

TRAGEDY, HOPE, AND AMBIVALENCE:
THE HISTORY OF THE
ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
1936-1962

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Part Three: Ambivalence

Storm Clouds

If rays of hope for theological consistency shined on the Orthodox Presbyterian Church at the end of the 1940s following the Van Til/Clark controversy,¹ it was not without the threat of storm clouds. One major difficulty would be the continuation in the church of those less than satisfied with the outcome of that controversy. A number of these people were influenced by the emerging evangelical consensus,² as well as by the Reformed confessional position embraced by the faculty at Westminster Seminary.

Edmund P. Clowney, a man whose stand was disappointing to many in the Van Til/Clark debate³ and eventually Westminster Seminary's first president,⁴ became representative of the more inclusive vision. He had been a brilliant student at Westminster, graduating in 1942. During his subsequent career, he became a

¹See Charles G. Dennison, "Tragedy, Hope and Ambivalence: The History of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1936-1962. Part Two: Hope," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 9/1 (1993): 26-44.

²For a brief statement on the modern evangelical impulse, see "Part Two: Hope," 40-41.

³Clowney's position is reflected in the taped interview (2/19/91), deposited in the OPC archives, Montgomery Library, Westminster Seminary, Philadelphia. He was critical of Clark's approach in the debate but supportive of his views on God's incomprehensibility, while at the same time appreciative of Van Til. Such a position added to the tensions internal to the committee charged to report to the general assembly on the theological matters involved in the debate, a committee on which Clowney served. Ned B. Stonehouse, also a member of the committee, expressed his dismay at Clowney's evaluation of the situation in a letter to Robert K. Churchill (4/7/47); he wrote: "I do not believe it [Clowney's evaluation] is the view of the Reformed theology. . . . [S]uch a formulation does not begin to do justice to the teaching of Scripture" (the Stonehouse collection in the Westminster Seminary archives, Philadelphia).

⁴Clowney came to Westminster in 1952 as a lecturer in practical theology and served as its president from 1966 to 1982.

gifted defender of a Reformed biblical theology⁵ and an articulate spokesman for the doctrine of the church.⁶ His student years had produced in him strong Calvinist convictions. However, practical ties to the evangelical world placed him on a somewhat different path than Van Til and the majority of Westminster's early faculty.⁷

One area where Clowney differed from that majority, in which he was in closer step with the evangelical world, was his expectations for the presbyterian movement of which he was a part.⁸ In 1979 Clowney expressed his commitment in an article marking the end of the *Presbyterian Guardian* through its merger with the *Presbyterian Journal*.⁹ Citing Machen's famous remark upon the founding of the OPC about "a true Presbyterian church . . . at last,"¹⁰ Clowney went on to quote H. McAllister Griffiths, who said:

Now we look ahead, with a Church that is pure, that has only begun to develop and exhibit its strength. We

⁵E.g., Clowney's book *Preaching and Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1961) remains a classic; and his *The Unfolding Mystery: Discovering Christ in the Old Testament* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1988) is an excellent introduction to the biblical theological approach to the Old Testament.

⁶Clowney has written extensively on the church; see his recent work *The Church* in the series *Contours of Christian Theology*, ed. by Gerald Bray (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995).

⁷Clowney's perspective on Van Til intersects with John Frame's at many points. For example, Clowney and Frame have a similar view on the Van Til/Clark debate; both see Van Til and Clark speaking past each other. For Clowney, see footnote 2 above; for Frame, see *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987), 21ff.; also, see Charles G. Dennison, "Part Two: Hope," 41-3, especially footnote 49. Furthermore, Clowney and Frame speak out of sensitivity to the wider evangelical community. Van Til criticized evangelicalism for its inherent Arminianism; Clowney would not be comfortable with such an assessment (cf. "Part Two: Hope," 40, especially footnote 44); but note also Frame's remarks: "Van Til equated the Reformed creeds very closely with the teaching of Scripture and was very suspicious of any terminology or ideas that came from outside the Reformed tradition. I was, and am, more ecumenical in spirit. . . . In my view, Van Til was something of a Reformed chauvinist; in his view, I am too friendly to broad evangelicalism" (*Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* [Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1995]).

⁸Clowney was ordained a minister in the OPC in 1942 and served in that church until 1984, when he was received into the Presbyterian Church in America.

⁹Edmund P. Clowney, "The Presbyterian Church: Looking to the Future," *Presbyterian Journal* 38 (December 5, 1979): 9-10, 23.

¹⁰*Presbyterian Guardian* 2 (June 22, 1936): 110.

believe that in a generation it will compare numerically with the body whose light has gone out.¹¹

In the remainder of his article, however, Clowney attributes Griffiths' vision for a large church to Machen, as if this were Machen's "hope for American Presbyterianism." As the article makes clear, Clowney embraced this hope as his own.

The question remains, however, whether Machen actually looked for a large, dominant presbyterian communion? While he undoubtedly would have rejoiced over the growth of the new church and while an early Machen may have looked in the direction of the church's size, there is no evidence that he shared Griffiths' statistical interest at the time of the OPC's founding.¹² In fact, where he had opportunity, he expressed a different spirit.

Robert H. Graham, a minister in the OPC from its beginning, witnessed that spirit and recalled: "In the first year of [the OPC] Dr. Machen actually said, 'I [am] not afraid of the church . . . being too small but that it be too big. . . .'"¹³ According to Graham, Machen made his comment in the context of discussions about requests from churches and ministers for reception into the OPC, many of which Machen personally opposed for doctrinal reasons. He was not impressed with the appeal to numerical strength.

Machen himself wrote about the newly-formed Orthodox Presbyterian Church this way:

¹¹H. McAllister Griffiths, "Looking Backward and Ahead," *Presbyterian Guardian* 2 (June 22, 1936): 111.

¹²This is not to discount what Machen did say about growth. For instance, in his 6/3/35 letter to Maitland Alexander, he pleaded for a non-compromise position in his struggle for ecclesiastical integrity. He wanted no ". . . paring down our program to suit the enemy, so as to get a lot of 40 percent, 60 percent, and 80 percent people." As a result, Machen went on to say, the real Presbyterian Church would "grow wonderfully, with the blessing of God," only after the most modest beginning (cited in D. G. Hart, *Doctor Fundamentalism: An Intellectual Biography of J. Gresham Machen, 1981-1937*, [Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University, 1988], 319-20). It should be obvious that Machen's perspective, even here, is different than that expressed by Griffiths. He was a man who, in his Christian faith, remained free of an enslaving statistical interest and dependency.

¹³Preserved in Robert H. Graham's personal diary and notes, recorded June 14, 1986, as Graham reflected on the proceedings at the Fifty-Third General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, during its debates on union with the Presbyterian Church in America. This diary is deposited in the OPC archives.

We do not look upon these matters as the world looks on them. We ground our hopes not upon numbers or upon wealth but upon the exceeding great and precious promises of God. If our opponents despise us as being but a tiny group, we remember the words of Scripture: "There is no restraint to the Lord, to save by many or by few." If we are tempted to be discouraged because of our lack of material resources, we say, again in the words of Scripture: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts."¹⁴

To be sure, Clowney, steeped as he is in a finely developed biblical theology, offered his perspective on American presbyterianism out of a more profound ecumenical commitment than many who have looked his way. Still, his direction was distinct from Machen's and toward a more ambivalent position, one much more directly focused on growth and much more at home within the practical theological environment of the evangelical world.

