

Sunday, December 22, 2013—Grace Life School of Theology—*Grace History Project*—Lesson 119
The Stam GBC Controversy, Part 3

Introduction

- As the calendar turned from 1966 to 1967, the controversy that began brewing with the GGF regarding their only approved institution of higher learning did not relent. In fact, the New Year saw an expansion in both the size and intensity of the controversy.
- The Spring, 1966 publication of “Spirit of Bereanism” by David Weddle in the *Journal of Grace Theology* proved to men like Stam and Farrell that their long suspected fears of neo-evangelicalism and intellectualism were making headway amongst the faculty and staff at GBC. Farrell’s July, 1966 letter addressed to Baker was the first step in bringing this disagreement to open controversy.
- Whether or not there was a lull in the controversy during the winter months of ‘67 is difficult to determine. While we suspect not, it is important to note that DeWitt’s file in the GBC library is relatively devoid of evidence of any letter writing activity during the first four months of ‘67. DeWitt’s files pick up the trail again in May of ‘67. Please note that we do not think, nor does DeWitt claim, that his file is a complete collection of all correspondence related to this controversy. What we do know is that DeWitt saved a copy of anything that came across his desk.

Major Events of 1967

May, 1967 Special Addendum to Truth Magazine: Open Letter to Unnamed Pastor

- At the top, in italics, one reads, “The pastor of one of our Grace churches has written to the College stating that he has received warning that Grace Bible College is becoming Neo-evangelical and that since one of the chief tenants of Neo-evangelicalism is anti-dispensationalism he must know if there is any truth to this charge. There may be others who have become upset by similar allegations and, therefore, we have felt it wise to print this reply as an open letter.”
- The college defended itself against “all tenants of Neo-evangelicalism” or any “other ism which in any way, whether in doctrine or practice, conflict with our doctrinal statement.” In other words, the college’s position is that they were against any portion of the NE agenda that contradicted the school’s doctrinal statement. Having stated this fact, they expressed some outrage over why or how such an accusation could be made against them.
 - “As you have stated, Neo-evangelicalism is an anti-dispensational movement among evangelicals, and we can hardly understand how anyone could even begin to bring such charges against G.B.C., since it is the only school in the this country that has for its main purpose of existence the proclamation of the Word of God rightly divided according to

the dispensational principle of the unique Pauline revelation. Perhaps we have not sufficiently communicated this fact to our constituency but we would point out the following facts:

- The College has the same doctrinal statement as the Grace Gospel Fellowship, and every Board member and Faculty member is required to annually subscribe whole-heartedly to this statement:
 - The verbal inspiration and plenary authority of the Bible in its original writings.
 - The eternal Trinity of the Godhead.
 - The eternal Deity and spotless humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - The total depravity of man by nature.
 - Salvation by grace through faith in the crucified and risen Christ.
 - The eternal security of the saved.
 - The personality and Deity of the Holy Spirit.
 - The essential unity of all believers of the present dispensation as members of the one true church, the Body of Christ.
 - The privilege and duty of all the saved to walk as children of light.
 - The communion of the Lord's Supper as revealed through Paul for members of the Body of Christ, "till He come."
 - The One divine baptism by which believers are made members of the Body of Christ as the only baptism necessary in God's spiritual program in this dispensation of the grace of God.
 - The resurrection of the body.
 - The pre-tribulation rapture of members of the Body of Christ.
 - The personal, pre-millennial return of Christ to reign on earth.
 - The eternal punishment of the unsaved dead.
 - The worldwide preaching of the gospel which Paul calls "my gospel" in contrast to the gospel of the circumcision.

- Further, the College catalog also contains a six-fold statement of objectives, the first of which is: "To teach the whole Bible as the inspired Word of God, interpreting it in the light of the revelation of the mystery.

