

# Last Minute Lucubrations

*or the Modest Newsletter on the Eve of a New Year*

## Women and M.Div. Degrees: First Objection

*By Deborah Forteza*

Why would a woman get an M.Div.? The question has been raised in numerous settings. At times the question has been raised sincerely, at times, pejoratively. Nevertheless, an answer must be given.

The first objection raised against women studying for an M.Div. is that the degree historically has always been a pastoral (or professional) degree. If one holds to the biblical view that women must not become pastors, it follows that women have no reason to get a pastoral degree. The argument can be condensed to the following syllogism:

Mp: The m.div is a pastoral degree.

[A]                    [B]

mp: pastoral degrees are only for those who will be pastors.

[B]                    [C]

c: The m.div. is only for those who will be pastors.

[A]                    [C]

The syllogism is valid, but we must examine also whether it is sound. Are all the premises true? Well, it depends upon who you ask.

The major premise in some circles is no longer accepted as true. Instead of seeing the M.Div. as a professional degree, some schools and individuals (and I mean conservative complementarian ones) consider it an academic degree. The reason this degree has become an academic degree for some is related to the statement of the minor premise. Not all conservative complementarians believe that M.Div. degrees are exclusively for pastors (and here I do not necessarily speak of those who have chosen to allow women in this program), and therefore, they have made the degree more of an academic, rather than a professional, degree.

If one believes that the M.Div. is a professional degree, and that only those desiring to be pastors ought to pursue it, then consistency would demand that many men would be disqualified from being accepted into the degree. In most circles, men who are divorced, mentally handicapped, and unable to teach, to name a few, would be automatically eliminated. In addition, in order to be consistent and biblical, those men characterized by greed, pride, a bellicose spirit, and flirtation should not be considered for ready admittance. If a person would accept into the M.Div. program any man who has no capacity or intention of ever being a pastor, why should not women also be given the opportunity to learn the Scriptures?

All of these considerations lead us to ask the following question, Is the problem giving women the content of the degree or the degree itself?

A standard M.Div. degree consists in 96 credits of theology, history, Bible exposition, biblical languages, hermeneutics, and practical theology. Much of the program is not dissimilar to the information taught in Bible colleges, though the teaching level and purpose is somewhat different. Most conservative seminaries will allow women to take many or at least to audit all of the M.Div. classes, with the obvious exception of the pastoral theology classes. Moreover, in an ideal world (and perhaps in the first century NT church), all of this knowledge would be taught

to the church at large in the gathered meetings. The M.Div. degree provides the most basic tools for a pastor precisely because it provides the basic tools of research and Bible study, and these would be valuable to any believer who is serious about understanding the Scriptures.

If the content of the program is helpful and good, then granting men and women who will not be pastors a pastoral degree must be the problem. If traditionally this has been a pastoral degree, I can see how some people would feel uncomfortable granting it to women. If that is the case, then perhaps seminaries could offer a similar degree with a different name, so that at least the content (the really important part) can be available to all.

Is theology to be relegated exclusively to the pastor? If the pastor were the only person in a church who was proficient in theology, he would have a very difficult job, since he would have to teach every Sunday School class, and every Bible Study. He would have to disciple every new believer, choose every hymn for worship, and pray every public prayer. Would not our churches be stronger if our people became serious about God and about studying His Word? Should not even the littlest believer be granted sound biblical knowledge?



### **The Narnia Episode**

*by Ryan Martin*

The recent surge of interest in the *Chronicles of Narnia* provides an interesting study in the phenomenon we call “popular culture.” In his book, *Experiment in Criticism*, C. S. Lewis describes the popular approach to art as a way of “using” instead of “receiving” art. He says, “Many people enjoy popular music in a way which is compatible with humming the tune, stamping in time, talking, and eating. And when the popular tune has once gone out of fashion they enjoy it no more. Those who enjoy Bach react quite differently” (4). He does not regard the popular approach as “reprehensible,” but deficient. The popular approach to art leaves “a man outside the full experience of the arts in question” (26). So here is a criticism of popular culture in that it is deficient--it is not humanist.