Clowney's perspective did not encourage Van Til, who spoke of it in a letter, written late in life, to his dear friend Hattie DeWaard. Reflecting on Clowney's presidential address at the 1975 seminary commencement, Van Til said:

There was very little of Augustine's picture of the struggle between the City of God and the City of man. There was little of Kuyper's idea of the antithesis between regenerate and non-regenerate mankind. There was little, rather, nothing of Machen, who wanted to put the flag on the top of the highest peak and do it, if necessary, alone. This is the sort of thing [Clowney] has been doing ever since he took over . . . the address to the graduates. The first time was just after I had given the commencement address. . . . He started out by saying that he knew I would speak militantly so he thought he would say something more practical.¹⁵

¹⁴*Presbyterian Guardian* 2 (June 22, 1936): 110.

¹⁵A copy of this letter is found in the OPC archives.

Interestingly, in the book *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic*, Harvie Conn pinpoints 1974, the year before Van Til's letter to Mrs. DeWaard, as a crossroad in the history of the seminary.¹⁶ According to Conn, a "new Westminster"¹⁷ had been taking shape in the early seventies and was, in some ways, marked off by the publication in 1974 of Van Til's last book *The New Hermeneutic*.¹⁸ Conn sees this book as transitional: On the one hand, it was sensitive to the direction discussions about the Bible were taking; on the other, it remained typical of the older "defensive" posture of the original Westminster faculty.¹⁹

Conn assures his readers the new Westminster remained on line with the old in "its commitment to the foundational character of the inerrancy of Scripture and [in] its creative effort to address new theological questions and hermeneutical constructions as they arise."²⁰ However, his comment about the older defensive posture — what Clowney, according to Van Til, identified as militancy — suggests a negative feature beyond which the new Westminster had now moved.

Divestiture of its Reformed militancy and investiture with a more practical agenda placed the seminary closer to an evangelical stance. Interestingly, the seminary also drew closer to the positions of those who left the OPC in the thirties and forties, who criticized the church for being strident, intense, and theologically hardline. It is not without reason, therefore, that Westminster Seminary, as the original faculty faded, progressively distanced itself from the OPC.²¹

¹⁶*Inerrancy and Hermeneutic: A Tradition, A Challenge, A Debate*, ed. by Harvie M. Conn (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1988), 17

¹⁷Conn uses this term on page 18.

¹⁸Conn, 17.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Conn, 27.

²¹The separation between the OPC and Westminster Seminary gained momentum during the Clowney presidency but peaked after his departure in 1982 with the exit of many professors from the denomination during the eighties. This break has been recognized in the OPC, especially by the Ministerial Subcommittee in the denomination's Committee on Christian Education. The subcommittee has engaged the Philadelphia campus in discussion about the seminary's desire to hire female faculty (*Minutes of the Sixty-Third General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* [1996], 179) and presently is investigating alternatives for educating candidates for the ministry, including the organization of an OP

These observations raise many questions. Most pressing for our purposes is: How was it possible for the more evangelical perspective to gain strength at Westminster, given evangelicalism's lack of sympathy toward the militant posture both of the seminary and of the OPC? Particularly, how was the more evangelical point of view able to gain influence at Westminster, given a faculty that included such Orthodox Presbyterians as Van Til, Kuiper, Murray, Young, Woolley, and Stonehouse?²²

The answer to this question leads us into the more immediate storm that came upon the church at the end of the Forties, namely, Peniel. The Peniel controversy presented a great challenge to some of the strongest theological voices in the OPC partly because the denomination was now perceived in many quarters to be devoid of Christian charity and warmth. In the face of severe criticisms, a number in the OPC were left especially sensitive to the charge of intolerance. And, of course, pressure on them multiplied when arguments were put forward by gracious people who appeared to excel in the very qualities the church was thought to lack.

The Peniel controversy also set before the church, in a most direct way, the perplexing age-old problem of the relationship between doctrine and life. It has been contended that there are two sides to the church, the one emphasizing doctrine, the other life.²³ The dynamics of this problem are complicated because each side, in the interests of wholeness, tends to compensate for its deficiency in

seminary; see *Minutes* (1996), 180. At the same time, Westminster continues to employ a number of Orthodox Presbyterians and is cordial to the denomination. This is evidenced by the seminary's gracious housing of the OPC archives.

²²Evangelical influence at Westminster appears to be remarkable, given the strength of the early faculty's Reformed convictions; note, especially, E. J. Young's exchange with Robert Strong over Arminianism. Young was asked if Arminianism is the gospel and concluded it is not ("Is Arminianism the Gospel?" *Presbyterian Guardian* 13 [September 25, 1944]: 264-65). Strong took exception in the interests of cordiality and cooperation (*Presbyterian Guardian* 13 [October 25, 1944]: 302).

²³The dynamics of this struggle can be observed throughout the history of the church but are apparent in the conflicts within American presbyterianism in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. The suggestion that Christianity is a religion in which life is in tension with doctrine, gained many adherents among Presbyterians in the Old Side/New Side (especially as the influence of Whitefield and the Wesleys took its toll in the rise of Methodism), but also in the Old School/New School and in the Fundamentalist/Modernist controversies. Of importance in this regard is Machen's career-long battle against those who claimed that Christianity is a life not a doctrine.

efforts to incorporate the other. However, difficulty rises when the doctrinal side reduces the importance of doctrine in order to appeal to those who, despite their doctrinal handicap, show evidence of spiritual health. Likewise, the life side could be said to weaken itself when it reaches out to doctrine for the sake of its own credibility, thus raising questions about its sincerity.

Possibly, a more profitable approach to the doctrine/life problem is to realize that both sides carry within them what is perceived to stand opposite to them. If both the doctrine and the life sides are distinct temperaments in their approaches to Christian faith, they stand holistically, as “systems” complete in themselves. Therefore, the doctrine side has its own perspective on the Christian life, while the life side is not devoid of doctrine but possessed of doctrine essential to its character.

An illustration of the dynamics involved in the doctrine/life debate rises out of the more recent history of the OPC, the struggle in the eighties over the church growth movement.²⁴ During that struggle, the church growth forces assured the denomination that they embraced and assumed the church’s Calvinism, that their interest was in the practical matters of church development and dynamic Christian witness, and that they played down the denomination’s name, identity, and doctrine only in the interests of greater visibility. Some, however, sensed these practical interests actually expressed a theology inherent to them, one relativizing doctrine altogether but also relying on a more Arminian view of human prominence and potential and, thus, at variance with the confessional commitment of the denomination.

²⁴The church growth movement – for its suspect origins, all its trendy means, and dismal ends – should have been subject to the most penetrating scrutiny and assessment from those in the Reformed church charged with the theological task. Instead, it was greeted with uncritical support or equivocation. One attempt to be helpful was the collection of articles found in *Theological Perspectives on Church Growth*, ed. by Harvie M. Conn (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1976). But even here, Conn, possibly representing the “new Westminster” (see notes 16 and 17 above), sought to be complimentary and described the book as “a tribute” to Dr. Donald McGavran, the movement’s founder (“Introduction,” found on the unnumbered second page). For the effect of the church growth movement on the OPC, see D.G. Hart and John Muether, *Fighting the Good Fight: A Brief History of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (Philadelphia, PA: The Committee for the Historian, 1995), 65-70.

Still, in the debates neither side seemed to be able to reach the theological ground floor. A number on the doctrinal side were side-tracked by certain sensational factors in the controversy.²⁵ Others, while convinced the problem was more severe, did not press on to a thorough and more penetrating analysis.²⁶ Without such an analysis, the church continues to be troubled by an ambivalence, such as was evident earlier in the conflict over Peniel.

