

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled. (2 Corinthians 10:3-6)

Number 171 Copyright 2003 John W. Robbins Post Office Box 68, Unicoi, Tennessee 37692 May, June 1999
Email: tjtrinityfound@aol.com Website: www.trinityfoundation.org Telephone: 423.743.0199 Fax: 423.743.2005

Antichrist 1999

Edited by John W. Robbins

The actual word *Antichrist* is used by only one Bible writer—John in his first and second Epistles. However, it is generally recognized that the apostle Paul refers to the same figure in *2 Thessalonians 2*, where he warns the church about the man of sin, or mystery of lawlessness.

Few figures have stirred the imagination and anxious forebodings as much as the mystery figure of Antichrist. As different generations of Christians have scanned the horizon for signs of the end of the world, they thought they discovered the Antichrist in such men as Nero, Constantine, Napoleon, Mussolini, Hitler, Kissinger, and Stalin.

Views of the Reformers

In the sixteenth century the European church was awakened and shaken by the Reformation. Although there were several branches of the Reformation, and there were points of disagreement, there was complete unanimity on three things:

1. The Reformers came to a united understanding of the sovereignty of God in predestination. Luther's *Bondage of the Will* and

Calvin's *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* are the classic statements on the doctrine of God's sovereignty.

2. The Reformers came to a united understanding of justification by faith alone. They unanimously upheld its primacy and centrality in the Christian theology.

3. The Reformers came to a united understanding that it was the work of Antichrist to oppose and corrupt the glorious Gospel truth of justification by faith alone. To the Reformers, justification by faith alone was the great truth upon which the church stood or fell. To take this away was to take away the very life of the church. No greater harm could be done than to rob the church of justification by faith. And since the religious establishment of their day opposed the great Reformation doctrine, the Reformers unitedly declared that that revered religious establishment was Antichrist.

It is hard for us to appreciate the daring and very shocking stance of the Reformers. In their day there was only one church structure. Reverenced for centuries, it was seen to be the

holy city on Earth, the very gate of Heaven. To call it Antichrist was worse than pointing the incriminating finger at your own mother. Nor can we appreciate the Reformers' conviction on this matter (for it was a sincere theological conviction) unless we appreciate how strongly they believed in the importance of justification by faith alone.

Whatever we may think today about the Reformers' views on Antichrist, we have to acknowledge that they were so widely held by Protestants for 300 years that they became known as the Protestant view of prophetic interpretation.

Views of the Counter Reformation and Modern Futurism

Naturally, the established church was not going to appreciate the damning appellation of Antichrist. Being challenged to present a plausible alternative interpretation of Bible prophecy, Jesuit scholarship rallied to the Roman cause and presented what became known as the *futurist* system of interpretation. In this, Antichrist was said to be still future and therefore could not be the papal church. Three hundred years later, these same futurist views took root on English Protestant soil; and today they are so widespread among Protestants that they are almost a test of orthodoxy in some circles.

The Biblical Perspective

Whether we subscribe to the Reformers' view that Rome is Antichrist or to the popular evangelical views of today which declare that Antichrist is yet to come, we are still in danger of missing the vital Biblical message about Antichrist. If we content ourselves with the

thought that the Reformers were correct in their identification, we are in danger of blinding ourselves to the Biblical warnings with a sort of Pharisaical complacency or Protestant self-righteousness. If we gaze off into the future, especially looking to events among the Jews in the Middle East, we will also fail to be aroused by the Biblical warnings about Antichrist. For what the Bible has to say about Antichrist is not given as mere information, and certainly not information to gratify or titillate idle curiosity about the future. What the Bible says about Antichrist is to warn and energize the Christian congregation.

The Bible presents four outstanding features of Antichrist:

1. The Religious Character of Antichrist

The Greek prefix *anti* means *in the place of*, or *in the stead of*. It may also contain the idea of *substitution*. For instance, when Paul says that Christ gave himself a *ransom* for all (1 Timothy 2:6), he does not use the ordinary word meaning *ransom* (Greek – *lutron*), but he uses the prefix *anti* (Greek – *antilutron*). Girdlestone, as well as other linguists, points out that the word literally means *substitutionary ransom*.