The frenzy surrounding the *The Chronicles of Narnia* demonstrates another aspect of popular culture—its immanence. Popular culture earns its living off the modern god NOW. The draw is in its *trendiness*. And at least two closely related factors are moving the individual to give himself over to the popular: 1) he desires to be at the forefront of the enthusiasm, and 2) he wishes not to miss out on the great benefit. Remember the *lack* of build-up around the *Chronicles* fifteen years ago? Comparatively speaking, there was none—or, at least, very little to speak of. Several voices contribute to the new hype—the constant mass media throb, the echoes of our mothers’ reading it to us, the new movie recently released, the book stores’ and publishing companies’ increased supply and “special editions”—all these elements can move us to join the “frenzy” for *Narnia*.

But consider some of these elements. Why are the publishing companies releasing the “special editions” and increasing supply? To profit off its *trendiness*. Even the mass media news, in releasing “news” stories on *Narnia* (and this includes everything from the movie reviews to spots on the “meaning behind *Narnia*”), do so because they know that the *trendiness* of the *Chronicles* will move their audience to “stay tuned” to their story about it—and increased ratings mean increased profits. The point here is that while all these factors contribute to and compound the frenzy surrounding popular culture, what lies at the root, or at least close to the root, is

*trendiness*. As these outlets of mass information move to profit off the trend, the trend compounds upon itself. As the trend increases, so doth the mass media's exploitation of the trend. It reminds one of an Escher sketch.

And as this great commotion increases, with so many voices blessing the object of the trend, so increases the individual's desire to be part of this desire. The Great Pop Culture Locomotive is steaming by, they fear, without them. And some are better at staying in the first cab than others. What is interesting here is that it appears to be the frenzy itself, not the object of the frenzy, that actually drives the continued interest of the populace. Although the value of the object may be more or less recognized, this is secondary. The *trendiness*, I believe, is primary. Again, this is demonstrated in the relative "unpopularity" of the object several years prior. The intrinsic worth of the object has not increased to any great degree if at all. The surge of popularity can be attributed to its *trendiness*.

I think it is helpful to add that this *trendiness* may be more or less in degree. Nevertheless, with all popular fads, it is still present. For example, one could argue that *The Chronicles of Narnia* have always been, to a certain extent, popular. I would not dispute that, and use the books more as an example of a recent product of "hyped" enthusiasm to make my general point. At the time of this writing, they are a matter of great interest with the release of the first movie. Some may even be so bold to accuse me of exploiting the *trendiness*. To a small degree I probably do. But my use is more for example than necessarily throwing myself head-long into the insanity.

As a counter-example, consider the now dying wave of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. The *trendiness* is beginning to wear itself off. Fresh in our memories is the hype over those books from the Peter Jackson adaptation of it. Now they are spent. The train is slowing and coming to a complete halt. The books are not selling as quickly, nor being read as devotedly. Soon they will be relegated to *Left Behind* status.

I do not doubt that there have always been fads and trends, going back to our earliest parents. I do believe, however, that popular culture proper can be distinguished from these more ancient fashions. The enthusiasm over religion in the first Great Awakening of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was no doubt part fad, and part Spirit of God. Trends have always come and gone. The popular culture of today, is more pronounced and heightened since the aid of mass media moves it along in a way that was never known in past cultures.

Finally, this discussion, if it has any merit, should lead us to have great hesitancy toward Christian assimilation with popular culture. *Trendiness*, among other things, contradicts, by its very nature, transcendence and eternity. Christians are to concern themselves with the things pertaining to eternity, to God and Jesus Christ. Popular culture, in stressing, as I said earlier, the god NOW and the spirit of this age, contradicts eternity. What Christians desire are the permanent things, the things which will last. We do not have time for the fleeting things, because we are citizens of the country which knows no time. Our worship should not wrap itself in immanent mutability, because the Triune God exists changelessly and immutably. Christianity ought to concern itself with ancient and enduring forms and art. By attempting to ride each wave of popular culture, it makes itself look foolish and unable to speak to the enduring problems of mankind. The eternal God is not its primary concern, but the changing fancy of silly men. Instead, we should seek to worship in ways that endure, that transcend, and that speak to the timeless faith we have in the one eternal God.