Peniel

The Peniel issue disturbed the OPC directly for fifteen years and indirectly for much longer.²⁷ It was a monument to an ambivalence in some of the church's strongest voices, even some at Westminster Seminary. The movement derives its name from the Genesis account of Jacob's struggle with the angel (32:30). Peniel means "the face of God" and designates the place where Jacob said, "I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved." The Peniel movement, in its name, set as its objective life before the face of God.

The early history of Peniel has received varying accounts. Don Mostrom, an adherent, provided a brief overview to an inquiring student in 1990.²⁸ According to Mostrom, the movement dates from the early thirties. Liberalism prevailed in upstate New York, and young people from some of the liberal churches in and around Schenectady began meeting for Bible study. When it

²⁵A turning point for the church growth forces in the OPC came in 1987 with the publication in *Eternity* magazine of an advertisement from the OPC's Committee of Home Missions and Church Extension, depicting an attractive woman to the headline "She Wants It All" The general assembly reacted quickly, demanding an apology from the home missions committee to all who were offended (*Minutes of the Fifty-Fourth General Assembly* [1987], 15, 19-21)

²⁶Many judged the canons of Christian decency had been breached by the ad (mentioned above), but few perceived how the obvious commercializing of the church reflected far deeper theological difficulties. Even the home missions committee's attempt the following year to regain its balance in its report "Principles, Policies, Methods, and Vision for Church Growth" failed to reach the ground floor of the discussion, see *Minutes of the Fifty-Fifth General Assembly* (1988), 195-217

²⁷An overview of the Peniel controversy is found in Hart and Muether *Fighting the Good Fight*, 121-33

²⁸Contained in Mostrom's letter to Charles H. Roberts (11/28/90), the OPC archives

became evident they needed help, they turned to the nearby Albany Bible Institute. Two teachers, Susan Beers and Rhoda Armstrong, came to their aid. They were joined in teaching the young people by an engineering student from Union College named Raymond Meiners, himself a member of the group.

In 1933, after Meiners left to pursue theological studies, the group took advantage of an offer from one of its members to use a family cottage on Lake Luzerne for a week-long retreat. Misses Beers and Armstrong were again involved in the teaching. Before too long, the loan of a family cottage turned into the rental of many cottages and then the purchase of property. From these beginnings, the Peniel Bible Conference took shape.

A more dramatic and revealing account comes from the pages of the *Peniel* magazine and its 1946 series "The Story of Peniel."²⁹ As presented here, the group responsible for organizing Peniel included Misses Beers and Armstrong from the start. Miss Armstrong was the first teacher and, from her instruction, person after person accepted "the message of deliverance from sin, of victory for the Christian, of entrance into fulness of life by way of Calvary." In the distinctive vocabulary of the group, the members ". . . accepted the Cross for the Christian, namely, consented to the verdict of God upon the 'old man' according to the Scriptures (plainly set forth in Romans 6,7,8), and then began to enter into resurrection and ascension life (Eph. 2:1-6)."

As the group met for informal prayer, one of the members, Mildred Keyser, expressed a "particular prayer burden." She

greatly desired the establishment of a summer camp . . . where young people could hear [the] precious truths regarding the Cross for the Christian, guidance by the Holy Spirit into God's plan for each child of His, and the life of Victory over "all the power of the Enemy". . . .

²⁹This re-telling comes from quotes of the April 1946 issue of the *Peniel* found in the "Report of the Committee Elected by the Presbytery of Philadelphia to Study the Teachings of the Peniel Bible Conference," by Raymond E. Commeret, Arthur W. Kuschke, Jr., and R. B. Kuiper (5/21/51).

In response to this “burden,” the group committed itself to prayer and seemed to settle on one of the aspects of their distinctive view on guidance, i.e., the “perfect unity” of the Holy Spirit’s witness.

The description of the following events, related to the desire for a youth camp, helps to clarify the group’s approach to the Christian life.

. . . All members of the group agreed that the prayer burden . . . was from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself [But] we had to inquire from the Lord who the directors and teachers were to be; the place where the camp was to be held; and the exact dates and rates. [But we] could not find the mind of the Lord on these matters. So we waited before the Lord, earnestly requesting that He . . . show where the point of obstruction was.

The Holy Spirit had previously witnessed to us that the young people [at the camp] were to be both boys and girls. As we were in a prayer meeting one night, one of us said to Mildred Keyser and Robert McCullough, who were engaged to be married, “How can we have a co-ed camp without a married couple at the head?” That suggestion struck all forcibly. They had previously gone separately before the Lord to find out . . . whether it was God’s highest will for them to be united for their life work.

Then as we began to stand with them about God’s exact date for their marriage, the obstruction to prayer was lifted and we knew we were contacting the Throne of Grace. Later, after Mr. McCullough and Miss Keyser had found out from the Lord that the date of their marriage was May 6, 1933, the Lord witnessed in rapid succession to the fact that the place for the Camp was Lake Luzerne, that the dates were to be July 6 through 20, and that the rates were to be \$6.00 a week.

The directors were Mr. and Mrs R. Y. McCullough; the teachers Miss Susan E. Beers and Miss Rhoda Armstrong.

If this account is judged remarkable by Reformed standards, it does not compare to what follows. When no place on Lake Luzerne was available for the camp, and the deadline of Saturday, July 6, approached, the group continued “to look to God for His place on [the lake].” Then, on Friday, July 5,

the Lord spoke to one of us saying, “Look in the morning paper at the Classified Ads”. . . . We did look . . . in obedience to the word of the Lord, and there we found a summer camp advertised for rent on Lake Luzerne! Can you imagine our trepidation as we called the owner and asked him when his camp was available? His answer was, “The camp is available beginning tomorrow, July 6, through July 20 – the very dates about which the Lord had spoken to us!”

During the next year, the group received instruction “from the Lord” that they were to purchase property. Through disclosure to the group from the Holy Spirit about the purchase price for a piece of property called Ye Wayside Inn, a contract was signed, but only after the owners finally “succumbed to God’s proposal.” However, this property was lost to fire in 1938. New property was secured, again through a unified witness “from the Holy Spirit of God” about the details of the purchase.

Despite the discrepancies between these accounts of Peniel’s origins and the questions they raise, the subsequent fact remains: The group was destined for greater impact beyond the Bible conference that had taken shape. Importantly, the churches in upstate New York, because of liberalism, were in deplorable condition, and Ray Meiners had gone off to secure the education necessary to address the problem. After studying at Westminster Seminary and graduating in 1938, he returned to Schenectady and to the group, ready and willing to organize a church. Meiners’

training determined the course of things and on November 4, 1938, Calvary OPC was received into the Presbytery of New York and New England.³⁰

The congregation and the Bible conference flourished. As a sign of their impact, many young men were seen off to seminary. The seminary of choice, at that time, was Westminster. Two men deeply affected by the movement were Herman Petersen, a 1941 graduate from Westminster who came to pastor the newly organized Covenant OPC of Albany, New York, from 1943-1949; and Grover Travers Sloyer, a 1950 graduate who served as stated supply at Redeemer OPC, Philadelphia, from 1950-1954 and as pastor from 1954-1959. Around these two men, as we will see, the Peniel case within the OPC would turn.

Theologically, Peniel's roots are debated. Questions rise about the influences upon the movement in its early days. Mostrom claims that "[i]f any theological construction prevailed in the early years it was the Reformed faith brought into Peniel by Ray Meiners straight out of Westminster Seminary and [from] Gresham Machen."³¹ Undoubtedly, the Reformed faith played a part in Peniel's identity early in its development, at least since Meiners' days at Westminster.

