

Gaps for Wednesday: 7:30,  
8; 8:30; 11:30; 12; 12:30;  
1; 1:30; 2; 2:30; 3; 3:30;  
4:30; 5.

University of Notre Dame  
Religious Bulletin  
October 1, 1935

Prayers: deceased, Mrs.  
L. Gronwald, Godmother  
of Al Orzechowski '35.  
Grandfather, D. Balliet.

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"Back to Sin."

Mr. Paul Hutchinson, in October Scribner's, attempts to uncover--for Protestant ministers evidently--certain new trends in theology. His point seems to be that theology --or "the dominant religious ideas of any period" (most curious definition!)--follows the moods and experiences of the people of that period.

Seven years ago, in the good old Hoover regime, the American mood was optimistic. People in the pews were "debating inwardly on the relative merits of a new Packard or a Cadillac." The preacher who was up in theology knew his optimism, talked glowingly of a "kingdom of God" just around the corner.

Now things are different. Folks in the pews are "canvassing the relative discomforts of window jumping and monoxide poisoning." They are convinced of "vast, implacable, and inevitably victorious demonic forces." There is a "sense of some inward rottenness, some ineradicable weakness within men which makes it impossible for them to rise above immediate self-interest to those levels of renunciation and sacrifice on which a larger good might conceivably be gained." (Can it be that Protestants are groping for Confession and Communion, for the aids of a sacramental system of grace?)

The up-to-the-minute preacher, knowing the dominant ideas of this period, simply has to preach pessimism, or he won't be preaching theology, and he won't have a Chinaman's chance of landing such "intellectual" big fish as Ernest Hemingway, Eugene O'Neill, and T.S. Eliot.

In Catholic churches the pews are resting places where people sit to listen to the word of God. The pulpit is the rostrum from which the preacher preaches the word of God "in season and out of season." In periods of prosperity and optimism he often reminds people--after the example of the prophets, of Christ, and of St. Paul--of their weaknesses, of sin and its consequences.

He doesn't tell them, simply because they want to hear it, that they are beings "of infinite powers marching swiftly to the heights," for that is a lie or a false conception of human nature. And when a period of pessimism, like the depression, comes along, he doesn't try to convince his hearers that they are "defeated and pitiful victims" of "an inner, pervasive power of evil," because that, too, is a lie or a mistaken impression.

The Catholic preacher doesn't cock his ear to the pews for his theology but he takes it from Holy Scripture and Tradition according to the infallible interpretation of the Church. That is why you find no contradictions in Catholic theology. In matters of theology, the formula for Catholic preaching is this: from the Word of God to the pulpit, from the pulpit to the pews. Old-fashioned Protestants used to agree, in theory at least, that this should be the direction of religious truth.

But today evidently, some modern Protestants think that the pulpit is nothing but an echoing post of the "dominant ideas of the period." Theology for them starts in the pews, jumps to the pulpit, and finally lands within the pages of The Book.

After Protestant theology has voyaged, on the single question of sin, all the way from man's essential corruption to no corruption and back again to essential corruption, is it any wonder that the pews have taken over the formation of Protestant theology? Perhaps Protestant theologians, seeing the chaos in their man-made theology, may feel deeply the loss of their infallible guide. That realization would mean momentous progress in Protestant theology.

PRAYERS: Ill, sister and aunt of Bill Daniels (Morrissey); Sister Francis Joseph; friend of Dan Donovan (St. Edward's). Four special intentions.