

Seminary Student

(letters from a retired professor to a disillusioned young seminary grad)

Letter #1: God Is Not A Syllogism

Dear Theo,

What a surprise to hear from you. I am so glad that you were “strangely compelled” to contact me because I have been “strangely compelled” to pray for you since your graduation (and my retirement). Now as you well know, I’ve never been one for long formalities, so let’s cut right to the chase—

First, let me put your mind at ease—no, I am not offended that when you were in Seminary, you “wrote off” many of my views (If you hadn’t, I’m sad to say, you might not have passed some of your courses). I am aware that I was affectionately known as “the mad professor” by the enlightened crowd. I’m just happy that you have finally decided to give me a hearing—the devil delights when we caricature and write one another off before we’ve actually heard one another out. And one more thing, technically speaking I am not a Pentecostal, though some of my dearest friends are. I am what you might call an old-school Evangelical. I will be happy to explain the distinction later, but I will hold off for now—you seem to be looking for some help, not definitions.

Theo, my young brother, the most fundamental thing you need to understand is that a true, vital, living knowledge of God cannot transfer from one person to another through formula and syllogism, any more than I can transfer my relationship with my wife through formulas and logic. Top scores in systematic theology courses say little about whether you really know God (in the biblical sense of “know”) or not. Your high scores simply reveal that you were a good student, and would have excelled in just about any field of study—botany, Russian history, or whatever, but this says little about whether you really know God.

It seems abundantly clear to me that you are finding, to your chagrin, that much of your seminary theories are not working out so well in the real world. I tried to warn you students that you can’t spend ivory tower currency down in the valley of tears--i.e., real life. It seems that, in spite of your divinity degree, you are becoming more and more convinced that you have missed something vital. I had a very similar experience as a young minister, and truth be told, I only came into a satisfying experience with God and His ways after earning my theological degrees, and to a large extent, in spite of them.

The dissatisfaction you are experiencing points to what so many “properly trained” ministers in our time are in desperate need of—revelation knowledge. Revelation

knowledge is a very different thing than the dry logical systems which so many wide-eyed seminary students mistake for living water. Revelation knowledge is an encounter with the living God, like Isaiah had in the temple: **In the year of King Uzziah's death, I saw Yahweh sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple . . . Then I said "Woe is me, for I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, Yahweh of hosts."** (Isaiah 6:1-5) I am sure that Isaiah understood orthodox theological concepts well enough. Perhaps he was even credentialed and ordained by his denomination, but prior to this, he hadn't seen God as he needed to see Him. The sort of revelation I am talking about is a gift that only God Himself can give—**No one knows the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him (Matthew 11:27)**. It is given to the desperate and humble. You will know when "you've got it" because it hits like a lightning shaft through the soul. The over-schooled Wesley said his "*heart was strangely warmed*." The brilliant Pascal explained it thusly, "*Fire. God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of the philosophers and savants. Certitude, certitude; feeling, joy, peace ... Grandeur of the human soul. Just Father, the world has not known you, but I have known you. Joy, joy, joy, tears of joy ...*"

When I talk about really knowing God, most professing "Christians" smile and nod, as if they know exactly what I am talking about—especially pastors and professors (it would take a great deal of humility to acknowledge that perhaps they missed the boat). But I am convinced that only a small percentage of professing Christians in our dark day have come face to face with the living God. There are a few indicators that a man has seen the LORD high and lifted up—fire in the eyes, a brokenness of spirit, an unconquerable optimism, a sort of numinous quality, as if he is taking his cues from some imperceptible Reality. . . O yes, and according to Scripture, those around him should think him a bit mad.

The sad reality of our day is that innumerable "Christians" are attempting to live off of paltry secondhand information about God, "Broken cisterns which hold no water." They merely parrot dry systems, creeds and theologies which others have taught them—"Rabbi so-and-so says that Rabbi so-and-so says . . ." In Joban terms, they have heard about God "**by the hearing of the ear,**" but have not "**seen Him with their eyes**" (Job 42:5). But, God never intended for your spiritual thirst to be quenched with mere words. He intended for your spiritual thirst to be quenched by a Person—"If anyone is thirsty, let Him come to Me and drink" (John 7:37). Are you sure that you really know Him, as a Person, not just a system, or some sort of mysterious wholly other. I would humbly suggest that in spite of your rigorous studies and musings upon the Patristics, medievals, Reformers, Moderns and Postmoderns, what you really need is to swim deeply in the ocean of revelation knowledge of the Person.

All the heroes of the faith, biblically and historically, needed to graduate from “mere words” to an experiential knowledge of God. The book of Job is a beautiful example of one who had to leave behind “mere words” and embrace revelation knowledge. Only after struggling, wrestling and seeking God in the furnace of affliction could he say, **“Now I see You with my eyes” (see Job 42:5-6)**. By his own admission, Job only knew God **“by the hearing of the ear”** prior to hearing the voice out of the whirlwind. You see a very similar thing in the life of Moses. The Great Confession (**Exodus 34:6**), only came to Moses after striving, wrestling and seeking in the midst of an excruciating trial. Prior to this glorious revelation, this man certainly had “orthodox” notions about God, but by his own admission he did not really know Him. At the point of utter desperation, he cries out, **“Let me know Your ways, that I may know You” (Exodus 33:13)**. It was only then that God disclosed His heart to Moses, and entrusted to him these words which serve as the theological baseline throughout the Old and New Testament: **“Yahweh ... compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and great in kindness and faithfulness” (Exodus 34:6)**.

