

Calvary Orthodox Presbyterian Church

WILLOW GROVE, PENNSYLVANIA

Rev. Robert Strong, S. T. F.
PASTOR

May 6, 1942

Dear Gordon:

You had indicated in my hearing that conditions were not too pleasant at Wheaton, but I did not realize what you were up against until your letter came. The treatment you have received in your work and the demands that your department head has imposed are simply outrageous. Anyone knowing the facts would entirely sympathize with your feeling that matters were rapidly approaching the stage where the situation would have to be deemed intolerable. At the meeting of the Committee of Nine last night (present: Rian, Kuiper, Van Til, Thompson, myself) it was mentioned that something like a show-down had occurred; the information came from one of the students, who had ^{just} received a letter from you. My perhaps unreasonable suggestion would have been to hold on as long as you possibly could at Wheaton--for the sake of the students you would still be influencing in spite of all restrictions, for the sake of preserving an OPC testimony in that strategic area, etc.--but this latest development, which evidently came right on the heels of your letter to us three, makes my contemplated suggestion out of order, I take it. That fact directs me to address myself particularly to the two questions of your resolution and your application for ordination.

Before I turn to these subjects let me report some of the things that were said last night about developments at Wheaton. Van Til was especially outspoken in his regret at the course of events. He paid the highest tribute to your work out there, pointing out that the Wheaton group at Westminster is at the seminary because of your influence and that, whereas he used to have to spend a large part of his time in the first year in rooting out Arminian notions from Wheaton-trained minds, now, thanks to you, the Wheaton men come Calvinists already. The seminary fellows view it as a great loss to their own work that you are having such embarrassing difficulties put in your way as to all but force you to resign from the Wheaton faculty. The whole church will groan at the news that Gordon Clark is seriously considering leaving Wheaton.

Now about your resolution. I still feel that it would be better not to present. I mean that I feel the same way even after reading your letter and sincerely entering into the problem with which you are faced as the one who brought the abstinence matter again to the notice of the church. Not to present the resolution might involve you in a charge of inconsistency, it is true. But new factors have entered that will make such a charge fall quickly to the ground. This, for example: last night my brother's church had a congregational meeting to vote on the question of joining The OPC--I haven't heard from him yet this morning, but after his saying that both of the boards of the church were unanimously in favor of affiliation I have no doubt about the outcome--and I wonder if we all ought not to feel that the new relation thus established should be guarded very tenderly. Here as OP churches go is a very strong church; we're thrilled to be thus reinforced; we want them to get settled into the denominational harness painlessly. Might not a big row on the abstinence question do harm at this point? Now it's quite true that my brother is red-hot for an abstinence resolution, but I should think that his zeal would now be even stronger for the success of the new step in which he had led his congregation and that he would be well enough satisfied with something on expediency rather than a bitterly fought-over abstinence resolution. If my analysis is accurate and if the point appeals to your thinking too, there could be no justice in charging you with inconsistency or with seeking personal advantage in withdrawing or not sending in your resolution; and everyone would, I think, come quickly to recognize the fact. So I say, since the good of the church would be served and your own integrity would not be in the least compromised, you would do well to withhold the resolution, Gordon.

Now about your ordination. I think we could put that through all right. Your prestige in our group is very high. All recognize that you have selflessly served the Cause. If it is your judgment that you are now ready for the step of ordination there will be mighty few who won't be ready to go along wholeheartedly. I cannot think that anyone will impugn your motives. Instead of that the men will rally around a man who has stood to his guns in a hard place of battle. That's my judgment. As you say, the constitutional procedure is pretty slow.

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If things have indeed come to a final head at wheaton and you are under the necessity of making a new connection quickly and you can do so better attached to another group, I for one would understand perfectly if you should make the change. Who indeed wouldn't? With all my heart I'd lament the necessity and I'd certainly do everything in my (little) power to obviate the necessity, but it would be my last thought to reproach you about the change if it came.

All of this boils down to a very brief statement: we're for you, Gordon, all the way and have the most complete confidence in you; whatever you do, you'll do because you think it's right to do and that's enough for us."

Yours in the bonds of ~~faith~~ and prayer--

Cordially,

Bob

P.S. May I add that my secret hope is that you'll be offered a chair at some institution where you can continue your great work of molding the thinking of young men and women. How desperately are men like yourself needed in the colleges and universities of today! I am fully consistent in saying this and in also encouraging you in your desire for ordination.

