC for its action in the Kaseman case or even "begin the process to repudiate its apostasy . . . every Christian is obliged to separate from the non-Christian denomination."<sup>90</sup> Gerstner did just that shortly after the 1981 General Assembly meeting, moving to the Presbyterian Church in America.

The Kaseman controversy played a significant role in Boice's decision to lead Tenth in withdrawing from the UPCUSA (as mentioned in the letter to the church from the session), though there is little in his correspondence about the issue. This is most likely because Overture L had already cemented Boice's decision to leave the UPCUSA and the PJC ruling on Kaseman came a year after Tenth had already withdrawn from the denomination. Boice did write to one pastor, "We have been following the Mansfield Kaseman affair closely. It is hard to believe that any presbytery in the UPCUSA would go ahead with an installation when the man has made the kind of explicit denials

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<sup>87</sup> Williamson, "Believing Anything (or Nothing) in PCUSA." *The Layman*, August 25, 2011, accessed April 11, 2018, <https://www.layman.org/news2f3a-2/>. See also Office of the General Assembly, *Minutes of the General Assembly*, pt. 1, November 1981, 114.

<sup>88</sup> Hyer, "Highest Presbyterian Court Upholds Minister."

<sup>89</sup> Gerstner, "The Apostasy of the United Presbyterian Church."

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*



Kaseman has. But those are the days in which we live.”<sup>91</sup> However, Boice did address the Kaseman issue in the media. Although the letter from the session refers to the apostasy of the denomination, Boice told the *Philadelphia Bulletin*, “We’re not vindictive. We’re not calling the denomination apostate. We just think it’s gone one direction, and we’ve gone another.”<sup>92</sup> He did, however, criticize the UPCUSA for not ruling on the “substance” of the Kaseman case.

### **The Property at Tenth**

The disposition of the church property emerges as one of the most significant issues involving Tenth’s leaving the Presbytery of Philadelphia and the UPCUSA. Abiding under Presbyterian governance, churches in the UPCUSA did not actually own the building(s) or property on which the church sits, but rather the presbytery held ownership. The current section regarding church property in the Constitution and Book of Order of the PC(USA), which has changed little since the timeframe pertaining to this dissertation, reads, “All property held by or for a congregation . . . is held in trust for the use and benefit of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)” because “Presbyterian congregations emerge from the collective gifts of God’s people.”<sup>93</sup> Given this circumstance, one may think that a prevailing reason Boice did not lead Tenth to leave the UPCUSA sooner was that he did not want to lose the church property.

Tenth is situated in “City Center” Philadelphia in the heart of downtown and is, therefore, a very valuable piece of property. In addition, Boice was very committed to

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<sup>91</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Rev. Stewart J. Rankin,” April 9, 1980, series 4, box 4.

<sup>92</sup> Paula Herbut, “Tenth Presbyterian Prepares to Secede,” *Philadelphia Bulletin*, March 7, 1980, 1.

<sup>93</sup> Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), “Book of Order 2017-2019,” PCUSA.org, accessed April 17, 2018, [http://oga.pcusa.org/site\\_media/media/uploads/oga/pdf/book-of-order2017-electronic\\_updated110117.pdf](http://oga.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/oga/pdf/book-of-order2017-electronic_updated110117.pdf).

ministry in the inner city of Philadelphia.<sup>94</sup> In his sermon the week after Tenth voted to withdraw from the UPCUSA, Boice comments,

I want to say that we have this continuing obligation to the city of Philadelphia, and we must press on here. . . . Our concern is to be here in Philadelphia and to minister to this neighborhood. That is the basis for our concern with the property, not merely to have a building (who cares what the building is like so long as the ministry goes on), but to have a building in this neighborhood to which we're committed.<sup>95</sup>

No selfish or monetary reason played into Boice's strategy regarding his relationship with the UPCUSA, evidenced by the fact that Tenth severed its ties to the denomination before the question of the property's ownership was ever settled. Boice wrote to a fellow pastor regarding the issue of the property: "I think a seceding church must be prepared in advance to lose its property."<sup>96</sup> In another letter, Boice concedes, "Our dispute with the presbytery about property is not yet resolved and may very well go against us."<sup>97</sup> For Boice, the crux of his struggle with the UPCUSA was theological, and if it came to losing the valuable property of Tenth or capitulating to the theological liberalism of the denomination, Boice would sacrifice the property.

Upon Tenth's voting to withdraw from the UPCUSA, the Presbytery of Philadelphia acted quickly to enforce its right to ownership of the building. Included in the aforementioned letter from the presbytery to Tenth seeking to replace the session and defrock Boice was also a request to surrender the church's property and all applicable records related to it. Boice wrote, "The denomination is in the process of making its claim

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<sup>94</sup> Linda M. Boice, interview with author, Philadelphia, February 9, 2017; Michael Horton, telephone interview with author, Shawnee, OK, August 1, 2017.

<sup>95</sup> Boice, "Pressing On." Another expression of Boice's commitment to ministry in the inner city was his, along with his wife Linda, founding of the City Center Academy. This was a college-preparatory school located near Tenth for children living in the downtown area.

<sup>96</sup> James Montgomery Boice, "Letter to Rev. James A. Thomson," July 3, 1980, series 4, box 4.

<sup>97</sup> James Montgomery Boice, "Letter to Langston and Tracy," February 26, 1981, series 4, box 3.

to ownership of all properties explicit.”<sup>98</sup> However, Boice responded to the presbytery that since Tenth had terminated its relationship with the UPCUSA, the “presbytery had no authority to vest your Administrative Commission with any powers of session over Tenth or to make any of the demands referred to in your letter.”<sup>99</sup> He also stated in the same letter that “the properties of which you demand that we surrender possession were purchased by and in the name of our congregation,” and since Tenth was no longer affiliated with the UPCUSA, the buildings “created and maintained by [Tenth] constitute the property of our congregation and corporation.”<sup>100</sup> Linward Crowe’s March 2, 1980, statement to the church from the session echoes the same sentiment: “We believe that this building is ours. We believe it was built by the people of Tenth Church, that it has been paid for by them, has been maintained by them.”<sup>101</sup>

The presbytery, in light of Tenth’s response, filed suit against the church in civil court for ownership of the property. This action did not take Boice by surprise, as he wrote in a letter, “The presbytery is currently suing us for the property as expected.”<sup>102</sup> Knowing that a lawsuit was coming, Boice and the leadership at Tenth researched their dilemma and gathered information on what would likely come next and how they should prepare for it. Crowe informed the church that several things “have been made clear to us in discussions with other leading churchmen in this country who have gone through

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<sup>98</sup> Boice, “Letter to Rev. James A. Thomson.”

<sup>99</sup> Boice, “Letter to Rev. John Franklin McCleary.”

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. Bernard Ramm encouraged Boice in his fight for the church to maintain possession of the building and emphasized the self-serving motive for the presbytery to want to take it over:

I think it is sub-Christian to want to put a hold on the real estate. I have heard all the rhetoric of the denominational leaders but it is nothing more than political, religious rhetoric. The local people paid for that building and also contributed thousands to the denomination through the years. To me there is something gracious in a denomination in saying, “If you go your own way, keep the church building.” There is something odious to demand the church property. (Ramm, “Letter to James Boice”)

<sup>101</sup> Crowe, “Statement on Leaving.”

<sup>102</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Rev. Leslie M. Gonjean,” June 5, 1980, series 4, box, 3.

these kinds of problems before—Men who have gone through dozens of cases that affect relationships between presbyteries and the local church.”<sup>103</sup> Three principal areas of concern emerged from the fruit of these discussions to which Boice turned his attention.

First, Boice was aware that some other UPCUSA churches that severed ties with the denomination were almost immediately locked out of the building by a court order. One of the earliest and well-known examples was the South Presbyterian Church in Denver, Colorado. After the ruling on the Wynn Kenyon case, Dale Schlafer, pastor of the church, came into conflict with the Denver Presbytery for not ordaining women as elders in his congregation.<sup>104</sup> Just months after the ratification of Overture L in the summer of 1979, South Presbyterian severed its ties with the denomination and the presbytery immediately changed the locks on the doors barring Schlafer and other church leaders from entering the building. In the February 26, 1980, meeting of Tenth’s session in which representatives from the Presbytery of Philadelphia were present, the executive presbyter, Kenneth A. Hammonds, seemed to threaten the session by stating in the meeting that if the “session of Tenth continued along the present path it would put the presbytery and Tenth in an adversarial relationship . . . and that it was the wish of the presbytery that another ‘Denver’ not occur in Philadelphia. This referred to the lockout of a congregation by the Denver Presbytery.”<sup>105</sup>

Crowe warned the congregation in his statement that “there may be a day or two when the presbytery closes [the building] by court order,” but then assured them that their

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<sup>103</sup> Crowe, “Statement on Leaving.”

<sup>104</sup> Boice was in contact with Schlafer as evidenced in Boice’s letter to a pastor about the Kenyon case and presbyteries beginning to force churches to ordain women as elders: “Dale Schlafer has been hit with the problem immediately following the PJC decision. He is now awaiting some word from the presbytery, but he thinks the choice will be either peaceably comply or get out.” James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Rev. William G. Hay,” December 22, 1976, series 4, box 2.

<sup>105</sup> *Minutes of Session*, Tenth Presbyterian Church, February 26, 1980.

plan was to have “our trustees seek a temporary restraining order to have it reopened.”<sup>106</sup> In the interview with Mrs. Boice, she recalled a day when “we worked late into the night moving boxes of records and other items out of the building” for fear the presbytery would lock them out.<sup>107</sup> The Philadelphia Presbytery elected not to file a motion for a lockout in the interest of the minority who voted against secession and wanted to continue to use the building.<sup>108</sup>

Second, after consulting with others in his position, Boice had come to learn of the absolute necessity that a church be in as much unison as possible when it severs ties with the UPCUSA. The reason is that the UPCUSA, in dealing with conservative churches leaving the denomination, had adopted a practice of finding or creating a minority within the church in whose name they could file suit for ownership of the property. In a letter, Boice refers to a conversation he had with a consultant who advised that “the most important item is having a united stand by the congregation. If you do not have a unanimous or nearly unanimous vote, the issue then becomes: Which faction, the majority or the minority, is the true church?”<sup>109</sup>

In one case in which a UPCUSA church in Alabama voted 1,500 to 5 to withdraw from the denomination, the civil court in Alabama gave the property to the five stating that they were the continuing church.<sup>110</sup> Thus, if a church has a unanimous vote to withdraw, the courts seemingly have little choice but to award the property to the church. However, if a minority in the church votes against secession, then the presbytery views that minority as the “continuing church” through which they can take control of both the

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<sup>106</sup> Crowe, “Statement on Leaving.”

<sup>107</sup> Boice, interview.

<sup>108</sup> Herbut, “Presbytery Votes to Oust Pastor, Elders,” 2.

<sup>109</sup> Boice, “Letter to Rev. James A. Thomson.”

<sup>110</sup> Crowe, “Statement on Leaving.”

church's building and operations. This was the tactic of the Presbytery of Philadelphia regarding Tenth which they made clear in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*:

The presbytery maintained that 33 percent of Tenth's 750 active members were not present for last Sunday's vote [with] seven voting "no." For that reason, the presbytery maintained "there is a continuing Tenth church," and authorized a 10-member administrative commission to gain access to membership rolls . . . to do all things necessary to secure the church property . . . and appoint an interim pastor of the "continuing" church.<sup>111</sup>

The relationship between Tenth and the Presbytery of Philadelphia had unfortunately become publicly contentious.

Boice was concerned that the vote by Tenth to withdraw was not completely unanimous (372 to 7) and wrote to Bruce B. Howes, "It distresses me that we did not have an entirely unanimous vote. . . . Right now the presbytery is working to create or find a minority. I trust they will be unsuccessful in that."<sup>112</sup> According to Boice, he uncovered evidence revealing unscrupulous attempts by the presbytery to gain a sympathetic minority in Tenth:

The presbytery appears willing to use anything it can find in support of its case. Presbytery officials and their lawyers have found letters that I have written to concerned individuals explaining our position, and they have used them to imply reasons for our departure that we do not really hold and which they feel are helpful to their case and detrimental to ours. . . . I think the denomination would use whatever means, honest or otherwise, to retain their claim on Tenth's property.<sup>113</sup>

One action by the presbytery was to mail a letter to every member of Tenth written in a "mild and pastoral tone" seeking to determine the existence of a minority "continuing church" in the congregation, which was in reality "a carefully worded legal maneuver."<sup>114</sup>

In a letter to the entire church, Boice references the letter from the presbytery and makes

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<sup>111</sup> Linda Loyd, "Presbyterian Churchmen Removed," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 15, 1980, 1.

<sup>112</sup> James Montgomery Boice, "Letter to Bruce B. Howes," April 9, 1980, series 4, box 3.

<sup>113</sup> James Montgomery Boice, "Letter to Henry C. Borchardt," June 29, 1981, series 4, box 3.

<sup>114</sup> James Montgomery Boice, "Letter to Congregation," April 9, 1980, series 4, box 3.

it clear that even a response to it by a church member validates the commission the presbytery is seeking to use to replace Boice and the session.

However, Boice does not threaten or attempt to strong arm anyone and states that if members disagree with the vote to withdraw and want to attempt to create a continuing church under the authority of the commission, they certainly have the right to do so.<sup>115</sup> To combat the presbytery sowing seeds of discord, Boice carefully informed the church about the importance of unity and what the presbytery was attempting to do.<sup>116</sup> Crowe also spoke to the issue of unity in his statement to the church and “broke down as he told the congregation that there should be no ‘hostilities’ among church members after the vote.”<sup>117</sup> Boice strongly believed that Tenth and he were on the right side of the litigation and that God would not allow the church to lose its building. He writes to a married couple who had encouraged him through the ordeal: “I think we just have to pray about these things. It is hard for me to think that God will allow our historic ministry in this central area of Philadelphia to be destroyed by selfish action on the part of the presbytery.”<sup>118</sup>

Third, even though Boice struggled with the admonition in 1 Corinthians 6 that Christians should not sue one another, he concluded that fighting the UPCUSA in civil court was necessary because of principle. Boice received a letter from a person concerned over the litigation between Tenth and the Presbytery of Philadelphia. Boice replied that if the dispute “were an individual matter, the admonition of 1 Corinthians 6 should be followed. That is, I should be willing personally to be wronged rather than to fight a battle

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<sup>115</sup> Boice, “Letter to Congregation.”

