

NICOTINE THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

Dedicated to Reformed Faith and Practice

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Sabbath, Psalms and Single Malt: The *NTJ*

Why are you reading yet another venture in Reformed desktop publishing (aside from the fact that we can't afford a more substantial publication)? After all, confessional Presbyterians do not lack for periodicals that defend sound theology and spot bad imitations. There are many publications that print a steady diet of articles reflecting sound biblical and doctrinal insight, from denominational magazines to theological journals. Yet few, if any of these periodicals, pay close attention to the God-ordained means of grace as well as the habits and sensibilities that articulate, cultivate and reinforce orthodoxy. That is, few publications give proper heed to the embodiment of the Reformed faith, contenting themselves with the propositional and didactic elements of Presbyterian theology while ignoring the visible expression of Presbyterian convictions.

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It is the embodiment and practice of the Reformed faith that will be the subject matter of the *Nicotine Theological Journal*. Here our concern is not with dotting the I's and crossing the t's of Reformed orthodoxy, as important as that work is. Instead, our aim is to explore the ways in which the Reformed faith is more than correct doctrine, the ways in which correct doctrine takes visible form in the lives and practices of believers and the organized church, and the ways in which certain practices and habits cultivate Reformed orthodoxy. To use the language of the apostle Paul in Titus 2, the *NTJ* is about those aspects of our daily and weekly lives that are "fit" for "sound doctrine." Or to borrow some ideas from the sectarian mainline Methodists, Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, we want to use the pages of the *NTJ* to explore the practices that make confessional Presbyterians "resident aliens." Like Hauerwas and Willimon, we believe the church is at war with the world, that the kingdom of God is in conflict with the powers and principalities of this age. And just as God gave the Israelites a pattern for daily life that set them apart from the surrounding nations, so we believe that God has given his church specific habits and practices that make believers holy, that is, set apart, distinctive, or as Hauerwas and Willimon put it, "weird."

THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT WE do not recognize important differences between Israel and the church. We do. We are not theonomists. But we also believe that the calling of God's people in both the old and new covenants is to be different because God is holy. So while the church's practices will be

significantly different from Israel's (e.g., a lot less bloody both in worship and in government -- the church does not bear the sword even if Israel did), Christians will still be odd people in the way they order their lives, from observing the Sabbath to enjoying the good things of God's creation. The *NTJ* is about this oddness. In other words, we are committed to recovering the real meaning of practical theology.

Why do we need this kind of publication? We believe that one of the besetting problems of twentieth-century confessional Presbyterianism is the huge disparity between faith and practice. Conservative Reformed folk have been very good (for the most part) about doctrinal fidelity. But they have not been very astute about maintaining distinctively Reformed practices, and we believe that without the "plausibility structures" of these practices, Reformed orthodoxy will die a slow and painful death, which is another way of saying, it will have nothing to say about the way we daily order our lives. Confessional Presbyterians these days are virtually indistinguishable from any garden variety evangelical. They are involved in the work of their local churches, both on Sunday and throughout the week, they listen to Christian radio, subscribe to evangelical publications, watch wholesome television shows, and listen to Christian music. The odd thing, however, is that confessional Presbyterian theology is markedly different from the lowest-common-denominator theology that holds evangelicalism together. Yet, conservative Presbyterians behave in remarkably similar ways. Either that means there is really no difference

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between Presbyterianism and evangelicalism, or that Presbyterians have let evangelicals establish the patterns for how they practice the Christian faith.

