

Sunday, December 8, 2013—Grace Life School of Theology—*Grace History Project*—Lesson 118
The Stam/GBC Controversy, Part 2

Major Events of 1966 Continued

July 28, 1966—Letter Jeff L. Farrell to Charles F. Baker

- On July 28, 1966, Jeff L. Farrell addressed a personal letter to Charles F. Baker, then president of GBC, outlining his concerns regarding the school. In hindsight, Dr. Dale S. DeWitt described the Farrell Letter as the first shot across the bow in the controversies that rocked the college in the late 60s and early 70s.
- Farrell begins his letter by thanking Baker for taking the time “to talk with those who voiced concerns about Grace Bible College at the GGF convention.” The *Grace History Project* takes this to mean that, at some point in the immediate past, Farrell and others had discussed some of the matters addressed in the letter with Baker at the GGF convention earlier within the summer of 66. After thanking Baker for his “excellence in the presentation of the gospel of the grace of God,” Farrell begins to share his concerns regarding the college. Farrell goes on to list twelve concerns.
 - *Bible Issues*—a statement made by Dr. Dale DeWitt at the 1966 GGF convention that the RSV is linguistically a better translation than the AV, made by expert linguist and historians, and taken from a superior Greek text.
 - *Allegedly*—a statement made by John T. Dean, the acting president of GBC, that he is not a fundamentalist and did not wish to be classified as one.
 - *Allegedly*—Pickett has stated that he is a “liberal socialist.”
 - *Spiritual Condition*—reports that the spiritual condition of some students was lower than when they left home for the college.
 - *Catholic Wedding*—the open participation of students at the marriage of one of the female students in a Catholic Church after which alcoholic beverages were served at the reception.
 - *Lack of Discipline/Liberal Arts School*—Farrell had conversed with students from the college who gave him the impression that little discipline was being enforced upon the student body and that the greater emphasis was being placed on being a liberal arts school than a Bible College. These students also reported to Farrell that “intellectualism” was being promoted by some members of the faculty.
 - *Factions in the Grace Movement*—Farrell reports having interviewed a recent graduate of GBC who also pastors a Grace Church who did not wish to be known as a Fundamentalist. Farrell describes this person as “intellectually immersed,” believing that “truth can be found

in error, that there is truth in novels written by infidels, that there are two factions in the “Grace” movement, i.e., the intellectual for which he stands and the fundamental for which I stand.” These two factions cannot co-exist, and this young preacher was committed to driving Fundamentalists from the “Grace Movement,” according to Farrell.

- *Spirit of Bereanism*—Farrell also lists Weddle’s article among his list of concerns. After quoting extensively from Weddle’s article, Farrell concludes this point by stating, “All of these are taken from an article in a publication sponsored by GRACE BIBLE COLLEGE of which YOU ARE THE PRESIDENT!”
- *Emotionalism*—Farrell asserts that some faculty members had been “making light” of “spirituality” by equating it with “emotionalism.”
- *The Gospel Blimp*—the twelfth item listed by Farrell is an editorial by Dean in the May, 1966 issue of *Truth* in which he recommends that members of the GGF purchase and read *The Gospel Blimp* by Joseph Bayly. Farrell objected on the grounds that Bayly was promoting the tactics of the “new evangelicalism.”
- After assuring Baker that his list was merely a small sample of the information he had in his possession Farrell besought Baker to stop the spread of “new evangelicalism” and “intellectualism” at GBC. Farrell goes on to state that he could no longer support the College either finically or publically, noting that there were young people within his assembly that were of college age that he could not, in good conscience, recommend that they attend GBC. Farrell concludes his letter stating that he would continue to pray for Mr. Baker and GBC.

August 9, 1966—Letter David L. Weddle to C.R. Stam

- On August, 9, 1966 David Weddle addressed a letter to Stam in response to a letter that Stam had sent to Dean regarding the Spring publication of Weddle’s article “Spirit of Bereanism” in the *Journal of Grace Theology*. Among other things, Weddle took exception to Stam’s characterization of his article as a “perversion” of the context of Acts 17. Weddle is careful to note that if Stam understood his article to be suggesting that one seek a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ outside the pages of Scripture that Stam had misread his article. Moreover, Weddle claims that it is a misreading of his article to suppose that he supported the entire “neo-evangelical agenda.”