May 22, 1937

610 Howard St.
Wheaton, Ill.

May 9 1942

Dear Bob,

When I was with you in April, I did not think that things would develop so quickly. Had I seen ahead, I should have discussed matters more at length with all of you. At the present moment the outcome is still not clear. In your letter of May 8 you refer to a letter I wrote to one of the students. I gather from your remarks that he or you have misunderstood. The only student to whom I write is Westlake; if you have anyone else in mind, he has no letter from me. The letter I sent you last was, and still is the latest news. Therefore your "perhaps unreasonable suggestion" viz., to hang on, is neither unreasonable nor out of date. So far as I officially know, I can stay here next year if I want to. I may be fired; I may resign. But right now, I may stay.

Unfortunately I must get advice from my friends by letter, and it is a poor method. I have tried to remain on good terms with Buswell. Regardless of McIntire and Faith, I am positive that Buswell is honest and above board. Granted that he has made mistakes in practice and that his theology is peculiar in spots, I fear that many in our Church do not realize what he was up against here at Wheaton; and I know too how he defamed me when some of Bible Synod protested to him about keeping me at Wheaton. So I wrote to him also for advice. He too said hang on.

I suspect that there is a student at Westminster who get news ahead of time and usually gets it wrong; for the said student wrote to an instructor here regretting that I had been asked to resign. If Westlake tells you anything, it will (barring unclarity in my writing) be true, but one other young man combines a lively imagination with consistently poor judgment.

So, I may stay, for all I know now. But is it worth while to stay? If I can beat the combination against me, it may be worth while. The present head of the department may retire, and I would have (?) a chance to take his place. The students here are earnest Christians, horribly ignorant, but no ~~dumber~~ dumber than other students, May be I could later make more progress. But at the present moment all this looks very doubtful. Rather I judge that philosophy will be secretly discredited (as has been done) and invisible restrictions and hindrances will multiply. Several influential men on the faculty urge students not to take philosophy, and then the dear registrar shows how there is little interest in the subject, hardly worth continuing it.

What then? Find another college perhaps. probably not a Christian college. Few students ever thinking of going into the ministry. Perhaps I could get one student in two years

to go to Westminster. Of course I could write articles on Plotinus and show his effect of Augustinianism. I am already making my small way in the American Philosophical Assn with Plotinus. I could achieve the distinction of being a mediocre Plotinian. It would be a relatively easy, comfortable, and enjoyable life; provided I could get a job, for colleges are not advertizing for philosophers this year.

What then? Teach at Reformed Episcopal, or at Gordon? Not bad perhaps. I could strengthen R.E., help them get out of the Federal Council. It would be enjoyable, I know and like most of their men; and it would be definitely Christian work. Plotinus would be laid aside; I could continue my commentary on First Peter, study contemporary religious thought, and live in Phila -- a distinct attraction. At Gordon? Well, I need a job, and any port in a storm. Burt says that the President wants to make it more Reformed; I might even do some good.

Cut out.

~~Or else? Find a church. That requires ordination. I am the world's worst diplomat, but maybe I could keep a church going. I even think that without too much bad luck I could convince an independent group to enter the OPC. Of course the group would have to be found first. It might have to be founded, and that would be a harder job. Whether I would be more useful in a church or in teaching is another consideration.~~

~~For any light you have on the situation I shall thank you. I ~~feel~~ feel just now like the theology of crisis. That is, my present decision (if it is I and not the Trustees who decide) will probably stand for, quite likely, the rest of my life. If a change is to be made, now is the time, and I want all the wisdom I can gather.~~

Now for the resolution: I am delighted to hear of your brother's church coming in. Bradford wrote me that his church has been favorable to Faith since 1837. He thinks that the resolution would help him. And I must confess that, rightly or wrongly, I think the seminary men are woefully blind to the situation. Kuiper speaks of having a course introduced to take care of the matter. In my judgment no course on ethics is needed for this matter. Unless the professors change their attitude, a course will be no good. And if they change their attitude, a course would not be necessary. But what hope is there of the professors changing their attitude? For this reason I want to push the resolution. And I hate to withdraw it for fear that the opposition will raise such a loud noise that your brother's church, or Bradford's, will be harmed. It hinders the whole denomination to have a few that argue in effect: don't do this; it is not expedient; and it is not expedient because we shall see to it that it ~~is~~ makes more of a stink than it is worth. Cliff wrote me an almost overpowering letter to get me to withdraw it, and maybe I shall have to, but it will be a bitter disappointment. Strange as it may seem in view of my experiences at Wheaton, I have maintained a hope that the OPC could lead a considerable

section of the fundamentalists. They need leadership, and it ought to fall to us. But to lead them, we must have their confidence. . . . Well, you can continue the line of thought for yourself.