OUR INTENTION HERE IS NOT to imply that Reformed believers will always look different from evangelicals, or even that Christians will always look different from non-believers. Reformed, evangelicals and non-believing people all eat from the bounty of God's creation. But while unbelievers do not ask for God's blessing upon their food, and while evangelicals pray before meals, Reformed believers of an older sort used to pray before and after meals along with reading from Scripture. And those who value the passing on of traditions from parents to children, in other words, who confess the importance of covenant relationships, as the Reformed should, may also linger longer over their meals, and recognize the virtue of fellowship, telling stories and playing games. According to C. S. Lewis, "the sun looks down on nothing half so good as a household laughing together over a

meal, or two friends talking over a pint of beer, or a man alone reading a book that interests him." Though Lewis was no Presbyterian, we believe that when he wrote those lines he was expressing Reformed wisdom about the simplicity and depth of creature comforts.

We would even go so far as to suggest that one's profession of faith may also affect the food one eats. If God calls us to moderation and self-control, then we may tend to eat simple fare, avoiding either the excesses of heavy sauces and elaborate recipes on the one side or the inhuman mass-produced food of TV dinners and Boston Market on the other end. In the *NTJ*, then, you may find discussions of what Old School Presbyterians should serve

at a party and how they might structure the festivities. You may also find recipes for church pot luck suppers as well as for noon meals on the Lord's Day. These tips flow from our conviction that Reformed theology has something to say about these seemingly ordinary and irrelevant matters. This is a world-and-life view with a vengeance.

Yet, we also need to say that we believe in Christian liberty. The practices and habits we plan to explore in these pages are not settled; we recognize that they are contested and that Scripture does not speak to them directly. Of course, some aspects of Presbyterian practice involve explicit commands from Scripture that the Reformed tradition has propagated and defended, such as the Sabbath, worship, psalm-singing, and the observance of the means of grace. These more obvious elements of the Reformed tradition will be subjects for discussion in the *NTJ*. We even hope to encourage debate about these ordinances, allowing for dissent and reservation while also giving preference to the tradition itself, assuming that our forefathers in the

faith are innocent until proven guilty. But in other areas of the Christian life, those things that take place on days other than the Sabbath, we believe there is liberty for God's people. So we don't want to give the impression that there will be only one way of practicing the Reformed faith, suitable for all times, places and cultures.

But too often Christian liberty has been taken to mean silence. In other words, the liberty that believers have for ordering their lives throughout the week has led to the idea that our faith does not have much to say about our earthly and secular callings except in the case of moral matters that play themselves out in United States' politics. We want to cultivate thoughtful discussions about the way we practice our faith so that we will do it more self-consciously and, we hope, more faithfully.

NOW ABOUT OUR NAME. VICE President Gore's sanctimonious and tearful pledge to fight the wicked weed that produced part of his family fortune is but the latest example of the fierce public hostility to tobacco in our day. And it is another reminder of the necessity to explain why we employ the metaphor of tobacco for the purposes of this publication. We should begin by clarifying what we are not. This is not a Reformed version of *Cigar Aficionado*. We are not a hobby magazine, and these pages will not be devoted to cultivating yuppie trappings. So don't expect to hear about the latest seasonal offering of the Boston Beer Company, or what Demi, Madonna and Rush are puffing on these days.

Then why nicotine? First, in order to affirm the social utility of tobacco. As Wendell Berry writes, "Tobacco is fragrant, and smoking at its best is convivial or ceremonious and pleasant." Smoke and drink are conversation stimulants and together they suggest the relaxed and engaging atmosphere that we want to establish for the arguments and topics you will

find here. We also want to suggest that the kind of conversation that accompanies the moderate use of tobacco and alcohol is very important for sustaining us on our pilgrimage this side of glory. It may even be a foretaste of the fellowship we will enjoy when our Lord returns.

Second, tobacco exposes the hypocrisy with which people, including Reformed believers, treat the matter of health and well-being. The anti-tobacco crusade can be a convenient way to overlook the many other distractions of modern life -- from sports, to entertainment, money, politics and sex. We have reduced health to mere physical health, but physical health is not man's chief end. So the modern obsession with physical fitness and material well-being is often unhealthy. In this connection, we can hardly improve on the words of Garrison Keillor (whom we promise not to quote often), "nonsmokers live longer, but they live dumber."