Revelation knowledge is not promised to the smug religionist or the proud theological professor, nor is it promised to dabblers or half-hearted seekers. It is given to the desperate. To obtain the sort of revelation knowledge Moses and Job did, you, like them, must be broken and willing to do whatever it takes to see His glory. God tells us clearly how to find Him, **“Seek for Me, and you will find Me if you seek with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:13)**. Like David, you must seek Him **“as the deer pants for the waterbrooks” (Psalm 42:1)**. This desperate seeking cannot be done for you by a pastor, theological professors, or anyone from years gone by. They may point the way and cheer you on, but if you really want to find Him, you must step into the void and engage your Creator.

Now, if you are willing to wrestle, like Jacob at Bethel, and cry out, **“I will not let you go until you bless me” (Genesis 32:26)**, He will gladly give you what you seek. On the other hand, the person who is content with paltry logical systems, some variety of “-ism”, you may very well miss Him altogether. Are you willing shed much of that high-minded theological baggage you picked up in seminary and become **“foolish that you might become wise” (I Corinthians 3:18)**? Are you willing to be scorned by the academic world, religious and secular alike (perhaps be called “mad”)? The process will be humbling, but the rewards are great.

As to your request, it would be my pleasure to continue these correspondences if you find them helpful. Being in retirement now, I have more time to do as I please, and do so enjoy sparring with bright young theological minds like yours (of course, I don't really

believe in retirement. The holy writ says to “work by the sweat of your brow until you die”). You are aware, I presume, of the fact that I retired in order to invest myself in our Christian community. I am also continuing to pursue scholarly interests—right now I am engaged in a work which introduces an alternative, very simple, childlike approach to doing Christian theology. I have been thoroughly immersed in it for years now, and it will be inevitable that its contents leak out in future emails.

God make His face shine upon you,
Professor M

P.S. You mentioned that you were hoping to “nail me down” theologically because I quote from a broad range of sources. I line up 100% with none of the sources I quote—I am neither of Augustine or Aquinas, Luther, Zwingli or Menno Simons, I am not fully Arminian or Reformed (in their classic expression), nor am I Barthian neo-orthodox, nor am I a Christian fundamentalist. I am not a dyed-in-the-wool disciple of Calvin’s either. . . but I would agree with him on this point—even the best Christian theologian is probably no better than 75% accurate. I have found that there is much to glean from discussions with a wide variety of sources. Like a bee, I like to gather from many flowers. I guess the only title I am perfectly comfortable with is purely and simply “Christian” (II Cor 11:3)—which at minimum means that I have a very high view of Scripture, for the most part agree with the Apostles Creed, and believes that one must have a “born again” experience to enter God’s kingdom.

Letter #2: You Must be Born Again

Dear Theo,

O.K., first things first. So, you don’t like the fact that I am always stressing the need for people to be “born again?” You do realize, my friend, that your contention is not with me, but with the words of Jesus Christ Himself; He is the first to use the term “born again” in Scripture. **“Unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven” (John 3:3).** The great George Whitefield, firebrand of the First Great Awakening, had the selfsame criticism brought against him in his day. People were uncomfortable with his using the phrase “born again” all the time, and would ask why he was so emphatic about it. He would simply quote Jesus in reply, “Because you must be born again.” So lets get to the real point here. Has all your sophisticated theological dialogue about inclusivism made you too intellectual for Jesus’ simple message. Are you no longer able to sing with the children,

*What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
O, precious is the flow, that makes me white as snow.
No other fountain I know, nothing but the blood of Jesus.*

If you blush as such theological naïvity, you have not advanced in your understanding of God, but tragically regressed. Didn't some great man once say, **"See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy"**?

One of my heroes is a preacher by the name of Duncan Campbell. God used him mightily in the 1920's to lead thousands to Christ in what became known as The Lower Argyle Revival. After this revival, the poor bloke went to Seminary . . . and was ushered into a barren wasteland where he wandered for the next 17 years. This wasteland was academic critical Christianity, too smart for the Bible and its simple message. The views he picked up in Seminary caused him to lose touch with God and lose the touch of God on his life. Thankfully Campbell regained his spiritual senses. Eventually Campbell came out of his stupor, repented and was restored—He was reinstated by God and became a mighty instrument in the 1950's Hebrides Revival, which reads like a chapter straight out of the book of Acts. Campbell knew what it was like on both sides of the fence, one side is dryness and death, the other is life and joy. After coming back to his senses and returning to child-like faith, he would rail against the faith-destroying effects which formal religious training can have on formative young ministers.

I commend to you, and all the rest of the sophisticated seminary grads and profs in the world, the words of the apostle Paul, **"I fear, lest as the serpent deceived Eve, you too should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of Christ" (2 Corinthians 11)**. Salvation by grace through simple childlike faith is as necessary now as it was in the first century, and it is as necessary for a 5 year old child as it is for a theological PhD. Return to your simple roots, my friend, or you have lost everything. The older I get the more convinced I am that any earnest seven year-old child is much more apt to apprehend the main strokes of real, life-giving theology than the PhD (for the most part I have found PhDs a pathetic lot, spiritually speaking). The problem is that truths that give real life are so simple that "the wise and intelligent" often cannot stoop low enough to receive them. Jesus is the one who told us that we must enter the kingdom as a child (Matthew 18:3). If this sort of talk makes me "mad," as I have been called, then so be it; I have found that, historically and biblically speaking, I am in good company. I have all the powerhouse old-school Evangelicals behind me.

Here is the gospel: You are sinner and have violated God's righteous standards. Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son was punished for you on the cruel cross, and "whoever

calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:13). To be in right relationship with God, you must believe in Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection. You must repent/turn from your sins and make Him your Lord. If you do this, you are born again. If you don't, you are lost. **"I make known to you the gospel which also you received, by which also you are saved . . . if you hold fast the word that was preached to you, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scripture, that he was buried, etc. etc." (I Corinthians 15:1-3)** The second Person of the Trinity laid aside His glory, put on human flesh and spilled His blood so that we might be forgiven and reconciled to our God . . . born again. Anyone who rejects these simple truths spurns the gift of God, and according to Scripture is a dead man walking.