- Included in the thirty-five required semester hours of Bible and Theology, all of which are taught in the light of the unique Pauline revelation, are a number of courses dealing with dispensational truth. These include a two-hour and a three-hour freshman course, a two-hour sophomore course, a two-hour advanced senior course, and a two-hour senior research course. Texts used in these courses include C.R. Stam's *Things that Differ*, C.F. Baker's *Dispensational Relationships, Real Baptism, God's Clock of the Ages*, besides reference works of

all of the dispensational writings which have been produced in our Grace Movement.

- In order to insure our students receive a thorough indoctrination in dispensational truth, the O’Hair Memorial Lectureship has been instituted. One of our Grace Pastors is brought in for a week of lectures near the beginning of each school year. Past speakers have included C.R. Stam, D.C. Elifson, Clarence Kramer, and Roscoe Kent.
 - *Truth Magazine*, which is the official organ of G.B.C., carries regularly not only articles on the uniqueness of the dispensation which was committed to Paul, but from time to time editorials plainly stating the commitment of the College to this truth and our criticism of a non- or faulty dispensational approach to the Bible.”
- Given all these factors, the signers of the document express frustration as to why anyone would charge that the College had joined with the NE in their anti-dispensationalism. In the end, they state, “we trust that this letter will allay any fears which you may have had about a creeping Neo-evangelicalism or liberalism at Grace Bible College.” The letter was signed by: Charles F. Baker, John T. Dean, Dale S. DeWitt, Raymond E. Reich, Donald C. Elifson, Vernon A. Schutz, Kenneth L. Springstead, Vernon H. Stromberg, William Rigg, Arthur G. Anderson, Teresa E. Baker and Evlyne Beyer. F. Pickett was on leave out of the country and therefore not able to sign.
 - This letter is important for a couple reasons. First it establishes a clear position on the part of the College that they had not embraced NE in terms of its anti-dispensationalism. Second, they do not deny that other aspects of the NE agenda were being embraced by members of the faculty. This of course left the door open for the entertaining of portions of the NE agenda that did not directly contradict the doctrinal statement of the school.

June 14, 1967 Letter to Stam by William Root, Pastor of Grace Bible Church of South Gate, CA

- Root chides Stam for his personal conduct in handling the controversy with GBC. Root calls Stam out for seeking to induce people to “premature” conclusions regarding GBC while seeking to do likewise with others.
- Root mentions having received a letter from Stam dated June 1, 1967. He also references a pastor’s retreat in Lombard, IL that took place sometime in late 1966 (gleaned from a letter by Pastor Don Elifson dated June 12, 1967 during which Elifson called for a vote of confidence in GBC) at which time the only person’s word he had for the trend toward liberalism at GBC was Stam’s. Since the Lombard meeting Root conducted his own investigation into the tests being given at GBC. After doing so, Root concluded that the tests currently being given at GBC were identical with tests that had been given several years prior when even Stam still felt the school was sound.