THIRD, THE CULTURAL

antagonism toward tobacco mirrors well the evangelical dismissiveness toward confessional Presbyterianism. Our commitments to things like Sabbath and psalms can't even gain a hearing in most evangelical quarters. (Raise a question about holidays like Christmas and Advent and evangelicals think you just arrived from Mars.) Like most smokers, confessional Presbyterians are feisty and cantankerous because that is the only way one can take the Reformed confessions seriously in our day. In the light of the ascendancy of mass-marketed evangelicalism, it is necessary for confessional Presbyterians to be resistance fighters. Our resistance will often take confrontational, dogmatic and sectarian forms -- and we believe in the good senses of those words. But we will endeavor to avoid arrogance and narrow-mindedness. So, for example, along with offering reflections about the value of Sunday evening services,

we will also recommend a good blend of Scotch every now and then. And while we have yet to be persuaded of exclusive psalmody, we also remain unconvinced about the virtues of chewing tobacco; nevertheless, we will entertain arguments for both.

FINALLY, OUR NAME SETS A tone of lightheartedness that we want to characterize these pages. The *NTJ* will be occasional and occasionally serious. Along the way we hope to have fun, not least by poking fun at ourselves. Several friends have asked if smoking and drinking are requirements for membership in the Old Life Theological Society. Of course, the answer is no. One can be an Old School Presbyterian in spirit if not Old School in spirits (though there are some things we will expose as irredeemably New School, such as light beer or any alcohol-free pretender). As for smoking, to borrow a phrase from Richard John Neuhaus, we only ask those who refuse to light up that they at least strive to lighten up.

Whatever readers may think about tobacco or our title, the more important issue concerns the way we practice our faith. We hope that all Reformed (and not so Reformed) believers who are troubled by the increasing disparity between Reformed orthodoxy and Reformed practices will read and write for this publication. And for those who love Reformed theology but have not thought about the visible and tangible ways in which believers express and are sustained in those convictions, we trust that they will also read the *NTJ* because sound theology cannot be abstracted from the means that God has ordained for cultivating and encouraging faithfulness. Ultimately, our profession is only as good as our practice. *SC88*

Psalms or

Hymns?

Sometimes you will find interesting stuff strewn along side the Superhighway, such as the debate that follows. The authors, one of whom was a novice on the Internet, have asked that we assign them pseudonyms lest they offend their home congregations.

From: Glenn Morangie
To: T. Glen Livet
Date: 9/3/96 9:28am
Subject: Hymns

Glen,

The word here in Green Bay is that I am not impressed by arguments against exclusive psalmody. Mr. Mears gave one in Sunday School this week.

Here are my reasons: 1) that we may sing hymns is not very Reformed even though it may work for Lutherans; 2) if we believe that Col. 3 commands the singing of hymns, why hasn't our denomination commissioned capable people to write hymns reflecting NT revelation? 3) why also do we sing prayers written by men, namely Charles Wesley and Isaac Watts in the "golden age" of hymnody, who couldn't pass licensure or ordination exams (and so wouldn't be allowed to lead prayer in public worship)? 4) is any hymn as good as a good metrical psalm? 5) why does our denomination rely so heavily on John Murray on Gen. 2:7 but when it comes to Eph. 5 or Col. 3 finds him to be quite human? and 6) don't we need to revise our standards since the divines were exclusive psalmists (and isn't our fudging here the tip of the iceberg when it comes to other worship novelties)?

Of course, none of these make a convincing case *for* exclusive psalmody. But I do think exclusive psalmody is more prudential than hymnody. I am sure you disagree. But you are a disagreeable fellow. Any thoughts?