Antichrist therefore refers to some figure who puts himself in the place of Jesus Christ. He is a *substitute* Christ. To use the Latin rather than the Greek, he claims to be the vicar of Christ. Standing in the room of Jesus Christ, he tries to carry on the work of Christ. Yet his gospel is really another gospel. G.C. Berkouwer wrote:

The religious character of the opposition preoccupied the Reformers. Theirs was

not just the bitter tone of anti-papism. They were predominantly concerned and anxious about the well-being of the Church.... For the Reformers the Antichrist was all the more dangerous because he donned this religious cloak.... During the Reformation, this theme of the Antichrist's taking his seat in the temple of God [2 *Thessalonians* 2:4] was taken very seriously. The temple was not in Jerusalem, but the Church, and the Antichrist strategy was primarily to drive the true God out of this temple and replace him. (*The Return of Christ* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972], 268, 269)

2. The Present Reality of Antichrist

John's Antichrist was not merely a future entity. He was also a present reality.

Little children, it is the last time: and as you have heard that Antichrist shall come, even now are there many Antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us. But they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us, but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us. (1 *John* 2:18, 19)

For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an Antichrist. (2 *John* 7)

...and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of Antichrist, whereof you have heard that

it should come; and even now is it in the world. (1 *John* 4:3)

The apostle Paul wrote, "the mystery of iniquity does already work..." (2 *Thessalonians* 2:7). So Antichrist must always be seen as a present reality – in AD 65, in 1517, or in 1999. Antichrist's appearance belongs to the last days, and according to John, the spirit of Antichrist manifested in the false teachers was a harbinger of the end time.

Antichrist will have a future and final manifestation. But the trouble with a thorough-going futurism is that it is blind to the present reality of Antichrist. If we do not discern the work and forms of Antichrist from New Testament times, especially the great papal Antichrist, how can we discern the work and form that he will assume in his final eschatological manifestation? The Biblical warnings do not merely tell us that the hour is coming, but they declare that the hour is coming, and now is.

When the early church lost the clear Biblical truth of justification by faith alone, it also lost its clear eschatological vision. The last day became an event in the far distant future, and the church's mentality was decidedly futuristic. With the rediscovery of justification by faith alone in the sixteenth century, eschatological hope revived, and the church again saw itself living in the end time. G. C. Berkouwer wrote:

Luther felt himself surrounded by great eschatological tensions, and part of this for him included the role played by the Antichrist. For Luther the Antichrist

was not a remote figure of some future end-time, but a threatening and dangerous possibility each and every day.... The main point was that the danger was *present*, not relegated to the future.

Clearly, the actuality of the Antichrist as portrayed by John accords with the entire eschatological proclamation of the New Testament. Althaus correctly observed that the New Testament proclamation of the Antichrist is not an irrelevant prediction of some remote future, but an alarm signal. The Church must always look for the Antichrist as a reality present among it or as an immediately threatening future possibility.... The recognition of the Antichrist is a deadly serious matter; all other talk about Antichrist is idle and irresponsible play. (*The Return of Christ*, 263, 268)

As history moves on, the church is challenged to see Antichrist in his most current form of opposition to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Antichrist beast of the *Revelation* has seven heads, which symbolize the different forms he has assumed in his opposition to God's truth from one age to another.

It is not good enough to see the guise of Antichrist in AD 65 when John confronted the gnostic heresy, or in 1517 when Luther nailed his protest on the door of the religious establishment. Antichrist is a present reality. We must see how he is working in 1999.

3. The Internal Danger of Antichrist

To look for Antichrist as a foe external to the institutional church is to miss a vital part of the Biblical warning. Antichrist is not merely an enemy at the gate; he has infiltrated the city. He is a wolf in sheep's clothing among the flock. He looks like a lamb, but speaks as a dragon. He is, as his name suggests, a masquerader of Christ, and his message is a substitute gospel. The warnings of John and Paul make it very clear that he proceeds from the church itself.

4. The Human Form of Antichrist

Finally, it is a mistake to look for Antichrist in the form of the bizarre, the fantastic, the superhuman or the grotesque. The Bible stresses his very human configuration. He is called the man of sin (*2 Thessalonians* 2:3). He has a human number (*Revelation* 13:18). He has eyes like the eyes of man (*Daniel* 7:8). Certainly he has donned the religious cloak, but we must remember that, as Luther so clearly perceived, the chief human sin is religious.