Don't you remember the **"joy unspeakable and full of glory"** that you experienced the day that you embraced Jesus Christ as your sin-bearer, the sacrifice given to atone for you sins? Don't you recall how it felt to be washed and cleansed, to have your heart made anew? Remember singing amazing grace and meaning it? You used to be quite the evangelists, as I recall, concerned about the salvation of others—you even went on overseas missions trips, worked with city youths and the homeless . . . that is, until "higher" theological learning got hold of you. Once again, I don't think your newfound beliefs are an improvement, they have set you back. **"Remember from where you have fallen and repent."**

Now, I hope you realize that I have nothing against learning. God's best have often been God's brightest (intellectually speaking), but knowing the philosophical trends of the day and being taken captive by them are two different animals altogether. Too many of our best young men have been hamstrung in this way. I think you need to do some intellectual, spiritual house cleaning. **"See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the traditions of men, according to the elementary principles of this world, rather than according to Christ." (Colossians 2:8)**

God Make His Face Shine On You,
Professor M.

Letter #3: Old-School Evangelicals and The Power of Pentecost

Dear Theo,

So, you are unfamiliar with that fraternity of world-shakers whom I refer to as old-school Evangelicals? They are overlooked Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Anglicans etc. who tapped into the supernatural power of Pentecost (long before Pentecostalism emerged in 1906). These old-schoolers were nothing short of phenomenal in what they accomplished for God, courageous, holy men like John Wesley, Andrew Murray, C.T. Studd, D.L. Moody, John Hyde, R.A. Torrey, E.M. Bounds, Charles Finney, A.B. Simpson, A.J. Gordon. Are you familiar with any of these, my mentors? Yes, you can have mentors, who, "though being dead, still speak." These saints knew God intimately and demonstrated this via apostolic *dunamis*.

These old-schoolers are generally ignored by the proud Christian academy of our day, so eager for worldly approval as it is. The new-school Evangelical, yearning for the world's stamp (accreditation, recognition, or whatever), will not suffer these fire-eyed prophets to sit at their table. Why? Because the old-schoolers are just too simple, or should we say "childlike," in their approach to God. They worship a God who literally, actually parts the seas, sends manna from heaven, turns water into wine and comes like a mighty rushing wind.

If you want to have your religious paradigm shaken up a bit, I challenge you to go and study Evangelical history prior to about 1910 . . . in the primary sources—you must avoid the academic treatments or you will miss the true spirit of the movement. If you are willing to listen to these men, "who though dead, still speak," you will see that there was a time not so long ago when we Evangelicals "shook the world" in apostolic fashion (Acts 17:6). Sadly, the fire does not burn as brightly now as it once did. Why? Because we have deceived ourselves into believing that we are too intellectually sophisticated to listen to our simple forbears. There is a sad irony in the fact that these neglected old-school Evangelicals are the very ones who started the denominations and institutions and universities who now ignore them . . . but don't get me started.

Over the years some of my colleagues have disparaged me for preferring the old-schoolers to the latest theological fads to come down the pike. I have been accused of putting my head in the sand and embracing a sort of uncritical, unscholarly naiveté. Some have branded me "an academic lightweight," others have called me "an enthusiast." I am regularly dismissed by students who have been seduced by the hubris of the academy . . . that is, until they get into real trouble and need a God who is more than theory. Nevertheless, the opinion of my critics does not amount to much once a person has experienced God's power and love. I hope, however, you understand that I do not follow the old-schoolers because I am an obscurantist. I know very well the discussions swirling around in the fields of philosophy, theology and biblical studies, but mark my words, time will reveal the majority of these trends for what they are—transient, powerless fads. To once again quote one of my favorite verses, the Son of

God once said that divine revelation was "hidden from the wise and intelligent and revealed to babies" (Matthew 11:25). If being a "baby" is what it takes, then sign me up. The real *dunamis* of God can be found with the simple Evangelical old-schoolers. And don't be deceived, they were not all backwoods ignoramuses—many of them were brilliant (in fact, the movement started in the hallowed halls of Oxford).

Concerning your post script, I definitely think that the road trip is a good idea, if your son is strong enough and you have peace about it. The journey would give you and your wife time to pray and sort through all that is happening right now. Allow me to make a suggestion for the proposed trip. If your goal is to pray and soul search, forgo visiting historic sites, and instead experience the glories of God's creation. I recommend the Western United States, in particular Colorado—don't miss the breathtaking southwestern region of the state. . . . O.K., let me be honest, what I am really hoping is that you wind your way west and be our guest for a while. I assure you that your frequent emails are most welcome. I have the time and enjoy the correspondence more than you know. But, better yet would be theological sparring over tea when you come. This is a serious offer, bring your wife and son and stay with us as long as you need to.

God make His face shine on you,
Professor M.

Email #4: Choosing Mentors, Dead or Alive

Dear Theo,

So glad to here you will be paying us a visit. As to suggestions for stimulating religious literature to take on your trip, if you desire to study something other than Scripture, I suggest you leave the bulk of your seminary-recommended books at home. Theology must work in the real world, and most of the contemporary stuff doesn't. A healthy theology must have something of the explosive *dunamis* of the book of Acts about it—**"and when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken."** (Acts 4:31)

Unfortunately, most of the books circulating around our Bible Colleges, seminaries and churches these days are long on theory but short on power. Your spiritual mentors, be they dead (in books) or alive, should be those with *dunamis*. Martyn Lloyd-Jones has an outstanding chapter in his work *Revival*, and in it he suggests that if we are to tap into the power our Christian forbears knew, we need to go back and re-dig the wells from

which they drank. If you want to re-dig those wells, I suggest reading overlooked Evangelical literature, in particular biographies and devotional works from the nineteenth century—Andrew Murray, A.J. Gordon, Charles Finney, Moody, R.A. Torrey, C. H. Spurgeon, Hudson Taylor, E.M. Bounds, John Hyde, George Mueller, etc. No doubt, you will not agree with them on all points (they don't agree with each other on all points), but these men shared much common ground and they all packed a spiritual wallop. In their day, it was normal for the dunamis of the gospel to take over whole geographical regions, as in the days of the apostles—