<sup>116</sup> Boice, “Letter to Henry C. Borchardt.” “I have just completed a letter to the congregation explaining what is going on and asking everyone to pray.”

<sup>117</sup> Paula Herbut, “Tenth Presbyterian OKs Leaving Denomination,” *Philadelphia Bulletin*, August 10, 1980, 1.

<sup>118</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Al and Marion Dehoff,” April 4, 1980, series 4, box 3.

in court against another believer.”<sup>119</sup> However, Boice did not see Tenth’s dispute with the presbytery as an individual matter, but rather as a defense of those past, present, and future who fought for theological orthodoxy and invested in the ministry of Tenth:

[1 Corinthians 6] does not mean, however, that I am right to make that decision for you or some other person. On the contrary, my responsibility to another should be to defend that person’s interests at whatever cost. We think that is what is involved here. We have a responsibility to Christians of past generations as well as to those yet to come.<sup>120</sup>

Further, Boice believed Tenth must fight the presbytery in the struggle for ownership of the building because of the implications it would have for other churches engaged in a similar battle:

What is decided in our case will undoubtedly mean the continuation or the end of many church ministries other than our own. If the denomination succeeds in winning a case like ours, it will in effect be free to impose a stranglehold upon all its churches, dictating not only the use of the property but even the kind of doctrine that will be taught.<sup>121</sup>

Boice was confident that if Tenth could win in court over the UPCUSA or settle out of court, it would set the pattern for “more presbyteries [to be] encouraged to deal in a reasonable fashion with dissenting churches.”<sup>122</sup>

The litigation between Tenth and the Philadelphia Presbytery lingered on to 1983 when the presbytery, “not desirous of prosecuting this matter through the courts indefinitely . . . at such great cost,” approached Tenth with an offer to settle out of

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<sup>119</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Barbara Goodwin,” October 31, 1980, series 4, box 3. In this letter, Boice mentions that some view the situation as one not in conflict with the biblical mandate because those in the presbytery with whom Tenth had the dispute were not Christians (because of their heretical theological beliefs). Boice notes that he does not share this view.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid. The issue of being in a lawsuit with the presbytery had to have weighed heavily on Boice. In another letter written just seven months later, Boice expressed his desire to settle out of court with the presbytery because “we ought not to go to court with a brother. . . . I suppose it is just always best to avoid a court trial if possible.” James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Donald E. Hannahs,” May 27, 1981, series 4, box 3.

<sup>121</sup> Boice, “Letter to Barbara Goodwin.”

<sup>122</sup> Boice, “Letter to Donald E. Hannahs.”



court.<sup>123</sup> The presbytery offered to arrange a lease with Tenth to make payment for use of the building. In response, Boice, writing to the editor of the PCA Messenger, stated, “We are not happy with the idea of a lease. We are going to counter with an offer to purchase the building at some low but mutually acceptable figure.”<sup>124</sup> Boice was willing to settle out of court partly due to the concern about Christians suing one another and partly because the principle for which he had been fighting for the benefit of other conservative churches had been rendered moot by changes in the Book of Order by the denomination:

I am rather hoping that the presbytery might be willing to settle with us for some financial payment. . . . It strikes me that now that they have changed the Book of Order and that the situation is so different for other churches, there is not nearly so much advantage to others in our pushing through for a favorable judgment. It might be best for all around if we could just obtain a reasonable settlement.<sup>125</sup>

Understandably, Boice had grown weary of the dispute with the presbytery and was ready for it to come to a final conclusion.

The Presbytery of Philadelphia, now strapped for cash because of the number of churches leaving the presbytery and the decline in attendance and financial giving of those still in it, accepted Tenth’s offer of a monetary settlement.<sup>126</sup> In a selfless move, Boice proposed to the leadership of Tenth that the church give the manse (home of the pastor owned by the church) to the presbytery in exchange for the church building. The manse was located close to the church building, and its marketability would be significantly higher than attempting to sell an old church building in downtown.<sup>127</sup> The

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<sup>123</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Arthur H. Matthews,” September 27, 1983, series 4, box 4.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Rev. Robert B. Louthan,” August 9, 1983, series 4, box 4.

<sup>126</sup> Boice, interview.

<sup>127</sup> Tenth had originally purchased the manse for \$55,000. The Presbytery of Philadelphia sold

presbytery agreed, and at the end of 1984, Boice finalized with the presbytery the details of his family vacating the manse.<sup>128</sup> With that, Boice’s long struggle with the UPCUSA officially and finally came to an end. His deep commitment to remain in the denomination to strengthen what remains could not overcome the actions of the UPCUSA to force him to violate his conscience on the mandates of Scripture and to be part of a denomination that had become apostate.

### **Choosing a New Denomination**

Almost immediately after Tenth voted to withdraw from the UPCUSA, Boice’s correspondence reflects numerous leaders of the conservative Presbyterian denominations reaching out to him. These included luminaries such as R. C. Sproul from the PCA, Edmund Clowney from the OPC, and Francis Schaeffer from the RPCES. Tenth desired to join a like-minded denomination, as Boice explained in one article: “God wills us not to an independent kind of Christianity but to association and fellowship with other like-minded Christians.”<sup>129</sup> Tenth formed a special committee within the session in July 1980, to begin exploring with which denomination they should align. In September, the committee presented a detailed report of information on the RPCES and the PCA, including the pros and cons of each.<sup>130</sup> The report gave its recommendation that Tenth should join the RPCES instead of the PCA for essentially three primary reasons.

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it for around \$250,000. Ryken, *Tenth Presbyterian Church*, 123.

<sup>128</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Walter D. Monts,” November 8, 1984, series 4, box 4.

<sup>129</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “How Can We Choose?” *Presbyterian Journal* 39, no. 4 (May 1980): 10.

<sup>130</sup> The OPC was not given the same consideration since it was viewed as more restrictive in both its polity and theology as well as less evangelical (in terms of evangelism and working in a broad sense with other conservatives) than the PCA or RPCES.

First, the RPCES “tends to grant freedom in secondary matters. . . . It gives counsel in such matters but does not bind the conscience.”<sup>131</sup> Of particular importance to Tenth was the matter of women deacons. Boice and the leadership at Tenth believed Scripture forbade the ordination of women as teaching or ruling elders, but did not forbid women to serve as deacons. Both the PCA and RPCES technically did not allow women to be ordained as deacons, but the committee found “there is somewhat more flexibility for us [on this issue] within the RPCES.”<sup>132</sup> Second, at the time of the session’s report, the PCA was largely a southern denomination which, in the view of some, had “a possible racist image and an overly conservative political stance.”<sup>133</sup> Third, in a pragmatic sense, the RPCES already had a large Philadelphia Presbytery (compared to a fledgling one in the PCA) where Tenth could immediately join in working together on ministry endeavors. On December 5, 1980, the congregation of Tenth voted to join the RPCES and in January 1981, held an induction service with Francis Schaeffer preaching.<sup>134</sup>

Boice affirmed these three reasons for joining the RPCES in a letter to E. Crowell Cooley, an official in the PCA. Boice made it clear that Tenth “did not claim that the PCA was that kind of [denomination]” in reference to the issue of racism, but added, “Many people in the north do so consider the PCA [to be racist], and that opinion was a factor.”<sup>135</sup> Boice explains that Tenth’s decision to join the RPCES was largely based “upon very practical matters. The RPCES denomination had the strongest presence in our area, and policies regarding women deacons were most acceptable to us in our present

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<sup>131</sup> Session of Tenth Presbyterian Church, “Session Report to the Congregation on a Comparison of the PCA and RPCES,” September 23, 1980, series 3, box 2.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ryken, *Tenth Presbyterian Church*, 126.

<sup>135</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Rev. E. Crowell Cooley,” December 4, 1980, series 4, box 4.

situation.”<sup>136</sup> Even though Tenth joined the RPCES, Boice viewed all three conservative denominations as very similar, “working closely together and sharing a common witness.”<sup>137</sup>

Boice strongly hoped that all of the conservative Presbyterian denominations would join together as one as a unified voice for the historic, reformed, Presbyterian tradition: “We are looking forward to the day when there might be a united Reformed witness across the country.”<sup>138</sup> In a letter to the Stated Clerk of the RPCES, Boice writes that both the session at Tenth and he “are in favor of a national, reformed Presbyterian Church and would like to add [our] voices on behalf of any steps that can be taken toward merger of the three denominations.”<sup>139</sup> Just one year after Tenth joined the RPCES, the PCA and RPCES merged (but not the OPC), partially fulfilling Boice’s dream of a nationally-prominent and theologically-sound Presbyterian denomination. With the many years of turbulence dealing with the UPCUSA now behind them, Boice and Tenth were able positively to direct their energy and to focus toward ministry that would have significant impact in Philadelphia, the nation, and the world.

One final issue this dissertation seeks to explore is the degree to which Boice’s situation in the UPCUSA affected his preaching and writing. A valid query into the ministry of Boice is if his position amidst liberals caused the frequency and specificity of references against theological liberalism. The question lingers as to whether Boice’s preaching and writing may have taken a different shape had he been in a conservative

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<sup>136</sup> Boice, “Letter to Rev. E. Crowell Cooley.”

<sup>137</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Dr. Edmund P. Clowney,” May 6, 1980, series 4, box 4.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid. Even before Tenth withdrew from the UPCUSA, Boice had a vision for a unified, conservative Presbyterian denomination. In a letter to the leadership of PUBC, Boice calls for a committee to be formed to explore “the formulation of a new denomination, a merger with the PCA or to work out other options.” James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Dr. J. Murray Marshall,” September 28, 1977, series 4, box 4.

<sup>139</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Rev. Paul R. Gilchrist,” June 5, 1980, series 4, box 4.

denomination. An important topic for all speakers and writers is the role situation plays on one's rhetoric.

## CHAPTER 7

### THEORIES OF RHETORICAL SITUATION

One of the objectives of this dissertation is to explore the linkage between Boice's situation with the UPCUSA and the frequency and specificity of references to theological liberalism in his sermons and books. Ascertaining the degree to which Boice's situation influenced his rhetoric is difficult to quantify. To state that Boice's situation was the cause of his apologetic endeavors in defense of theological orthodoxy borders on a slippery slope. Situation does not preclude that Boice may have preached in a similar manner had he been in a denominational environment in concurrence with his theological convictions—though, as established in chapter 1, Boice's personal and educational background do not give credence that his approach was presuppositional or *a priori* in nature. Nor does situation guarantee that another conservative pastor in Boice's position would have taken the same outspoken approach as he did. However, given the frequency and specificity of references within Boice's sermons and writings so homologous to the developments in the UPCUSA at the time, it is difficult to summarily dismiss that any linkage between his situation and rhetoric exists. An exploration of relevant arguments in rhetorical criticism helps to provide a deeper understanding of how Boice's situation affected his rhetoric.

#### **Theories of Rhetorical Situation**

##### **Lloyd Bitzer**

Lloyd Bitzer is recognized by many as the one who formally began the conversation about rhetorical situation with his programmatic article entitled "The Rhetorical Situation." Bitzer refers to rhetorical situation as "the nature of those contexts

in which speakers or writers create rhetorical discourse.”<sup>1</sup> A key hallmark of Bitzer’s theory is that situation determines the rhetoric. “So controlling is situation,” writes Bitzer, “we should consider it the very ground of rhetorical activity.”<sup>2</sup> Thus, all rhetoric is situational. In other words, utterances are meaningless apart from context and never create the situation, but rather respond to it: “Nor should we assume that a rhetorical address gives existence to the situation; on the contrary, it is the situation which calls the discourse into existence.”<sup>3</sup> To Bitzer, all rhetors respond to a situation not of their own making. Rhetoric is not only birthed by the situation but is also shaped and given character by the situation: “Rhetorical discourse does obtain its character-as-rhetorical from the situation which generates it. Rhetorical works belong to the class of things which obtain character from the circumstances of the historic context in which they occur.”<sup>4</sup>

Since rhetoric is brought into existence by situation, rhetoric is not an instrument of reflection, but rather a call to action: “Rhetoric is a response to a situation of a certain kind.”<sup>5</sup> Bitzer argues that “rhetoric is a mode of altering reality,” whereby the altered reality is caused by “the creation of discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action . . . [rhetoric] functions ultimately to produce action or change in the world.”<sup>6</sup> Therefore, rhetors must describe a fitting response since “rhetorical situation

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<sup>1</sup> Lloyd F. Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 1, no. 1 (January 1968): 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 2. In the article, Bitzer quips that to argue situation is determinant of rhetoric is the same as writing an obituary for a person who never existed.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4. In his critical introduction to George Campbell’s book on the philosophy of rhetoric, Bitzer admires Campbell’s commitment to the “exclusively functional” nature of rhetoric and how “in speaking there is always some end proposed, or some effect which the speaker intends to produce on the hearer.” George Campbell, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, ed. Lloyd F. Bitzer (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1963), 339.

does not invite just any response . . . it invites a response that fits the situation.”<sup>7</sup> Not only must the rhetor describe a fitting response to the situation, but a prescribed course of action to modify the situation is needed as well: “A situation which is strong and clear dictates the purpose, theme, matter, and style of the response.”<sup>8</sup> Bitzer notes that “the situation controls the rhetorical response in the same sense that the question controls the answer and the problem controls the solution.”<sup>9</sup>

Rhetorical situation has a pragmatic element that is not merely concerned with what the rhetor is saying, but with what he is doing by what he is saying and how he desires the audience to respond. Situations demand more than description, but also a prescription of appropriate praxis, thus making rhetoric a moral act. In light of the outcome of rhetoric in response to a situation, Bitzer provides a fuller definition of rhetorical situation:

A complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence.<sup>10</sup>

Rhetorical situation creates rhetoric that can change the problem, or exigence, presented by the situation. Thus, rhetoric comes into existence when the rhetor believes the exigence can be remedied.