What is clear in the New Testament references to the Antichrist is that this is not a supernatural or superhuman concept, but takes place and manifests itself on a human level. Behind the Antichristian powers the shadow of the demonic may fall, but with the concept of the Antichrist we find ourselves not on some remote evil terrain, but on the well-known terrain of our daily human existence. Indeed, the human level of the Antichrist is one of the most compelling messages of the New Testament. It is a human force – a human "Anti" – that elevates itself and disintegrates through the victory of the Lamb (*The Return of Christ*, 278).

Conclusions

Let us conclude by saying that the real force of the Biblical picture means that Antichrist is religious and not irreligious; already present and not just future; internal to the institutional church, not external, and familiarly human and not grotesquely superhuman. This means that we cannot afford to gaze back to the remote past or forward into the distant future. What are the gospel substitutes today? What have churches put in the place of the glorious work of God in Jesus Christ?

Antichrist at Work Today

Before we identify the work of Antichrist today, we must be reminded of one more thing. Since Antichrist's chief work is a diabolical *substitution* for Christ and his Gospel, we can identify Antichrist only as we keep looking at the Gospel. The only truly successful way to detect a counterfeit dollar bill is to be thoroughly acquainted with a genuine one.

The Gospel

The Gospel is the good news about the person and work of Jesus Christ, the second Adam. In the whole stream of human history there are only two men who have universal significance – Adam and Jesus Christ. Adam was not merely the biological father of the race; he was the legal representative of the whole human race. He acted for all. His sin involved all: “by one man's disobedience many were made sinners...” (*Romans* 5:19). Consequently, the whole stream of human history has been corrupted by human sinfulness, and all stand under the judgment of the law. None of that history can satisfy the demand of holiness, for

even the lives of the best saints fall far short of the glory of God.

Into this sinful stream of human history, God sent forth his Son to be our “everlasting Father” (*Isaiah* 9:6), our second Adam, our new representative. His name was *Immanuel* – God with us.” In Jesus Christ we see God with us in poverty and humiliation, God with us in trial and sorrow, and finally, God with us in suffering and death. More than that, Jesus was “God...for us” (*Romans* 8:31). What he did in all his glorious acts of goodness was done for his people. It was done in our name and on our behalf, for he was our representative who acted for us before the bar of eternal justice. By his sinless life he fulfilled the precepts of the law for us, and by his death he satisfied the penalty of the law for us. On our behalf he strove with sin and annihilated its power. In his human nature he engaged the devil in hand-to-hand combat and destroyed his power. He tasted death and abolished it, “...having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And he has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it” (*Colossians* 2:14, 15).

All that Christ did is imputed to his people through faith. His victory is ours. So the apostle says, “By the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life” (*Romans* 5:18).

There are three things we must say about this good news of Jesus Christ:

1. The Gospel is about an *historical* event. It is about Jesus Christ coming into the world and not about Jesus Christ coming into our hearts. It is historically objective. Christianity is the only truly historical religion. It alone proclaims a salvation based on a concrete outside-of-me event. Of course, the Gospel has subjective benefits. It has effects and fruits in the hearts of all who believe it. But in the Gospel itself there is not one subjective element. It happened completely outside of you and me.

The Gospel brings to view a new holy history – the thirty-three years which Jesus Christ lived on Earth. In the death of Jesus Christ, God rejected and punished our sinful history; and having buried it with Jesus Christ, he brought forth that new history. Now he proclaims to us that he accepts us as righteous solely on the basis that he has accepted his Son and our representative, Jesus Christ. The Gospel is the good news that the saving deeds have taken place, the redemptive transaction has been sealed by Christ's blood and attested to by his resurrection from the dead. God's liberating act has been carried out, and believers are cleansed, accepted, and restored in the person of Jesus Christ. *The Gospel is historical.*

2. The Gospel is about a *unique* history. There is no other event, and can be no other event, like the Christ event. His holy history is unique. In the whole stream of human history, Christ alone is without sin. We must never compromise the unique sinlessness of Jesus Christ. Only one is absolutely righteous in reality and fact. The saints can be absolutely righteous only by the merciful reckoning of Christ's righteousness by faith alone. No one but Christ, the slain Lamb, is able to open the book and look therein (*Revelation 5:1-5*).