". . . and there were added that day about three thousand souls." (Acts 2:41)

I am certain that as you become more and more familiar with the lives of these old-school Evangelicals, you will be shocked at how robust and vigorous their faith was when compared to the anemic Evangelicalism of our time. Furthermore, I am convinced that if the apostles were to pay us a visit, they would be perplexed by today's Evangelicals, but they would be right at home with the old-schoolers. One more thing, when you study the old-schoolers, be sure to read their own writings, not recently sanitized versions, or academically stilted treatments of them. If you don't stick to primary sources, you will miss the true ethos of their writings.

Having said this about Christian literature, though, I would also encourage you to live by this general rule—before you pick up any other book, get in the habit of spending at least one hour daily with the Scriptures. Jesus told Martha that there is really only one necessary thing—**sitting at His feet, listening to His word (Luke 10:42)**. Memorize the BOOK, meditate on it, love it, pray over it, saturate yourself with it, until like John Bunyon (author of *Pilgrim's Progress*), wherever they prick you, you bleed bibline. One of the great Evangelical old-schoolers, George Mueller, warns of a mistake he made as a young Christian: *"I was growing in the faith and knowledge of Jesus, but I still preferred reading religious books instead of the Scriptures . . . God is the author of the Bible, and only the truth it contains will lead people to true happiness. A Christian should read this precious Book every day with earnest prayer and meditation. But like many believers, I preferred to read the works of uninspired men rather than the oracles of the living God. Consequently I remained a spiritual baby both in knowledge and grace."* (You do know of George Mueller, don't you? This powerhouse, old-school Evangelical was one of the most phenomenal examples of living faith in recent centuries. If I recall correctly, he read through the Scriptures, cover to cover, 200 times.)

As to more specifics, nothing has more potential to change you than memorizing large tracts of Scripture—**"Let the word of Christ dwell richly in you"** Colossians says. Have you ever committed a short epistle, like James, to memory? If you take ½ hour a day, you could easily get through it in a month's time. If you will do this, in just a few short

years, you will truly begin to be mighty in the word. Memorizing books may sound audacious by today's standards, but this is only because the church in such a low state. Wouldn't you agree that if Muslim and Orthodox Jews can memorize their holy texts, we should be even more zealous to do so?

The devil wants to keep you away from the Scriptures at all costs, and would gladly have you an expert on postmodern thought, youth ministry methods or Reformation history in order to keep you from becoming "mighty in the word." He is cut down before "Thus sayeth the Lord." It is a travesty that in our day we have theologians and pastors who can quote Augustine, Calvin and Barth, but have never even memorized a small epistle. So, I recommend the Bible first, and only then find mentors who understand the dunamis of God—be they dead or alive.

God Make His Face Shine On You,
Professor M

Letter #5: Billy, Barth and Biblical Authority

Theo,

In your last correspondence, you asked me to spell out my understanding of the authority of Scripture. Surely the reason for this is because your Seminary studies have filled you with doubts and confusion on the matter. This is just as Satan would have it, because if your confidence in the BOOK is shaky, you will never operate in New Testament faith, and in this state you will be no threat to hell's agenda. I will begin by relating one of my all-time favorite accounts of an individual coming to terms with the authority of Scripture. This man of God (whom I will reveal momentarily) tells of a time in his life when he struggled like a man "on the rack" with unanswered questions concerning Scripture: *"O God! There are many things in this book I do not understand. There are many problems with it for which I have no solution. There are many seeming contradictions. There are some areas in it that do not seem to correlate with modern science. I can't answer some of the philosophical and psychological questions . . . others are raising" BUT at the end of this prayer he concludes, "Father, I am going to accept this as Thy Word—by faith! I'm going to allow faith to go beyond my intellectual questions and doubts, and I will believe this to be Your inspired Word."*

The man is Billy Graham (*Billy Graham, Just As I Am* [New York: Guide Posts, 1997], 139), and in many ways he is heir to the simple Evangelical old-schoolers I love so well—men with world-shaking spiritual power ... something today's Evangelicals have largely

lost. Graham knows something of this power—how often have I been awed to see his simple message move hundreds to repentance and faith. My convictions on the matter of Biblical authority are very close to those of Graham. I don't have all the answers, but I have staked my life on The Book, and believe it is the primary vehicle through which God speaks to us (II Timothy 3:16). So humor me as I review several competing views of biblical authority, and then make a more specific statement about my own view.

View A: The first perspective, which I reject lock, stock and barrel, is that of the old-school liberal or modernist Christian (a loose use of the term Christian to be sure). This view is predominate in churches and schools associated with "the seven sister" denominations-United Methodist Church (UMC), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. (PCUSA), the Episcopal Church, the American Baptist Churches, the United Church of Christ (Congregationalist), the Disciples of Christ, and a few others. The influence of this view is waning, but its death has been a slow one. For the true, dyed-in-the-wool modernist, Scripture is little more than a shot-up human document, riddled with errors, exaggerations and contradictions; it is merely a human record of religious experience. Unlike other human records, Scripture is not viewed as "innocent until proven guilty." No, for the liberal, Scripture is just plain guilty—it was written by humans, and to be human, of course, is to err. The assumption of the liberal is that those who wrote the Scriptures were naïve, superstitious and philosophically/scientifically unenlightened. For the real modernist, Abraham is fantasy, Moses is myth, the Exodus never happened and King David has less credibility than King Arthur of Camelot. The Torah was fudged together in the eighth century B.C., and the notion of Jesus as God was made up by his early followers