Glenn _____

From: T. Glen Livet
To: Glenn Morangie
Date: 9/3/96 9:27am
Subject: Psalmody

Glenn,

Without repeating the arguments with which you are familiar, there are a few thoughts that are persuasive to me:

1) Eph. 5 and Col. 3 are irrelevant. Neither passage addresses the saints assembled; each addresses mutual duties believers have to one another apart from their covenant-assembly. Further, the pronoun translated "one another" is actually the reflexive pronoun (heautois, not allelois), and might properly be translated, "singing to yourselves with..."

2) The evidence of 1 Corinthians 14:26: "What then, brethren? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification." I think it is entirely unpersuasive in this context, that the "hymn" spoken of is a canonical OT psalm. Manifestly, the passage deals with the saints gathered in assembly, and it appears appropriate to the new era in the history of redemption that, just as "revelation" and "teaching" (translated "lesson" here) continue, in response to the person and work of Christ, so also hymnody responds thereto.

3) Throughout the history of revelation prior to the coming of Christ, Israel's hymnody grew; new psalms were added at each significant phase of redemptive history (e.g., songs of captivity were followed by songs of deliverance, during and after the exile). It would be extremely odd, therefore, if, when redemptive history reaches its zenith, the covenant community's hymnody would be silent for the first time ever. Of all times for singing to the Lord "a new song," the day of resurrection is the time to do so.

4) Not surprisingly, then, the songs sung by the redeemed saints, recorded in the book of Revelation, are never canonical OT psalms, and further, they are explicitly Christo-centric (not merely implicitly so). Either those songs are sinful to sing at all, or sinful to sing on earth. The first isn't possible; the latter isn't likely, because elsewhere in the NT the "heavenly pattern" is to be our conscious goal and pattern. We are to seek the things above (including, presumably, the heavenly praise).

5) While the literary evidence is not 100% clear, there do appear to be hymns imbedded in the NT (e.g. Phil. 2) itself, suggesting that such were sufficiently well-known as to be cited by the apostle.

For what it's worth, I think #3, above (and the closely-related #4) are the most compelling reasons. I not only don't think exclusive psalmody is required; I honestly believe exclusive psalmody is sinful, that it is sinful not to sing praises that explicitly celebrate the person and work of Christ.

I DO concede that there are prudential reasons for not singing every hymn in the hymnal; and I surely concur that many of them are horrible. I've only approved about 1/7th of the hymns in the *Trinity Hymnal* for use in our church, for instance. But, as we all know, an argument against the abuse of a thing is no argument against the thing itself.

Glen _____

From: Glenn Morangie
To: T. Glen Livet
Date: 9/3/96 11:10am
Subject: Psalmody -Reply

Glenn,

Thanks for the response. This is surely better, but I am still uneasy about the compositions of men. Which means I think the inspired words of God are a pretty good way of singing praise to him. Is there any better?

Now of course, versifications are not inspired, which might be an argument for chanting psalms or any other hymn that is part of the canon, like the Magnificat, Nunc Dimitis, i.e. those NT hymns Calvin included in worship. But neither are translations of the Bible inspired and we don't seem to object to their use in public worship. We wouldn't read Chuck Colson's thoughts about Eph. 1 instead of reading the Word. We probably wouldn't read Colson at all. And in my book, his writings are no better or worse than Isaac Watts'.

In sum, I find it a very different thing to sing the composition of an author who has sat down and composed five verses based on a passage of Scripture or a particular doctrine, than to sing words that closely parallel the words of Scripture and use them as forms of prayer and praise. And this, I believe fits with Terry Johnson's argument in his new book. If the Reformed tradition has made the Word central to worship, why not make it central to our singing as well?

So I guess I am not an exclusive psalmodist and, therefore, able to take the Lord's Supper at your church (since I am not advancing sin). But I think exclusive psalmodists' instincts to be on the whole admirable.

And what do you do with our standards? Don't they need to be revised and don't we need to say that the early Reformers were wrong and show why?

