

Welcome

to this first Issue of Affirmation & Critique

Who We Are

Affirmation & Critique is published by Living Stream Ministry, which primarily presents the writings of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee, two servants of our Lord Jesus Christ. In this journal we hope to continue the heritage of ministry that the Lord has delivered to the church through these two brothers, and indeed, through all their forbears. We believe that you will find our presentation both fully scriptural and highly spiritual. And perhaps these terms *scriptural* and *spiritual* tell it all. On the one hand, Christian truth takes the Bible as its center and circumference, as its content and limit. As Christians we are committed to a living faith in Christ the Word of God, and we believe that the Bible is the complete Word of God. We are grateful to the Father that He has sent to man not only Christ the Word but also the Bible as the Word of God. On the other hand, for Scripture to be truth, it must be infused with and borne by the Spirit of God, as the Lord has said, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth" (John 16:13, NRSV). So close is the relationship between the truth and the Spirit that here the Lord calls Him the Spirit of truth, and the apostle John plainly says that the Spirit is the truth (1 John 5:6). Hence, God, in sending the Word to man, provides also His Spirit as the inner, vital essence of the Scriptures, making it the eternal truth. We, as partakers of the divine truth, need both the Word without and the Spirit within. Christian truth, being both scriptural and spiritual in its most proper form, manifests then the whole being of God—it is from the Father; it embodies the Son, who is the Word of God; and it is constituted with the Spirit, who breathes into it its divine quality. It is the scriptural and spiritual truths of the Bible that we wish to affirm in this journal.

*God,
in sending
the Word to man,
provides also
His Spirit
as the inner,
vital essence of the
Scriptures,
making it
the eternal truth.*

In affirming the truth we are also compelled to critique the current situation in the church. In holding ourselves to a spiritual (as well as a scriptural) standard, we recognize that we will stir objections from many avenues of modern Christianity. That objections will surface is proof to us that there is room for critique, at least for critique of the spirituality of modern Christianity. We are certainly aware that to affirm what is proper requires us to criticize what is improper. And so we affirm, not by way of imagined superiority but by way of careful and full presentation of the truth; and so we critique, not by way of meanness and denigration but by way of earnest concern and exhortation. We leave it to you our readers to evaluate the success of our mission, begging you to carefully — and nobly — consider whether the things we present are true (cf. Acts 17:11).

What We Believe

Immediately our readers should ask, "What do these people believe?" This is a fair question, deserving a proper response. As Christians, we are, above all, believers. We believe in the Bible, in God, in Christ, in the Spirit, and in God's redemption and salvation. First, we believe that the Bible contains the completed divine revelation. All aspects of our faith are founded on the Bible and controlled by the Bible. We accept what the Bible says in full, from Genesis to Revelation, and we reject any thought of man that goes beyond what the Bible says. The Bible is the true and objective gift from God that offers to us His revelation concerning Himself, His full salvation, and His plan, or *economy*, for man. Because the Bible is the Word of God, we believe in its accuracy and maintain its infallibility. The major topic of the Bible is God, and God is the object of our faith. As Christians we strongly believe in the unique triune existence of God. Although it is beyond

our human comprehension, the Bible clearly shows that God is eternally uniquely one (1 Tim. 2:5) and yet distinctly three (Matt. 28:19). He is eternally the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. The three of the Divine Trinity are distinct but not separate.

As believers, we are called Christians because we are men and women of Christ. Christ is the most wonderful person in the universe, and we are joyfully called by His name. Christ is eternally God. In eternity past, before creation, He was God; He is God now; and He will be God forever. And yet one day He became a man, our Lord Jesus. Hence, Christ is both the complete God and the perfect man. Without abandoning His divinity, He was conceived in the womb of a human virgin, was born as a baby, lived a human life on earth, and died a vicarious and all-inclusive death on the cross, thereby accomplishing our redemption. But He did not remain in death. After three days He resurrected bodily, and He became a life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b). The power of His divinity swallowed up death, and His humanity was resurrected and glorified. Today He is both our Redeemer and our life. He has ascended to the heavens and is in glory, ever yet fully God but still fully man. As such, Christ is now the Author of our salvation and the Perfecter of our faith (Heb. 2:10; 12:2). He is seated in the heavens, carrying out His heavenly ministry and accomplishing God's economy (Acts 5:31; Heb. 8:1-2). We look to His imminent return, when He will come back with the kingdom of God and reign over the earth in the millennium (Rev. 1:7; 11:15; 20:6).