cut out

Now for ordination. As I think I said in my last letter, Marsden raised the question about two years ago. I said No, rather positively, because I thought I was fixed for life, and as a professor I did not need it. But the idea remained, and I broached it to Woolley about a year ago. Then I postponed it because I wanted to serve on the Committee of Nine. The only deterring consideration now is the particular mess in which I find myself. That the situation has a bearing on my desire for ordination, I do not deny; certainly it has accelerated the progress of thought. And now that it is time to settle some problems, other problems also might as well be settled also.

Will you therefore kindly join with Woolley (if he will) and present the enclosed paper to the Philadelphia Presbytery?

P.S. John Harper, 1018 Real Estate Trust Bldg., southeast corner of Broad and Chestnut, knows all these details. In explaining them to him, I made mention of you and suggested that he attend church once again in his life. A point of contact that I hope you can use. I confess I have not spoken seriously enough to him.

610 Howard Street
Wheaton Illinois

July 1 1942

Dear Bob,

I have owed you a letter for a long while. The reason for the delay is that I expected the trustees to have something to say following their meeting on June 13. They said that a committee would meet with me on June 30. So I waited again. In the meantime other little items have come up, and we are in for a long letter; so it might be better not to read on unless you are comfortably seated with nothing to do.

To rehearse my own troubles. As I said, philosophy as a major was dropped without departmental recommendation, committee action, or faculty approval. When I brought the matter into the open at a faculty meeting, the faculty referred it to the Administration Committee. There Thiessen charged me with being an extreme Calvinist (he is a moderate Calvinist, denying explicitly most of the five points, the historic position on the nature of the incarnate Christ, and making false quotations from Calvin in order to discredit Calvin), and demanded that I never express disagreement with him. At a second meeting of the ~~ex~~ Administration Committee Dr. Edman, the president, ruled that the discussion must be confined to the merits of a philosophy major as such. Thiessen tried to make another speech against me, but Edman just shut him up. The major was restored. Edman told Thiessen that any personal matters could be presented to the trustees.

A committee of the trustees met with me last night, and I am enclosing a carbon copy of my report of the meeting. Even David Otis Fuller, who holds to a great deal of Calvinism, and who has edited some of Spurgeon, was dumbfounded to hear that the Westminster Confession taught reprobation. The others have had less opportunity for knowing the reformed position. It seems to me that their idea of extreme, "hyper-Calvinism" is anything they have never heard of before. Their ignorance defines 'extreme.'

The net result, I take it, is that I am supposed to behave myself for a year, or else. They were very polite, even personally friendly in the whole thing. But their whole background is so limited that they are simply unable to understand the historic reformed position. They think they are more than fair and just to tolerate on the faculty one with my views; the idea that I have a right to express them as much as Thiessen has a right to express his, seems to them merely absurd.

This raises problems for me. Of course I cannot hide my views; nor can I control students whom I teach, let alone students I have never met; and it will always be possible for Thiessen to get students and parents to complain about me. A few of the faculty do their best to prevent students from taking my courses → though there are on the other hand some very fine people here.

In the fall, then, I expect to circularize the colleges to discover whether there is a position in philosophy. Remembering that Ruddick looked for five years and found nothing, I have very little hope in this direction. And if I should find even a good position, it would be in a place where I could influence practically no one entering the ministry. It is for that reason that I consider a place in your seminary as the most satisfactory solution to the situation. And as to details, if you would attend to the matter at the proper time, I can teach the following: First year Greek, courses in exegesis (I have gone over Romans several times, and Gal., I John, and I Peter; I hope to write a commentary on I Peter for adult Bible classes), philosophy - including ethics, theism, and a course I have been working up on contemporary religious views - modernism, humanism, ethical idealism, religion of science, agnosticism. It ought to be possible to construct a full schedule out of all this.