Unpersuadedly yours,
 Glenn _____

From: T. Glen Livet
To: Glenn Morangie
Date: 9/3/96 1:36pm
Subject: Psalmody -Reply

Glenn,

Our Reformed worship is not in fact centered on the Word. Reformed worship is dialogical; God speaks to us and we speak to him. In Word and

Sacrament, God speaks to us; in prayer and praise, we speak to him. Thus, the rules governing the singing of praise are essentially the same as those governing prayer; the words should be faithful to the scriptures, according with biblical truth (including emphasizing what scripture emphasizes), but they need not be restricted to inspired words. For instance, how could we ever pray for Mrs. Jones, dying of cancer, using the language of scripture?

Indeed, as regards the sermon, the matter becomes even more pointed, doesn't it? In preaching, God speaks to his people. Yet, we do not limit the sermon to a reading of canonical scripture, but we entrust this grave responsibility to men who are orthodox and of good judgment. If we entrust uninspired men to speak God's Word to us, we can as easily trust uninspired men to speak our words to God.

I agree with you that the instincts of the exclusive psalmist position are largely admirable, especially in light of the poor quality of much hymnody. On the other hand, an instinct that denigrates praise being offered explicitly to the Second Person of the Trinity is not entirely noble.

Glen _____

From: Glenn Morangie
To: T. Glen Livet
Date: 9/3/96 3:21pm
Subject: Psalmody -Reply -Reply

Glen,

Are you a ninny or what? How can you say that Reformed worship is not centered on the Word and then in the next sentence write, "God speaks to us and we speak to him." That sounds to me like words are pretty central, and that it is God's word at the center, both in calling us to his presence, and in guiding what words we say to him. Just a nitpick.

The example of preaching does not entirely settle the issue of non-inspired

words in worship. If the Second Helvetic confession is right and the sermon, even from an unregenerate man, is the word of God, then there is something going on in preaching that is different from the words that non-ordained people speak. It certainly is not inspired in the sense of canonical revelation. But it is more on that order than the poem some proto-Unitarian wrote in the 18th century. Preaching and praying, then, are of a different order than poetry. Granted they are all words. But preaching and praying done by one of God's appointed undershepherds causes something different to happen. God has promised to bless them in a way that he has also promised to bless his inspired word. But I don't see any promise attached to the hymns the church may produce.

I also think that you are too hard on the psalms and much too literalistic, but then you were a charismatic once, weren't you? (Sorry, that's a cheap shot.) As one seminary president likes to say, the praise we see in Revelation is not that much more Christo-centric than the psalms. In the quick scan I just made of the book, I only see Christ referred to explicitly in ch. 12. Otherwise the praise is indirect, just like the Psalms. Which may mean that the reason we don't sing the psalms is part of a vicious circle. We don't sing them because we don't see Christ in them and we don't see Christ in them because we don't sing them, i.e., we don't know them.

I concede you are interesting to talk to about this because it does seem that you are open. A lot of people who argue against psalmody seem unwilling to take the other side seriously, their minds being made up and looking for any way to justify their position. Still, I do think your judgments against the Psalms are too harsh, especially when compared to the praise we see in Revelation.

But there is still one question you haven't answered. Aren't our standards exclusive-psalmodist? And shouldn't

we amend them if we think the Westminster divines were wrong? And if we don't how can we seriously argue against the New Lifers out there who are also selective (to be sure, more so) about the Standards?

You know Glen, this is scary. I think this is the heaviest discussion we have ever had and it is all taking place in this virtually unreal world of the Internet. What does that say about us as human beings? (Actually, I know what it says about you. I was wondering more about me.)

Blessings,
 Glenn

_____ **To be continued SC88**

Watch Your Tongue!

Did you attend a worship service or a worship *experience* last Lord's Day? Was it *celebrative*? Did it occur on the *weekend* and how could it if you assembled with the saints on the first day of the week? In other words, what difference does it make the way you talk about worship and the Sabbath? *NTJ* seeks to explore the subtle ways in which language shapes reality in a regular feature on language and rhetoric. Readers are invited to submit their suggestions of the things that Old Schoolers should -- and should not -- say.