3. The Gospel is about an *unrepeatable* history. This is the great emphasis given by the writer of *Hebrews*. The offering of Christ was once and for all:

By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till his enemies are made his footstool. For by one offering he has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. (*Hebrews 10:10-14*)

We are never called upon to initiate another redemptive event. Nothing needs to be added to what Christ has already done. Nothing can be added to it. God himself cannot add to it. We say it reverently but decidedly: This is one thing that God could not do again – the giving of and offering of his Son, Jesus Christ. Paul tells us that with him God gave us "all things" (*Romans 8:32*). To suggest that God could do this again is to imply that God did not really give everything the first time. But he emptied all Heaven in one gift. He poured out all the accumulated love of eternity. He kept nothing back, but gave all he had to give. The Gospel is unrepeatable history.

This unique, unrepeatable event, this holy history of Jesus Christ, is the focal point of Biblical proclamation. These mighty deeds of the incarnate Son, this awesome, effective act of atonement, is the one great pre-occupation of the apostolic message. Gospel preaching is

the constant exposition of this historical Gospel and the unfolding of its significance for men and women everywhere. All who believe are justified, not on the grounds of their faith, but on the grounds of the saving acts of God already done once and for all in Jesus Christ.

The Substitute Gospel

It is the work of Antichrist to substitute another gospel for the Gospel. He causes men to focus on other events and experiences rather than on the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

This masterly substitution does not necessarily consist in the enemy's putting something bad in the place of something good. Frequently he works by putting something good, in its right place, in a higher place.

For instance, personal righteousness is a good thing. Believers should live righteously, soberly, and godly in this world (*Titus* 2:12). The Holy Spirit is given to enable them to do this, for it is only by his indwelling that they can live righteously (*1 John* 3:7). But in the theology of the Roman Church (and Neo-evangelicalism), this personal righteousness of the believer is put in the place of the vicarious righteousness of Jesus Christ. The Reformers cried out against this as the doctrine of Antichrist, not because they were against personal righteousness (as they were charged by Rome), but because they were against putting anything in the place of Christ's righteousness. In his masterly volume on *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, James Buchanan points out that the heart of Rome's error was to put the new birth of the believer in the place of the *imputed* righteousness of Jesus Christ, for this means putting something

subjective in the place of Christ's objective and historical saving acts.

What is so plausible about the work of Antichrist is that he uses that which is otherwise good as his clever substitute gospel. Under the guise of honoring the Third Person of the Trinity, Antichrist brings in another gospel, for he substitutes the gracious work of the Spirit *in us* for the vicarious work of Christ *for us* as the ground of our justification unto life eternal.

The work of the Holy Spirit *in us* is a great and glorious work (*2 Corinthians* 3:18). But it is not to be put in the place of the Gospel. We must not confuse the work of the Second and Third Persons of the blessed Trinity. Christ's work was substitutionary. It was done for us – without our participation. We had no part in that righteousness. Furthermore, that work, being complete, is the only ground of our acceptance with God.

The same thing cannot be said about the work of the Holy Spirit. His is not a substitutionary work. Being a work within us, we do have a vital part in the life of new obedience which he inspires us to live. Furthermore, his work is not yet complete, and for some it has not even started. It can never be a ground of our acceptance with God.

In fact, the work of the Spirit is dependent upon and subordinated to the work of Jesus Christ. By his obedience and death Christ fulfilled all righteousness on behalf of his people, and he gave the gift of the Spirit to them. What Christ has done, therefore, is the Gospel. And what is more, it is the "full Gospel."

Contemporary Protestant Churches

We earnestly believe that, were Luther alive today, he would level the same basic criticism at the Protestant churches as he did at the Roman Church nearly 500 years ago. The doctrine of justification through the vicarious righteousness of Jesus Christ alone has disappeared in most "Protestant" churches. The fact is that Protestantism today stands much closer to the Roman Catholic tradition than to the Reformers.

In the first place, the question of justification before a holy God is not the burning question of contemporary religion. We take it for granted that God is gracious and that he forgives sins and accepts us. The healthy, Biblical fear of God is conspicuous by its absence. What we want to know is not, "How can I please God?" but, "How can God please me, make my life radiantly happy, heal my diseases, and make me fulfilled and content?" We are not asking theocentric questions any more, but anthropocentric questions. Man and his psychological needs are the center, not God and his righteousness. Things will not improve unless the holy law and Gospel of God are proclaimed.