By the way, to change the subject, I have been reading recently The typology of Scripture by Patrick Fairbairn. It is excellent; try to find time to look through its two volumes.

A day or two before your letter of June 15 arrived, we heard that Culbertson was coming to Moody. I have been pleased to tell some Moody people that they are very fortunate, but I am far from pleased that the RE church is losing his services. I always felt that he was one man on whom you could depend, and a man who commanded the respect of the whole church. Who will take Culbertson's church? There is one bright spot in the whole situation: it paves the way for your election as Bishop. Perhaps Higgins can carry on for a while, but I suppose he will shortly need a coadjutor, and you are it.

There is one point in your letter that was not clear; you say that you want Trotter back on the seminary board. How did he get off? Did someone have to resign in order to elect a new treasurer?

I sort of smile at the offer of the PE to reconsider the matters before their 1879 council. But there are two matters that puzzle me. First, why are they so anxious about you? They seem very persistent. Second, how much sentiment is there for them in the RE church. When I had lunch with Cloak and Arndt they mentioned someone

in your church, perhaps young Sonne I forget, who had gone PE, but their tone gave the impression that it was not at all disturbing. Of course Arndt could hardly have ranted against the PEs the first time he met me, nor even Cloak had much reason to complain, but the tone seem to indicate some ~~kd~~ indifference.

I wrote to Arndt a few weeks ago, stating again that I was willing to undertake a new work if they could find a suitable place and were willing to back it. He replied that some (I don't know how much) canvassing had been done, but that no place had appeared as yet. Our own church has not the finances to back a new venture so remote from other groups and without a nucleus.

And this leads me to another problem: ordination. First, I go on the assumption that I cannot stay at Wheaton much longer and that I want a position that is more Christian ~~kan~~ than secular. To tide over a time during which I may have no teaching position, or to combine preaching and teaching, ordination is something to be considered. Your church attracts me for several reasons; undoubtedly I could easily get along with men like Bustard, Percival, James, Steck; it is too bad about Cloak, Sonne, and Trotter. I have no objection to the Prayer Book; any objection would rather be to the church requiring it; I would prefer to use it without being required to do so. Then another point that inclines me toward you is the inertia of men like Van Til and M.F.T. Even Jn Murray is better on the whole than they are. This past year I was on a Com. of Nine, and the two above were merely obstructionists. MFT objected to everything proposed; I hardly believe there was a single matter of which he approved; and Van Til objected to nearly everything. The two brought in a minority report having the committee discontinued. The more aggressive group won something in the election of members (at Gen Assembly) to the Xn Ed. Com; but I do not think that the Assembly in toto advanced our work very appreciably. This discourages me with our church. Yet, when out here some of the faculty and some of the trustees circulate false rumors about Westminster and its students, it makes me ashamed to think of leaving our church, rather I want to get further into the fight. Harper also suggested that going into your church might look like leaving some of my friends while they are being attacked and leaving a work I had begun. But I do not think that anyone at Westminster would think I had left because it was being attacked. Some of them might get the motives wrong, but not that wrong. I have talked this all over with a few in our church since April, but they are chary of stating much of an opinion. Undoubtedly it is hard for them to weigh all the items in the situation. I wonder what you think of the OPC. Ought I to be discouraged with it. You once made a comment on the attitude of Cal Cummings. He made such an extreme proposal at the Gen Ass. that their

rejection of it led him to resign as chairman of the Xn Ed Com. That was part of our gain. But there are too many like Cal in our group.

One part of your letter, in contrast with the above paragraph, impresses me very favorably. That is, the new work being organized in Jenkintown and Newark.

During June we had rain on nineteen days. I wonder how it is at Dorset. The sugar rationing is typical of bureaucracy: here in town one family of five got a total of five pounds for canning, another family of five got thirty pounds; another family of four got three and a half; and I think we got nine. The board seems to be run by labor racketeers.

This morning (Thursday July 2) the paper say Sevastople has fallen and the Germans are far into Egypt. Oh me. A few more raids like Cologne would help, but apparently the British are not able to keep that speed up. Another raid on Tokio wouldn't do any harm either.

For summer work, I am writing an article on Plotinus' theory of providence. The one on sensation is to be published this month in The Philosophical Review.

Cordially