Second-Hand Smoke

In this section of *NTJ* we print (what we hope are) hard-to-find reflections on the virtues and delights of tobacco. We welcome submissions.

IT IS NOT NECESSARY TO BE a member of the tobacco trade to realize that the world-wide practice of

smoking is rapidly becoming, except for a small minority, a lost art and a limited pleasure. Indeed, many smokers in the furious tempo of modern life have freely admitted that it is only an essential narcotic for frayed nerves. For them, choice Havana cigars, handmade cigarettes, and lustrous meerschaum pipes, which graced the smoking rooms of fifty years ago, must seem almost as remote as the elaborate smoking paraphernalia which brought such excitement to Elizabethan England. Today the ubiquitous cigarette has robbed most of us of these former glories and gripped us by the throat. . . .

To one whose business it is to interest the public in the whole realm of smoking, all this is a very great pity. Yet it is not wholly explained by the economic problems of the day. He who smokes at all can afford to vary the way in which he smokes and to learn a little more about the pleasure, which, to say the least of it, is expensive enough. But, having tried to cater to the whims and caprices of smokers for many years, I am sure that a little sound knowledge of tobacco and some spirit of adventure are the very qualities that the majority of smokers lack. (From *The Gentle Art of Smoking*, by Alfred H. Dunhill [1954].) SC88

39 Alexander Hall

THE PLACE TO GO WHEN YOU THINK NO ONE WILL LISTEN

The Christian Right and the NTJ: Where We Stand

As we stated in our lead editorial the editors hold no brief for theonomy. We

are staunch proponents of the old Southern Presbyterian notion of the spirituality of the church, a doctrine that posits a clear and wide gulf between the church and the state. In that editorial we also quoted C. S. Lewis on the delights of family meals, pubs and reading. We take this opportunity to quote the entire sentence in order to indicate the editors' political preferences. (The statement, by the way, comes from the essay, "Membership," reprinted in *The Weight of Glory and other Addresses* [1975]). Lewis wrote, "the sun looks down on nothing half so good as a household laughing together over a meal, or two friends talking over a pint of beer, or a man alone reading a book that interests him; all that the economic, politics, laws, armies, and institutions, save insofar as they prolong and multiply such scenes, are a mere ploughing the sand and sowing the ocean, a meaningless vanity and vexation of spirit."

This means that once evangelicals begin to propose legislation and support candidates that promote the wholesomeness of conversation carried on while drinking a good English pub beer, then we will think about joining the Christian Coalition.

It Takes A Developer

(An Op-Ed piece reprinted from the Orlando *Sentinel*, Sept. 23, 1996)

Last Saturday's *Sentinel* featured an article on "Pointe Orlando," the newest addition to the bright neon of International Drive. As the writer breathlessly described, words like "shopping center" or "mall" are inadequate to denote the variety of features and services that it promises. Instead, it will be a "lifestyle entertainment center." So ambitious is the design of this project that standard American usage of the English language fails to capture its allure.

"Point" becomes "Pointe," an additional letter providing the necessary embellishment. (And leaving me confused: does it also add a syllable?)

This is not the first time that retailers have challenged the spelling of Central Floridians. Throughout our region, strip malls are transforming into "Shoppes" and "Centres." Sometimes this has produced humorous incongruities. Consider, for example, the new mall in Sanford, built on a cow pasture near the Interstate. Its developers are hoping for its commercial success, which can come only at the expense of any downtown shopping centers remaining in Sanford. So what do they name the mall? The "Towne [sic] Center." That's right -- they named it after the very thing it seeks to destroy! Closer to where I live in Altamonte Springs, Sears Home Life and Best Buy are anchors in a new shopping area designated "Weathersfield Village." It takes a village to buy a sofa-sleeper or a CD.