- “Since, I made a THOROUGH investigation of the VERY TESTS being given to the students THIS LAST SEMESTER. I showed them to you at our Council Meeting in con. Langer’s Office (along with tests made several years ago when even YOU felt that the school was doing a good job). These tests were IDENTICAL, yet YOU said that they were written for the express purpose of impressing YOU and the SEVEN other Pastors involved. NOW, Bro. Stam. . . Answer this one question, if these tests WERE written for YOUR benefit ONLY . . . HOW could the students taking them THIS YEAR get grades of between 90 and 100 on them? SOMEONE has been “true to the FUNDAMENTALS OF THE FAITH” or the students could NEVER have answered these difficult dispensational questions! You see, I received BOTH SIDES of the picture before making a FINAL decision.
- Root also calls Stam out for violating a “gentleman’s agreement” that was reached not to write on the subject of the controversy.
 - “One last thing. It was agreed 100% in THAT Council Meeting (at Langer’s) that there would be NO MORE WRITING re; this matter. It seems to ME that every letter you write, every article you print is a flagrant violation of that “gentlemen’s agreement,” don’t YOU? Brother Stam, you do not know me very well if you think for a minute that I have been “gotten to” (your words), or CAN BE “gotten to” by ANYONE. Right is right and wrong is wrong and I will stand firmly for what I feel in MY HEART IS RIGHT. As of this moment I feel YOU are COMPLETELY . . . W-R-O-N-G in TWO areas: in your METHODS and in your MOTIVES.
- Stam is scolded by Root for taking statements made by Dean and others out of context in his desire to draw public statements out of them in declaring their positions.
 - “You said in one of our Board meetings that you wanted Dr. J.T. Dean to “come out in the open and state his position relative to FUNDAMENTALISM . . . well, Bro. Jeff Farrell’s answer to my letter to Mr. Hayes gives you EXACTLY what you wanted (it seems to me). Jeff says that lately, Bro. Dean is saying he is “200% FUNDAMENTAL” . . . is this not what you asked for? The term “Fundamental” and “neo-evangelical” COULDN’T EVEN BE DEFINED at the Lombard Pastors’ retreat. When Dr. Dean made the statement that he “leaned toward neo-evangelicalism” it was a LONG TIME AGO, and then out of context. What he was referring to was the point that they (neos) made Fundamentals need more LOVE for one another; we are PROVING this right now.”
- After making the point regarding Roman Catholics being “fundamental”, Root concludes his letter by calling on Stam to “use a little LOVE and Grace, and look ahead and see where the road leads YOU wish to take us down. We are TOO SMALL an organization to divide, we need (and MUST HAVE) cooperation, and togetherness based upon the message of God’s Grace, and the revelation of the Mystery for which we ALL, (YOU, THE SCHOOL, our GRACE CHURCHES and I) stand for.”

June 30, 1967 Charles F. Baker and John T. Dean to an Unnamed Grace Pastor

- From this letter we learn that sometime in June, 1967 Stam sent out a packet containing some twenty pages of allegations against GBC. The purpose of this letter was to set straight some of the facts from the college's viewpoint for this Pastor's consideration. This letter also states that the College had done everything in their power to keep the controversy from going public because of their desire that the GGF not suffer a split.
 - "We also want you to know that the College has done everything possible to keep this controversy from becoming public for fear that it might result in a split in our Grace Gospel Fellowship. We know too that the members of the GGF National Council, of which Mr. Stam is a member, have tried to persuade Mr. Stam from publicizing this controversy but to no avail. During the past nine months a number of meetings have been held with Mr. Stam and one or two others who have backed him in these charges in an effort to resolve these problems. We have attempted to answer these charges in meetings and in writing, all of which has been rejected and labeled as "smoke screen," "defensiveness," and other like expressions, which are but other ways of saying we are hedging and not telling the truth. We therefore feel that Mr. Stam bears the sole responsibility of bringing this conflict to the full constituency of the Grace Gospel Fellowship and for many regrettable results which may issue therefrom.
- Since GBC was an approved organization of the GGF when Baker wrote to the National Council of the GGF stating that "he felt it was the moral duty of the Council to either rescind that approval if Stam's charges are true or to reaffirm its approval if the charges are false." Accordingly the Council met on June 20, 1967 (or there about - the letter was slightly deteriorated in this section) and passed the following two resolutions:
 - The GGF Council declares itself in support of the administration of Grace Bible College and reaffirms its position that GBC is a GGF approved organization.
 - The GGF Council states that to its knowledge there is neither any trend toward liberalism at the school nor is there any deviation from the GGF Doctrinal Statement being taught in Grace Bible College.
- This letter is crucial in outlining the editorial policy of the *Journal of Grace Theology* and Stam's actions with respect to it.
 - "A considerable part of the controversy has been over two articles which appeared in the *Journal of Grace Theology*. As you know the policy of the *Journal*, stated in its first issue, is that articles which are too scholarly, controversial, or philosophical or are too closely allied to the profession of gospel ministry itself to appear in our popular-type publications will, if accepted, be presented within these pages. Mr. Stam refuses to accept this policy statement but instead insists that the policy of the journal must be to accept only such articles which reflect the position of the College itself, and then, on the