August, 17, 1966—Letter David L. Weddle to Charles F. Baker

- On August 17, 1966 David Weddle addressed a letter to Baker regarding Farrell’s letter to Baker as well as some concerns about Stam. In this letter, Weddle explains to Baker what he meant by some of the more controversial statements in his article, namely his recommendation to consider Tillich’s analysis of the “God of popular theism” concept. Beyond this, Weddle just defends the major suppositions of his article to Mr. Baker.

September 7, 1966—Roger Anderson to Dale DeWitt

- On September 7, 1966 Roger Anderson (a later President of the GGF) addressed a letter to Dale DeWitt. In this letter, Anderson relates that it has come to his attention that DeWitt was suffering criticism for some comments he made at the 1966 GGF convention. In his letter Anderson conveys the idea that he (Anderson) had warned DeWitt that something like this (i.e., controversy) would happen if they moved forward with the *Journal*. It is clear that Anderson viewed the controversy as the by-product of “men bucking to gain position in the GGF.” While Anderson does not name names, he states the following; “those who speak the loudest (I think he has Stam in mind) about not wanting to be a denominational type of thing are the ones who insist on the control of what is happening. In many ways we are more denominational than the denominations.” At the end his letter, Anderson seems to ask whether or not grace extends to doctrine when he writes, “We speak of grace, but we tend to be ungracious. May God give us all the grace to forgive one another and to work together in spite of it. May he also give us the grace to stick to our convictions while at the same time being more understanding of the convictions of another.”

Fall, 1966—Suggested Statement of the Faculty to the College Board

- Contained within the files I went through in the Bultema Library was what appears to have been a draft copy of a statement by the GBC faculty to the board of the college. There is a handwritten date at the top that read “c. Fall, 1966.” There are also numerous other handwritten corrections and edits noted throughout the text.
- The statement is written to express the views of the faculty regarding a list of ten suggestions that had been sent to the board by Stam and Farrell. It is apparent from the first paragraph that the faculty wished to impress upon the board that they were in agreement with the doctrinal statement of both the college and the GGF.
 - “When we sign our contracts each spring we thereby also sign our affirmation of the College doctrinal statement and the Grace Gospel Fellowship doctrinal statement. We do this voluntarily because we want to and not because we are being forced to. We recognize that this is a legitimate limitation of academic freedom which we gladly accept...realizing that as Christians, indeed as Grace believers, we do not have total academic freedom and that we must work within the framework of the theological platform upon which we mutually agree.
- Regarding the charge of “neo-evangelicalism” at the college, the faculty stated:
 - “It is our conviction that many of the items included under the concept “neo-evangelicalism” are problems which press themselves upon the church of Jesus Christ as a result of the last 50-75 years of American church history. Particularly, these

problems grow out of the attempt of the true people of God to relate themselves to the world in which they live. Consequently, it would be unwise to force a commitment to a certain political philosophy, a certain method of evangelism, a certain translation of the Bible, a certain view of cooperation with other evangelical believers, a certain view of the church's social function in the world, etc. We believe, on the contrary, that a firm affirmation of enthusiastic and wholehearted unreserved commitment to the doctrinal statement as received, should be continued as a policy and that this commitment is sufficient for the entire faculty and administration."

- The faculty clearly viewed themselves as being "intimidated" into accepting the views of Farrell and Stam.
 - "We suspect that the opposition is an attempt to force the private views of some of the problem areas suggested above on the faculty in the name of orthodoxy. We further suspect that the pressure to do so, since it includes threat of public exposure on the part of Messrs. Stam and Farrell, constitutes an attempt at intimidating the board and faculty into such a position. We wholeheartedly support a refusal to succumb to this kind of intimidation."
- In the face of the controversy the faculty sought to stress the following points:
 - "We commit ourselves without reservation to the statement on the verbal inspiration and plenary authority of Scripture. We should go so far as to desire to add the word "inerrant" to the definition of Scripture since in modern theological discussions the terminology "verbally inspired" has taken on a certain vagueness, especially in the light of neo-orthodoxy.