However, Meiners' influence on the group predated his studies at Westminster. Moreover, many who came to Westminster early on were drawn by Machen and the seminary's reputation for fighting modernism, the very thing troubling the churches in the Schenectady area. Zeal within Peniel, therefore, could have arisen from fundamentalist influences since, in the popular mind, Machen and Westminster were joined to the fundamentalist cause. A fundamentalist connection seems likely in light of the link to the Albany Bible Institute.

But if fundamentalism had some influence on Peniel in its early years, what form did this influence take? Many features of the movement weigh against the conclusion that the form was of the

³⁰The Calvary Church story is found in *The Orthodox Presbyterian Church: 1936-1986*, ed. by Charles G. Dennison (Philadelphia, PA: The Committee for the Historian, 1986), 180-81.

³¹Mostrom to Roberts, 11/28/90.

ordinary American variety. For instance, Peniel was dependent upon female leadership in a way fundamentalism would not usually tolerate. Also, there is no evidence that Peniel was much exercised about the usual fundamentalist concerns, i.e., the millennium, the social/moral questions of the day, the threat of world communism, and the incursion of foreigners and their influence.³² Penielists not only were interested in other things, they pursued their interests in a way more meditative, more studious, more mystical than the fundamentalists.

It is true that Peniel, together with fundamentalism, held to an inter-denominationalism or maybe better, a supra-denominationalism. However, Peniel granted more autonomy and importance to this phenomenon than fundamentalism. For example, Mostrom said,

. . . Peniel has a far greater and more scriptural understanding of the "importance of the church as Christ's body and the harbinger of his kingdom" than [even] the OPC does, having not succumbed to the notion that we are the only true Church and must constantly purify ourselves from contact with all the rest of the Body.³³

The accuracy of this portrayal of the OPC aside, Mostrom seems to grant Peniel an ecclesiastical status. At the same time, he appears to set Peniel above the institutional church with "pride of place," because it better reflects the true nature of the body of Christ by including those the institutional church excludes.

Therefore, while influenced by fundamentalism and even the Reformed faith, Peniel has a distinctive identity. But what is Peniel's distinctive identity? Many features place it close to the broader-based evangelical movement. However, Peniel's doctrinal commitments make it more unique, even within the evangelical context.

³²For a brief analysis of the fundamentalists, see Dennison, "Part Two: Hope," 32.

³³Mostrom to Roberts, 11/28/90.

To begin with, Peniel courted the doctrine of a secondary work by the Spirit for full Christian maturity. Appealing to Susan Beers as spokesperson for the movement, Arthur Kuschke reports that she, in her teaching, made much of the word “then” in Romans 6:1, “What shall we say *then*?”³⁴ According to Miss Beers, Paul intends his readers to move on from the experience of justification, described in the previous chapters, to the experience of sanctification which is subsumed in Romans 6:6 under the words “Knowing this, that our old man is crucified. . . .” The experience of knowing that our old man is crucified Miss Beers called “meeting the cross.” She, then, moved from Romans 6:6 to 8:4 and its statement about walking “after the Spirit,” the implication being that only those who have met the cross in this secondary experience are walking in the Spirit.

From this point, again according to Kuschke, Miss Beers’s theology courted perfectionism, since Romans 6:12 implied to her that it was possible “not to let sin reign in your mortal body” in the perfectionist sense of that phrase. But even more crucial to the debate that developed in the OPC, walking “after the Spirit” meant such an awareness of God’s presence that the Christian could be assured of the Holy Spirit’s direct involvement in all sorts of decisions in life. Immediate guidance from the Holy Spirit, such as was evident in the earlier account of Peniel’s beginnings, was at the disposal of those who had “met the cross.”

Here is the door to Peniel’s exposition of such texts as John 14:26 and 16:13. Jesus’ promise to his disciples that the Spirit would come to lead them into all truth meant that all believers have at their disposal this resource. Such is the ministry of the Spirit that he gives us, in keeping with these passages, directions concerning things about which the Bible says nothing, such as the details of our daily lives.³⁵

³⁴Kuschke taped interview (1/28/91), the OPC archives.

³⁵Cf. Commeret, Kuschke, Kuiper, “Report. . . .” (5/21/51), 5-6. Peniel’s commitment to the individualized interpretation of the John texts is reflected in the “Doctrinal Platform,” Article IV, which reads “We believe that the Holy Spirit . . . is sent to dwell within the heart of each child of God, to comfort and to lead into all truth,” *Statement of Doctrinal Belief and Teaching with supporting Scriptural Texts* (Schenectady: The Peniel Bible Conference, 1947). This point is explicitly stated by R.Y. McCollough, “(the Holy Spirit) is our Guide into

Moving from John to Acts, Peniel found the concrete expression of the sorts of things it had in mind. For example, Philip's directive from the Lord to take the road from Jerusalem to Gaza (8:26) was looked upon as a paradigm for the kind of leading believers could expect.³⁶ It may be that, on further reflection, this text was abandoned because it states the message to Philip came directly from the "angel of the Lord." At any rate, the more useful text became Acts 16:6-7. The Spirit's prohibition to Paul to enter Bythina was not, in Peniel's estimation, special revelation but the kind of divine direction available to every believer.³⁷

It should be clear, from Miss Beers's theology and specifically from Peniel's doctrine of guidance, that the movement traveled on a collision course with the OPC over such issues as sanctification, illumination, the sufficiency of Scripture, and the closing of the canon. However, the question remains: Where were the roots to Peniel's theological identity?

Undoubtedly, much of Peniel's distinctive terminology came from Susan Beers and Rhoda Armstrong. Still, patterns of Peniel's theology find correspondence in many movements. For example, some have suggested a link between Peniel and Jessie Penn-Lewis, a key figure in the 1904-1905 Welsh Revival and a woman whose ministry continued into the late twenties. In her individualistic interpretation of Christ's binding of the strong man (cf. Mt. 12:29) and Paul's "I die daily" (1 Cor. 15:31),³⁸ as well as her support of

all truth, even in matters concerning which the Word of God has no direct thing to say" *Peniel Newsletter* (October, 1956), 3.

³⁶Commeret, Kuschke, Kuiper, "Report . . ." citing the July, 1946, issue of *Peniel Magazine*, p. 2.

³⁷Cf. J.H. McClay and G. Travers Sloyer, "Complaint against the Presbytery of Philadelphia," *Minutes of the Twentieth General Assembly* (1953), 9.

³⁸Penn-Lewis's approach to 1 Corinthians 15:31 was to promote personal mortification of sin, rather than to allow for the apostle's explanation of the danger to which he was subjected daily for the sake of the gospel; her interpretation of Matthew 12:29 was to suggest that the believer must be engaged in the binding of Satan, not that Christ had definitively done so. See the "Report of the Committee to Answer the Complaint of Messrs. Grunstra, et al.," presented to the Presbytery of Philadelphia by Arthur W. Kuschke, Jr., Leslie W. Sloat, and Ned B. Stonehouse (1/20/58), pp.10,12; a copy of this report is in the OPC archives.

her own brand of feminism,³⁹ Mrs. Penn-Lewis can be connected to certain aspects of Peniel.

