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WHY BOTHER?

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FINAL THOUGHTS

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The Puritan John Robinson once said, "God hath yet more truth to break forth from his Holy Word." By this statement he affirmed confidence in the Holy Scripture to produce good theology in every generation. This theology is not built as if nothing came before it. Church history reminds us of the continual need to pay attention to the truths already established and accepted by the great Christian tradition in its creeds and confessions. But, and this is a crucial *but*, we must be eager to understand the "more truth" that God may yet "break forth" from his Word by his Spirit. We do not believe, as historic Christians, in continuing revelation, in the sense that the Bible is incomplete. We do, however, believe that the truth of God in the Bible is far greater than what any one tradition of the church, or age of the church, has uncovered. This is to say we really believe *sola Scriptura*, not *solus symbolus*.



I often hear it said that theology never made much real difference. What really matters is life and practice. Try telling that to Thomas Oden, a contributing editor to this *Reformation & Revival Journal*. Oden, as some readers will recall, was once a thoroughly liberal theologian at Drew University, Madison, New Jersey. Some years ago he told Christopher A. Hall, in an interview published in *Christianity Today* (September 24, 1990): "Between 1945 and 1965, every turn I made was a left turn." He adds that his political radicalism was somewhat "moderated by reading Luther and Reinhold Niebuhr" while studying at Perkins School of Theology in Dallas but when he began to read Rudolph Bultmann along

with Sartre, Camus and Kierkegaard, things got worse. After a close up look at the political radicalism of the 1960s Tom Oden went to the famous Chicago Democratic National Convention in 1968 and saw enough to shake him. There he began to seriously question his political and social views. This led him to seek a foundation in Christian orthodoxy.

The time at Chicago in the summer of 1968 was followed by a sabbatical in which Oden says he read ancient Christian writers with the hope that they had a better word than his post-Enlightenment modernity provided. On his sabbatical he took with him the works of theologians like the Ante-Nicene Fathers, St. Augustine, Nemesius of Emesa (fourth century bishop), Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, John Wesley, and others. He began to realize that his "consciousness had shifted away from the idolatry of the new." What followed was a long and wonderful journey to the ancient-future faith of the historic church. Today Tom Oden is a cheerful, insightful and serious evangelical theologian who has impacted people across many traditions. His is a powerful voice for evangelical renewal in the Confessing Movement in the United Methodist Church. No, theology really does matter, it matters a lot. And Tom Oden's life proves it. For that we all give thanks.



In this issue of the *Reformation & Revival Journal* we shared the first of two parts of an interview we conducted with N. T. Wright. We want you to know Tom Wright better. His popular books, of which there are several, are readable and most helpful. His several academic tomes are well worth the time of serious readers. In our next issue we will have a full-scale article on the writing of N. T. Wright as well as the second part of our interview. Two N. T. Wright quotes, which appeared in *Christianity Today* (February 8, 1999), are worth noting:

The academic world has been in pain because it has tried to separate the spiritual from the academic. I think it was my vocation

to stand with one arm holding onto one and one arm holding onto the other.

Within orthodoxy, there is always a danger of faith collapsing into fear. I'm speaking autobiographically here, because I'm thinking of reactions to my own work. I see myself as a deeply orthodox theologian, and I am wryly amused, and sometimes a little frustrated when I see would-be orthodox people saying, "Oh dear, have you seen what Tom Wright is doing? Are you quite sure he's an evangelical?"

The Bible is the book of my life. It's the book I live with, the book I live by, the book I want to die by. How emphatically can I get about what the Bible means to me? But the Bible is God's book for God's people, and the security of God's people is ultimately in God. To get over-protective about particular readings of the Bible is always in danger of idolatry.

EDITOR

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John H. Armstrong, Editor