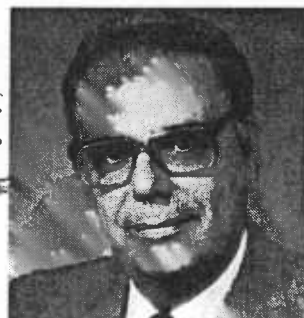


Theological Drift of the UCC

AN INTERVIEW WITH DONALD BLOESCH,
PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY AT DUBUQUE SEMINARY

A couple of months ago Exec. Dir. David Runnion-Bareford made a pilgrimage to Dubuque, IA to meet with one of the key founders of BWF and authors of the Dubuque Declaration. Dr. Donald Bloesch is probably the most widely known and read American theologian from the United Church of Christ, although our denomination rarely relies on his wisdom and perspective.

Dr. Donald Bloesch



has authored over 20 titles including *The Future of Evangelical Christianity* and *Crumbling Foundations*. The third volume of his seven volume systematic theology has JUST been released by InterVarsity Press. The first two volumes, *A Theology of Word & Spirit (Authority & Method)* and *Holy Scripture (Revelation, Inspiration & Interpretation)* are already available. All three volumes will be reviewed in the next "Witness."

The following is a brief excerpt from Dr. Bloesch's comments:

David: "Where do you see the UCC going theologically in the immediate future?"

Dr. Bloesch: "The theological trend in the UCC is toward a new gnosticism. It could be called post modern theology with its strong emphasis on relativism. Its primary drive is a need for immediate knowledge of God through experience. The role of the Bible in this theology is simply to provide a textbook of spiritual experiences from another age."

David: "Could you comment on the parallels you seemed to draw between the new feminist directions and the theological situation in pre-WWII Germany?"

Dr. Bloesch: "There are strong parallels between the American situation in the liberal churches today and the German situation in the 1930's. In both contexts there has been an effort to make the Bible egalitarian and to accommodate culture. National socialism was a form of gnosticism which was fed into by people like Carl Jung and the German faith movement. Jung is now a hero of the New Age movement. The German church saw itself as a bridge that could bring together the various cultural movements just as the UCC seeks today to integrate Christianity with a variety of cultural movements. And of course the radical

feminists openly support a revival of gnosticism."

David: In the UCC we are now debating whether to move away from the Trinitarian Baptismal formula. What effect is this going to have on us?"

Dr. Bloesch: "The danger for the UCC is - if it moves away from the Trinitarian formulas and the Apostles Creed, then it becomes a sect. It is also becoming a pariah among Ecumenical denominations. You see there is a difference. The Presbyterians for instance are two churches (liberal - evangelical) under one umbrella while the UCC is several religions under one umbrella.

In this the UCC seems to be following in the path of the United Church of Canada which has become a unitarian church because it sees the three persons of the trinity as metaphors rather than distinct entities.

David: "Can this really be the goal of the UCC leadership? What do they think will happen?"

Dr. Bloesch: "Ideologues lose their sense of consequence to see a goal. The remaining conflict will be between moderates who want a Christian formula and those who want a new religion."

The Unitarians are becoming a cult. There is a great deal of connection between the Unitarians and the UCC. The drift to Unitarianism is one of the key

Bloesch Interview
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you, "a new religion."

WOODWARD: I'm not alone! I read this after I said to

marks of the UCC, namely the drive to see God as bi-sexual or androgynous.

This is the basis of affinity with the Disciples. The disciple movement was never strongly Trinitarian to begin with. Barton Stone, one of their founders, was essentially Unitarian. The UCC is drifting into Unitarianism. The denomination is already Universalist. Such distinctions as heaven and hell, salvation and damnation are already lost.

There is nothing really to prevent a merger with the Unitarians. United Seminary, for instance, already has many Unitarian students. The difference is that the Disciples have a Biblicistic universalism and the "Biblical" is being eroded. We have a humanistic universalism, that is the state of grace is conferred simply by reason of being human.

The theology of religions is the latest fad. This says that our theology should include the greatest insights into world religions. In this the UCC has a growing affinity with the Bahai religion. The similarities are great and the differences small, except that perhaps the Bahai sect would have a more traditional morality.

Another trend is the drift of intellectual leadership into the Roman Catholic, Orthodox and other catholic communions. This is a sign of strong discomfort with both cultural relativism and Biblical literalism.

Some of these are Evangelical, but several of these are liberal. There may be a movement of sensitive theological minds into these traditions rather than cope with the kind of irrationality we have in the UCC. If we are going to lose our best young theologians to the Restorationist Renewal movements with a Catholic orientation then it will accelerate our demise. (See article "Charismatic Episcopal Church on this page.)

The opinions expressed in the editorials on the pages of "The Witness" are the personal views of the respective writers and may or may not reflect the opinion of the Biblical Witness Fellowship, its supporters and member congregations.

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March 12, 1996

Rev. Willis Elliott
309 L. Eliz. Drive
Craigville MA 02632

Dear Friend in Christ:

Thank you for your letter and also for the material on the New Century Hymnal. I greatly appreciate your penetrating thoughts on the current religious situation and also the article by Kenneth Woodward. I am preparing a critique of the hymnal for Christianity Today.

You are right that both of us see a new religion emerging in the UCC. In my opinion, the hope for renewal in our church as well as in the other mainline denominations lies in new kinds of Bible colleges that are not under the control of denominational bureaucrats but that still maintain a voluntary relationship to the wider church. These schools could function as training centers for the laity as well as spiritual and theological resource centers for clergy. My schedule is filled up so I cannot attend your colloquy this summer, but thanks for the invitation. May you continue your bold, prophetic witness to the faith once delivered to the saints!

In the fellowship of His service,

Don Bloesch

Donald G. Bloesch
Emeritus Professor of Theology

17 Mar 96, added # list

15 Mar 96, Willis: I'd read this.
No "he," no personal God.

PS. I include a section on the gender of God in my latest book God the Almighty (InterVarsity Press). I shall ask my publisher to send you a copy.

PPS. Please feel free to telephone me any evening after 8:00 (central time). My home no. is 319-582-6624.

DGB:skh