## On Being Preachers, or Not

*by Joel Zartman*

*We are all of us preachers in private of public capacities. We have no sooner uttered words than we have given impulse to other people to look at the world, or some small part of it, in our way.*

*Thus caught up in a great web of inter-communication and inter-influence, we speak as rhetoricians affecting one another for good or ill. —Richard Weaver*

The first half of this quotation is about the inevitability of putting across our point of view. Even when we do things badly we show our point of view. We show it obscured by mists and noxious vapors, but that still shows what things look like when our point of view renders things vague. After we have been careful, and if we are honest about the matter we are treating, and have learned how to approach our argument in a good way, there is something we can never remove that stamps our way of seeing things on what we say. This interesting effect is observable on several levels. We may compare ourselves among our closest friends and find the differences in personalities. We may compare ourselves to a larger circle of people who agree with us but are not continually with us and we see how much regular conversation influences groups within groups. We might compare across the ages and when we achieve sufficient distance I have no doubt that we will be able to notice how much all of us sound like our contemporaries, and where we differ from people we agree with from other ages. We put across a point of view.

The good thing is that we don't have to set out to do this, we will. There is no need to be didactic or preachy or concerned (in the style of the busybody) to make sure our point of view is there. The quotation may be taken to say that we should be concerned about how we say things because we affect each other thereby, but it doesn't have to be. I think that Weaver is talking about the inevitable influence that results from communicating, whether our ability is superior or inferior. Language naturally carries a tendency which serves to reveal the character of the speaker. So Weaver believes that language is made to display character, thus showing how important is a proper point of view, the soul from which our communications originate, the heart from whose abundance the mouth speaks. This is not to say that we shouldn't polish our skills. We ought to. What it means, however, is that you can't polish away the flaws of your character by efforts to improve the way you speak. It is like putting on makeup. The woman is still ugly underneath, and now she also looks artificial. Well, perhaps the illustration is drastic when applied to language. Nevertheless, you reveal your character every time you speak. In fact, polishing your skills will only serve to make your point of view all the more clear, which only underscores how much more important the underlying character is.

H. L. Mencken made a point of saying that none of his writing was done with a view to helping or saving anybody. He wrote for the joy of it. I like Mencken very much. Some might find it troubling that Mencken didn't want to help or save anybody. I don't think it is. In fact, I think Mencken's way is often better.

Mencken liked to stir things up and even to throw gasoline onto the flames. He hated pretenders and frauds and lived to expose them. He exposed them gleefully and with persistence that bordered on abandon. But whatever else Mencken did, he never lost the power to criticize well. Perhaps as I read more I will find more, but I haven't found him taking cheap shots or making unpersuasive arguments. There is a core of honesty to what Mencken says, and an

admiration for quality that is unmistakable. Character is the way we measure the quality of a soul, and that sort of quality was something Mencken admired a great deal.

Mencken was not concerned to preach or teach anything, what he was concerned about was to exercise good judgment. He was an author and editor all his life. He was an editor because of his ability to exercise good judgment. He was an author of book reviews for twenty-five years because of his ability to exercise good judgment. He was also an author of a great many essays and articles expressing his opinions, which were solicited all his life. Mencken was a fallible human. He was not a Christian. He was in many ways not admirable. Certainly there are things about his judgment we could find fault with. There are things about his underlying attitudes and prejudices we would object to. But in my brief acquaintance with the fellow, I have found him exercising good judgment more often than not. This, I think, is a remarkable achievement. And this is how he taught. This is how he preached. Mencken fits the quotation from Weaver. He exercises an influence, and I think there is a great deal of good in it.