Of course, this linguistic intensification is not limited to commercial real estate. Central Floridians know that it has characterized subdivision names for some time. Developers can create the image of upscale living by the careful choice of language. Now even the middle class can aspire to reside in such posh addresses as "estates" or "reserves" or "the landings." Again, it's done with little appreciation of the irony involved: so, for example, bulldozers remove trees around Bear Lake, in order that people can live in "Bear Lake Woods."

Where can the weary turn for a haven from this culture of consumption? To the church, one might have hoped. But, alas, our worship centers (worshippe centres?) have become the worst offenders of all. Forget the old nomenclature of First Methodist or Second Baptist. Out with the tired honorifics like "St. Andrews Presbyterian." Church growth

consultants (yes, there are such things) have been talking to developers. So, if you don't live among the Oaks or Willows or Palms, at least you can worship there (even though the sanctuary may still look like a store front or a middle school gym). One is left wondering whether these churches are offering new life for heavenly-minded sinners or peddling new lifestyles for upwardly mobile consumers.

THE EXOTIC OPTIONS WE HAVE in shopping, living, and worship will continue to expand as Central Florida development shows no signs of slowing. But such a myriad of choice only serves to disguise the real truth: projects like Pointe Orlando are really impoverishing the quality of life in our community, by preaching that image is everything, and thereby constricting our notions of the good life into mere preferences of lifestyle.

JRM

Lite for My Path

The New Living Translation of the Bible is out, with great public relations fanfare. After commissioning Barna Research to survey 1,000 adults, Tyndale has produced what the *New York Times* calls a "breezy paraphrase," with a print run of 1.1 million and a reading level carefully geared toward the sixth grade.

"Easy to Understand, Relevant for Today" is the slogan that graces the *NLT's* cover. Yet consider how it renders 2 Peter 3:16: "Some of [Paul's] comments are hard to understand, and those who are ignorant and unstable have twisted his letters around to mean something quite different from what he meant, just as they do other parts of Scripture -- and the result is disaster for them."

This leaves us wondering: Which is

it? Is Paul as hard to understand as Peter thought? Or is he now, with this breakthrough translation, easy to understand? Perhaps the *NLT* should market itself as "more perspicuous than the Holy Spirit." Except that might elude the grasp of most sixth graders.

The Follies of Anti-Smoking

What follows is a letter to the editor from a local paper in the Northeast United States about a community initiative to ban smoking from the neighborhood. It is the second of the author's responses, the first to a story about a restaurant going smoke-free and this one to another letter defending the anti-smoking initiative. The names have been changed to protect the author's neighbors.

August 28, 1996

To the editor:

I am grateful for Mr. Jones's response to my letter about a smoke-free Pine Comb Lane. Jones's letter gives me the opportunity to respond in a less sarcastic fashion to the anti-smoking efforts of the Pine Comb Lane Community Health Association (PCLCHA) and to explain why I find the anti-smoking crusade to be suspiciously selective if not downright hypocritical.

The heart of the matter is this: why single out tobacco as the substance to ban from our public spaces as well as from our lives? (The recent story in the *Local* [Aug. 22, p. 9] about this "mission" indicates that the PCLCHA is not simply concerned with secondary smoke but also wants people to stop smoking, period.) Of course, it is obvious, even to someone who smokes a cigar, that secondary cigarette smoke can be annoying. But is it really as dangerous as Mr. Jones alleges? He says it takes 50,000 lives a year. I seriously doubt that figure (what's the old line about statistics and damned

lies?). But people also die from fat and alcohol. What is more alcohol takes the lives of secondary drinkers through drunk driving. The numbers for alcohol-related deaths may not be as high. But is it merely a question of numbers? Is the threshold of acceptable deaths 10,000, 20,000 or 25,000? Or is the point of the ban on smoking really to eliminate all risks to health, both direct and indirect? If the concern is with all life-threatening forms of behavior, as smoking, drinking and eating are, then again, why single out tobacco?