basis of his privately formulated policy for the Journal, he has attacked the school as advocating every idea of every article appearing in the Journal. It may interest you to know that the Editorial Staff of the Journal offered to publish Mr. Stam's rebuttal to the article entitled, "The Spirit of Bereanism," to which he was so violently opposed and that Mr. Stam refused the offer, stating in a letter to Dr. Dean as of November 11, 1966: "in the context of the present situation, I feel that this should not be published in the JOURNAL." Pastor Jeff Farrell promised to write an answer to this article but never did. Consequently the hands of the Editorial staff were tied in presenting Mr. Stam's objections to this article. As we see it, the question boils down to this: Can the pastors who have been ordained by and who are members of the Grace Gospel Fellowship and who adhere to the Doctrinal Statement of the GGF be allowed to present their views in the Journal? We believe that they should be allowed to do so and that others who may disagree with their views can write the Editor and express their views through the Letters-to-the-Editor column. This is the stated procedure of the Journal. It is the responsibility of the authors to defend their own statements; not that of the editorial staff of the Journal. An editorial in the Fall issue, 1966, of the Journal made it clear that articles in the Journal express individual views and do not necessarily represent the views of the staff of the Journal."

- In addition, the letter notes that "within the past three weeks" (would have been the first three weeks of June, 1967) the College had received letters from many local Grace Churches stating their confidence in the College (two in GR, two in Muskegon, Holland, Belmont, Moline, Ravenna, Grand Haven, and Volney, MI are named specifically). Moreover, letters from thirty-nine Pastors and thirteen prominent laymen within the GGF were received by the College voicing the confidence, support, and rejection of the accusations made by Stam.
- The Board of Directors of Grace Bible College, at its most recent board meeting (June 24, 1967) prior to the publication of this letter, issued and signed the following resolution:
 - "We the members of the Board of Directors of Grace Bible College hereby affirm our whole-hearted confidence in and support of the Administration and Faculty of Grace Bible College. We want it to be known publicly that the Board is and has been of one mind throughout this situation."
- Baker and Dean also wished to express their commitment to the Bible College philosophy stating they had no desire to be a "liberal arts" college.
 - "We want it understood also that Grace Bible College is pursuing a ten-year plan which is dedicated to the Bible College philosophy of requiring a Bible-Theology major and Christian Service each semester of every student and that we are not, nor do we have any interest in becoming a Christian Liberal Arts College."

June 30, 1967 C.R. Stam to Dale S. DeWitt

- Acknowledging receipt of DeWitt's letter dated June 25 Stam makes only three points.
 - "I think you overstate our views when you indicate that we believe there is "apostasy at Grace Bible College." Our contention is that there has been a "trend toward liberalism." This is different."
 - "As I read your letter, Dale, it appears to me to have a great deal to say which is beside the point. The fact is that a member of the official board advocates for the reading of immoral books by Christian college students and Brother Baker and Brother Dean have defended him. We believe this is unscriptural and sinful. America's youth has already gone far enough downhill morally reading such books."
 - "I take issue with you when you say that we denounce what we think Weddle's article intends to say. What Weddle himself intended to say may be debated but no one can debate what the article says; that is clear enough. . . It appears to me, Dale, that in "intellectual" circles, or should I say academic circles, the question is too often asked: "But what does the word mean?" Or: "What did this writer mean?" Finally everything is a gray blur and nothing is black or white. Fundamentalism? What does it mean? Liberalism? What does it mean? This man says so-and-so quite plainly but what did he mean? It seems to me that this makes for the most confused kind of thinking. I go to a simple dictionary to look up liberalism and fundamentalism and I find that they mean just what I thought they meant for many years, but the "intellectual" comes along and re-evaluates everything until nothing seems to have any very specific meaning. God's best to you, Dale. Be assured that I do not hold the slightest ill-will in my heart toward any of you."