The third of the Trinity is the Spirit. As the Father is the source of the Divine Trinity, the Spirit is the consummation of the Divine Trinity. All that the Father has and is, is embodied in the Son; and all that the Son is, is realized as the Spirit. For this reason, He is called the Spirit of reality (John 15:26; 16:13; 1 John 5:6). The reality of what Christ is and even of what the Triune God is, is the Holy Spirit. This Holy Spirit carried out the incarnation of Christ (Luke 1:35; Matt. 1:18, 20). Because He bears to us the humanity, human living, and

death of Jesus, He is called the Spirit of Jesus (Acts 16:7); and because the divinity and resurrection of Christ are made real to us by Him, He is called the Spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:9). He is also called the Spirit of Jesus Christ, indicating that He is the source of the bountiful supply to the believers (Phil. 1:19). The Spirit of Jesus Christ is compounded with His humanity and death and with His divinity and resurrection. This Spirit is the Spirit of life and the indwelling Spirit (Rom. 8:2, 11). As the Lord Spirit, He transforms us by renewing us (2 Cor. 3:18; Titus 3:5). The all-inclusive Spirit is our holy anointing (2 Cor. 1:21; 1 John 2:20, 27), as typified by the compound ointment in Exodus 30:23-31. As such, He becomes a seal and a pledge to us (Eph. 1:13-14). Daily the Spirit comforts us as our Paraclete (John 14:16-17), supplies us in our Christian walk, and intercedes for us (Rom 8:4, 26). Such a Spirit was breathed into us as our life essentially (John 20:22) and was poured out upon us as power economically (Acts 2:1-4, 17). In the age of degeneration, this wonderful Spirit is intensified sevenfold as the seven Spirits of God (Rev. 1:4; 4:5; 5:6). Eventually, this intensified Spirit, as the consummation of the Triune God, becomes one with the redeemed, regenerated, renewed, transformed, and glorified church, which is His bride, for the eternal manifestation and expression of the Triune God in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 22:17).

The Triune God is indeed wonderful, but man falls far short of what God intended him to be and is therefore in need of His salvation. Man has fallen and is hopelessly lost in sin. Yet because of His great love for man, God in Christ came to redeem man to Himself. Formerly, man belonged to God; but through the fall of our first ancestors,

all our race was enslaved to the devil and to sin, and we came under the heavy demands of God's righteousness, holiness, and glory. We were absolutely unable to fulfill the requirements. But Christ fulfilled all the requirements through His death on the cross. This accomplished an eternal redemption for us, and this redemption is the base of God's full salvation. Because of Christ's death, God forgives sinners of their sins (Eph. 1:7), reconciles them, His enemies, to Himself (Rom. 5:10), and justifies them by making

The Triune God
is indeed wonderful,
but man falls far short of
what God intended him to be
and is therefore in need
of His salvation.
Based on Christ's redemption,
God regenerates the
redeemed with His Spirit
to consummate His salvation,
that they may become His children.

Christ their righteousness (Rom. 3:24; 1 Cor. 1:30). Based on Christ's redemption, God regenerates the redeemed with His Spirit (John 3:5-6) to consummate His salvation, that they may become His children (John 1:12-13). Now possessing God's life and nature, the believers enjoy a daily salvation in this age (Rom. 5:10; 1 Pet. 2:2; Phil. 2:12) and the eternal salvation (Heb. 5:9) in the coming age and in eternity. This salvation is a salvation in life (Rom. 5:10), not merely a salvation from eternal punishment. The life that we enjoy in this salvation is the Triune God Himself realized in Christ (1 John 5:20) as the eternal Spirit (Heb. 9:14). This is symbolized by the river of water of life, flowing in the New Jerusalem, and by the tree of life, growing in the river (Rev. 22:1-2), both of which are for the eternal life supply of all God's redeemed people. This is God's full, complete, and dynamic salvation. "So great a salvation" (Heb. 2:3)!

What We Offer

In *A&C* we hope to present a scriptural and spiritual view of the crucial truths of our Christian faith. Each issue will be primarily topical, with major articles focused on one particular truth or one aspect of a particular truth. Typically, we will have a major article that affirms the truth in focus and one that critiques the situation today among Christians. As need dictates, other major articles may appear to strengthen our affirmation or critique.

Our first issue is focused on the Divine Trinity. We intend it to be the first of three issues devoted to this most important of all truths of the Bible. In the first installment we wish to

The truth concerning the Trinity is taken for granted by a great number of the believers. For many it is sufficient simply to declare that God is triune, and little thought is given to what effect His being triune has on our relationship with Him.

particularly present an overview of this crucial truth. Our experience in discussing the Trinity with many Christians tells us that the truth concerning the Trinity is taken for granted by a great number of the believers. For many it is sufficient simply to declare that God is triune, and little thought is given to how He is triune—how He is one and how He is three—why He is triune, how His triuneness relates to His saving actions in Christ through the Spirit, and what effect His being triune has on our relationship with Him. In fact, many Christians have resolved not to delve into these matters at all but to limit themselves to the simple (albeit true) declarations of the creeds and councils, because God as triune is so ineffably mysterious. Sadly, however, human minds never truly limit themselves to simple formulations. Whether we are conscious of it or not, we all construct a "theology" of sorts out of what we have read in the Bible or heard in the church. Without delving into what God has already provided for us concerning the revelation of Himself, it is easy for us to be latently aberrant in our understanding and experience. Hence, we lead off this issue with a short exhortation for the believers to consider the Triune God in more than an axiomatic way.