The belief that Scripture is riddled with errors and inaccuracies is foundational to the fanciful theories of the modernist's so-called higher biblical criticism, like the documentary [JEPD] hypothesis and "the search for the historical Jesus" (I'm sure you wasted plenty of time on these theories in Seminary). These views continue to be given press by the secular media (remember the "Jesus Seminar" of the late twentieth century), leaving simple saints spinning, but anyone willing to do the research will find that the theories of the modernist are generally pulled out of thin air. The reason such views have been accepted in the academy is not because they are reasonable, or scientific, but rather because they have been stated with such bombastic confidence, again and again and again. Why, for instance, should we accept the liberal notion that the Torah is not an accurate historical record, but was fudged together in the eighth century B.C? The liberals just repeat such fantasy until it is accepted in the academy as fact. Any sort of quasi-Christianity that accepts this view of Scripture has completely lost its foundation. This is why modernist schools of Christianity, beginning with Schleiermacher, are so subjective—the source of authority shifted from Scripture to

“whatever I think or feel is true.” Please don’t spend too much time dialoging with these misguided souls, or ichabod will be written over your ministry. They write lofty tomes, but moves of God simply do not occur among liberal Christians.

View B: The second view is that of the Christian fundamentalist, who in many respects is the polar opposite of the modernist. This camp is obsessed with proving that every jot and tittle of the Bible is wholly without error—dates, biology, history, math, astronomy, etc. Major proponents of this view spill oceans of ink “proving” that their perspective can be defended by the canons of logic and the modern scientific method. Although I find myself agreeing in principle with much that the fundamentalist has to say, I must confess that much of the writing from this side of the fence makes me uneasy. I would agree, more or less, with the fundamentalist that there is certainly no deficiency in the text of Scripture (even though I still have some unanswered questions), but the view of the fundamentalist at best takes us only half way there. The primary reason for my reservation is that they often seem to neglect the role of the Holy Spirit in the process of apprehending spiritual truth, and this is no small matter. Paul tells the Corinthians, “a natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God because they are foolishness to him, and he cannot comprehend them” (2:14). The *dunamis* of the written text is unleashed when the Holy Spirit makes it, for us, “living and active and sharper than any two edged sword.” Yet, you will find the fundamentalist arguing as if their case can be won by sheer force of reason. Perhaps it is this colossal oversight which explains the sad lack of spiritual *dunamis* among many of the most vociferous proponents of the fundamentalist perspective.

View C: The third view I will refer to as the Barthian view, for lack of a better label. These individuals acknowledge the human element in Scripture, and therefore concede that it has difficulties (historical, chronological, etc.). The most famous of these Barthians is without question Dietrich Bonhoeffer. From this perspective, the key to Biblical authority lies not in its inerrancy, but in the voice of the Holy Spirit which speaks authoritatively through the Scriptures. It may seem as if this latter perspective has the potential to take a person further than views A or B above. Nevertheless, I have massive reservations with the Barthians, because they give too much credence to the “flawed” human element in Scripture. In fact, they seem to have little concern if any of it—Scripture—is literally, historically true (they love to use the word “myth”). There is, of course, a human element to Scripture, but this does not mean that they are riddled with error. I think that Scripture is a miraculously accurate historical record, and I believe that God’s Spirit was more than able to keep human frailty under control as the Scriptures were penned. Thus I believe that the truth lies, more or less, in a combination of views B (a God-inspired text) and C (unlocked via the power of the Holy Spirit).

Now a forth perspective which has emerged in recent years is also worth touching on—that of the so-called post-modern Christian. If you follow this lot, with their belief that biblical authority [and meaning] is ultimately rooted in the Christian community, I am afraid that you will miss the *dunamis* of God. The problem with this lot is that they have lost faith in God's ability to speak to individuals with "Thus sayeth the Lord" authority. Now, if the Christian community gets to decide by consensus what God says and means, the whole prophetic genius of biblical religion is undermined. What I mean is this, if the faith community gets to determine truth, how then does God address His apostate people (BECAUSE THEY ARE USUALLY APOSTATE) with "a voice crying in the wilderness." Committees do not validate prophets like Moses, Elijah, John the Baptist, or Paul [or men like Savanorolla, Luther and Wesley], God does. God can speak to you, the individual, if only you humble yourself and have "ears to hear."

Hopefully I am not raising too much dust here. As I said, my own view of biblical authority is sort of a combination of the B and C above—an authoritative, flawless text unlocked via the power of the Holy Spirit. You come with a pure heart, fully trusting that God will speak His eternal truths through the text as it stands. This seems to be the view of the old school Evangelicals I admire (I still need to give you a formal introduction to them). Perceived difficulties can usually be explained by an appeal to genre, transmission, etc., and the text comes alive for those with clean hands and pure hearts who are open to the living voice of the Holy Spirit. There are definite conditions that need to be met—humility, purity, faith, etc. What this means is that proud men cannot force the spiritual truths out of it with mere exegetical tools (but this discussion is for another time). Suffice it to say at this point that it is this openness to the Holy Spirit that is really the key to unlocking revelation knowledge and true spiritual *dunamis*—He is the one who opens our spiritual eyes, and elevates the jots and tittles of Holy Writ into a divine revelation to the human soul.