Evelyn Waugh's ability to tolerate vicious humor extends a little way past my ability, but not too much. I sometimes wonder if he doesn't make the world as he would like it, rather than dealing with the world as it is. There are so many pathetic and ridiculous characters in some of Waugh's novels that I wonder if he can bring his point of view to bear on the actual state of affairs. But some events that transpired during the week leading up to Christmas involving the indignation of parties criticized and the abject responses they offered has gone a long way toward reconciling me with the world of Waugh. If you read Waugh, I urge you to make it to the end of the book so that you can see the overarching point emerge. He doesn't write long books, but he takes the whole book to build up to what he wants to say. What he wants to say has always been satisfying and good. It may seem to some that what he wants to say is bad, and that is why I say you should make it to the end of the book.

*Black Mischief* is the book in which Waugh displays his full horror at the decline of Christian civilization. He takes Basil Seal to depths that even such a character as Seal finds instructive. Seal is a character with whom Waugh can do a great deal, for Waugh is skillful and subtle. I will not give away what happens, but it is clear that Waugh wanted to put across a point of view that was full of horror. There is no hero in this story, only the anti-hero, the man who embodies the spirit of the age. Waugh's stories are usually about how people discover the importance of the permanent things, and turn toward them in the end. But in *Black Mischief* he shows what life becomes without the permanent things, and without the possibility of returning to them; and I do not exaggerate when I say that there is horror.

Waugh's way of writing is often called lapidary, which perhaps accounts for the shortness of his books. His point is made precisely too. I don't think he works hard at persuading anybody. What he works at is doing what he's doing well. You don't have lapidary prose unless you have good critical faculties. He makes his point delicately and exactly. He makes his point so delicately and exactly, in fact, that he seems indifferent to whether his point is taken. He does not run the risk of belaboring the point, ever.

I would recommend Waugh over Mencken at the end of the day. They were similar men in many ways. They can both have an influence on you for good. But the better influence is the influence of Waugh.

Since I am no Waugh, let me point out my point. The point that I want to make in this essay is that neither of these two were men accused of being concerned with a message. They

were more concerned with character. Their influence for good was as great as it was because of this. And this I find very interesting.



### **Afterglow: Some Remaining Testimonials**

Rev. Sodder saved me from untold misery and grief when he convicted me to use the KING JAMES BIBLE exclusively. Before I met Rev. Sodder, I thought nothing of using one of those other corrupt, perverted so-called translations. But HALLELUJAH! PRAISE GOD! Under Rev. Sodder's teaching I have now been set free to experience the blessings of the TRUE WORD OF GOD. I can still hear his words ringing in my ears: "Many of the new translations contain the letter "S" - the RSV, the NASB, the ESV. Watch out for that "S" - it's the HISS of the serpent!"

- Ima Dolt

Dr. Sodder is so SOLID and such a GODLY MAN! I can't wait to get his new schedule as soon as it comes out. I follow him to wherever he's speaking, and I order tapes of all his messages. I don't want to miss a single WORD of his ANOINTED PREACHING. And he's like so SOLID!

- Bim Beau



### **Did our Lord wear t-shirts? Some Exegesis**

*by A. Bloke (name changed to protect the guilty)*

I think the story of the woman caught in adultery is pretty plain. When she showed up wearing a t-shirt with a scarlet A on it, it is clear that our Lord was also wearing a t-shirt at the time. We are pretty sure that the pharisees were NOT wearing t-shirts because they considered t-shirts something for common people. And the pharisees thought they were above the common people. But the part of this inspired story that gives us irrefutable evidence that our Lord was wearing a t-shirt is the part where he writes on the dust. People who think highly of themselves don't stoop down and write in the dust anymore than they wear t-shirts. Besides that, had he been wearing a tie like the fundamentalists seem to think, he would have gotten it dusty, which makes that notion unlikely, bogus and unendurable. So it is pretty reasonable to suppose that he was wearing a t-shirt. But the clinching evidence is the fact that he was actually making t-shirt designs in the dust. What else would he be writing in the dust? Not treatises or philosophy. He was thinking of things that it would take courage to wear, simple and forthright slogans that would lovingly change the mind of the pharisees, like "Hell sucks" and "Heaven's all pimped out." So don't be a pharisee. Show your religion in public. Be real. Wear it on your clothes. Peace.