Even more to the point, Mrs. Penn-Lewis was raised in the Calvinistic Methodist tradition in which she gravitated more to the Methodist side of things. Peniel has affinity with the methods of Wesley, as well as with the holiness movements emanating from Charles Finney (whose influence was indeed felt in upstate New York), with the Keswick movement of England, and with twentieth century American Pentecostalism and its doctrine of secondary blessings.⁴⁰

Yet, Peniel, while having similarities to all these, has never accepted direct linkage with any of them. Peniel sees itself more broadly still and in a way that transcends these movements, just as it sees itself transcending denominations. To its adherents, Peniel is more catholic, more universal than these more restricted expressions of the Christian faith.⁴¹ The interest of Peniel is something that runs through all these movements, something that

³⁹Cf Jessie Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Women* (Bournemouth, England The Overcomer Book Room, 1919)

⁴⁰Hart and Muether make reference to Peniel's criticism of the OPC. They say that, according to Peniel's defenders, "[t]he Reformed 'dull-hearted complacency,' needed the healthy corrective provided by the holiness movement and the Methodist tradition" (*Fighting the Good Fight*, 128), cf Peniel's response to the OPC's Twenty-Sixth General Assembly, *Minutes of the Twenty-Seventh General Assembly* (1960), 25

⁴¹Of interest, in this connection, is the exchange between G Travers Sloyer and F Clarke Evans during Sloyer's interview before the Presbytery of Philadelphia (Transcript, unit 1, page 3 [October 12, 1957]) Evans

[in Peniel] "it seems to me that one may be a Methodist, or one may be a Presbyterian, or Episcopalian, hold to any kind of theology, you might say He might be a pre-millennialist, or a post-millennialist That really isn't the important thing This [Peniel] conference has a special interest in the spiritual life and in Christian experience And would you say that Methodist, Baptist, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, people from all denominations, attend this conference and that they attend simply because they have this interest in the Christian life and in Christian experience? And would you say that is really your interest in this conference? It isn't because of any set of doctrines, or anything like that, but you feel that there is some spiritual emphasis in this conference which you might say our own denomination doesn't have or that we haven't developed, we haven't emphasized, and that you get that emphasis there and that development there, and particular doctrines of Christian life and experience that you cannot get in our denomination?" Sloyer "Yes, I would say that is true"

finds expression even in the Calvinism of the OPC.⁴² As a result, Peniel, in its distinctive identity, best fits into the more mystical so-called spirituality tradition.

Richard Lovelace, of Gordon-Conwell Seminary, a disciple of Peniel and a graduate of Westminster Seminary, has set out the evangelical defense for the spirituality tradition in his book, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*.⁴³ He dedicates this volume to Susan Beers and Don Mostrom,⁴⁴ along with Jonathan Edwards and Cotton Mather. He writes in the interests of what he calls a “unified field theory of spirituality.”⁴⁵ The burden of his argument is to bring to light the common thread running through the various groupings of genuine believers, namely, “newness of life in Christ.”⁴⁶ Experiences of the Spirit and claims of renewal are the common bond between Arminians, Calvinists, charismatics, Catholics, etc.

It takes little reflection to realize that Lovelace’s spirituality theory enjoys the advantage, the rather imperious advantage, of identifying with many movements, yet hovering over them all.⁴⁷ In the doctrine/life dichotomy of which we spoke earlier, Lovelace’s spirituality is heavily weighted on the life side, while claiming to have a doctrinal position amendable to the many he considers legitimate, including the Reformed tradition. Unfortunately, too

⁴²One thing emphasized by Peniel throughout its struggle with the OPC was the fact that it was “not bound to the Westminster confessional standards, though appreciative of them” (cf. Robert E. Nicholas, “Answer to Peniel,” *Presbyterian Guardian* 30 [December 1961]: 209).

⁴³Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1979).

⁴⁴Mostrom’s own contribution to the discussion of evangelical spirituality appears in his book *The Dynamics of Intimacy with God* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1983). Mostrom dedicates this book to Robert and Mildred McCullough. Charles Roberts pointed out this volume to the writer of this article.

⁴⁵Lovelace, 17.

⁴⁶Lovelace’s full comment is this: “The Christian life is being offered in diverse packages, but what is inside is the same – newness of life in Christ” (*Dynamics*, 17).

⁴⁷Interesting, by way of comparison, is Walther Eichrodt’s description of mysticism: “The mystic has always sought for quietude and avoided religious controversy, for he has never found any difficulty in associating himself with the most diverse conceptions of God,” *Theology of the Old Testament*, I (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1961), 317; he makes further note, citing de la Saussaye on Islamic mysticism, “Sufism is more tolerant than any other regime; prominent Sufis have candidly placed all positive confessions of faith on the same plane,” (in Eichrodt, *Theology*, 317, note 3).

often missed is the fact that the spirituality movement has a doctrinal commitment inherent to itself, one that stands at variance to the Reformed point of view.

Peniel in the Courts of the Church

In 1948, during the OPC's Fifteenth General Assembly in Wildwood, New Jersey, Arthur Kuschke went to dinner at the invitation of John Rankin and Herman Petersen.⁴⁸ The subject of discussion was Peniel. Rankin's little congregation in Worchester, New York, had been disturbed by an influx of Peniel young people;⁴⁹ and Petersen's congregation in Albany was divided over the issue.⁵⁰ Making matters worse for Petersen, he had been a disciple of Peniel but now found himself, he felt, a victim of its excesses and at odds with its teaching.⁵¹ Kuschke advised these two men to stand their ground and bring their concerns to the attention of their presbytery.

Matters came to a head at the September meeting of the Presbytery of New York and New England. The presbytery had set before it not only the worries of these two pastors but consideration of a recent vote at the church in Albany. The Albany congregation had voted thirteen to twelve in favor of Petersen's removal, as Petersen said "because of my repudiation of Peniel teaching."⁵² Subsequently, the presbytery conducted an extensive investigation, found in Petersen's favor, and then passed several resolutions on the subject, all warning of Peniel's dangers. However, as far as the Albany congregation was concerned, the damage had been done. The Penielists left and by December of 1949, so had Petersen. The church limped along for thirteen years, sometimes without a pastor, finally being dissolved in March 1962.

⁴⁸Cf. the Kuschke taped interview (1/28/91).

⁴⁹See *The Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, 183.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 171.

⁵¹Petersen's recounting of his Peniel years appears in *Peniel* in "Complaint and Statements of 13 Members of Redeemer Orthodox Presbyterian Church" (August 4, 1957), 21-26.

⁵²Petersen's statement, "Complaint. . .," 24

From the Presbytery of New York/New England, the debate moved to the Presbytery of Philadelphia. The transition figure was Grover Travers Sloyer. Sloyer was a disciple of Peniel. Despite this tie, he was licensed to preach without dissent in the Presbytery of New York/New England soon after graduation from Westminster in 1950. But remaining in the Philadelphia area following his graduation, he became the stated supply at Redeemer OPC, a small congregation that, although without a pastor for seven years, had become a favorite place of worship for many Westminster students.

To say the least, Sloyer's relationship to the Presbytery of Philadelphia was controversial. His license was received from the Presbytery of New York/New England in January 1951. Many in Philadelphia, including Arthur Kuschke, had been alerted to the threat of Peniel, and so discussions began between Sloyer and the Candidates and Credentials Committee of the presbytery.

After much discussion, the presbytery recalled Sloyer's license on March 17, 1952, largely because, in its judgment, he appeared to hold to "new revelations of the Spirit." The debate raged hot and heavy over the next two years. It was no help to Sloyer's opponents that many had been drawn to Sloyer; his ministry had been generating visible evidences of effectiveness at Redeemer Church, a congregation that had struggled since its organization in 1936.

