THE PRINCETON SEMINARY BULLETIN

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Editorial

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Ronald C. White, Jr., Editor J. J. M. Roberts, Book Review Editor

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Emile Cailliet: Christian Centurion

by Richard J. Oman

An alumnus of Macalester College, the University of Minnesota, Princeton Theological Seminary, and New College, Edinburgh, Dr. Richard J. Oman is currently the Howard C. Scharfe Professor of Homiletics and Interim Director of the D.Min. Program at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. He is the author of several articles and is a member of the Academy of Homiletics and the North American Academy of Liturgy. While at Princeton, Dr. Oman served as Dr. Cailliet's Teaching Fellow, and later spent three years as his staff instructor.

The eminent writer and teacher, Emile Cailliet, has left the Church and the world a legacy of practical, inspirational, and learned books. While he was perhaps best known for his authoritative Pascalian studies, his mind and pen roamed the Christian landscape of reality from science to literature, from philosophy to theology.

Dr. Cailliet was born at Dampierre (Marne), France, on December 17, 1894. Following service on the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania (1926-31), he held professorships at Scripps College and the Claremont Graduate School, Claremont, California (1931-41); the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, University of Pennsylvania (1941-45); Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut (1945-47); and at Princeton Theological Seminary (1948-59), where he was Stuart Professor of Christian Philosophy.

A layman, Dr. Cailliet had pursued advanced studies in anthropology and philosophy, and received doctorates from both the Université de Montpellier (1926) and the Université de Strasbourg (1938). He died in Santa Monica, California, on June 4, 1981.

It was my privilege to be his student, colleague, and friend for over thirty years. Without question he was the one person who held the greatest influence over my own life, shaping my thinking and ministry. The debt I owe this marvelous and unique man can never be measured or weighed in merely human terms.

Dr. Cailliet had described the "centurion type of Christian" as a Christian with but one concern—"to do the Lord's will in joy and simplicity of heart. . . . It is a life of love and power, because it is a completely surrendered life, and therefore a life in line with the will of God. As such it abides forever" (*The Beginning of Wisdom* [New York: Fleming H. Revell, Co., 1947], p. 182. Cf. *Journey Into Light* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Co., 1968], p. 98). No better words could depict the life journey of this contemporary pilgrim.

Following in the footsteps of his beloved Blaise Pascal, Cailliet, too, wrestled with such questions as the nature of man, the source of authority in religion, the seeming hiddenness of God, the relation between faith and reason. In both prophetic and practical ways, he spoke to many of the issues which plague and perplex the lives of countless moderns, both within and without the Church.

In a world increasingly broken and fragmented, Cailliet sought to bring to-

gether a viewpoint which sees life as a whole. Three examples serve to illustrate his search for meaning.

I

Philosophy in Relation to Theology

Every human being is, in fact, a philosopher. If we think of philosophy as a meditation upon life, then each person has some outlook on life which motivates us whether we realize it or not.

The question is: Are we *Christian* philosophers? Cailliet observed that "Christian philosophy appears whenever and wherever a Christian begins to think. The possible alternatives to this could only be either a thinker who was not a Christian at all, or a Christian who did not think at all. And then it should be of uttermost concern to the Church to have people think as Christians, and to see to it that Christians actually think, and do think as Christians" (*The Christian Approach to Culture* [Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1953], p. 59).

This means that there is a Christian view of nature, a Christian outlook on history, a Christian approach to psychology—and "a Christian epistemology preparing the way for constructive Christian metaphysics" (Ibid., p. 77).

Because, as Cailliet observed, philosophers are impatient by nature, in their anxiety to solve problems they prematurely cease debate, and are often tempted to fill in the unknown by "spinning out of their mind some ontological entity" (Ibid., p. 177).

Theology Cailliet defined as "that scientific discipline which concerns itself with the human aspects of both general and special revelation" (Ibid., p. 262). Theology deals with the theme of the light going out into the world, while Christian philosophy deals with the theme of the world going to the light. Philosophy in this sense is the servant of theology, hopefully a helpful one.

In examining the long history of the relationship between philosophy and theology, Dr. Cailliet singled out Immanuel Kant and Karl Barth as being representative of influential thinkers in the making of the modern religious mind.