We believe that the walk of the Christian is of great importance and we commit ourselves unreservedly to a responsible appropriation of the power of Christ for victory over sin and though the statement says nothing about separation from the world, we believe and practice that the Christian should constantly be experiencing the cleansing of the spirit of separation from the spirit of worldliness. We gladly, on the principle of limiting Christian freedom for the well-being of the whole people of God, restrict our liberty as suggested to us by the Board during the summer months.

We further affirm that to require us to believe certain philosophies of the relationship of the church to the other concerns is an undue and unnecessary imposition on our Christian liberty. We affirm therefore that any added requirements related to our views of evangelism, cooperation, translation versions, social problems, etc. must be firmly resisted. Specifically, if a faculty member holds certain views on methods of evangelism, we believe that is his own business. We also maintain that it is his right as a faculty member to hold those views and to teach them as long as there is not inherent contradiction with the platform to which we have committed ourselves.

- We should like to specify several particular areas where this liberty should be maintained.
 - One's views of methods of evangelism
 - One's views on sources of truth
 - One's views on church music
 - One's views on modern versions of the Bible
 - One's views on cooperation with other evangelicals
 - One's views on the role of the church in society (the GGF's statement wisely avoids dogmatic statements on this point)
 - One's views on political issues and contemporary social problems
 - One's views on the place of scholarship in the Christian academic community"
- In summation, the faculty of GBC did not deny that neo-evangelical thinking had been embraced, to varying degrees, by some of the school's faculty. Rather they argued that they ought to be allowed to maintain their "academic freedom" so long as they were not teaching doctrines directly contrary to the doctrinal statement of GBC or the GGF. By framing the conversation in this fashion, the faculty of the college sought to maintain the school's historic stance for dispensational theology in general and the theology of the Grace Movement specifically, while embracing various other aspects of the neo-evangelical platform. In short, to varying degrees the faculty could be seen as embracing a modified version of neo-evangelicalism minus the prohibition against dispensational theology. This nuanced argument is something that Stam never completely understood.

Conclusion

- By the end of 1966 the GGF was embroiled in controversy that centered on its only approved institution of higher learning - GBC. Judging from Stam's comments in *Silence Now Would be Sin* it would be fair to say that he had been having misgivings regarding GBC for some time, possibly as early as 1964. In a recent phone conversation with Dr. Dale DeWitt (Thursday, November 14, 2013) he shared with me that Stam had been the guest speaker at the college for a series of lectures (The O'Hair Lectures) in the first half of the 1960s, probably either 1962 or 1963. DeWitt described Stam's reception by students and faculty as cold at best.
- The Spring, 1966 article by Weddle in the *Journal of Grace Theology* seemed to be something of a last straw for Stam and Farrell. It was at the Summer, 1966 GGF convention that private misgivings regarding the college and its leadership began to morph into public grumbling and criticism. Shortly after the 1966 convention, Farrell addressed his letter to Baker, an action that DeWitt characterized as the first shot across the bow.
- Pastoring in the Chicagoland area there is little doubt that Stam and Farrell had spoken prior to Farrell drafting his letter and sending it to Baker. As news spread through the Grace Grapevine of the controversy, an exchange of spirited letter writing emerged which did little to calm the situation.

- By the end of 1966 clear sides were emerging in the conflict, Stam and Farrell and their supporters were pitted against Baker and Dean and their supporters. One of the primary bones of contention was the incursion of “neo-evangelicalism” and “intellectualism” into the Grace Movement and its perceived acceptance by the faculty of GBC. As we have seen, the faculty suggestions related to the board, drafted in the fall of 1966, presented a nuanced argument that would allow for the acceptance of any viewpoint that was not in direct violation of the college’s doctrinal statement.
- As the calendar turned into 1967 the controversy did not subside but burned ever hotter as we shall see in our next lesson.

Works Cited

See personal correspondence letters listed above.