In June, Sloyer appealed the presbytery decision to the general assembly.⁵³ He cited, among other things, the positive response at Redeemer Church and the fact that he did not believe, nor had the presbytery proved that he believed, in new revelations of the Spirit. The general assembly agreed with the appeal and granted it, instructing the presbytery to "restore the licensure to Mr. Sloyer."⁵⁴

But in January 1953, the presbytery again recalled Mr. Sloyer's licensure for what it judged were his mistaken views on guidance. This time Sloyer lodged a complaint against the

⁵³ *Minutes of the Nineteenth General Assembly* (1952), 5-6

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 48

presbytery.⁵⁵ The assembly agreed that the presbytery did not prove its case and directed it once more to restore Sloyer's license.⁵⁶ At the same time, the assembly urged the Presbytery of Philadelphia to continue to investigate Sloyer's position on guidance and even appointed a committee to consult with him.⁵⁷

Despite the wrinkle in the assembly's action, Sloyer's support had consolidated. His license was restored, the assembly's committee found his views "in harmony with the Scriptures and our subordinate standards,"⁵⁸ and on July 25, 1954, he was ordained and installed as pastor of Redeemer Church. However, he took office under a cloud of formal complaints lodged within the presbytery. While taking note of some irregularities in presbytery actions, the general assembly refused to overturn the presbytery's decision to proceed with the Sloyer ordination; the ordination stood.⁵⁹

As things turned out, Sloyer's ministry was as turbulent as his licensure. Within three years, division developed in the church and in August 1957, thirteen members at Redeemer filed a complaint against the session "for failure to protect the congregation against false doctrines of guidance and of sanctification, which are now being circulated in the congregation."⁶⁰

These members cited the "distinct spiritual fellowship" of the Peniel adherents and their practice of directly "challenging Satan." Their complaint also cited Peniel teachings about "choosing death to the old man," "experiencing the victory of the cross," and "receiving the guidance of the Holy Spirit for the details of daily

⁵⁵*Minutes of the Twentieth General Assembly* (1953), 7-10.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 74.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 75.

⁵⁸"Report to the Presbytery of Philadelphia," by James W. Price, Edmund P. Clowney, and John H. Skilton (September 21, 1953), 13; cf. the Clowney Peniel collection in the Westminster Seminary archives. See also the assembly action on this report, *Minutes of the Twenty-First General Assembly* (1954), 35.

⁵⁹*Minutes of the Twenty-Second General Assembly* (1955), 6-10, 46-50, 54-55.

⁶⁰"Complaint and Statements of 13 Members of the Redeemer Orthodox Presbyterian Church," (August 4, 1957), 1.

life including a life partner.”⁶¹ The complainants, in support of their position, had gathered testimonies not only from within their own circle but from former adherents to Peniel, including Herman Petersen.

While the complainants did not attack Sloyer directly, the case against him had begun to mount. So strong was it that some who formerly supported him in the presbytery reversed themselves, even to the point of leading opposition against him.

In late October, after much debate, the presbytery concluded that the complaint had merit. In its judgment, Sloyer and his supporters obscured “the decisive significance, at conversion, of our union with Christ,” calling “for additional steps on our part.” The presbytery further stated that the congregation’s leadership had erred “in its assumption that aspects of indwelling sin may be put to death by specific procedure not set forth in the Scripture.” Moreover, according to the presbytery, Redeemer’s leadership had slipped into a “false mysticism,” had compromised both “the authority and sufficiency of Scripture,” and had disrupted the unity of the church. As a result, the session at Redeemer Church was directed to resist the specified practices in the whole of its ministry and to report to the next meeting of presbytery about its willingness to comply with the presbytery’s instructions.⁶²

On November 18, 1957, Bernard R. Grunstra and Walter T. Oliver, together with Sloyer, a majority of the session at Redeemer, responded to the presbytery.⁶³ They complained that the presbytery was guilty of treating the matter before it without a clear distinction between the administrative and judicial aspects of the case. In the judgment of these session members, the session was being pressed to outlaw certain doctrines when the presbytery had made no study of them. In addition, the session was being held accountable for the

⁶¹The quotations come from the statements of the complainants, *ibid*; and the summary found in the *Presbyterian Guardian* 26 (October 15, 1957): 140.

⁶²This paragraph draws its quotes from the text of the presbytery’s action as found in the *Presbyterian Guardian* 26 (November 15, 1957): 152.

⁶³“Complaint against the Presbytery of Philadelphia,” Bernard R. Grunstra, Walter T. Oliver, and G. Travers Sloyer (November 18, 1957).

circulation of Peniel teachings within the church when, in their judgment, this had not been proved.

But most importantly and in a way that might be thought inconsistent with the last point, Grunstra and Sloyer attached to the complaint their own defense of Peniel's teachings.⁶⁴ This defense is a studied attempt to bring together the standards of the OPC and the teachings of Peniel. It even appears to be a corrective to many of the doctrinal abuses of Peniel, an indication of the evolution of the movement or, at least, of the developing assessment of it by certain of its Reformed friends. Still, the old vocabulary is retained, e.g., "meeting the cross," "resisting" and "binding Satan," etc.

The presbytery, through a committee, conferred with the session, met with members of the congregation, and attended a congregational meeting in which motions both to support the presbytery's directive and to declare a lack of confidence in the pastor were defeated. The committee reported to presbytery in January 1958, with an extensive 15,000 word document.⁶⁵ According to the committee, the questionable practices did in fact exist within the congregation, nor were they denied. Therefore, the committee concluded:

These practices . . . constitute a system or pattern, of sanctification and guidance, contrary to the Bible and our standards. [Since the complaint of Grunstra, et al.] does not seek to come to grips with the testimony as to the existence of these practices; nor does it deny the existence of these practices; nor does it repudiate these practices. . . . [nor does it] . . . exclude the Presbytery's interpretation of these practices . . . ; [t]he complaint does not therefore furnish ground for the reversal of the Presbytery's action. . . .⁶⁶

⁶⁴Ibid., 3-6.

⁶⁵"Report of the Committee to Answer the Complaint of Messrs. Grunstra. et al.," Arthur W. Kuschke, Leslie W. Sloat, and Ned B. Stonehouse (January 20, 1958).

⁶⁶Ibid., 1-2.

When Sloyer indicated that he neither would comply with the presbytery's directive nor resign his charge at Redeemer Church, the presbytery acted to dissolve the pastoral relationship.⁶⁷ At that point, Walter Oliver informed the presbytery that the session's case would be carried to the general assembly. Another complaint against the presbytery's action was filed by those who, while not supportive of Peniel's position, disagreed with Sloyer's removal for procedural reasons.⁶⁸

The assembly, meeting in June 1958, dismissed the Redeemer session's complaint but granted the procedure objection, instructing the presbytery "to restore the pastoral relationship" between Sloyer and the church.⁶⁹ It also established a special committee to "study the doctrines and practices of the Peniel Bible Conference."⁷⁰

However, before the committee reported to the next assembly, Sloyer and the majority of Redeemer Church had withdrawn from the OPC. The events were as follows: In July the presbytery restored Sloyer; in September the presbytery elected its own committee to draft charges against members of the session for not complying with the presbytery's directive of October 1957; in November Sloyer and the majority of the congregation declared their intention to separate from the OPC, in part because they judged the presbytery dishonest for pursuing them administratively and not doctrinally; and in January 1959, Sloyer forwarded documentation of this decision to the presbytery.⁷¹ A year later Sloyer joined the Reformed Church in America and was serving congregations of that denomination in New Jersey.