Bitzer organizes his theory on rhetorical situation around a rubric of three constituent parts: exigence, audience, and constraints.<sup>11</sup> The exigence “is an imperfection

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<sup>7</sup> Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation,” 10. Bitzer imagines Lincoln failing to address the epic battle that occurred shortly before his Gettysburg Address or Lyndon B. Johnson talking about the national budget in a presidential campaign speech during the week in 1964, when Khrushchev was deposed and China tested a nuclear missile as examples of “missing the mark” rather than a fitting response called by the situation.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>11</sup> For an excellent and detailed treatment of how Bitzer’s constituent parts of his theory can be applied to practical examples of rhetoric, see Keith Grant-Davie, “Rhetorical Situations and Their



marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be.”<sup>12</sup> An exigence that cannot be modified (e.g., the coming of winter or death) is not rhetorical. Neither is an exigence rhetorical if it can be solved simply by one’s own action that does not require discourse (e.g., stepping out of the way of a moving train). Bitzer states that an exigence is rhetorical “when it is capable of positive modification and when positive modification requires discourse.”<sup>13</sup> Any rhetorical situation has at least one controlling exigence that specifies the audience to be addressed and the solution that needs to be undertaken. Thus, the exigency is the problem presented by the situation, which can be addressed and remedied by a particular audience through the help of rhetorical discourse.

The audience represents the second constituent in Bitzer’s theory. Since rhetorical discourse “produces change by influencing the decision and action of persons who function as mediators of change, it follows that rhetoric always requires an audience.”<sup>14</sup> The audience cannot be a group of mere hearers or readers, but must “consist only of those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change.”<sup>15</sup> Some rhetors, such as scientists, may provide discourse to an audience that is incapable of effecting change (e.g., identifying the composition of dark matter or making time travel possible). Discourse, according to Bitzer, is rhetorical only when the audience can actualize the remedy called for by the exigence: “The rhetorical audience must be capable of serving as mediator of the change which the discourse

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Constituents,” *Rhetoric Review* 15, no. 2 (Spring 1997): 264-79.

<sup>12</sup> Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation,” 5.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

functions to produce.”<sup>16</sup> Hence, rhetors believe something is wrong, and a particular audience has the ability to correct it.<sup>17</sup>

The third constituent can be defined as a group of constraints generally comprised of “persons, events, objects, and relations that are parts of the situation because they have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence.”<sup>18</sup> As Katherine Heenan simply states, constraints “are tools that the speaker can use to help make changes.”<sup>19</sup> Bitzer explains that the wellspring of constraints for the rhetor usually comes from standard sources such as “beliefs, attitudes, documents, facts, traditions, images, interests, motives, and the like.”<sup>20</sup> The rhetor, then, manages the constraints provided by the situation and in addition provides his/her own constraints to the oratory, such as style, character, and logical proofs (*pathos*, *ethos*, *logos*). Bitzer identifies these constraints as two separate classes: those that originate with the rhetor and those that are operative. Aristotle termed these two classes as “artistic” and “inartistic” proofs.<sup>21</sup> The nature of both classes of constraints must be properly understood as each can be used improperly in discourse.

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<sup>16</sup> Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation,” 8.

<sup>17</sup> See Roderick P. Hart and Suzanne Daughton, *Modern Rhetorical Criticism*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Pearson Education, 2005), 41-42.

<sup>18</sup> Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation,” 8.

<sup>19</sup> Katherine Heenan, “The Rhetorical Situation,” Arizona State University: College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Fall 2005, accessed April 3, 2018, <http://www.public.asu.edu/~kheenan/courses/472/f05/bitzervatz.htm>.

<sup>20</sup> Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation,” 8.

<sup>21</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004), 6-8. Aristotle coined the terms *pathos*, *ethos*, and *logos* as the three principal artistic proofs. Artistic proofs are typically characteristics or arguments that are uniquely attributable to the rhetor: namely, oratorical style (*pathos*), personal character (*ethos*), or those that the rhetor invents that are used in the speech itself (*logos*) such as comparisons, arrangement of material in the speech, etc. Aristotle’s artistic proofs are what Bitzer calls “constraints.” Inartistic proofs, such as quoting someone else, laws, witnesses, contracts, etc., lie beyond the rhetor.

## Analysis of Bitzer and Boice

Many elements of Bitzer's theory fit the rhetorical situation of Boice. To begin, the exigence of the situation in which Boice found himself was not created by his rhetoric. Along with his statement that rhetorical address does not give existence to a situation, Bitzer adds, "It does not follow that a situation exists only when the discourse exists."<sup>22</sup> When Boice became the pastor of Tenth in 1968, he found himself in a theological battle that was not of his own making. The UPCUSA had been steadily shifting toward liberalism for decades before Boice came to Tenth, nor did Boice's sermons or writings create the controversy of liberalism versus conservatism within the denomination—a battle Boice's mentors had been fighting for some time before Boice's career. Boice's desire to "strengthen what remains" by staying in the denomination to work for reform demonstrates that his discourse was in response to his situation rather than creating it.

In addition, Bitzer's theory brings into sharper focus that a critical aspect of Boice's preaching and writing was a direct response to his situation: "A particular discourse comes into existence because of some specific condition or situation which invites utterance . . . each utterance is essentially bound up with the context of situation."<sup>23</sup> Boice's rhetorical response further aligns with Bitzer in that his discourse was a "fitting" response to the situation. The corpus of material produced by Boice during the struggle with the UPCUSA clearly addresses the critical issues created by the situation. Boice's discourse was also "fitting" in that it was not malicious or sardonic, but rather attempted to thoughtfully engage and to convince his opponents in favor of orthodoxy. The frequent and specific references to theological liberalism in the works of Boice do not appear to be indiscriminate, theoretical, or *a priori* postulations; they are rather, appropriately directed at the exigence of his situation.

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<sup>22</sup> Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," 2.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

Another aspect of Bitzer's theory that comports to Boice involves the argument that the exigence must be able to be modified with assistance by the rhetor's discourse if the situation is to be considered rhetorical. Boice's commitment to remain in the UPCUSA is certainly grounded in his belief that he could play some role in the reclamation of the denomination for orthodoxy. If Boice did not believe the exigence of his situation could be modified through his rhetoric, then the content of his sermons, writings, and correspondence would presumably have borne fewer and more equivocal references to theological liberalism.

In addition, Boice's involvement in the PUBC and CUP reveals his belief that change was possible in the UPCUSA. Furthermore, if Boice had deemed the denomination a lost cause, he would have spent his time and energy moving Tenth to another Presbyterian denomination that was theologically like-minded with the church and him.<sup>24</sup> The pragmatic aspect of Bitzer's theory calling for the rhetor to prescribe a course of action for the audience to modify the exigence corresponds to Boice's rhetoric. As excerpts from Boice's sermons and writings from chapter 5 reveal, Boice did more than simply describe or complain about the problem of theological liberalism; he called for his audience time and again to resist liberalism in specific ways and to adhere to the tenets of biblical confessionalism.

The three constituent parts of Bitzer's theory can be seen in the situation of Boice. The exigence, in a broad sense, was the continued development of theological liberalism in the UPCUSA and its abandonment of adherence to the Westminster standards. More specifically, the exigence was the progressive movement by the

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<sup>24</sup> That Boice would have moved Tenth to another denomination if he thought the UPCUSA was hopelessly ensconced in liberalism cannot be stated unequivocally given the fact that some members of Tenth were committed to the tradition of mainline Presbyterianism even though they theologically disagreed with it. An example of this is C. Everett Koop who, upon Tenth's eventual withdrawal from the UPCUSA, left Tenth for a time in protest to the church's decision to withdraw from the UPCUSA. James Montgomery Boice, "Letter to Arthur H. Matthews," July 5, 1984, series 4, box 4. This is also confirmed in the interview with Mrs. Boice.

UPCUSA toward a position enforcing all its presbyteries to ordain women as ruling elders in the churches. In addition, the Presbytery of Philadelphia began inhibiting graduates from Westminster Theological Seminary to serve on the ministry staff at Tenth. These two issues affecting Tenth in particular, combined with the ordination of Mansfield Kaseman who denied the deity of Christ in a sister presbytery shortly before Tenth withdrew from the UPCUSA, marked the urgency of the exigency that Boice faced. The evidence of Boice's sermons and writings demonstrates his belief that discourse was capable of modifying the exigence, although the outcome of his efforts resulted in Tenth's withdrawing from the UPCUSA and the denomination continuing its course of theological liberalism.<sup>25</sup>

The rhetoric of Boice was aimed at a specific target audience in several nuances. In this way, Boice's audience meets the criteria for Bitzer that "a rhetorical audience must be distinguished from a body of mere hearers or readers."<sup>26</sup> The audience in Boice's situation was firstly the congregation at Tenth. Although the congregation was conservative, Boice sought to prevent the church from drifting toward liberalism, which many mainline Presbyterian churches had already done. The Presbytery of Philadelphia had already embraced liberalism, and even though Tenth and the presbytery had largely steered clear of each other since the tenure of Barnhouse (because of their theological

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<sup>25</sup> Although Boice's rhetorical efforts might be considered a failure in one sense, evidence exists in which similar efforts kept a denomination from straying into liberalism. One example is the Southern Baptist Convention, specifically its 1985 annual meeting where moderates attempted to thwart the advance of conservatives by retaking the presidency of the denomination. Charles Stanley defeated the moderate candidate Winfred Moore by a 55.3 percent to 44.7 percent margin. Many attribute Stanley's victory at the largest attended meeting in SBC history (44,519), to a telegraph published by Billy Graham endorsing Stanley on the morning of the election. In addition, a now legendary sermon delivered days before the election by W. A. Criswell entitled, "Whether We Live or Die," outlining the disastrous path the SBC would be placed upon should moderates win control of the denomination, most likely played an influential role in the outcome of the election. David Roach, "1985 Dallas SBC: 'A Watershed Moment,'" *Baptist Press*, June 11, 2015, accessed March 19, 2018, <http://www.bpnews.net/44919/1985-dallas-sbc-a-watershed-moment>. For the full text of Criswell's sermon, see W. A. Criswell, "Whether We Live or Die," W. A. Criswell Sermon Library, June 10, 1985, accessed March 19, 2018, <https://www.wacriswell.com/sermons/1985/whether-we-live-or-die-sbc/>.

<sup>26</sup> Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," 8.

disagreement), it would have had a direct influence on Tenth simply in terms of its proximity and ecclesial authority over the church.

In keeping with Bitzer's contention that the audience must be capable of mediating modifications to the exigency, Boice's audience also included pastors, professors, elders, and the laity (all with whom he had correspondence) within the UPCUSA. Boice's high profile position as pastor of Tenth demonstrates that many conservatives in the denomination looked to his viewpoints and leadership, as the multitude of letters he received during the time period of the struggle with the UPCUSA verifies. The publication of the sermons and books delineated in the previous chapter reveals his reach to those outside the membership at Tenth. Regarding other conservatives in the UPCUSA, Boice believed there still remained enough people in the denomination faithful to confessionalism who could help turn the tide away from liberalism.

Bitzer's argument is that the rhetor must be convinced that the audience, with the assistance of discourse, can modify the exigence. One reason Boice remained in the UPCUSA to fight for change is that he genuinely thought he could either win the battle and reclaim the denomination for orthodoxy or at a minimum, halt the advance of liberalism. Boice's rhetoric sought to equip and encourage this segment of his audience to work for reform in their respective positions in the denomination and thus prescribed a remedial course of action. Furthermore, Boice undoubtedly hoped to influence those in the UPCUSA who had embraced liberalism to return to their historic, confessional roots by exhibiting through discourse the theological and practical reasons they should do so.

Boice employed a number of constraints in his rhetorical situation. The primary constraint was an orthodox understanding of the nature of the Bible and its interpretation. For Boice, the most significant motivation to either avoid or turn away from theological liberalism was its distortion and/or denial of the teaching of Scripture. In this sense, Boice relied on the "inartistic" proof of appealing to a text which, in his estimation, carried the highest possible authority. Another inartistic proof used by Boice was the

measurable decline of the UPCUSA under the dominance of liberalism. He cites rapid, denomination-wide decline in attendance and in financial giving in the years following the Confession of 1967.<sup>27</sup>

There existed also several “artistic” proofs that contributed to the effectiveness of Boice’s discourse. The *pathos* of Boice was an engaging style of preaching that appealed to a broad audience. Boice’s sermons had an academic tone as seen in the previous excerpts of his preaching whereby he quotes numerous scholars and carefully lays out arguments that are theological, logical, and philosophical. At the same time, Boice adeptly used illustrations which prevented his messages from becoming tedious and unrelatable.<sup>28</sup> He also frequently closed messages with some form of application. In short, Boice was a skilled expositor of the Bible and a popular preacher because of his oratorical skill.

Boice’s *ethos* earned him the respect of his peers and a right to be heard in the particulars of his situation. He had a doctorate from a European university and a reputation for being a careful thinker whose discourse was well-documented and refrained from spurious or inflammatory content. Boice’s long tenure at Tenth, the multitude of invitations in his correspondence to preach or requesting his resume for position of pastor, professor, or president, and the fact that his notable peers selected him to chair the first International Council on Biblical Inerrancy all bespeak the integrity of his character and admiration by many.

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<sup>27</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “The Secular Church, Part I: The Liberal Churches,” *Tenth* 6, no. 3 (October 1976): 10-11.

<sup>28</sup> As noted previously in this diss., Boice frequently quoted Barnhouse. Many of these citations were illustrations used by Barnhouse, who was known for his skill in the use of sermon illustrations. Journalist Russell T. Hitt noted that Barnhouse’s use of illustrations “was perhaps unparalleled in his generation. No one who heard Barnhouse explain the Scriptures could ever forget the striking illustrations he employed to make spiritual truth come alive.” Russell T. Hitt, introduction to Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Bible Truth Illustrated* (New Canaan, CT: Keats, 1979).

Boice's *logos* was fitting of his situation. He did not ignore the theological controversy swirling about his denomination, and his rhetoric was "fitting" and "hit the mark" as Bitzer claims is essential in rhetorical discourse.<sup>29</sup> Perhaps the most distinguishing mark of Boice's *logos* was the occasional uniqueness of his interpretation of a biblical text or stance on a theological issue (e.g., his views on the age of the earth, the Nephilim in Gen 6, and dispensationalism).<sup>30</sup> These seeming anomalies, though by no means heretical, reveal that Boice was not afraid to diverge from views that were regarded as normative for evangelicals or adherents of Reformed theology. Thus, Boice's occasional rebuff of "the party line" added an element of mystique to his discourse, which increased his appeal and effectiveness as a rhetor.