In the second place, even where the Gospel is acknowledged, it has ceased to hold first place. We have seen that the Gospel is historical. It has no subjective element. Yet it bears subjective fruit. When proclaimed and believed, it changes lives – producing love, joy, peace, goodness, temperance and humility in the hearts of men and women. The experience it brings to believers is real and vital. But we must ever remember that the Biblical order and perspective is the historical over the personal:

Historical

Personal

This means that the *for us* aspect of grace must always stand prior to and above the *in us* aspect. Jesus warned the disciples of this when they returned from a successful missionary excursion. They were rejoicing in the fact that they had had a glorious experience working in Christ's name – preaching, casting out demons, healing, *etc.* But Jesus said, "Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you; but rejoice that your names are written in Heaven" (Luke 10:20).

But the history of the church has demonstrated that the cursed tendency of human nature is to reverse the order until the *personal* is elevated above the *historical*. (Or to say it another way, the *in you* is elevated above the *for you*.) When the *historical* element of Christianity is eclipsed, the univocal truth of the Christian message is lost, and Christianity is reduced to everything else in the world that offers you a glorious experience. And when religious experience itself is preached as the Gospel, it is the gospel of Antichrist himself. For when the *personal* is placed above the *historical*, the divine order is reversed.

It is an interesting (and alarming) fact that the elevation of the *personal* above the *historical* has taken place in both the liberal and conservative wings of the current religious scene. In the liberal wing, man and his experience are elevated to an unbiblical prominence via such teachings as "encounter theology" (Emil Brunner), "demythologizing" (Rudolph Bultmann), and the denial of propositional

revelation (Karl Barth and others). All this means is that man and his experience (insight, hunch, intuition) are substituted for God, his Word and his Gospel. Instead of man being the creature to be transformed by the renewing of his mind, man assumes the role of transforming God and his Word.

When we look into the conservative wing of the churches – into conservative Romanism, Pentecostalism, or Neo-evangelicalism – we see that the same thing has taken place. Here the dominating motif is the centrality of religious experience. In traditional Romanism this is seen in the doctrine of *gratia infusa* – the concept of justification by infused grace (the sacraments and the changed life). In Pentecostalism it is seen in the preoccupation with the Holy Spirit and the inner experience of Spirit possession. In Neo-evangelicalism it is seen in salvation by the inward experience of new birth, a new psychology, the gospel of “the changed life,” the witness to the Spirit-filled life of the believer, or the glories and wonders of full surrender and self-crucifixion. There is in all this a believer-centeredness that is contrary to the Bible. It is the same old error of placing the *personal* over the *historical*, the subjective over the objective, experience over truth. That the men who do this are religious men does not alter the crime, for after all, man’s chief sin is religious sin.

Many Antichrists

The apostle John says that there are many Antichrists (1 *John* 2:18). That is, there are many men who are offering substitutes for the Gospel. Here are some of the doctrines of Antichrist in 1999:

The regeneration of the believer replaces the imputed righteousness of Christ.

The work of the Third Person of the Trinity replaces the work of the Second Person.

Sanctification replaces justification.

The personal righteousness of the believer replaces the vicarious righteousness of Christ.

Faith replaces the meritorious obedience of Christ.

Our self-crucifixion replaces his crucifixion.

Our new life replaces his sinless life.

Our experience replaces his.

Our love for God replaces his love for us.

Our surrender replaces Christ’s.

Our victorious life replaces his.

Our attainment replaces his atonement.

Our baptism in water replaces his baptism in blood.

The church (the body) replaces Christ (the Head).

Our obedience to the law replaces Christ’s obedience to the law.

The diabolical trick of Antichrist is not necessarily to place the bad in the place of the good, but the good in the place of the glorious work of Jesus Christ. But when these good things – baptism, the Lord’s Supper, regeneration, and so forth – are preached as the Gospel or hold the place in our thinking and witnessing that should belong to the Gospel alone, then we have perverted the Gospel. We have used God’s gifts to rob him of his glory.

Putting experience in the place of the Gospel is not like stealing a few gems from the royal crown. He who does this is guilty of stealing the crown itself and placing it upon his own head. This is the deed and work of Antichrist. It is the sin of religious man. Unless we take

the Biblical warnings seriously and examine our own hearts and church, we too will be found to be part of Antichrist's conspiracy.