God Make His Face Shine On You,
Professor M

Letter #6: *Dunamis* Unpacked

Theo,

You wanted me to unpack the notion of apostolic *dunamis* which I refer to so often, so once again I will cut right to the chase--it's the Greek word for "POWER." We in the western church have become so accustomed to spiritual famine (Amos 8:11) that we have concluded that our experience is normal—. . . **holding to a form of godliness,**

although we have denied its power. " (II Timothy 3:5) We have made a cottage industry of developing theologies to support and defend our desiccated spiritual state (I'm not just talking about the modernists either). Don't be deceived. The current state of Evangelicalism in our country is neither healthy nor normal ... and attempting to be relevant to the post-modern mind, or some such nonsense, is not going to save the day either. It is the old-school Evangelicals who can lead us back to the ancient wells of apostolic power—*dunamis*.

So, what characterized these old-school Evangelicals? In our time, many Evangelicals are convinced that right doctrine has always been the distinctive earmark of the movement. This is true as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. The truth of the matter is that right doctrine only tells half of the Evangelical story. Right doctrine indeed has its place, but alone it will not win the day. No, the world's ills will be cured when the Evangelical Church rediscovers the power that is supposed to attend and confirm right doctrine; this is what made Evangelicalism great— POWER, *dunamis*. Evangelicalism erupted in the early 1700's, not because scholars were writing lofty tomes on theology, Evangelicalism exploded onto the scene when a few simple biblical truths set proper doctrine on fire (we call this the First Great Awakening).

As I said previously, I have nothing against learning; I quite enjoy it and have a few credentials myself. But if you look at the historical facts, Christian scholasticism, the obsession with right doctrine (e.g., the centuries immediately following the Protestant Reformation), can be just as deadly, perhaps even more deadly, than outright worldliness. Many moves of God's Spirit through the ages were God's merciful deliverance from cold, dead orthodoxy. What we need, what we lack, is *dunamis*, not mere book learning. Historically speaking, Evangelicalism became great when a few Reformation distinctives, like salvation by faith, were lit on fire with Holy Spirit power—*DUNAMIS*.

The testimonies of old-school Evangelicals like Wesley, Whitefield, Harris, McChesney, Finney, Murray, Spurgeon, Booth, Moody, Goforth, Hyde, Mueller, etc., are a rebuke to the weak, ineffective Church of our time. It is reported that people were warned not to sit in the trees during John Wesley's open air sermons. Why? Because when the convicting power of God came like a thunder clap, there was a good chance you would fall out and hurt yourself. David Brainerd said of the power that attended his ministry, "*It could be compared to nothing more aptly than a rushing torrent or a swelling deluge which presses down everything before it.*" When the power of God fell on Wales in 1905, witnesses said that God came in like a flood that swept up everything and everyone in its path.

Not only has there been a tragic dearth of power in Evangelicalism in recent decades, we no longer teach our young people about the days of glory or the heroes of the tradition, missionaries like Jonathan Goforth, C.T. Studd and John Hyde. Hyde was a Presbyterian whose passion for evangelism compelled him to wrestle in prayer for one soul a day, for an entire year. At the end of that year he had personally led over 400 to the Master (many pastors and missionaries in our day have no converts . . . for their entire lives!). The following year, Hyde's burden increased—he asked for two souls a day, and ended that year harvesting over 800. The following year, he wanted four a day, and at year's end he had harvested over 1600. This is the way of the old-school Evangelical—truth demonstrated with power—*dunamis*. I was recently handed a contemporary book on Evangelism and was appalled—the author told story after story of sharing the gospel . . . but in 200-plus pages he had almost no converts! Follow old schoolers like Hyde if you want to experience and apostolic power.

If “properly trained” (i.e., Seminary trained), Evangelicals want *dunamis*, like Hyde experienced, they need a thorough theological working over. The doctrine and experience of the Holy Spirit in our day is sorely lacking—read a few chapters in V. Raymund Edmunds' *They Found The Secret* and you will see my point. The doctrine and practice of prayer in our many of our churches is also tragically deficient—read, e.g., Andrew Murray or E.M. Bounds for a cure. But most importantly, I have come to believe that the heart of Evangelicalism woes is its deficient doctrine of God—until we get this straight, all other corrective measures will as superficial as a bandage on a cancer. This is actually the central point of theology book I am now working on—it argues that our view of God controls all other religious beliefs and practices, it is our Copernican Center, and Evangelicalism's present low estate has everything to do with its crippling theological views.

My wife is now calling me for sandwiches and tea. I will write more later.

Sincerely,
Professor M.

Letter #7: Evangelicals Revising Their History? Never!

Theo,

I am so glad you picked up the little book, *Praying Hyde*, what a gem. “Why weren't you taught about people like Hyde in seminary,” you asked. As a young man I wondered the same thing. It seemed to me that I was the victim of some sort of conspiracy plot, a plot to hide the real history of my Evangelical tradition. I was a student at D.L. Moody's

School, but was never taught what the man Moody actually believed about the Holy Spirit. I was never encouraged to read his writings, and in fact remember a theology professor poking fun at Moody as if he were a sort of back-woods theological yokel. I attended Christian and Missionary Alliance churches, but was told nothing about the radical and revolutionary A.B. Simpson, the founder. I attended Baptist Churches, but was never given a copy of A.J. Gordon's book on divine healing.

When I finally did begin to research the men who led the Evangelical movement when it had power, as I said, I felt like the victim of some sort of revisionist conspiracy. It reminds me of the days I spent in communist Russia, prior to the fall of the iron curtain. The average, educated citizen there was told that Stalin was not such a bad chap, and they had the best life-style in the world. Anyone in touch with reality knows that Stalin was a butcher, and the Russian lifestyle under communism was fear, drudgery and darkness. Any Evangelical today who thinks that John Wesley, William Booth, C.H. Spurgeon, or D.L. Moody would have been welcome at one of our twenty-first century Church Growth Conferences or Financial Security Seminars is just as deluded as the poor Russians under communism.