Bitzer's theory of rhetorical situation is an effective model, with limitations, to comprehend the relationship between the content of Boice's sermons and writings with his situation. Given Boice's desire to remain in the UPCUSA "to strengthen what remains" and "work for change from within" coupled with the frequency and specificity with which he defended orthodox theology and challenged liberalism, it would be an oversight to fail

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<sup>29</sup> Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," 10.

<sup>30</sup> Boice believed in an old age of the earth/universe and did not ascribe to the theory that God created the earth in six, twenty-four days. See the sermon, "Views of Creation: Six-Day Creationism," in James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis*, vol. 1, *Creation and Fall (Genesis 1-11)* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 63-71. Boice believed that "the sons of God" in Gen 6:2 were demons who procreated with human women resulting in demigod-like offspring known as the Nephilim (Gen 6:4). Boice anchors his interpretation through a connection of Gen 6:1-4 with Jude 6-7, 14-15 in which he claims the latter text is a quote from the Apocryphal book of 1 Enoch, which endorses the view that "the sons of God" were fallen angels. In addition, Boice connects the Nephilim with "the spirits in prison" in 1 Pet 3:19-20 and its relationship with Noah's flood. Thus, Boice contends that the worldwide flood described in Gen 6-8 is more than an act of God's judgment, but also of his salvation since God took eight people uncontaminated by demon procreation and spared them on the ark, destroying everyone else, in order that the Messiah might come from a pure blood line. See the sermon, "Sons of God/Daughters of Men," in *Genesis*, 1:305-11. In a departure from most proponents within Reformed theology, Boice adhered to a dispensational eschatology rather than one rooted in Covenant or New Covenant theology. Boice makes his eschatological position clear in *The Last and Future World*, in which he interprets the book of Revelation as well as other prophetic/apocalyptic biblical texts from a dispensational perspective. James Montgomery Boice, *The Last and Future World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974). See also Boice's sermon, "When Shall Messiah Come?" in *Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 95-102. Additionally, in my interview with Michael Horton, Horton described his disagreement with Boice's dispensational view.



to see any connection between his situation and his rhetoric. The chief issue is the extent of that connection, namely, causality. Boice's situation and Bitzer's theory generate the question, "Did Boice's situation cause his rhetoric?" As just stated, there is little doubt that Boice's situation impacted his discourse, but the question remains whether a conservative such as Boice placed in the situation in which he found himself was compelled, or even coerced by his situation, to speak against theological liberalism. Bitzer would argue in favor of such a proposal since he claims that situation controls the discourse of the rhetor to the point that he/she is "obliged to speak at a given moment . . . to respond appropriately to the situation" and goes as far as to say that situation invokes such a strong initiation for response that the rhetor is "required" to speak.<sup>31</sup>

Bitzer's theory is flawed, however, in that it seems to make rhetors something akin to automatons who are helpless before the determinism of the situation to do anything but respond with discourse that befits the exigence.<sup>32</sup> Yet, if another conservative were put in Boice's situation, there is no guarantee that he would have spoken against the liberalism of the UPCUSA or would have done so with rhetoric that was appropriate to the situation. Another pastor may have chosen to be completely silent about the issue or may have used discourse that was too tenuous or acerbic to have been effective. In addition, a conservative such as Boice preaching expositionally and adhering to confessionalism and theological orthodoxy would to some degree have possessed a mien against liberalism simply by virtue of faithfully preaching biblical texts. Yet, in the case of Boice, given specific references in sermons and writings of his disagreement with developments in the

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<sup>31</sup> Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," 4, 9.

<sup>32</sup> Bitzer's theory seems to fall prey to the logical fallacy *post hoc ergo propter hoc* (*post hoc* or *Doubtful Cause* fallacy). This fallacy is the argument that since one event followed another event, the previous event must have caused the latter—since event Y followed event X, event Y must have been caused by event X (e.g., "where there is smoke, there is fire"). The chronological order of successive events does not necessarily render causality. See Annette T. Rottenberg, *Elements of Argument: A Text and Reader*, 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 190-92. See also Edward P. J. Corbett and Robert J. Connors, *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 68-69.

UPCUSA toward liberalism; his opposition to specific theologians and doctrines espoused by liberals in the UPCUSA; the high percentage frequency of references related to liberalism in his sermons; and his stated desire to reform the denomination, it is impossible to claim that Boice's rhetoric was not impacted by his situation. Thus, it may be accurate to state that Bitzer's theory comports to the ministry of Boice in a qualified sense.

Boice, given his theological and homiletical commitments/convictions, still would have been opposed to liberalism in his sermons even if he had been in a conservative denomination. However, the assumption is that Boice's situation in the UPCUSA gave rise to the frequency and specificity of his grievances against liberalism. At the same time, Bitzer's theory fails as a universal axiom postulating situation as the cause of rhetorical response. Bitzer's overall claim that situation affects rhetoric along with the three constituent parts of his theory, provides a good template for understanding the rhetorical situation of Boice. Applying Bitzer's work to Boice, and others, in terms of causation is an overreach, but viewing it in terms of correlation is a helpful tool in perceiving what Boice was attempting to do with his rhetoric.

### **Richard Vatz**

Richard Vatz is one of the most notable critics of Bitzer's theory of rhetorical situation, and he argues stringently against it, particularly in terms of what he deems its *fatalism*.<sup>33</sup> Vatz disagrees with Bitzer that situations are deterministic for rhetoric, but instead "they actually only inform us as to the phenomenological perspective of the speaker," making situations "found in the head of the observer" rather than possessing universal exigencies.<sup>34</sup> Bitzer, argues Vatz, depends too heavily on his Platonist

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<sup>33</sup> Vatz's essay is considered a seminal response to Bitzer and others who "surrender to 'scenic' explanations for rhetorical acts, of the kind generally offered by 'objectivist' historians and sociologists." Herbert W. Simons, Elizabeth W. Mechling, and Howard N. Schreier, "The Functions of Human Communication in Mobilizing for Action from the Bottom Up: The Rhetoric of Social Movements," in *Functions of Human Communications*, ed. Carroll C. Arnold (Newton, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1984), 802.

<sup>34</sup> Richard E. Vatz, "The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 6, no. 3

*Weltanschauung*, which views the relationship between situation and rhetoric as a “realist” philosophy.<sup>35</sup> In other words, Vatz views the exigency of a situation as determinant on the subjective nature of the rhetor’s epistemology, whereas Bitzer views the exigency as ontological within the situation itself.

Vatz complains that Bitzer simplistically believes that “meaning emanates, so to speak, from the thing [situation] . . . that it contains an ethical imperative supposedly independent of its interpreters,” which is evidence of “an intrinsic nature in events from which rhetoric inexorably follows.”<sup>36</sup> Rather than the rhetor being at the mercy of the exigence of the situation, Vatz asserts that the rhetor is in control of the communication for two reasons. First, the rhetor has “a choice of events to communicate” and works through the process of “sifting and choosing” what he/she deems salient to share with the audience.<sup>37</sup> Second, since “the very choice of what facts or events are relevant is a matter of pure arbitration,” communication is “an interpretative act . . . a creative act . . . a rhetorical act of transcendence. . . . Therefore, meaning is not discovered in situations, but created by rhetors.”<sup>38</sup> Vatz summarizes this aspect of his theory: “Rhetoric is a cause not an effect of meaning. . . . Rhetors choose or do not choose to make salient situations.”<sup>39</sup>

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(Summer 1973): 154.

<sup>35</sup> Vatz, “The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation,” 154-55.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 155-56. Vatz adds, “One cannot maintain that reports of anything are indistinguishable from the thing itself.” *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 160. Vatz is not alone in his rather radical view that exigence is created by the autonomous subjectivity of the rhetor. Arthur Walzer agrees with Vatz when he writes, “It makes more sense, however, to think of exigencies as contingent . . . in the way that the ‘new pragmatists’ or ‘social constructionists’ would have us to look at all knowledge claims as ‘constructs generated by like-minded peers.’ . . . Exigencies are those that evolve out of a writer’s sense of [truth].” Arthur E. Walzer, “Lloyd Bitzer’s ‘Rhetorical Situation’ and the ‘Exigencies’ of Academic Discourse” (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Atlanta, March 19-21, 1987), 4-5. In addition, Charles Willard posits a theory that “cuts against the practice of adopting a normative model as a basis for empirical claims. Not all situations share the explicit rule structure . . . with their entailments

A principal element of Vatz's theory, given the tenets of his argument, is that communication "cannot be the 'real' situation," but rather the situation "must be translation . . . [where] rhetors can arbitrarily choose eulogistic or dyslogistic coverings for the same situation."<sup>40</sup> Thus, one rhetor may view a person as a "boss" whereas another views him/her as a "leader." One rhetor may view discourse as "education," and another see it as "propaganda." The truth of a situation is "not according to the situation's reality, but according to the rhetor's arbitrary choice of characterization."<sup>41</sup>

Vatz criticizes Bitzer for failing to take into account that the relationship between situation and rhetoric cannot neglect the initial linguistic depiction of the situation. Vatz lauds his theory as superior to Bitzer in that his view of situation being dependent upon the arbitrations of the rhetor actually increases moral responsibility in the act of communication: "To view rhetoric as a creation of reality or salience rather than a reflector of reality clearly increases the rhetor's moral responsibility."<sup>42</sup> In Bitzer's view, "We ascribe little responsibility to the rhetor with respect to what he has chosen to give salience." In other words, Vatz views Bitzer's theory as fatalistic in that the rhetor never has to take responsibility for what he/she said since his/her communication is at the mercy of what the exigency of the situation demands. Vatz's theory on rhetorical situation might best be summarized in the following quote in which he takes "the converse position" of each of Bitzer's major statements regarding this relationship [rhetoric and situation]:

I would not say "rhetoric is situational," but situations are rhetorical; not . . . "exigence strongly invites utterance," but utterance strongly invites exigence, not "the situation controls the rhetorical response" . . . but the rhetoric controls the situational response; not . . . "rhetorical discourse . . . does obtain its character-as-

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and requirements plainly stamped on their faces. . . . Organizing procedures must be created, culled from one's cognitive repertoire." Charles Arthur Willard, *A Theory of Argumentation* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2003), 74.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>41</sup> Vatz, "The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation," 157.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 158.

rhetorical from the situation which generates it,” but situations obtain their character from the rhetoric which surrounds them or creates them.<sup>43</sup>

### **Analysis of Vatz and Boice**

Vatz’s theory has difficulty aligning with the situation and ministry of Boice for two principal reasons. First, Boice matches the epistemology of Bitzer and not Vatz. The Platonist, “realist” worldview of Bitzer with which Vatz differs is the worldview of Boice. Bitzer writes, “The exigence and the complex of persons, objects, events, and relations which generate rhetorical discourse are located in reality, are objective and publicly observable historic facts in the world we experience.”<sup>44</sup> Boice’s view of the nature and authority of the Bible causes him to believe in truth that is absolute, objective, and propositional. Vatz views truth as subjective, qualified, and conditional. Boice’s disagreement with liberalism in the UPCUSA is that it has rejected an understanding of truth objectively and historically grounded in Scripture for one that is subjectively grounded in man.

Boice would argue that liberalism is an exigence because it defies an orthodox understanding and interpretation of Scripture. Vatz would argue that liberalism is an exigence merely because Boice believes it to be so and since truth/reality/exigence is the arbitrary characterization of the rhetor. Therefore, because an exigence is “found in the head of the observer” and is a matter of one’s translation of the situation and not reality, Vatz could easily side with liberals who might argue that Boice’s protestation against liberalism is the actual exigence.<sup>45</sup> The truth of the exigence, for Vatz, is in the eye of the

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<sup>43</sup> Vatz, “The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation,” 159.

<sup>44</sup> Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation,” 11.

<sup>45</sup> Exigence created “in the head of the observer” is what Bitzer calls “sophistical and spurious” failing to see exigence as “real” and “present in the historical environment.” Lloyd F. Bitzer, “Functional Communication: A Situational Perspective,” in *Rhetoric in Transition: Studies in the Nature and Uses of Rhetoric*, ed. Eugene E. White (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1980), 24.

beholder. Whereas the conflicting issue with Boice and Bitzer may be deemed causality, the problem with Boice and Vatz is authority.

The second reason (closely related to the first) why Vatz's theory does not mesh with Boice is that Vatz would argue that Boice is the cause of the exigence in his situation with the UPCUSA rather than responding to it. Boice would demur with this assessment stating that his discourse was a response to the exigence created by liberals who had rejected orthodoxy. For Vatz, the exigence is caused by Boice's interpretation of Scripture and subsequent theological convictions. The rhetor creates "the reality or salience" of an exigence rather than responds to it.<sup>46</sup> Vatz's reformulation of the nature of the relationship between rhetoric and situation creating the rhetor as a purely autonomous individual has left few satisfied with his theory.<sup>47</sup>

Situation, at least to some degree, must have an influence on the rhetor. For Boice, the baseline of what determines the truth of an exigence is the plain sense meaning of a biblical text, interpreted through a grammatical-historical hermeneutic. Boice is responding to an exigence created by liberals. Vatz contends that Boice has created an exigence by disagreeing with liberals.<sup>48</sup> The possibility exists, however, for some space to be carved out for Boice inside of Vatz's view regarding causality. Boice's work could be

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<sup>46</sup> Of note is the fact that Vatz quotes Murray Edelman multiple times in his article, yet Edelman is a proponent of "groups of people" who establish situations "by a process of mutual agreement upon significant symbols." Murray Edelman, *Politics as Symbolic Action* (Chicago: Markham, 1971), 66, cited in Stephen M. Pogoloff, "Logos and Sophia: The Rhetorical Situation of 1 Corinthians" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1990), 74.

<sup>47</sup> Pogoloff, "Logos and Sophia," 74.

<sup>48</sup> Vatz errs in stating that all situations are created by the rhetor, going so far as to say that the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 was only a "crisis" because of the rhetoric of President Kennedy. Vatz, "The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation," 159. However, some situations exist purely from the objective reality of the situation. For example, if a person witnessed a predatory animal creeping up behind someone unbeknownst to him/her, that person would issue rhetoric in response to the situation in an attempt to save the person's life. In this case, there is no plausibility for the rhetoric creating the situation, nor is the truth and urgency of the situation a subjective creation of a person's distinctive worldview. This is how Boice viewed his situation with the UPCUSA. Given the rejection of the Bible's authority along with the plummeting statistics of the denomination, Boice was responding to an existing, ontological exigence.

plausibly viewed, to some degree, as at least creating a greater awareness of the exigence for the audience.<sup>49</sup> Perhaps the rhetorical efforts of Boice heightened the urgency and/or severity of the detrimental reality of liberalism in the denomination. Nevertheless, the conflict between Boice and Vatz is one of epistemology and how reality/truth is determined.