Kant's views stand like pyramids on our horizon, casting their shadows upon all our thinking. Much of our philosophical and theological reflection remains a running commentary on Kant. He is a great divider in the history of human thought, for better or for worse.

The point of departure for Kant was the knowing mind. When we look at the universe or ourselves or think of God, what we are doing in fact is putting with our minds an imprint of the reality we perceive. We never get to know things as they are; higher realities are definitely beyond our reach. Metaphysics are ultimately impossible. In placing such a ceiling on our thinking, and making us prisoner of our own minds, no wonder that some called Kant "the greatest disaster that ever happened in philosophy."

But if we live in the long shadow of Kant, the atmosphere for philosophy was further clouded by the work of Karl Barth. "No one has ever challenged the relevance, validity, and even the advisability of Christian philosophy as has Karl Barth in our day" (Ibid., p. 50). He would have theologians turn away from any philosophical approach to theology. There is no need to study philosophy, for these are the arguments of a darkened mind.

Cailliet acknowledged that we owe an eternal debt to Barth for restoring the perspective that true thinking must begin with God—His sovereignty, His Word. But Barth intervened at a time of tremendous crisis, and as is often the case, like a pendulum. he went to extremes. The image of God was not to be found in persons at all.

For Cailliet, the ultimate question became: In our thinking should we give priority to what is, *or* to our knowledge of it? The answer to this particular question holds the key to theology and philosophy. The "or" part of the question is the special burden of modern philosophy.

It was Augustine who had laid his finger on what Cailliet felt was the greatest truth of Christian philosophy: *Nostra Philosophia*. "I believe so that I may understand"—this insight points to nothing short of a scriptural notion of truth: when everything has been said and done, truth proceeds from the trustworthiness and reliability of God. To Augustine, the way to understand the world of nature and of man is to view it in the light of general revelation (God-bathed) as a means of leading to special revelation; to view time as duration with meaning under God. Cailliet later confessed that he had lost interest in the distinction between general and special revelation—for where, indeed, should the dividing line be drawn? Better that the view of Christian philosophy be that of a seamless robe—i.e., be seen as a whole.

Cailliet's judgment of what he learned from Pascal is germane to the issue: "That Christianity is essentially a matter of commitment; that theology is a matter of authority; and that in the last analysis the supreme authority in theology is that of the Incarnate Son, the Supernatural Christ" (*Pascal: Genius in the Light of Scripture* [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1945], p. 363).

II
Science and Religion

Cailliet was very much at home in the arenas of scientific inquiry. In his writings he sought to provide the world view suggested by science in our day, against the broad picture of the rise of scientific research as a background, with special attention to the present day need for a Christian recovery of a sense of purpose.

While inspired by a candid intellectual honesty, at the same time Dr. Cailliet approached the question of a philosophy of science in a constant awareness that by birth and by right our Reformed tradition is called upon to develop a good-neighbor policy with the new science. In so doing without appeasement or compromise, Cailliet was convinced that the churches and institutions of learning issuing from the Reformation would keep in touch with the world which is their mission field. They would be in a better position to speak to the condition of contemporary men and women. By the same token theology and Christian philosophy would gather from scholars of science a great deal of information, with reference to both methods and subject matter, that would prove useful at a time when "reconstruction" is the order of the day.

A word used often by Cailliet was "mystery." A mystery, as he saw it, was an invitation to pilgrimage—to study, explore, search for meaning—and should never be allowed to degenerate into a mere problem.

Such an approach to mystery he attested to be the attitude of the true scientist, "this expectant faith, this spirit of submission to fact coupled with a readiness to proceed upon the resulting situation, however, perplexing it may be" (*Journey Into Light*, p. 51). Such an attitude was bound to "expose the deception of all attempts on the part of New Testament Christianity to save its life by sacrificing its objectivity, or even satisfy its imagination at the expense of a committed intellect" (Ibid., p. 49).

What makes for the greatness of the modern scientific method at the same time proves its stumbling block! Science today is characterized by brilliancy of achievement *and* obscurity of understanding. The consequence of all this is that the scientist is lost in a maze of facts—and facts need interpretation.