Next, we offer two major articles affirming the truth of the Divine Trinity. The first examines the issue of how we can know the Triune God. What resources do we have and what are the proper ways to make use of these resources? These are, of course, divine provisions that fall broadly into the categories of the scriptural and the spiritual. But we feel that it is important to consciously and vigorously attend to these provisions, not allowing them to be taken for granted or nullified by the millennia of use and abuse that they have seen. Having laid a foundation for a detailed examination of the revelation of the Divine Trinity, we present the second major article, which affirms the scriptural view of the Trinity. It is unfortunate that many believers have not had the opportunity to review the data of the Bible concerning the Triune God. Perhaps they have a proper notion of the Trinity, but they are not adequately acquainted with the biblical facts that underpin their belief. The data of the Bible relative to the Trinity are surprising sometimes and force us to reconsider what we arrive at logically concerning God as triune. The second article presents the data and argues for an understanding of the Triune God that respects them rather than the logical structures we subconsciously create.

Our third major article addresses and critiques the ways that Christians mistakenly understand the Triune God. Because the truth of the Trinity is dismissed by many as too esoteric, we observe that many Christians are latently aberrant in their understanding. Of course, as Solomon says, "There is nothing new under the sun" (Eccl. 1:9), and modern aberrancies generally repeat ancient heresies. There are only so many ways you can deviate when it comes to the Triune God. We review these aberrancies and offer arguments against them, both old and new.

In each issue, besides major articles, we will also have some regular departments. When feasible, the departments will follow the issue topic. "The Straight Cut" will present an issue in the Scriptures according to the Scriptures. Here we attempt to let the issue say what it has to say about itself from the text of the Bible alone. For example, the overwhelming majority of Christians believe that heaven will be our eternal dwelling place—except us. The fact of the matter is, the Bible does not say that we will dwell with God in heaven for eternity. Among the editorial staff of this journal, we call this all-pervasive mistake "the leaven of heaven." (We intend to make this clear, though not in this first issue—you'll just have to wait). In this issue of "The Straight Cut," having noticed a propensity to explain away troubling passages concerning the Trinity, we suggest that such a practice is not necessary, illustrating our suggestion with reference to three specific passages. In "Glossa" we will look at a topic from a linguistic perspective, basing our presentation on the original Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic of the Scriptures. In this first issue, we offer "The Trinity and the Prepositions." Periodically, we will take a look back at the history of the Christian thought in "Milestones." Primarily, this will be a report on how the church dealt with vital issues during its long history, though in some cases we may use "Milestones" to defend our position on a particular topic. We will also offer a review of books in each issue. The books we will consider may be recent and of current interest, but frequently we will review books that have had lasting interest or import. Not all our reviews will be positive, but neither will we be seeking to find fault alone; we will be recommending books which we feel offer—predictably—scriptural and spiritual presentations of the truth of Christian practice. In "Misaimings" we will present short summaries of key points of the truth in contrast to teachings that, while prevalent, nevertheless miss the mark of the truth. In each issue we hope to present a hymn or two that

Our prayer is that this journal will increase our appreciation, enjoyment, and participation in Christ, and will bring us all closer to the oneness of the faith.

relate to the topic of the issue. The hymns of the believers throughout the ages provide a wealth of material that enhances not only our worship to God but also our understanding and internalizing of the truth. To this end, we will attempt to explicate the hymns we present in a way that will nourish, refresh, and enlighten. The final feature of every issue will be an essay that brings all of the relevant points of the topic issue together in "The Crystallization." In future issues we will include letters from our readers—both positive and negative. We welcome letters and intend to publish those that are signed, that are well-reasoned, and that demonstrate proper respect and decorum.

We hope that you will enjoy reading *A&C* as much as we enjoy writing and publishing it. We believe that at the base of our endeavor is a common ground with you our reader: We hold as common our portion in Christ and we genuinely desire to come to the full knowledge of the truth, as we are certain you are. Our prayer is that this journal will increase our appreciation, enjoyment, and participation in Christ, and will bring us all closer to the oneness of the faith. To God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen. 

An Invitation

We recognize that some of our readers may wish to engage in a constructive dialogue in response to our affirmation and critique. We invite, therefore, reasonable, article-length responses to our presentations (3000 words or less). We welcome, and will provide space for, articles that present alternative scholarly views on the issues we have addressed. These will appear in an occasional department called "Counterpoint." While we reserve our editorial privilege to accept or reject submissions, the submissions we print will bear their original content. Submissions to "Counterpoint" will be accepted if they are thoughtful and delivered in a proper spirit. Only signed contributions will be accepted. Needless to say, we will offer our further comments on the points raised by these guest authors. On matters of great import we welcome an ongoing exchange in print.

Submissions should be sent to *Affirmation & Critique*, P.O. Box 2032, Anaheim, CA, 92814-0121. All submissions should be sent both in printed form and on MS-DOS diskette, to facilitate its review and its formatting and typesetting, should it be accepted for inclusion in this journal. Submissions will not be returned, and must not have appeared previously in print. Upon selection for inclusion, the author(s) will be notified.