Vatz's view appears to afford Boice more discretion in how he responds to the exigence than Bitzer's view. Giving the rhetor more control of the discourse allows greater provision for "artistic proofs," which take into consideration one's personality and skill in responding to a situation. Vatz may also take into account the courage Boice employed to stand up for orthodoxy better than Bitzer. This is an important feature for Boice given the complexity and unique challenges of his situation and the personal cost he endured throughout his struggle with the UPCUSA. However, this is not to say that Bitzer precludes the use of artistic proofs, nor does his view rule out the rhetor's control of adapting discourse to a limited degree in order to shape a "fitting" response. As J. H. Patton notes, Vatz misunderstands Bitzer "based on a fatalistic theory of knowledge and action" and that not all features of discourse are "predetermined by the universally controlling nature of rhetorical situations."<sup>50</sup>

One of the consequences of Vatz's misunderstanding of Bitzer as too fatalistic is Vatz's unwarranted accusation that Bitzer's theory is morally irresponsible. Bitzer

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<sup>49</sup> Johann D. Kim cites James Dunn's interpretation of Paul's argument in Rom 9-11 stating that Paul's rhetoric in these chapters was an attempt to create an exigence regarding the debate over the Jewish-Gentile conflict in the church at Rome. Dunn believes that Paul attempts (and fails) to recreate the exigence of the ethnic conflict by redefining "Israel" as those called of God. However, Paul is not creating a new exigence in this case so much as he is clarifying what the true exigence and its proper solution actually are. In the same way, Boice's rhetoric may be construed in part as clarifying or raising awareness of the existing exigence, but does not create a new one. Johann D. Kim, "God, Israel, and the Gentiles: Rhetoric and Situation in Romans 9-11" (Ph.D diss., Union Theological Seminary, 1999), 36. James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 531-32.

<sup>50</sup> J. H. Patton, "Causation and Creativity in Rhetorical Situations: Distinctions and Implications," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 65 (1979): 38-39.

understands the moral effect of rhetoric when he states that rhetoric alters reality, “but he does not attribute ethical values to it because the subject matter of his discussion is completely different from that of Vatz.”<sup>51</sup> For Bitzer, the ethical implications of rhetoric are imbedded in the objective truth of the situation. In summary, Vatz’s theory suffers from greater flaws than that of Bitzer and is not an effective model for clarifying the connection of Boice’s rhetoric to his situation.

### **Scott Consigny**

Scott Consigny wrote an important article that sought to bridge the disparity between the views of Bitzer and Vatz. The “apparent antimony” between Bitzer and Vatz, Consigny argues, “Arises from partial views which fail to account for actual rhetorical practice.”<sup>52</sup> Consigny agrees with Bitzer, stating that situations have an “objectively recognizable exigence . . . characterized by particularities.”<sup>53</sup> He disagrees, however, that “rhetorical situation is a determining situation in that it controls the response of the rhetor.”<sup>54</sup> Consigny believes that situations do contain objective realities, but not to the extent that they control the discourse of the rhetor.

In his assessment of Vatz, Consigny finds agreement when he states, “The proper response of the rhetor is itself determined by the rhetor. . . . Vatz correctly treats the rhetor as creative.”<sup>55</sup> However, Consigny argues that Vatz “fails to account for the real constraints on the rhetor’s activity. The rhetor cannot create exigencies arbitrarily

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<sup>51</sup> Kim, “God, Israel, and the Gentiles,” 36.

<sup>52</sup> Scott Consigny, “Rhetoric and Its Situations,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 7, no. 3 (Summer 1974): 176.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 175-76.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 175-76.



but must take into account the particularities of each situation.”<sup>56</sup> Thus, Consigny seeks to find a middle position between Bitzer (situation controls the response of the rhetor) and Vatz (the rhetor creates the situation indeterminately) by adhering to the objective nature of an exigence while at the same time allowing the rhetor to offer a creative response.<sup>57</sup>

The balance between Bitzer and Vatz (and the exigence and the rhetor) is expressed in two conditions in Consigny’s theory. The first condition is integrity. Integrity in rhetorical situation exists when a rhetor can authentically and creatively manage “situations without his action being predetermined . . . [or be] forced to respond in a ‘fitting’ manner.”<sup>58</sup> The rhetor should have the freedom to choose from “a repertoire of options” in crafting discourse, but integrity also means that the rhetor is constrained by the objective particularities of the situation.<sup>59</sup> Arbitrarily creating exigencies from the mind of the rhetor is not integrous to the situation.

The second condition is receptivity. Receptivity is “allowing the rhetor to become engaged in individual situations without simply inventing and thereby

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<sup>56</sup> Consigny, “Rhetoric and Its Situations,” 176.

<sup>57</sup> Where Consigny attempts to balance the best of Bitzer and Vatz in an attempt to avoid the “chicken or egg” causality dilemma of the two theories, Barbara Biesecker takes a completely different and more subjective approach altogether. Biesecker applies Jacques Derrida’s principle of *differance* (essentially his theory of deconstruction which questions fundamental conceptual distinctions between text and meaning) to rhetorical situation. She states that speaker and audience are “constituted by *differance*” and “the subject [exigence] is shifting and unstable (constituted in and by the play of *differance*), then the rhetorical event may be seen as an incident that produces and reproduces the identities of subjects and constructs and reconstructs linkages between them.” In other words, speaker, audience, and exigence are articulated through *differance* to the degree that determining causality, or even the true meaning of exigence, is unknowable since rhetorical situation is not a linear process. Biesecker believes that meaning is so elusive and shifting in rhetorical situation that it cannot be understood through any objective or causal means. Barbara A. Biesecker, “Rethinking the Rhetorical Situation from within the Thematic of *Differance*,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 22, no. 2 (1989): 125-26.

<sup>58</sup> Consigny, “Rhetoric and Its Situations,” 181.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 181-82.

predetermining which problems he is going to find in them.”<sup>60</sup> The rhetor must be receptive to the particularities of the situation in order to find the relevant problems contained within them. Both integrity and receptivity allow for the discourse in rhetorical situation to be “heuristic” (discovering the real issues in situations) and managerial (superintending the particularities of the situation through creative options).<sup>61</sup> Discourse, according to Consigny, must be both heuristic and managerial to be rhetorical.

Consigny posits his definition of rhetorical situation as “an indeterminate context marked by troublesome disorder, which the rhetor must structure so as to disclose and formulate problems.”<sup>62</sup> This definition reveals Consigny’s construction of rhetorical situation. The exigence cannot be fully determinate: “construing the situation as determinate and determining a ‘fitting response’” is an error.<sup>63</sup> Neither can the exigence be fully determined by the arbitration of the rhetor, creating the situation: “construing the rhetor as completely free to create his own exigencies at will and select his subject matter in a manner of ‘pure arbitration’” (so Vatz) is also an error.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, since the exigency has objective particularities and the rhetor has some creative control of the discourse, Consigny contends that, given these two realities, the “context” of a situation is indeterminate while at the same time governed to some degree by the universal realities of the exigence. When rhetorical situation is chiefly understood through context, rather

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<sup>60</sup> Consigny, “Rhetoric and Its Situations,” 182.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 180-81.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* Some, like Consigny, view the “fitting response” motif of Bitzer to be causal and deterministic; however, others, such as Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, see the fitting response to be corroborative of details inherent within the situation. Thus, discourse is “fitting” if it aligns with the *a posteriori* observations of the exigence. Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “Rhetorical Situation and Historical Reconstruction in 1 Corinthians,” *New Testament Studies* 33, no. 3 (1987): 386-403, quoted in John Paul Schuster, “Rhetorical Situation and Historical Reconstruction in Philippians” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1997), 19.

<sup>64</sup> Consigny, “Rhetoric and Its Situations,” 178.

than exigence or rhetor, it allows the rhetor to observe the objective particularities of the exigence and then discover and articulate the problems of the exigence through discourse.

Consigny further explains the importance of emphasizing context (along with integrity and receptivity) by noting the often fluid nature of situation. Issues related to both the exigence and the audience of a situation can evolve during the rhetor's attempt at remedial discourse—something Aristotle referred to as the *pragmata* of the situation.<sup>65</sup> When such changes in exigence and/or audience occur, the rhetor must make adjustments in order to deliver effective discourse. Kenneth Burke refers to variances that can occur as the “incalcitrance” of a situation where either changes in the exigence or mind-set of the audience “may force [the rhetor] to alter [his] original strategy.”<sup>66</sup> Any rhetor who fails to work properly through the *pragmata* of a situation and who fails to take into account the constraints of the exigence or changes in the audience “may never get in touch with events or his audience, and may rightly be dismissed as ineffective and irrelevant.”<sup>67</sup>

Consigny describes a rhetor who successfully manages rhetorical situation as one who

discloses issues and brings them to resolution by interacting with the situation, revealing and working through the phenomena, selecting appropriate material and arranging it into a coherent form. Through his actions the rhetor attains a “disposition” of the situation . . . [and] discloses a new “gestalt” for interpreting and acting in the situation.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Consigny, “Rhetoric and Its Situations,” 178. Aristotle described *pragmata* (actual things) in rhetorical discourse as the point of arrival or departure of a process of change. For example, if one were arguing that a piece of wood was a certain shade of white, and over the course of time the wood became a different shade of white or off-white, the rhetor would have to adjust the discourse. Paloma Perez-Illarbe and Maria Cerezo, “Truth and Bivalence in Aristotle: An Investigation into the Structure of Saying,” in *Logik, Naturphilosophie, Dialektik: Neue Internationale Beitrage Zur Modernen Deutung der Aristotelischen Logik*, eds. Niels Offenberger and Alejandro G. Vigo (Hildesheim, Germany: Olms, 1997), 6.

<sup>66</sup> Consigny, “Rhetoric and Its Situations,” 178. See Kenneth Burke, *Permanence and Change* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), 255.

<sup>67</sup> Consigny, “Rhetoric and Its Situations,” 178-79.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

Thus, for Consigny, the central issue of rhetorical situation is not the dominance of the exigence or the rhetor, but whether the rhetor can be “engaged in an indiscriminate situation” and be “able to disclose and manage exigencies therein.”<sup>69</sup>

Consigny argues that a rhetor can properly assess and manage the exigency of the situation, as well as maintain integrity and receptivity, through the art of topics. In ancient rhetorical tradition, thinkers such as Aristotle and Cicero described topics (also called commonplaces) as “an instrument or device for the invention of arguments and the disclosure of phenomena.”<sup>70</sup> Consigny defines the topic as “a device which allows the rhetor to discover, through selection and arrangement, that which is relevant and persuasive in particular situations.”<sup>71</sup> Plainly stated, a topic is a source or template whereby the rhetor can generate arguments from his/her accumulated knowledge of various subjects.

Consigny notes that the topic must be an *instrument* that the rhetor uses to discern particularities of the exigence and from that knowledge form a rhetorical response. Bitzer would reject the topic as instrument, opting instead for the determinant nature of the exigence in shaping the discourse. Topics must also have *situation*, or exist within the realm of the objective aspects of the exigency. Vatz would reject the topic as situation, stating that the rhetor creates the exigence free from any constraint of the situation. Consigny finds in the use of topics the middle ground he seeks between Bitzer and Vatz, helping to bridge the gap between the principal features of the two theories: “The topic as instrument must remain in dynamic interrelation with the topic as the situation . . . the

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<sup>69</sup> Consigny, “Rhetoric and Its Situations,” 179.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 181. For Aristotle, the topics included a variety of subject matter such as right conduct, natural science, politics, and other unrelated fields. See Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 11-12. For Cicero, the topics related primarily to the invention of arguments. See Cicero, *Topica*, trans. H. M. Hubbell (London: William Heinemann, 1968), 387.

<sup>71</sup> Consigny, “Rhetoric and Its Situations,” 181.

topic must maintain a dynamic interplay between instrument and realm.”<sup>72</sup> The topic, then, relieves the antimony between an overemphasis on exigence or on rhetor and “allows the rhetor to become engaged in particular situations in a creative way.”<sup>73</sup>

### **Analysis of Consigny and Boice**

Like Bitzer, Consigny’s theory on rhetorical situation is helpfully analogous to the ministry of Boice. Consigny’s inclusion of the objective truth and particularities inherent within the exigence certainly fit Boice’s belief that the problem of liberalism in the UPCUSA was not a subjective issue, but a violation of authoritative truth found in Scripture. Consigny views the particularities of exigence as the guardrails that keep the rhetor’s creative activity in discourse aligned with the realities of the situation. Thus, rhetors have freedom to discover and to articulate the exigence to the audience but do so in a way that is grounded in the universal/objective reality of the situation. This is a helpful model to use in assessing Boice’s rhetoric. Boice’s preaching and writing were well connected to the exigency of his situation, which at the same time employed Consigny’s understanding of topics in his rhetoric.

The emphasis on integrity of the rhetoric in Consigny’s approach is evident in Boice’s sermons and writings. The substance of Boice’s discourse against the UPCUSA is directed at the obvious issues which comprised the controversy in the denomination. The parts of Boice’s rhetoric aimed at the UPCUSA are not guilty of straw man or red herring, but are cogent concerns and arguments articulated from Scripture and the traditional confessionalism of the denomination as they apply to the exigence. For Consigny (and Bitzer), rhetorical situation is grounded in objective, observable particularities that are historical. Patton notes,

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<sup>72</sup> Consigny, “Rhetoric and Its Situations,” 182.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

The underlying assumption is that rhetoric is essentially historical, i.e., in keeping with its origin in the classical period as a pragmatic art, its purpose is to later real events and experiences. . . . The role of perceptions does not reduce the situational approach to mere relativism [contra Vatz]. . . . The perceptions cannot be merely matters of personal preference or speculation if they are to be constitutive of genuinely rhetorical discourse.<sup>74</sup>

Boice's grievances against theological liberalism were not figments of his imagination, assumptions, or predilections, but rather a well-founded argument based on a sound and historical hermeneutical approach to the Bible.