Billy Graham, the leading world evangelist, in his book, *How To be Born Again*, declared that The greatest news in the universe is that we can be born again (10). For the Neo-evangelicals the new birth is the mark of true Christianity. It has become their gospel. Raising any questions about the centrality of the new birth is regarded as attacking it. But the gospel of the new birth is a false gospel.

The false gospel of the new birth teaches that what happens in the believer is the greatest news in the world. This is classical Roman Catholic theology. It confuses a good thing with the Gospel, and makes the work of the Spirit (or of the sacraments dispensed by a priest) greater than the work of Jesus Christ two thousand years ago. It takes an effect of the Gospel – the new birth – and makes it into a new gospel.

The Neo-evangelical gospel of the new birth is introspective, self-preoccupied, and subjectivist. Neo-evangelical navel watching does nothing to commend Christianity to unbelievers. Worse, it robs Christ of his glory by making the righteousness of the believer more important than the righteousness of Christ, by substituting the work of the Spirit for the work of Christ.

The Reformers charged Rome, and in particular the papacy, with being the Antichrist. The Roman pontiff had shamelessly and arrogantly transferred to himself what belonged to God alone, and especially to Christ. For Calvin the tyranny of the Roman

pontiff was all the more serious because it did “not wipe out...the name of Christ or of the church but rather misuses a semblance of Christ and lurks under the name of the church as under a mask” (*The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV.7.25). By substituting the church (the body) for the head, and the pope for Christ, the Roman Church had become Antichrist. By substituting the interior work of the Holy Spirit for the exterior work of Christ, the Roman Church taught the doctrines of Antichrist.

Seeing the new birth as the greatest news in the world is a doctrine of Antichrist. Antichrist puts something good in the place of the best, and easily purveys lies and deception. The worst evil might not be the blatant denial of truth, but its corruption. Satan, both in the Garden with Adam and Eve and in the wilderness with Christ, quoted God's words, but in such a way as to twist their meaning. The false gospel of the new birth, whether taught by Neo-evangelicals or by the Roman Catholic Church, perverts the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Preoccupation with the new birth as the great act of God that saves us is Roman Catholic theology, not Biblical theology.

For the Protestant Reformers, being born again was neither the Gospel nor that which justifies the believer before God. Being born again was the fruit of election and the preaching of the Gospel. It was an effect of the Gospel, not the Gospel itself. Rome either equated the new birth with the Gospel of Christ's righteousness or regarded the new birth as that work which justifies a person before God. Many Neo-evangelicals also equate the Gospel with the new birth. “You must be born again,” is their cry. So far is it from being the Gospel, the good

news, that it expresses no news at all, let alone good news, but imposes a duty on unbelievers. "You must be born again," is law, not Gospel.

When Ian Thomas asserted, "This was the miracle of the new birth, and this remains the very heart of the Gospel," he was expressing Roman Catholic theology (*The Saving Life of Christ*, 1964, 11). C. H. Dodd also equated the Gospel and regeneration of the sinner in his books, *The Epistle to the Romans* (12, 53, 58, 84, 99) and *The Meaning of Paul for Today* (106). In equating the Gospel and the new birth, the Neo-evangelicals stand squarely in the tradition of Rome. Regarding the new birth as the great saving act of God places the emphasis on the internal and subjective rather than on the external and objective. Making the new birth our emphasis focuses on what God does *in* us rather than on what he did *for* us in Christ. It directs our attention from Christ to ourselves as the basis of our salvation.

Faith is the chief work of the Holy Spirit. Saving faith always has for its object, not the believing sinner, nor the work of the Spirit in the sinner, nor the sacraments, nor the church, but Jesus Christ alone. Instead of focusing on one's experience, saving faith confesses, I believe that Christ lived and died for his people, according to the Scriptures. The object of saving faith is not what has happened *to* the believer or *in* the believer, and still less in what the believer does, but what has happened *for* the believer in Christ. Saving faith looks *out*, not *in*; *up*, not *down*.

Preoccupation with the new birth in Neo-evangelical thinking perverts the whole Bible. Neo-evangelicalism gives the impression that God accepts a person on the ground that he is

born again. But this is not true, and it is not Biblical. The sole ground of acceptance with God is the doing and dying of Jesus Christ. It is not any experience or act of obedience of the believer, including the act of believing itself, that justifies the believer. There is only one ground, one basis, for justification: the finished work of Christ. Anything that denies or perverts the Gospel is of Antichrist.