Can science produce the necessary faith principle? Cailliet was aware of two ever-present dangers in approaching this question. One was the danger of reductionism, always evident in our age of specialization. The second danger was the false faith-principle of ideology. Ideologies are subtle and dangerous because as a rule they appear at the apex of a scientific or philosophical quest, and become in fact substitute religions.

To Cailliet the universe of science is *not* the universe of creation. The confusion between these two is responsible for a great deal of our trouble. We are not observing two universes on the same scale. It is the scale of observation which creates phenomena.

Thus, the universe of science may be seen as a construction of the human mind, and the question becomes, how much does this construction have to do with the actual world of God's creation? Cailliet believed there was no basic conflict between science (construction) and religion (interpretation), that theology should not be afraid of science *per se*, and that when the scientist recovers his/her humanity, it makes all the difference whether the scientist is a Christian or not.

When the core of truth touches human situations, it immediately raises questions of a scientific nature. The key to keeping the truth whole is to be found in the distinction between the "actual world of creation" and the "construction" which the scientist puts upon investigation. The former is the perennial proclamation; the latter, the hierarchy of sciences.

Theology, in the realm of the sciences can do much for the scientist as a scientist and as a person: it can demonstrate how the fact of "construction" needs, and actually calls for, a "higher."

Sciences, as constructions, are always changing. Reality (truth) is rooted in the very nature of the Divine: God's reliability.

III

Presence and Purpose In the Midst of Solitude

Following his retirement from active teaching in 1959, Dr. Cailliet devoted a considerable amount of his thinking and writing to one of the most pressing issues of modern life, loneliness—and its Christian antithesis, a transfigured solitariness. Intimations of this concern, of course, are scattered throughout many of his earlier works, but his retirement years became the crucible for reflective meditation, culminating in his volume, *Alone At High Noon* (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1971).

"Thou, O Lord, hast made me powerful and solitary." These words serve

as pointers to the nature of the life of a servant of God. Such a life is one of power and one of solitude. Solitude itself is a state of mind and of soul.

To Cailliet, there was a world of difference between being alone and being solitary. While being alone or living alone is neither good nor bad in itself, aloneness can become painful, even violent. Like a disease, it threatens to invade and destroy our true self. "A divided soul soon turns into a lonely soul . . ." (Ibid., p. 35).

The answer to such an enervating possibility? To capture a sense of the Presence of God and to recover a sense of cosmic Purpose in life.

In words reminiscent of Pascal's great "Fire in the Night" experience, Cailliet pointed to his first encounter with a Bible at the age of twenty-three, his plunge into its depths, and his emerging from beyond the words to the Word, the Living Word, Jesus Christ. It was this Christ who now became alive to him. This event proved to be his initiation to "the notion of Presence which later would prove crucial to my theological thinking" (*Journey Into Light*, p. 18).

Note that Cailliet here is not talking about the *existence* of God—a question he called "a metaphysical matter ultimately beyond verification" (Ibid., p. 88). The Presence refers to the indwelling of the spirit of the living Christ in power. It is that indwelling Presence which brings certitude to the believer, "certitude" being that which endures, things which do not change, the abiding things of God. Such a person in the midst of solitude finds oneself moving in the direction of both sanctity, which is health of spirit, and sanity, which is health of intellect.

Those who would know with certitude are persons in position to *do* the truth—which brings Cailliet to the problems involved in the recovery of a sense of purpose in life. Lack of purpose according to him is at the root of solitude. How many persons, for example, use the phrase "killing time" as evidence of the fact of a loss of purpose? If we are to reach any meaningful conclusion regarding the meaning of solitude, it is by coming to grips with the issue of Cosmic Purpose. Here is the clue to the solitary life. Authenticity in solitude demands the sense of reality which purpose makes possible.

As the Presence enters the human soul, so the Promethean departs, the Promethean being that which is finally responsible for the loss of purpose in every being.

Personality as the crown of life finds its fulfillment, receives its full stature, when a person becomes an act of God. Such a person truly learns to live and savor life at its fullest. And physical death—when it comes—may be compared to the blinking of the eye which does not interrupt the vision. So it was, I believe, for this Christian centurion, Emile Cailliet.