At the same time, Consigny's attention on integrity also calls for more freedom and creativity on the part of the rhetor than Bitzer presumably allows. This is especially helpful in analyzing Boice in terms of what Consigny deems as the rhetor "formulating" the problem. "Formulating" should not be taken to mean creating the exigence *a priori*, but articulating the existing exigence in terms the audience can comprehend. An important facet in Boice's rhetoric, both in the clarity and quantity of his references against theological liberalism, is that in addition to arguing against the exigence and prescribing a solution, he was also elucidating what the exigence was in the first place. Often a paradigm shift in ideology or theology for a particular audience can occur gradually over time or be cast in an incomprehensible manner creating a need for the exigence to be elucidated by the rhetor. As demonstrated in the excerpts from his sermons and writings, Boice is not a pedant or empty alarmist; he gives careful information explaining how liberalism violates the tenets of Scripture and what its negative consequences are for the church and denomination.

Consigny's inclusion of receptivity is also evident in Boice's rhetoric. Receptivity includes viewing the particularities of the exigence in an impartial manner that is not forced upon the rhetor by the situation nor is a product of the rhetor's subjective thought. As already demonstrated in this dissertation, Boice's rhetoric is not fueled by presuppositional commitments be they personal or political. The foundation of Boice's

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<sup>74</sup> Patton, "Causation and Creativity," 54-55.

argument against theological liberalism is the traditional understanding of the nature and interpretation of Scripture. In this way his approach to the exigence is objective. Boice does not exude a brash, shortsighted, or exclusivistic attitude in his rhetoric. Rather, he was willing to work alongside those who disagreed with him as evidenced in the fact that he remained in the UPCUSA as long as he did.

Receptivity also includes a freedom for the rhetor to discover (receive) the relevant issues of the exigence and the various forms of discourse that can be used to modify the problem. Related to this aspect of receptivity is Consigny's inclusion of Aristotle's *pragmata*, or how a situation can evolve in both exigence and/or audience.<sup>75</sup> Boice's situation certainly evolved in the twelve years he pastored Tenth while it was a member of the UPCUSA. Repercussions from the Confession of 1967 began to materialize in a growing acceptance of homosexuality, women as ruling elders, and ministers passing ordination examinations while denying the major theological tenets of the Christian faith. In addition, many conservative congregations abandoned the UPCUSA for other denominations or to function independently. These changes forced Boice to be creative in the use of his rhetorical skill and energy to strategize and to implement effective means of discourse to address the growing urgency of the exigence. This may be evidenced in the growing number of correspondences related to developments in the UPCUSA and Boice's increased activity in PUBC and CUP in the latter half of the 1970s as opposed to the earlier half.<sup>76</sup>

In light of the evidence of integrity and receptivity in Boice's rhetoric, his work was both heuristic and managerial. His sermons and writings display a cognition of the objective/historical realities of the exigence and their use of rhetoric as an instrument.

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<sup>75</sup> Leroy Steinbacher refers to the changes that can occur in exigence and audience in rhetorical situation as "dynamic equilibrium." He defines this term to mean, "If one element [exigence, audience, rhetor] changes the others should be adjusted as well to meet the needs of the situation." Leroy Steinbacher, "The Rhetorical Situation," accessed April 3, 2018, [http://www.leroysteinbacher.com/public\\_html/4634/rs.pdf](http://www.leroysteinbacher.com/public_html/4634/rs.pdf).

<sup>76</sup> I make this claim upon reviewing Boice's correspondence in the decade of the 1970s.

Consigny's theory, drawing upon the work of Aristotle and Cicero in terms of how topics are used, is a beneficial analytic regarding Boice. Boice's education and extensive knowledge go beyond theology and cover a variety of topics, such as philosophy, science, history, education, and others (all evidenced in his sermons and writings), which Boice adroitly uses in responding to the exigence. The intelligence, experience, and wisdom of Boice flourish in his rhetoric against theological liberalism.

### Summary

Boice's rhetorical struggle with the UPCUSA easily fits the categories and parameters of Bitzer's theory. The work of Vatz is flawed in its summary dismissal of the objective particularities of exigence and thus does not match the rhetoric of Boice. Theories addressing rhetorical situation that do not take into account the objective particularities of exigence are deficient—Bitzer and Patton agree: "Historical realities remain the focal point for rhetorical activity."<sup>77</sup> Although Consigny's theory is more complex and opaque than Bitzer's or Vatz's, it appears to be the best template for understanding the rhetorical situation of Boice and the relationship between his rhetoric and the conflict in which he was engaged with the UPCUSA.

Bitzer stumbles in two ways in using his theory in reference to Boice. First, Bitzer fails in viewing the exigence as the cause of rhetoric. Although there is more space in Bitzer's theory for creativity on the part of the rhetor than is often afforded by critics, his understanding of rhetorical situation is too deterministic. The theory suffers at the hands of the *post hoc ergo propter hoc* logical fallacy. To state that Boice was forced to speak out against theological liberalism is a misnomer. Bitzer places too much emphasis on causation, and Vatz places too little emphasis on correlation regarding the influence of situation on rhetoric.

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<sup>77</sup> P. K. Tompkins, J. H. Patton, and Lloyd F. Bitzer, "The Forum: Tompkins on Patton and Bitzer, Patton on Tompkins, and Bitzer on Tompkins (and Patton)," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 66 (1980): 89, cited in Kim, "God, Israel, and Gentiles," 39.



Second, Bitzer does not give sufficient allowance for Boice's unique intellect and his creativity in diagnosing the exigence and forming rhetoric to remedy the problem. Randall Lake makes the important point that *personae* plays a significant role in the rhetorical act as it persuades the audience: "All speakers necessarily assume personae that not only consummate a role but also instrumentally invite audiences to participate, to 'be as I am.'"<sup>78</sup> Boice's oratorical and intellectual abilities combined to create an impressive personae. Stated differently, Boice had a "presence" or "aura" about him that was persuasive. Thus, Bitzer's theory fails to take into full account Boice's usage of inartistic proofs—his *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*.

Consigny, then, best captures the rhetorical efforts of Boice. His theory is the least flawed and takes into consideration Boice's commitment to both the objectiveness of the exigence and the creativity and skill of the rhetor.<sup>79</sup> Consigny's theory does not fall prey to *post hoc ergo propter hoc*, but makes provision for how the realities of the exigence give focus to the rhetoric. In Consigny's view, one is not forced to say that Boice had no choice but to deliver the discourse that he did, but rather his situation influenced his discourse. Given the statistics and evidence enumerated up to this point in this dissertation, it is difficult to deny that situation impacted Boice's rhetoric. Corbett and Connors, regarding the relationship of rhetoric and causality, insightfully write, "While it is true that argument by analogy always rests on shaky ground, it is possible for someone to become so niggling in his attitude toward all analogy that he is liable to strain

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<sup>78</sup> Randall A. Lake, "The Implied Arguer," in *Argumentation Theory and the Rhetoric of Assent*, ed. David Williams and Michael David Hazen (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1990), 73.

<sup>79</sup> Hunsacker and Smith find fault with Consigny's view in that it does not give sufficient emphasis to the role of the audience in rhetorical situation. They argue that "the goal of rhetorical discourse is consensus" whereby the rhetor helps to reconcile the issues related to the exigence with the perceptions of the audience. David M. Hunsacker and Craig R. Smith, "The Nature of Issues: A Constructive Approach to Situational Rhetoric," *Western Speech Communication* 40 (1976): 144-45.

at a gnat and swallow a camel.”<sup>80</sup> Consigny stops short of rendering Boice’s situation as the cause of his rhetoric, but allows for situation to influence it.

Consigny also makes adequate provision for Boice’s creative and skillful use of rhetoric as he employed it in his unique situation at Tenth and in the UPCUSA. Fiorenza makes the distinction between discourse that is written (or rhetorical) and that which is spoken (or poetic).<sup>81</sup> Both can be used by the rhetor with skillful effectiveness based on his/her understanding of the audience. Boice demonstrates a creative mastery of written and spoken forms of discourse to address the exigence he faced. In addition, as conditions worsened and became more dire for a conservative to remain in the denomination, Boice sought to meet the challenges that confronted him by adapting his rhetoric and efforts accordingly. Consigny’s theory best takes into consideration Boice’s perceptive, skillful, and adaptive rhetorical abilities to persuade his audience.

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<sup>80</sup> Corbett and Connors, *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*, 69.

<sup>81</sup> Fiorenza, “Rhetorical Situation,” 386.

CHAPTER 8  
CONCLUSION

**The Success of James Boice**

This dissertation sought to lay out the evidence that Boice chose to stay in the liberal UPCUSA as long as he could in order to work for theological reform and to “strengthen what remains and is about to die.” The preaching and writings of Boice, with the many specific and frequent references opposing theological liberalism, reflect his commitment to theological orthodoxy and to his ardent desire for the denomination to return to its confessional roots. This dissertation also sought to explore the relationship Boice’s situation within a liberal denomination had on his preaching. The two objectives, staying in the UPCUSA to work for reform and the effect of situation on Boice, are not mutually exclusive. Boice sought to carefully craft his rhetoric based in part on his situation in order to change the status of his situation. The question remains as to whether Boice was successful in his endeavor.

In one sense, Boice failed in his efforts to reform mainline Presbyterianism. In 1983, three years after Tenth severed its relationship with the UPCUSA, the UPCUSA and PCUS merged to form a national, mainline Presbyterian denomination called the Presbyterian Church (USA). This denomination continued in the path of theological liberalism which the UPCUSA had carried out. Its denial of the nature and authority of Scripture and the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith have been expressed in recent developments within the denomination. In its General Assembly meeting in 2014, the PC(USA) voted to allow its ministers to perform gay marriages in states where it was

legal.<sup>1</sup> In the 2016 General Assembly meeting, a Muslim clergyman led a prayer to Allah arranged by the Ecumenical and Interfaith ministry staff of the PC(USA).<sup>2</sup> The continued progression into theological liberalism has contributed, at least in part, to hurt the denomination as it reports plummeting statistics every year in attendance and financial giving.<sup>3</sup>

Given the UPCUSA's progression into liberalism, one might argue that Boice failed those churches he encouraged to remain in the denomination. Some of the churches with whom Boice had correspondence encouraging them to stay and work for reform, did stay in the denomination, but abandoned their orthodox beliefs to join the liberalism of the UPCUSA.<sup>4</sup> The argument can be made that it would have been better for Boice to have encouraged churches to leave the UPCUSA while they still held to orthodoxy. Had they left, they might still be conservative today. However, Boice encouraged churches to remain in the denomination and work for reform out of good faith, as he genuinely believed the UPCUSA could be reclaimed for orthodoxy.

Any consideration of Boice having failed to meet his objective must be qualified. Boice did not give in or quit his fight for reform in the denomination because he grew too weary or too frustrated. Because Boice refused to succumb to pressure from

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<sup>1</sup> Lauren Markoe, "Presbyterians Vote to Allow Gay Marriage," *Religion News Service*, June 19, 2014, accessed April 14, 2018, <https://religionnews.com/2014/06/19/presbyterians-vote-allow-gay-marriage/>.

<sup>2</sup> Jonah Hicap, "Presbyterian Church U.S.A. Caught Reciting Muslim Prayer," *Christianity Today*, July 1, 2016, accessed April 14, 2018, <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/presbyterian-church-u-s-a-caught-reciting-muslim-prayer/89667.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> David Haskell, "Liberal Churches Are Dying But Conservative Churches Are Thriving," *Washington Post*, January 4, 2017, accessed April 14, 2018, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2017/01/04/liberal-churches-are-dying-but-conservative-churches-are-thriving/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.08c1a8e4dd2b](https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2017/01/04/liberal-churches-are-dying-but-conservative-churches-are-thriving/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.08c1a8e4dd2b).

<sup>4</sup> Multiple pastors of churches with whom Boice corresponded contained in this dissertation did stay in the denomination after Tenth left and eventually abandoned orthodox beliefs and embraced the liberalism of the PC(USA). Two of those churches are Babcock Memorial Presbyterian Church in Baltimore ("Letter to Rev. Robert B. Louthan," August 9, 1983, series 4, box 4) and Northminster Presbyterian Church in Endwell, NY ("Letter to Rev. Barry Downing," February 20, 1980, series 4, box 3).

the denomination to violate his conscience, he was forced out. He was forced out by action of the denomination to violate his conscience. Not only that, if Boice continued to lead Tenth in the UPCUSA after Overture L, he would have been party to encouraging others to violate their consciences as well. As previously mentioned, the UPCUSA had grown to a point in its liberalism that guilt by association was an argument he could no longer refute. Long had he contended that Tenth's presence in the UPCUSA was not a sign of theological capitulation, but dedication to labor for change in the errant denomination. Boice appears to have been willing to carry on the battle for reform indefinitely, but the time had come in which he could no longer associate himself or the people of Tenth with the UPCUSA.

In another sense, however, the efforts of Boice can be considered a success. First, a portion of Boice's personal success can be attributed to the fact that throughout the entire struggle with the UPCUSA, Boice never surrendered his theological convictions and never abandoned the fight to defend them through faithful preaching of the Word. Boice is exemplar in modeling a pastor who did not wane in his commitment to preach the Bible expositively in the midst of a broader environment that found it unpalatable. Boice rose to the occasion of his rhetorical situation and matched his rhetoric with the great need of the hour in which he found himself. As discussed in chapter 7, Boice skillfully used his abilities as a rhetor in attempt to modify his exigence. He did not view his situation as deterministic and thus give up on working for reform. Neither did he see his situation as having no correlation for his preaching and thus fail to address the crisis of the situation within the UPCUSA. Instead, Boice understood the propositional nature of the Bible and used his rhetoric in a fitting manner to call people to obey the Word.

Boice sensed great pressure from the denomination either to alter his beliefs or at least to cease his vigorous efforts contending for reform. However, Boice's correspondence reveals an exhausting schedule of church meetings, meetings with other organizations, and speaking engagements all over the country (not to mention his duties

as pastor of Tenth) in an effort to champion theological orthodoxy. In his work to make a positive impact for right doctrine in the denomination, he did not allow the denomination to impact him negatively.