This turn of events did not end the matter. The general assembly in 1959 passed along the reports of its special committee to the church's sessions and presbyteries and asked for response from the Peniel Bible Conference.⁷² The following assembly judged

⁶⁷See the account in the *Presbyterian Guardian* 27 (February 15, 1958): 27.

⁶⁸This complaint is dated March 25, 1958, and appears in the *Minutes of the Twenty-Fifth General Assembly*, 103-104

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 107.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 102.

⁷¹See Sloyer's letter to the Presbytery of Philadelphia (January, 1959), in the OPC archives.

⁷²*Minutes of the Twenty-Sixth General Assembly* (1959), 93.

the concerns of the church had not been adequately addressed by Peniel but, at the same time, established a new committee “to examine the current doctrine and practices of the Peniel Bible Conference.”⁷³ In 1961 the assembly declared Peniel’s formulations of the doctrine of guidance to be “erroneous” and its doctrine of sanctification to involve “unwholesome tendencies.”⁷⁴ The Presbytery of New York and New England then asked the assembly again to study the doctrine of guidance.⁷⁵ The assembly complied with yet another committee and, in 1968 and 1969, received its final reports.⁷⁶ Although not addressing Peniel directly, these statements supported the earlier conclusions of the assembly.

Peniel, Stonehouse, and OP Ambivalence

In 1947 Carl F. H. Henry came to prominence with the publication of *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*.⁷⁷ Henry spoke for the emerging neo-evangelical movement over against the older evangelicalism. His criticisms were clearly stated, well written, and safe. They would commend him to the audience he wished to reach (the American religious mainstream) and damn him with those in whose company he was none too anxious to be found (the American religious hinterland). Henry’s respectable call to evangelical social action had an astute “politically correct” edge. It was perceptively opportune, focusing on an easy target, while leaving the true difficulties untouched, namely, evangelicalism’s determined commitment to the immediate situation (i.e., its closet modernism), its stubborn insistence upon the right to operate outside the church, and its inability, despite the quest for a social conscience, to release its grip on the autonomous personality.

⁷³ *Minutes of the Twenty-Seventh General Assembly* (1960), 106.

⁷⁴ *Minutes of the Twenty-Eighth General Assembly* (1961), 86-87.

⁷⁵ *Minutes of the Twenty-Ninth General Assembly* (1962), 6.

⁷⁶ *Minutes of the Thirty-Fifth General Assembly* (1968), 108-16; *Minutes of the Thirty-Sixth General Assembly* (1969), 129-41.

⁷⁷ Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1947).

From compromises soteriologically to tolerance of even the most bizarre subjectivism, evangelicals have pursued a course that mocks their call for more meaningful church life and doctrinal maturity. The point is that the movement, old or new, never was healthy; and the attempts presently to salvage some of its features and figures are not helpful. Wesley's strangely warmed heart was in fact just that! Calvinist appeal to it in the interests of proving that the Reformed also possess tender spiritual capacity is a mistake. Head and heart are not, nor can they be, separated. For this reason no hope is to be found in the suggestion that happy solutions lie within reach for those merely willing to add Wesleyan emotion to Calvinist intelligence.⁷⁸

In keeping with this, neither the religious "exhibitionism" of spiritual autobiography, nor the methodistic prescriptions for religious insecurity belong to the theology of Calvin. Neither were they the substance of the prevailing position in the early days at Westminster Seminary. It could not even be said that affections for either the presbyterian new side or new school, with their revivalist sympathies, characterized the early faculty. Furthermore, because of Westminster's influence on the developing OPC, such attitudes were not able to gain control of the church, despite their presence and continuing influence.

This is not to say that Westminster was unaffected by the evangelical impulse. Something of that impulse survived the move from old Princeton, as is evident from the popularity at Westminster of Warfield's book *The Plan of Salvation*. Although in many ways an excellent and useful work, this book compromised Calvinist theology by subordinating the church to the individual and by making the Reformed church a subset of evangelicalism.⁷⁹ Machen himself reflected evangelical attitudes and carried their

⁷⁸Van Til's unpublished treatise, "The New Evangelicalism," (on file at Westminster Seminary) remains a powerful response to Henry and the movement of which he is a part. Before David Wells, Os Guinness, and Mark Noll, and in a way much more to the point, Cornelius Van Til laid the axe to the root of the theological flaws in neo-evangelicalism.

⁷⁹Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, [repr. 1966]), 19-20.

influence with him into Westminster. One notable example was his curious support of Billy Sunday.⁸⁰

Moreover, the evangelical impulse, however subtly, remained a factor at Westminster throughout the ordeals of the thirties and forties. In the fifties it accounted, in part, for Edmund Clowney's inclusion in the faculty. It also influenced a number of the faculty during the OPC's struggle with Peniel. Clowney himself, having recently come to Westminster, served on the 1953 general assembly committee that defended Sloyer before the Presbytery of Philadelphia.⁸¹ Later, Mostrom recalled Clowney's "kind offers to be of assistance" to the Penielists.⁸²

Among the faculty, however, it was Ned B. Stonehouse who stood out in the Peniel controversy. Stonehouse had distinguished himself as a talented, internationally recognized New Testament scholar and an able churchman, as had been proved in the thirties and forties by his strong stands within the church for consistent Reformed theology.⁸³ At the same time, here was a man in whom the struggle over Peniel became intense, a man in whom the continuing ambivalence within the OPC would express itself most strikingly.

For whatever reason, Stonehouse, especially during his later career, became a study in diplomacy. In fact, his rightly popular and valuable biography of Machen, published during the days of his early involvement in the Peniel dispute, can be read in this light. The biography is meant to rescue Machen from the clutches of extremism and place him more in the mainstream as a model for intelligent, to be sure orthodox, Christian living. Stonehouse even goes out of his way to make Machen appear "normal." To this

⁸⁰Ned B. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1954), 222-28.

⁸¹*Minutes of the Twentieth General Assembly* (1953), 74.

⁸²Mostrom's letter to Clowney, 3/21/60, in the Westminster Seminary archives.

⁸³Charting Stonehouse's strong stand can be done easily by reviewing his articles and editorials in the *Presbyterian Guardian*: e.g., on fundamentalism, "Godliness and Christian Liberty," 3 (February 27, 1937): 201-204; on the incomprehensibility debate, "Doctrine and the Clark Case," 14 (April 25, 1945): 121-23.

end, much to the dismay of Machen's family, he conjured up a romance for the life-long bachelor.⁸⁴

As the diplomat, Stonehouse was the consummate gentleman. His correspondence is polite and clearly reveals an admirable effort to rise above difficulties and conflict. In his letters, he disarms an opponent by way of kind and solicitous remarks. There is no reason to question the sincerity of these comments. Still, they have a definite rhetorical tone and reflect a possible trace of naiveté, i.e., the notion that the generous spirit, together with the argument, will convince the adversary, or at least compel him to think well of you, even while he rejects your position.

What characterized Stonehouse in his private correspondence characterized him in his professional life; he was the gentleman. His scholarship commanded a well-earned hearing from many hardly sympathetic to his Reformed convictions, and he gained a favorable reputation among some at the so-called highest levels in biblical studies. His work on the synoptic Gospels continues to be a benchmark.⁸⁵ In this regard, he approaches Machen whose work in the areas of the virgin birth and the origin of Paul's religion provides models for competence at which Reformed scholarship must continue to aim.

However, the question remains whether anything less than rigorous attack upon the foundations of modern biblical scholarship will do. There is clearly a difference between unmasking academic and religious fraudulence, and being accepted as a gentleman into the academy responsible for both. Not that there can be any question about Stonehouse's devotion to Reformed orthodoxy. Still, he was caught in a tension and, as a result, he followed, from time to time, what could be judged a more compromised line.