LET'S TAKE A COUPLE examples that may show how inconsistent the anti-smokers are. What would Mr. Jones say if a Pine Comb Lane restaurant refused to serve him because he had used an automobile to travel to his favorite eatery? Isn't car exhaust a health problem that contributes to the deaths of bystanders? And Isn't walking up and down Pine Comb Lane two hours a week just as bad for one's health as sitting for two hours in a smoke-filled bar or restaurant? Then wouldn't the PCLCHA be wise to ban cars from the neighborhood for fear of what auto emissions do to residents' health?

Or how about the case of charcoal grills? Isn't this another form of consumption that pollutes the air and hurts the lungs of Pine Comb Lane? So why isn't Mr. Jones also backing a plan to make Pine Comb Lane barbecue-free?

Which again raises the issue of why we single out smokers for our disapproval. One reason is the obvious economic advantages to businesses that ban smoking. If a restaurant has the smart little PCLCHA sticker on its door, announcing that it does not allow smoking, it has a different market niche than the restaurant that doesn't. In fact, because there are more non-smokers than smokers the restaurant that prohibits smoking has probably increased business. But ask that same

restaurant owner to stop serving alcohol, fat, cholesterol or charcoal-grilled steak, and see just how far the concern for health goes.

Which leads to the other big reason why smoking has been singled out for attack: it allows non-smokers to feel self-righteous. Even if we take in too many calories, fail to pick up trash in our neighborhood, or drink a few too many beers at the Labor Day block party, if we don't smoke, our anti-tobacco culture gives us the satisfaction of thinking we are still decent people, and healthy to boot.

Of course, American history is thick with the kind of moralism and intolerance seen in the current crusade against smoking. The Eighteenth Amendment and America's experiment with prohibiting the sale and distribution of alcohol is one example. Such crusades have never viewed moderate consumption of the undesirable substance as an option. In the case of alcohol, what started as temperance, that is, the temperate drinking of alcohol, quickly became total abstinence.

Readers may wonder how the idea of moderation and smoking tobacco fit in the same sentence, since most people assume tobacco is addictive. (Our cigar-smoking president may be the biggest example of hypocrisy here since he should know, contrary to his concern for teens addicted to cigarettes, that it is possible to smoke without inhaling.) But alcohol is also addictive and no one is asking Pine Comb Lane restaurants to stop serving beer, wine and hard liquor. And those who doubt the concept of moderate consumption of tobacco should remember that pipe and cigar smokers generally do so moderately. What is more, if some pollster would bother to ask how many cigarette smokers do so for pleasure rather than addiction our ideas about the plight of smoking might change.

THE THREAT OF PROHIBITION,

then, is why I find the anti-smoking campaign to be so objectionable. Is the day coming when the mission to ban smoking in public will mean that I cannot smoke on the streets of Pine Comb Lane, in the woods of the Red Moose River, or on the front porch of my house?

Because of America's fixation on prohibition it is not surprising to see the anti-smoking lobby making its way into Pine Comb Lane. What is surprising, however, is to see this mentality in a neighborhood that prides itself on tolerance and diversity. Despite all of the liberal rhetoric, when it comes to tobacco some Pine Combers can be just as intolerant and dogmatic as the religious right.

Sincerely,
T. L. Dyte
SC88

ABOUT THE *NTJ*

Sponsored by the Old Life Theological Society, the *Nicotine Theological Journal* is a semi-serious and semi-regular publication dedicated to a full and feisty exploration of the riches of Old School Presbyterian culture. Subscriptions are available for \$7.00 per year. For \$15.00, your annual subscription will also include enrollment in the Old Life Theological Society, complete with a 100-percent cotton t-shirt certifying your membership.

The *NTJ* welcomes contributions of clever and thought-provoking articles on the practice of Old School Presbyterianism. All inquiries should be directed to the editors:

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