Second, there is a sense in which Boice was successful regarding Tenth Presbyterian Church. His faithful preaching of the Word and consistent cautions against the error of theological liberalism denying the authority of Scripture no doubt helped to keep Tenth in line with orthodoxy. In addition, Tenth blossomed under Boice's leadership once the church separated itself from the UPCUSA. Average attendance rose from 916 in 1979 to 1,232 in 1984 with a surge of new members and ministries.<sup>5</sup> Boice wrote to supporters of the decision to leave the UPCUSA:

The effect of all this on the congregation has been good. I have never seen the church so united or so forward looking. People are really anxious to reach out now and make an increasingly effective impact on the city and other places through the missions program.<sup>6</sup>

In another letter he describes that growth at the church has been so rapid that it is causing significant space problems:

Tenth has been growing so quickly that we have been operating far beyond our space capacity for the last twelve months. We have classes meeting in the basement (against prevailing fire codes). . . . The membership class has been meeting outside the restrooms . . . and we are on the verge of adding other staff without any possibility of office space for them.<sup>7</sup>

Tenth's ongoing conflict with the UPCUSA proved to be a distraction for the church in accomplishing its ministry and mission. Once Tenth finally separated from the denomination, its full focus could be placed on fulfilling its biblical mandate as a church.

Financial giving at Tenth also rose significantly after Tenth's departure from the UPCUSA. From 1980 to 1981, the missions budget rose 42 percent, and "for the first

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<sup>5</sup> Philip G. Ryken, ed., *Tenth Presbyterian Church: 175 Years of Thinking and Acting Biblically* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P and R, 2004), 126.

<sup>6</sup> James Montgomery Boice, "Letter to Walter and Lillian Phillips," April 4, 1980, series 4, box 4.

<sup>7</sup> James Montgomery Boice, "Letter to Dessah Randall," February 26, 1981, series 4, box 4.

time in my thirteen years as pastor we ended the summer with a surplus in our general budget account, rather than a deficit.”<sup>8</sup> Boice comments in a number of letters that “giving to the various budgets is higher than ever.”<sup>9</sup> For the next twenty years under the leadership of Boice, Tenth continued to be a healthy, theologically strong church making a positive impact for the kingdom of God and continues to do so to this day.

In a third sense, Boice’s struggle for theological orthodoxy was deemed successful for the world. The reverberations of Boice’s efforts were experienced far beyond the membership of Tenth or those within the UPCUSA. Boice’s sermons, broadcast nationally on the radio through the Bible Study Hour, have become a popular set of expositional commentaries today. He continued his work leading the PCRT until his death. The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy was chaired by Boice, a stalwart defender of biblical inerrancy, as it came under attack by many both within and outside his denomination. Boice went on to be instrumental in the formation of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals and the Cambridge Declaration, which encouraged churches to recapture their roots in the Reformation. He also fought to find the funding needed to keep *Eternity* magazine, a publication started by Barnhouse that had a broad impact among evangelicals, in operation.

The broad and positive impact of Boice for evangelicalism is unmistakable. In November 1980, Billy Graham, who was then chairman of the board of trustees for Gordon-Conwell Seminary, asked Boice to become the president of the school. Then again in May 1981, Graham proposed that Boice become the editor of *Christianity Today*. These invitations reveal the significance of Boice and the high esteem with which he was held by the evangelical community. Boice declined both offers, citing that he was called to be

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<sup>8</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Tenth Presbyterian Church,” November 21, 1980, series 3, box 3; James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Langston and Tracy,” February 26, 1981, series 4, box 3.

<sup>9</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Rev. David Allen George,” April 10, 1980, series 4, box 3.

a pastor and specifically a pastor in the inner city of Philadelphia.<sup>10</sup> Boice was the quintessential pastor-theologian who proved himself faithful to the Word and to the ministry throughout his ordeal with the UPCUSA. Perhaps the highest accolade that can be said of Boice and his accomplishments for evangelicalism was spoken by John MacArthur in an opening address at a conference on biblical inerrancy. Speaking about the work of the ICBI, MacArthur states, “Leading it all was Jim Boice, a remarkable servant of the Lord. I remember when he died, R. C. Sproul said to me, ‘The death of Jim Boice is God’s judgment on America.’ That’s how significant he was.”<sup>11</sup>

### **The Price to Be Paid**

The rigorous efforts of Boice to champion theological orthodoxy did not come without a personal price. When a person takes on the mantle of a daunting task like Boice did, he or she often feels the physical and emotional drain of such an endeavor. Once, after an especially demanding and extensive trip of speaking engagements, Boice returned to preach at Tenth on a Sunday morning. Waiting behind the stage for the service to start, Boice leaned back against the wall, tipped back his head and said to associate pastor Carroll Wynne, “Sometimes I hate coming back here.”<sup>12</sup> But when the music started, Boice walked through the door and brilliantly led the service. Wynne noted that Boice was a natural and that Tenth was undoubtedly the place where God called Boice to serve. His statement behind the stage was brought on by utter exhaustion.

Aside from a grueling schedule, Boice had to contend with those who were unhappy with the theological stand he took and with some of the decisions he was forced to make. As can be expected given Boice’s high profile, he received many letters from

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<sup>10</sup> Ryken, *Tenth Presbyterian Church*, 127-28.

<sup>11</sup> John MacArthur, Jr., “Inerrancy Under Attack,” *Grace to You*, March 3, 2015, accessed April 14, 2018, <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/GTY150/inerrancy-under-attack>.

<sup>12</sup> Carroll Wynne, interview with the author, Philadelphia, February 9, 2017.



people across the nation objecting to his theological conservatism. The criticism Boice received because of his departure from the UPCUSA and issues related to it must have caused him great anguish. When Tenth withdrew from the UPCUSA, Boice received letters rescinding invitations for speaking engagements. One such letter states,

The turn of events in the Presbyterian Church has repeatedly made national and religious news. Due to the prominent role which Tenth has had in all this . . . [we] have nothing to gain and much to lose by inviting such identification in the eyes of the broad constituency which [we] serve.<sup>13</sup>

Choosing to take a side in a conflict, rather than ambigulously attempting to remain neutral, often results in criticisms and punitive actions from the opposing side.

During the litigation regarding the property of Tenth, Boice was somewhat harassed by the legal counsel of the UPCUSA. In a letter he received from the attorneys asking for documents related to his ordination so that he could be properly defrocked, Boice replied, “This is a funny request to come from presbytery and should be construed, I believe, as a fishing expedition. The presbytery itself conducts that service and knows fully well [that] they have full minutes of the meeting.”<sup>14</sup>

A prominent member of Tenth, C. Everett Koop, stopped attending Tenth for a period unhappy with the decision to leave mainline Presbyterianism. Boice was forced to respond to the media and others regarding Koop’s decision.<sup>15</sup> Boice received one letter from a member of Tenth upset that the church was about to join either the PCA or RPCES in light of the fact that they did not officially allow for the ordination of women

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<sup>13</sup> Leroy Brightup, “Letter to James Boice,” July 25, 1980, series 4, box 3. Brightup was the Chairman of the Division of Religion and Philosophy at Friends University in Wichita, KS.

<sup>14</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Jean C. Hemphill,” February 26, 1981, series 4, box 4.

<sup>15</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Letter to Arthur H. Matthews,” July 5, 1984, series 4, box 5. Koop, at the time of Tenth’s departure from the UPCUSA, was Chief of Surgery at Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia. He pioneered advancements in neonatal and pediatric surgery and served as Surgeon General of the United States under Ronald Reagan. Holcomb B. Noble, “C. Everett Koop, Forceful U.S. Surgeon General, Dies at 96,” *New York Times*, February 25, 2013, accessed September 3, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/26/us/c-everett-koop-forceful-surgeon-general-dies-at-96.html>.

as deacons.<sup>16</sup> Boice received a letter from a member of a church in the Philadelphia Presbytery that typified other letters he had received criticizing his conservatism and Tenth's move out of the UPCUSA. The letter accused Boice of having "seduced the church with your comprehension of biblical splendor" and pulling Tenth out of the denomination with a method "pursued in secrecy."<sup>17</sup> The author of the letter goes on to call Boice a liar who denied dissidents in his church the very freedom of conscience he was seeking. It closes by stating,

Only time will tell how much farther you will go to justify your actions. . . . I present this paper . . . to help you see the errors in that great mind of yours which your friends tried to reason with and failed. Go to church Sunday . . . and see if the church can forgive seventy times seven the offenses they will believe to be done by the presbytery against you and them, but will be the offenses you have committed against them and the presbytery.<sup>18</sup>

In many of Boice's sermons, he noted that standing for orthodoxy would not come without a price. Boice's personal experience reveals the price he paid.

Perhaps the most heart-wrenching letters of criticism in Boice's correspondence are from fellow conservatives in the UPCUSA who believed Boice, one of their strongest leaders for reform in the denomination, abandoned them in their hour of greatest need. One pastor writes, "I was alarmed and concerned that you and your church withdrew from the UPCUSA. . . . I sense a need to be a voice . . . for conservative evangelicals . . . in such places [the UPCUSA]."<sup>19</sup> Another pastor candidly wrote to Boice,

I know that you want to see things change. So do I and many other ministers who are of the same opinion as you. When I see what is happening with all the pull-outs . . . I begin to wonder. The ones who can do something about the matter, the men who do count in evangelicalism are all pulling out and letting us in the minorities carry the brunt of the matter. You fellows have all the clout. You fellows can express yourselves through your programs, your writings, your addresses. The minority does

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<sup>16</sup> Philip Barackman, "Letter to Clive Stockdale and James Boice," August 4, 1980, series 4, box 3.

<sup>17</sup> J. B. Adams, "Letter to James Boice," March 15, 1980, series 4, box 3.

<sup>18</sup> Adams, "Letter to James Boice."

<sup>19</sup> Spencer R. Frye, "Letter to Dr. James Boice," May 7, 1980, series 4, box 4.

not have the power you fellows have. Are we left to sink while proclaiming the gospel? Can it be better to be on the inside standing up for what is right than on the outside? I have admired you very much and would like to know how to stem the tide and fight back for the purity of the church.<sup>20</sup>

Boice certainly believed he was forced to leave the denomination and had no choice but to do otherwise, but these letters must have been painful knowing that his departure from the denomination also meant he was leaving his fellow conservatives who were fighting the good fight for reform.

Linda Boice provides an insightful summary of the personal price Boice paid to contend for orthodoxy to the extent that he did:

It struck me that Jim spent much effort trying to save two institutions. The UPCUSA was one, and *Eternity* magazine was the other. . . . He was so stressed and exhausted with those efforts that he did damage to his relationships with elders, and others. And in the end he couldn't save it.<sup>21</sup>

The lesson to be learned for those who may find themselves in the same situation as Boice is that there will most likely be a personal price to pay. Standing for theological orthodoxy will create enemies. A person must have a tough skin, but not be belligerent or offensive in how he/she responds to others. In addition, pastors, especially those who find themselves fighting for one side of a controversy, must be aware of the all-consuming nature of the task. They must be careful to guard their relationships, especially with family, and not to neglect their sacred task of feeding and caring for God's flock.

### **Should I Stay or Should I Go?**

As referenced in the first chapter of this dissertation, churches today still find themselves at odds with their denominations over biblical orthodoxy. For example, over the last few years, over three hundred congregations have left the PC(USA) primarily over its open acceptance of homosexuality.<sup>22</sup> When disagreement occurs, members of the

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<sup>20</sup> John N. DiGiacomo, "Letter to James Boice," May 15, 1981, series 4, box 3.

<sup>21</sup> Linda Boice, email message to author, March 5, 2018.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Gryboski, "PCUSA's Eighth-Largest Member Church Votes to Leave and Join Conservative Denomination," *Christian Post*, July 18, 2016, accessed April 14, 2018,

church leadership have difficult decisions to make. Often, historic, sentimental, and pragmatic reasons warrant remaining in a denomination. At the same time, a commitment to biblical orthodoxy must not be compromised.

In an article Boice wrote shortly after Tenth's withdrawal from the UPCUSA, he enumerated the traits that every evangelical church should desire within a denomination.

(1) "The denomination must be committed to the highest possible standard of biblical authority. We regard this as the undeniable watershed of Christian life and theology."<sup>23</sup>

This also means that a denomination must adhere to theological orthodoxy that is confessional and in alignment with a grammatical-historical hermeneutic of interpreting the Scriptures. (2) The denomination must be committed to a biblical form of church governance. (3) "The denomination must be committed to biblical practice in areas where the Scripture speaks, but it must allow liberty in non-biblical or biblically doubtful areas."<sup>24</sup>

A denomination cannot bind the conscience of its constituent churches in particulars where the Bible is not explicit in its instruction. Boice also adds that it is desirable for a denomination to be "evangelistically aggressive" and "a visible testimony to the unity of the church."<sup>25</sup>

An evangelical church will most likely find itself in a dilemma if it is part of a denomination that does not possess the three essential characteristics outlined by Boice. This was the situation in which Boice found himself, and his actions form a favorable template for pastors who find themselves in the same situation. First, Boice diligently labored to match his preaching and writings to address the contingency of the situation.

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<https://www.christianpost.com/news/pcusas-eighth-largest-member-church-votes-leave-join-conservative-presbyterian-denomination-166638/>.

<sup>23</sup> James Montgomery Boice, "How Can We Choose?" *Presbyterian Journal* 39, no. 4 (May 28, 1980): 8.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

If a pastor finds himself in a church or denomination that denies the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith, then he must shape his rhetoric in an attempt to remedy the error. Second, Boice exemplifies a desirable balance of convictional firmness in addressing heterodoxy while at the same time striking a tone that is patient and pastoral instead of truculent. Third, Boice sought to build unity within his church and to find common ground with other like-minded Christians in his presbytery and beyond. No pastor facing an errant denomination should take a “Lone Ranger” approach. Rather, the approach of building a consensus and of working through proper channels of church and denominational polity constitutes a desirable method.

Finally, every pastor who finds himself in a similar situation as Boice would do well to understand that he has come to the point of departure when the denomination forces a pastor to violate his conscience clearly based on the teaching of Scripture. Whether a pastor chooses to stay, as Boice did, in an errant denomination is a matter of one’s conscience and sense of the Lord’s guidance. Boice often noted in his correspondence that even though he may disagree with conservatives who chose to leave the UPCUSA, he respected their right to do so. However, whereas the example of Boice allows for freedom of conscience on remaining in a denomination, it also signals when a pastor and church should withdraw from that denomination—when freedom of conscience is violated. Thus, pastors can discern how long to stay in a theologically adrift denomination and may sense God leading them to do what Boice did—to stay and strengthen what remains. Yet, when the denomination creates and enforces policies that require a pastor to transgress a personal, accepted understanding of Scripture, then, he is obligated to leave that denomination and to lead his congregation to associate with a body that will help the church thrive, rather than recede, in its mission.