⁸⁴The family's dismay was expressed by Arthur W. Machen, Jr., and Mary Gresham Machen to Charles G. Dennison during an interview in Baltimore, March 9, 1983. Stonehouse's overworked treatment of the "romance" is found in the biography, pages 315-20.

⁸⁵For a valuable review of Stonehouse's contribution to New Testament scholarship, but one that plays down his book *Origins of the Synoptic Gospels*, as well as his commitment to Gospel harmony, see Moises Silva, "Ned B. Stonehouse and Redaction Criticism (Part I)," *Westminster Theological Journal* 40 (Fall 1977): 77-88; Ned B. Stonehouse and Redaction Criticism (Part II)," *Westminster Theological Journal* 40 (Spring 1978): 281-303.

This disposition in Stonehouse became the opportunity for influence from the evangelical side. It led to his initial support of Clowney for a faculty appointment at Westminster and this despite his sharp disagreement with Clowney in the Van Til/Clark debate.⁸⁶ It also provided the opportunity for the evangelical impulse to affect some of his ecumenical efforts. After resisting pressures to align the OPC with the fundamentalist American Council of Christian Churches, Stonehouse defended OP involvement in the fundamentalist International Council of Christian Churches.⁸⁷ His support of the ICCC brought swift and sharp response from baffled observers.⁸⁸ On the other side of the ledger and during the last years of his life, he supported the church's participation in discussions between the mainline Reformed and Lutheran bodies, participation which interestingly dissipated once Van Til, upon Stonehouse's death, succeeded him as the church's representative at these meetings.⁸⁹

If ambivalence marked Stonehouse's ecumenical efforts, it most certainly marked his stand in the Peniel controversy. When troubles about Peniel arose in the Presbytery of Philadelphia, he became one of Sloyer's most ardent defenders. As Stonehouse himself said, "I took a firm position in support of [Sloyer]. . . ."⁹⁰ As far as the public record is concerned, Stonehouse's signature heads the list of complainants objecting to the January 1953 action of presbytery by which Sloyer's licensure had been recalled a

⁸⁶See footnote 3.

⁸⁷Stonehouse, with R.B. Kuiper, opposed involvement in the ACCC; see *Minutes of the Fourteenth General Assembly* (1947), 70-71.

⁸⁸On this matter see the interaction in the *Presbyterian Guardian* between Stonehouse and Arthur Kuschke, beginning with Kuschke's remarks in "Membership in the International Council," 19 (November 15, 1950):204; and Stonehouse's comments in "Appraising the International Council of Christian Churches," 19 (December 15, 1950): 226-28. This discussion continued into the next year.

⁸⁹OPC involvement was not without controversy; see *Minutes of the Twenty-Ninth General Assembly* (1962), 69-71. Van Til's written assessment of the dialogue appears in the *Minutes of the Thirty-First General Assembly* (1964), 102-105; in February 1966, Van Til was released from the obligation to attend further meetings of the consultation, and from that time the OPC was no longer represented; see *Minutes of the Thirty-Third General Assembly* (1966), 72. Van Til's extensive evaluation of the mainline ecumenical movement appears in *The Confession of 1967: Its Theological Background and Ecumenical Significance* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1967).

⁹⁰Stonehouse's letter to William C. Brownson, 10/15/57, in the OPC archives.

second time.⁹¹ When Sloyer was finally ordained, it was Stonehouse who, at Sloyer's request, presided at the ordination service in a gesture obviously reflecting his commitment to Sloyer and his cause.⁹²

But as strongly as he had defended Sloyer, Stonehouse with equal strength finally opposed him. In the end, he became the pivotal figure in the controversy. His presence among Peniel's opponents would bring matters to a close.

Change for Stonehouse came in 1957 as a result of the charges leveled against the Redeemer session by members of Redeemer Church. Forced to it by the disunity in the congregation, Stonehouse reevaluated his position. He now clearly saw the threat to the church in Peniel's approach to sanctification and guidance. He went on record in the *Presbyterian Guardian* with his concerns. He also became a member of the presbytery committee that presented the unanimous and devastating report in response to the complaint from Sloyer and others in the Redeemer Church session.⁹³ In all this, his conclusion was that Peniel was particularly guilty of confusing inspiration with illumination. He said, ". . . [Peniel] . . . falls far short of making the sharp distinction between the inspiration which constitutes the Scriptures as the Word of God and the illumination given by the Holy Spirit whereby we are enabled to enter into genuine understanding of them."⁹⁴

Stonehouse died on November 18, 1962. His death, in some ways, was a watershed for the church. He was the first member of the Westminster faculty to die since Machen, and his passing marked the beginning days for a changing of the guard within the leadership of the denomination. In the end, whatever inconsistencies he displayed and whatever nagging ambivalence clung to him, his stand against Peniel proved to be consistent with his earlier positions and helped the OPC to deal with evangelical spirituality. His contribution to the debate moved the church toward a more

⁹¹*Minutes of the Twentieth General Assembly* (1953), 10.

⁹²*Presbyterian Guardian* 23 (August 16, 1954): 150-51.

⁹³The report is cited in footnotes 37 and 63.

⁹⁴*Presbyterian Guardian* 26 (November 15, 1957): 154.

consistent position on its own spirituality. Coming into sharper focus was the fact that the spirituality of the OPC must be distinctively Reformed, of a piece with and inseparable from its doctrine.

Such a spirituality expresses itself in the interests of the glory of God and his sovereignty over all creation. It draws, with ever deepening appreciation, upon the biblical presentation of salvation history in which the church stands. With thankfulness to God for the completed work of Christ, it keeps in view the eschatological end to which Christ's church presses. Such spirituality is conscious of the corporate confession which the pilgrim church must make in this world.

As a result, OPC spirituality cannot be comfortable with those essentially trans-ecclesiastical or para-ecclesiastical in spirit. Neither can it be comfortable with those who trivialize fellowship with the God of glory through mystical insight for personal decisions or programmed remedies for personal problems. It is not at home with those who claim to be guided, beyond Scripture, by their intuitions about God's secret will, who suggest an additional level of Christian consciousness. Much less is OPC spirituality at peace with those who truncate biblical eschatology for the sake of the immediate goals of personal holiness and emotional security.⁹⁵

But while the essential nature of OPC spirituality has more clearly been marked out by the Peniel controversy, the church continues to struggle on this very front. The strength of modern evangelicalism is obvious, and its impact on the OPC is as undeniable as it is subtle. Even Stonehouse, together with others in the church, was affected in ways he did not perceive.

In her post-Peniel days, the OPC has faced the threat of evangelical spirituality in the charismatic question of the seventies and the church growth and new life movements in the eighties. In some ways, these matters have not been resolved and testify to the

⁹⁵Reflections on OPC spirituality are found in the previous articles in this series; see also Charles G. Dennison, "Some Thoughts about our Identity," *New Horizons* 13 (June/July, 1992): 2-3; cf. the essays of D. G. Hart, Charles G. Dennison, and John R. Muether in *Perspectives: Lectures from the Pre-Assembly Conference Commemorating the 60th Anniversary of the OPC* (Beaver Falls, PA.: The Committee for the Historian, 1996).

continuing ambivalence in the church. This ambivalence has now become especially evident in the area of worship. Its presence challenges the OPC to reach the ground floor in the spirituality debate for the sake of her own genuine Reformed identity.