So, I can't tell you how pleased I am to hear that reading of the old-schooler Hyde, and even more pleased to hear that he has shaken you a bit. I hope you made a special note of his experience with the "Baptism of the Holy Spirit." He was offended at the suggestion at first, but by and by "gave in to better judgment." You also mentioned that you found his practice of expectant prayer "jarring." He prayed like all the old-schoolers prayed—He prayed in an attempt to move God's hand (it occurs to me that this is how Moses and Elijah prayed too). O, if only Evangelicals today would only follow the example of the old-schoolers like Hyde, I am convinced that the heavens would open again.

Prayer, the Word and a robust doctrine of the Holy Spirit came to drive the Evangelical movement for two centuries—how far we have fallen. If you would like to sample more of this old-school Evangelical ethos, read the Dutch Reformed minister Andrew Murray, one of his best works being *The Ministry of Intercession*, or get a hold of D.L. Moody's *Prevailing Prayer* or R.A. Torrey's *Power Through Prayer*. These men knew how to lay hold of the promises of God, and persevere in prayer until the glory fell. Another suggestion, anything by E.M. Bounds. I would also commend to you a study of the Moravians of Herrnhut; they were not technically "Evangelicals" but were very significant forerunners (technically Pietists). They had a prayer watch that went on unbroken 24 hours a day for 100 years—yes, unbroken for 100 years (Yes, these are the same Moravians who led Wesley into salvation and power).

As to your question about how much time you should be spending in prayer, Historically speaking, I have found that no heavy hitter in Christian history spent less than an hour daily in prayer (at this level, you will at least have a pulse). If you are having trouble getting started in prayer, pray for divine assistance (Spurgeon used to say, "Pray until you can pray"). Of the plethora of books on prayer out there, a good rule of thumb is that the best books are generally going to be the older Evangelical classics (at least 100 years old) like Bounds or Murray—that pastors in our day don't know Bounds and Murray is simply a travesty—no, the word "travesty" is not too strong.

If you, like Gideon of old, are asking "where are all His miracles" (Judges 6:13), consider this, just a few years ago, Gallop's survey concluded that most ministers in our day spend only minutes a day in prayer—how tragic, and how unlike the biblical prophets and apostles. Be very skeptical of recent books on prayer, because many of these works are analogous to auto repair manuals written by men whose cars don't run—do the men who wrote them have apostolic power? Are they soul winners? Are they world changers?

Before I sign off, let me give you another strong caution . . . you dropped a couple of names in your last email, and I cringed. In our day Evangelicals who hunger for spiritual reality are overlooking the classics of their own tradition, like Hyde, Bounds, Murray and Moody and instead they are voraciously consuming works by Catholic mystics. Works like "The Cloud of Unknowing" and authors like St. John of the Cross have become all the rage.

Unfortunately, few Evangelicals really have any idea where the Catholic mystics are coming from theologically, nor are they aware of where many of these guides are trying to take them . . . into the "divine dark." Wouldn't it make more sense for Evangelicals to check their own tradition before running after the Catholic mystics. This trend is so troubling, I will say more about it later . . . but right now I need to take the dog out for a romp in the woods.

Sincerely,
Professor M.

Email #8: Beware The Divine Dark!

Theo,

It doesn't surprise me a bit that while you were in seminary Professor R— encouraged you to "feed your spirit" on the Catholic mystics. He was well-intentioned but sadly misguided. His assertion that "Catholics have a more satisfying spirituality than Evangelicals" tells me that he has entirely missed the treasures of his own tradition. You would be surprised at how many Evangelicals, even PhDs, are ignorant of their own tradition. I will briefly explain what it is about the mystics which troubles me, and then I will explain why the spirituality of the old-school Evangelicals like Hyde and Muller, Moody, Bounds, etc. are to be preferred.

The mystical Catholic works, stretching back to the fourth century Pseudo Dyonisius (or Dennis the Menace as some have called him) promote what is called "contemplation." In a nutshell, the goal of contemplation is to journey into God's awesome transcendence— what is often referred to as "the divine dark." Once there, the seeker attempts to unite their soul to God in an experience that is beyond all speech and thought: *God is completely transcendent, beyond all human thought, reason, intellect, or any approaches of the mind. A term which occurs repeatedly in this writing is "the Divine Dark." The human mind can only say what God is not, never what God is . . . but is there no way to penetrate this divine darkness? Yes, there is one. This is the via negativa by which the soul strips off its selfhood and, in ecstatic union with transcendent deity, both feels and knows its oneness with the infinite.[1]*

This may all sound tantalizing to Evangelicals in our day, starved for authentic religious experience as they are, but there is simply no biblical justification for it (we are *sola scriptura* people, are we not?). It is fairly easy to show that what the Catholic mystics are actually promoting is a sort of neo-Platonist (pagan Greek) spirituality in Christian garb. I truly fear for those who would delve into this realm, the so-called "divine dark," because Scripture says virtually nothing about it—the Scripture commends to us a knowable Person, by the name of Yahweh, who revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. I would never recommend attempting to raise your consciousness above all rationality in order to ascend into the realm of "the divine dark." The God who reveals Himself in Scripture and in the person of Jesus Christ is not all-mysterious, and is not encountered in an altered state of consciousness. Moses, Elijah, John and Peter never encourage us to do any such thing—they experience God with their minds fully engaged.

God presents Himself to us as a Person who can be known in much the same manner as all other personal beings are known—He has likes and dislikes, preferences and pet-peeves, He rejoices, gets angry, and has consistent character traits. As a matter of fact, if you really come to know Him, you actually find that His actions and reactions are quite predictable (is this not what Jonah 4:1-2 affirms?). He is awesome, yes, but this does not mean He is unknowable.