On Good Friday, April 21, 2000, Boice was diagnosed with an aggressive form of liver cancer. Boice last spoke to the congregation on May 7 to inform them of the severity of his rapidly deteriorating condition. In this address, Boice stated, “If I was to

reflect on what goes on theologically here, there are two things I would stress . . . the sovereignty of God . . . [and] God is good.”<sup>26</sup> Throughout Boice’s prestigious and important ministry, during his struggles with the UPCUSA and victories in various ministries, God sovereignly and lovingly guided the faithful pastor in ways that brought glory to God and increase to the kingdom. His widow shared a statement with me that proves to be an adept summary of Boice’s life and this treatment of a specific stage of his ministry:

Jim was a true conservative, seeking to preserve and strengthen what we have received from the past which is good and, to conservatives, worth preserving. Or, to put it biblically, to live out Rev. 3:2 [“Strengthen what remains . . .]. Clearly, he also needed to be fighting for things that were bigger than just the issues directly related to the life of Tenth church.<sup>27</sup>

On June 15, 2000, James Boice concluded his life-long struggle in defense of theological orthodoxy when he passed away and met face to face with the One whom he had lauded for the entirety of his ministry.

Carl F. H. Henry noted in his sermon at Boice’s ordination, “James Boice . . . you cherish the message of all the apostles. May you share the momentum of the apostle to the Gentiles in matching the myths of our age with the timeless truth of the revelation of God’s Word.”<sup>28</sup> Those words proved to be prophetic as James Boice honored the Lord in his rhetorical situation through his love for Scripture, his faithfulness to biblical preaching, his courage in defending the great doctrines of the faith, and in all of these he strengthened what remained.

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<sup>26</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Final Address at Tenth Presbyterian Church,” in Tenth Presbyterian Church, *The Life of James Montgomery Boice 1938-2000* (Philadelphia: Gerald Stevens, 2001), 44-45.

<sup>27</sup> Boice, email message.

<sup>28</sup> Philip Graham Ryken, Derek W. H. Thomas, and J. Ligon Duncan, eds., *Give Praise to God: A Vision for Reforming Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P and R, 2003), 5.

APPENDIX 1

FAMILY TREE OF PRESBYTERIAN DENOMINATIONS

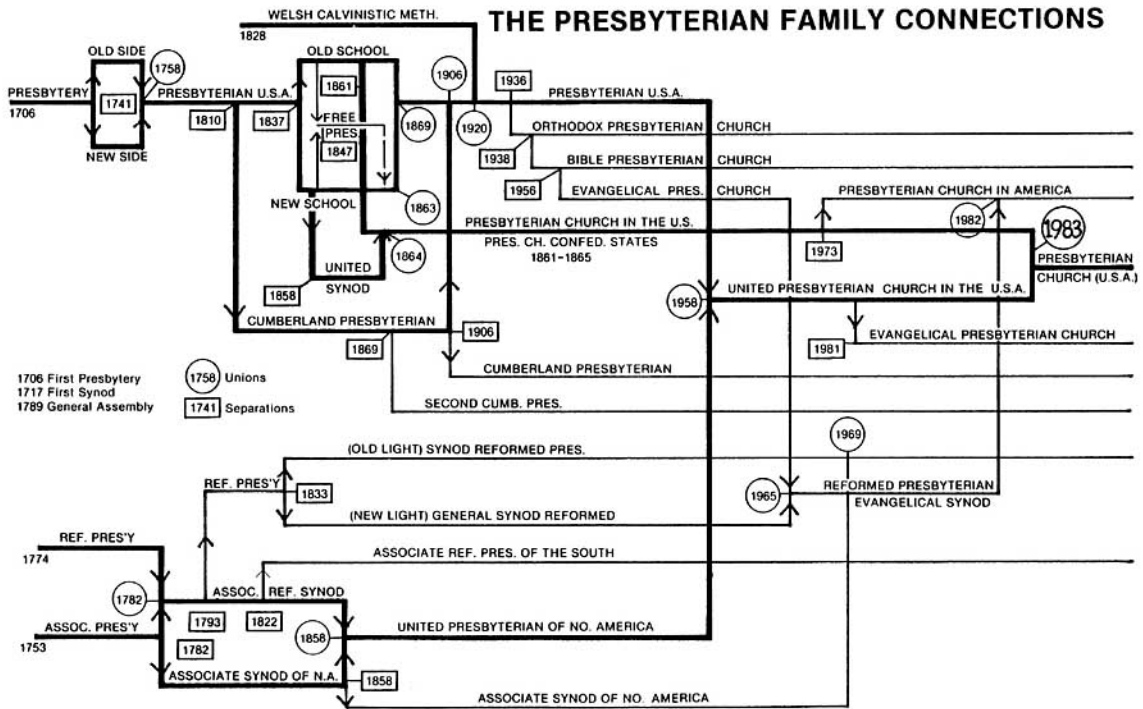


Figure A1. Presbyterian denominations in the United States

Courtesy of the Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia

APPENDIX 2

REFERENCES TO THEOLOGICAL LIBERALISM AND  
ERRANT THINKERS AS CITED IN BOICE'S  
PRINTED SERMONS

Table A1. Liberal/Neo-Orthodox theologians and errant religious thinkers

Horatio Alger	Arius	Jean Astruc
D. Sherwin Bailey	James Barr	Karl Barth
Bruno Bauer	F.C. Bauer	G.C. Berkouwer
Annie Besant	E.C. Blackman	Eugene Carson Blake
John T. Brink	Lewis Browne	Emil Brunner
Rudolf Bultmann	J. Lowell Butler	Charles Capps
Cerinthus	G. Michael Cocoris	Kenneth Copeland
Harvey Cox	Paul Crouch	Oscar Cullmann
Rene Descartes	Adolph Deissman	Wilhelm De Wette
Martin Dibelius	Mary Baker Eddy	Johann Eichhorn
Desiderius Erasmus	Ludwig Feuerbach	Joseph Fletcher
Arthur Ford	Harry Emerson Fosdick	Sally Gearhart
Sidney Gulick	Kenneth Hagin	I.M. Haldeman
Adolf Harnack	Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel	Ferdinand Hitzig
Zane C. Hodges	William R. Johnson	Immanuel Kant
Soren Kierkegaard	Emil G. Kraeling	Harold Kushner
Gottfried W. Leibniz	Shirley MacLaine	Marcion
Jurgen Moltmann	Thomas More	Reinhold Niehbur
Norman Vincent Peale	Troy Perry	James Pike
Alexander Pope	Peter Popoff	William Ramsay
Rao	Walter Rauschenbusch	Hermann S. Reimarus
Ernst Renan	Edouard Reuss	Albrecht Ritschl
Pat Robertson	John A.T. Robinson	Oral Roberts
Heinrich Schliemann	Robert Schuller	Robert Sandeman
John Skinner	Joseph Smith	Rudolph Steiner
George Steindorff	David Friedrich Strauss	Paul Tillich
Robert Tilton	T.F. Torrance	Casey Treat
Wilhelm Vatke	Leslie Weatherhead	Julius Wellhausen
John Wimber		



Table A2. Atheist/agnostic thinkers

Stewart Alsop	Francis Bacon	Franz Borkenau
G. L. Leclerc de Buffon	Samuel Butler	George Lord Byron
Charles Darwin	Erasmus Darwin	Jeane Dixon
Havelock Ellis	Amitai Etzioni	Sigmund Freud
Erich Fromm	Thomas Hobbes	Aldous Huxley
Thomas Huxley	Robert Ingersoll	James Jeans
Chevalier de Lamarck	Richard/Mary Leakey	George Lord Lyttleton
Karl Marx	Margaret Mead	Desmond Morris
Anson Mount	Friedrich Nietzsche	Everett C. Olson
George Orwell	Camille Paglia	Jean-Jacque Rousseau
Bertrand Russell	Carl Sagan	Jean-Paul Sartre
Arthur Schopenhauer	B.F. Skinner	Oswald Spengler
Algernon C. Swinburne	Voltaire	Hugo de Vries
Gilbert West	Oscar Wilde	Thomas Wolfe

Table A3. Errant doctrines/theories/philosophies

Antinomianism	Arianism	Donatists/Donatism
Dualism	Naturalistic Evolution	Gnosticism
Hedonism	Higher Criticism	Humanism
Inclusivism	JEPD Source Theory	Liberation Theology
Manichaeism	Mysticism	Neo-Orthodoxy
Pelagianism	Pluralism	Pragmatism
Polychrome Bible	Process Theology	Rationalism
Reincarnation	Romanism	Sandemanianism
Secularism	Universal Bro. of God	Universalism

Table A4. Key words/phrases

“Attack”	“Critical, Critic(s), Criticism”	“Error/Errant”
“Heresy/Heretic(s)/Heretical”	“Liberal(s), Liberalism”	“Modern, Modern Scholarship/Scholars”
“Popular”	“Progress/Progressive”	“Pseudo”
“Skeptic(s)/Skeptical/Skepticism”	“The So-Called”	“Neo-orthodoxy”

### APPENDIX 3

#### THIRTY MOST REFERENCED LIBERAL AND NEO-ORTHODOX THEOLOGIANs

- |                       |                              |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Karl Barth         | 16. Wolfhart Pannenberg      |
| 2. F.C. Bauer         | 17. Karl Rahner              |
| 3. Emil Brunner       | 18. Walter Rauschenbusch     |
| 4. Rudolf Bultmann    | 19. Hermann Reimarus         |
| 5. Harvey Cox         | 20. Ernest Renan             |
| 6. Oscar Cullman      | 21. Paul Ricoeur             |
| 7. Martin Dibelius    | 22. Albrecht Ritschl         |
| 8. Ludwig Feuerbach   | 23. John A.T. Robinson       |
| 9. Adolf von Harnack  | 24. Friedrich Schleiermacher |
| 10. John Hick         | 25. David F. Strauss         |
| 11. Immanuel Kant     | 26. Paul Tillich             |
| 12. Soren Kierkegaard | 27. T.F. Torrance            |
| 13. Hans Kung         | 28. Hans von Balthasar       |
| 14. Jurgen Moltmann   | 29. Leslie Weatherhead       |
| 15. Reinhold Niehbur  | 30. Julius Wellhausen        |

## APPENDIX 4

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APPENDIX 5

REFERENCES OF LIBERAL THEOLOGIANS IN  
SERMONS BY BOICE AND HIS PEERS

Table A5. Liberal theologians referenced by evangelical preachers

<b>Theologian</b>	<b>Boice</b>	<b>Macarthur</b>	<b>Graham</b>	<b>Criswell</b>	<b>Rogers</b>
Barth	*	*	*	*	*
Bauer	*	*		*	
Brunner	*	*	*	*	
Bultmann	*	*	*	*	
Cox	*				*
Cullmann	*	*			
Dibelius	*				
Feuerbach	*		*	*	*
Harnack	*	*		*	
Hick		*			
Kant	*	*	*	*	
Kierkegaard	*	*	*		*
Kung		*	*		
Moltmann	*	*	*		
Niebuhr	*	*	*	*	
Pannenberg					
Rahner					
Renan	*	*		*	
Rauschenbusch	*		*	*	
Reimarus	*				
Ricoeur					
Ritschl	*				
Robinson	*	*	*		*
Schleiermacher	*	*	*	*	
Strauss	*	*		*	
Tillich	*	*	*	*	
Torrance	*		*		
von Balthasar					
Weatherhead	*	*	*		
Wellhausen	*	*		*	
# of sermons searched	1,142	3,220	3,700+	4,100+	1,925
# of theologians referenced	25	19	15	14	5

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## ABSTRACT

### STRENGTHEN WHAT REMAINS: THE RHETORICAL SITUATION OF JAMES MONTGOMERY BOICE

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018  
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This dissertation argues that James Montgomery Boice, upon becoming pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, remained in the liberal United Presbyterian Church USA for the first twelve years of his pastorate in order to reclaim the denomination for orthodoxy. His efforts toward reclamation are principally grounded through the content of his preaching and writing, which was affected by this rhetorical situation.

Chapter 1 states the thesis, which attempts to answer two major questions that arise from this era of Boice's ministry: Why remain in a liberal denomination when conservative options were available? Why does the content of Boice's rhetoric contain large amounts of references to liberal theology?

Chapter 2 describes the rise of theological liberalism in northern mainline Presbyterianism commonly known as the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy. This portion of the denomination's history provides a picture of its theological status when Boice became pastor of Tenth in 1968. The way some conservatives responded to the controversy impacted Boice's own response to liberalism.

Chapter 3 examines the personal correspondence and published articles of Boice delineating his opposition to theological liberalism and desire to remain within the UPCUSA to be an advocate for orthodoxy.

Chapter 4 describes the major influences in Boice's life that helped shape his desire to stay within an errant denomination to strengthen what remains rather than

abandon it. These influences are Donald Grey Barnhouse, Harold John Ockenga, Robert J. Lamont, and John Gerstner.

Chapter 5 provides examples from Boice's sermons and writings during the time period germane to the dissertation (1968-1980). The sermons are from his Sunday morning series on Genesis, John, and Philippians and organized around topics pertaining to theological liberalism that appear in each series. These sermon and book excerpts illustrate Boice's rhetorical efforts against heterodoxy.

Chapter 6 explains why Boice eventually was forced to leave the UPCUSA. Despite his desire to remain within it, the denomination began enforcing legislation that would require Boice to lead his church in a way that would violate his conscience.

Chapter 7 explores the impact Boice's situation had on his rhetoric. The chapter outlines the arguments of Lloyd Bitzer, the seminal theorist in the field of rhetorical situation. An opposing view argued by Richard Vatz is described next, followed by the intermediate view of Scott Consigny. All three views consider the degree of causation that occurs between situation and rhetoric. The chapter argues for the theory put forth by Consigny that situation does not determine why a rhetor speaks, but rather helps to shape what he or she speaks.

Chapter 8 serves as the conclusion which assesses whether Boice was successful in his endeavors to reclaim the UPCUSA for orthodoxy. The approach of Boice to remain in an errant denomination as long as one can is posited as an exemplary approach for those in similar ministry situations.

## VITA

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### EDUCATION

B.A., Oklahoma Baptist University, 1992  
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### MINISTERIAL

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Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church, Wellston, Oklahoma, 1994-1997  
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