Very different from the Catholic mystics is the spirituality of the old school Evangelicals. Their preferred type of prayer is not contemplation, but rather intercession. The latter is best understood as “the art of moving the God’s hand.” The old Evangelicals like Moody, Hyde, Murray and Mueller would lay hold of God’s promises by faith, and persist in prayer until God’s power and glory manifested—salvation, healing, provision, guidance, etc. God was not the divine dark, but a Person to be known, talked to, loved, interacted with and influenced. Furthermore, I call your attention to the fact that supporting intercession from Scripture is an easy task, while defending the mystic’s “contemplation” from Scripture is a virtual impossibility.

I must warn you that Evangelicals today who would follow the Catholic mystics, as Professor R— suggests, risk cutting themselves off from the very thing they seek—authentic spirituality. You will ever find the supernatural power of the apostles and prophets in Catholic contemplation. The reason being that conversions, provision, healings and the like are the reward of faith-filled intercession—“moving God’s hand.” If you study the mystics, you will find that as a rule, they downplay the significance of such intercession, i.e., trying to move God’s hand. They see this sort of praying as belonging to novices and neophytes. Nothing could be further from the plain sense of Scripture. Moses, Elijah, Peter and Paul all attempted to move God’s hand via prayer, and they were certainly not novices and neophytes. Jesus says, **“Now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry out to Him day and night. I tell you that He will bring about justice for them and He will do it speedily. However, when the Son of Man returns, will He find any faith on earth?” (Luke 18)**

I would be the last one to try and defend the Evangelicalism of our time, it is indeed shallow and unsatisfying, but would to God that young Evangelicals would rediscover their own tradition. As I said earlier, good people like Professor R— lean toward the mystics because they are thirsting for satisfying spiritual experience, but I suggest they go back to the wells of their Evangelical forbears. Evangelicals have lost touch with their heritage and this is why so many of them are migrating toward Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy and this new trend called “The Emerging Church.” So my young brother, before looking in foreign fields in your attempt to tap into authentic spirituality, I suggest you re-dig the wells of your forefathers.

I am compelled to suggest another work for your perusal—Jonathan Edwards’ Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit. This work by one of Evangelicalism’s Patriarchs, was written in an attempt to help biblical Christians in the 1700s, who were experiencing powerful manifestations of God, to discern what sorts of experiences were

of God and which were not. O, How far we have fallen (I said that once already didn't I). I am thoroughly convinced that the old-school Evangelicals experienced God in a richer, fuller and more biblical way than mysticism commends, so if you are hungry, keep digging.

God Make His Face Shine On You,
Professor M

Letter #9: The Art of Moving God's Hand

You think that I was being too hard on the mystics, do you? You have every right to disagree with me on any point I raise, but you will need base your arguments on Scripture. We are Protestants, aren't we? Our cry is "*Sola Scriptura*," and it seems obvious to me that Abraham, Moses, Elijah and Paul were doing something very different than the Catholic mystics. The Patriarchs, prophets and apostles were pleading, arguing and engaging a God who could be reasoned with and prevailed upon—see Abraham in Genesis 18, Moses in Exodus 33, Elijah in I Kings 17 & 18, Hezekiah in II Kings 20, Amos in chapter 7, the apostles in Acts 4, etc. etc. As I said in my last letter, it is widely known that the mystics view petition (and intercession) as second-rate, immature praying. I will quote from Underhill's classic book on the subject: "*Mysticism's aims are wholly transcendental and spiritual. It is in no way concerned with adding to, exploring, re-arranging, or improving anything in the visible universe. The mystic brushes aside that universe, even in its supernormal manifestations.*"[2]

Whatever it was that the mystics were doing, I am absolutely convinced it was a completely different animal than biblical praying. Biblical praying, as I have repeatedly said, is the art of moving God's hand—check Jesus' teaching in, e.g., Luke 11 and Luke 18. Again and again, Jesus teaches us to persevere in prayer until we obtain: "**Now, He was telling them a parable to show them that they should pray at all times and not lose heart**" (Luke 18:1) This is what the Old Evangelicals rediscovered, and it set the world on its ear! For an excellent example of this sort of praying, I will quote McGaw's work on John Hyde (which you have in your possession). This man certainly would have made sense to an Elijah or a Paul: "*The place where John Hyde met God was holy ground. The scenes of his life are too sacred for common eyes. I shrink from placing them before the public. But near the closet of John Hyde we are permitted to hear the sighing and the groaning and to see the tears coursing down his dear face, to see his frame weakened by foodless days and sleepless nights, shaken with sobs as he pleads, "O God, give me souls or I die."*[3]

Once again, if you ever hope to see conversions (Hyde, if you recall, was in the habit of leading four souls each and every day to Christ), or if you ever hope to see miraculous provision (have you started getting acquainted with George Mueller yet?) or healing (have you read Murray, Gordon or Simpson?), you need to learn to prevail with God like Hyde did. This form of prayer which was obscured for hundreds of years, then rediscovered by Evangelicals, has tragically been lost again in many quarters of Christendom. The old-school Evangelicals can lead us back to this ancient well, if we will but listen.

So much of what we call prayer in our Evangelical churches today bears absolutely no resemblance to what the Scripture calls prayer, and this is why so many have never seen God move in power. The all-night prayer meetings of the early church seem an exercise in futility to today's "properly educated" Evangelical, and fasting is just an unpleasant (not to mention inexplicable) spiritual discipline. From Genesis to Revelation, however, the faithful pray to move the almighty arm of God. They are not hampered by thoughts of God's unchangeable will, foreknowledge or immutability (a subject for another day). They wrestled and engaged a Person, and they prevail. **"O Lord, listen! O Lord, Forgive! O Lord, listen and take action! For Your own sake, O my God, do not delay, because Your city and Your people are called by Your name."** (Daniel 9:19) When a nation is on the brink of annihilation, an intercessor like Moses can save the day by prevailing upon God. Moses pleads and wrestles until, **". . . the LORD changed his mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people."** (Exodus 32 ...

(more to come)