

The High Calling

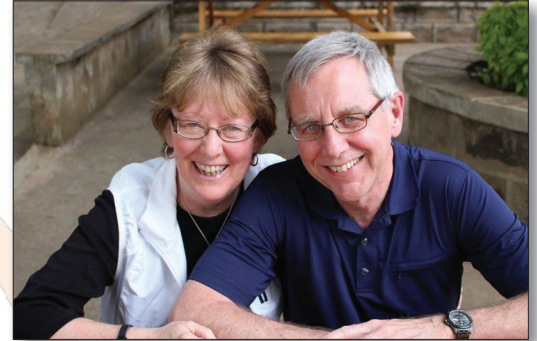
a bimonthly publication of The Francis Asbury Society

Pulpit Power

By Stan Key

During my life as a pastor, one of the churches I led found itself in a building campaign. It is not often one has the privilege of designing worship space and I knew we on the Building Committee needed divine wisdom. Pews or chairs? Sloped or level floor? One big screen or two smaller ones? Would there be windows? Stained glass? A cross? A place to kneel? An organ? One of the most passionate conversations concerned the pulpit. Would it be a divided chancel or a central pulpit? Would it be a large and prominent piece of solid furniture or a small, portable lectern? As Senior Pastor, I convinced the committee that “we” wanted a large wooden pulpit in the very center of the platform. “Preaching the Word is central to everything we do,” I explained. “Our worship space needs to emphasize this!”

When we moved away from that congregation a decade later, I learned that after my departure, the pulpit had been removed and replaced with a moveable music stand. The drum set was now the central reality on the platform.



Perhaps such matters merely reflect the practical realities of contemporary worship. Perhaps these decisions are only symbolic and have nothing to do with what is going on in the heart. Maybe. But symbols *are* important! Though I neither want to assume that I know why others make decisions nor do I mean to judge their hearts, I do

Continued on page 5

Beware of False Prophets

By John Wesley



John Wesley (1703–1791) devoted his life to caring for the sheep of God’s pasture. He worked as one who knew he would one day give an account (Heb. 13:17). Few things troubled Wesley more than leaders in the church who, rather than caring for the flock, actually harmed them! Included in his *52 Standard Sermons*[†] was a message based on Matt. 7:15–20 whose purpose was to warn against the danger of false prophets. The following is an abridgement of Sermon XII and has been slightly modified to make it more understandable to modern readers.

To urge mankind to enter at the narrow gate that leads to life, God has sent prophets to point the way. But what if the watchmen themselves fall into the snare against which they are sent to warn others? What if the prophets prophesy falsely? What if the spokesmen for God are actually exhorting men and women to walk in the broad way that leads to destruction? How terrible it is when the ambassadors of God turn into agents for the devil! When those commissioned to teach the way to heaven do in fact teach the way to hell! Little wonder that Jesus cautions his followers with these words:

[†] John Wesley. *Beware of False Prophets*. Vol. 1 of *Sermons on Several Occasions*. (London: Baker, 1978), 413. Originally published in 1771.-

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves” (Matt. 7:15).

Who are these false prophets?

By “prophets” here are meant, not those who foretell things to come but those who speak in the name of the Lord, those men who profess to be sent from God and to teach others the way to heaven. A prophet is therefore someone who teaches a path that supposedly leads to heaven. Jesus had just explained that “the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction” (Matt. 7:13) so we can be sure that anyone who teaches men to walk in a broad way that many walk in, is, in fact, a false prophet. The Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7) makes clear that the way to heaven is the way of lowliness, mourning, meekness, holy desire, love of God and neighbor, doing good, and suffering for Christ’s sake. Therefore, they are false prophets who teach, as the way to heaven, any other way than this.

If it be asked, “But who today teaches such things?” I answer: “Ten thousand wise and honorable men; even those, of whatever denomination, who encourage the proud, the trifler, the lover of this world, the man of pleasure, the unjust or unkind, the careless, the useless, and the one who has never been persecuted

Continued on page 4

The Prayer of a Minor Prophet

By A. W. Tozer



Shortly after his ordination to ministry, A. W. Tozer (1897–1963) withdrew to a quiet place and wrote down a prayer that became his covenant with God. Throughout his life he renewed this covenant and carried it with him always. Late in his ministry he shared it with a wider public by printing it in the magazine *The Alliance Witness*. Humbly recognizing himself as a “minor prophet,” the prayer reveals the heartbeat of the kind of man that God can use greatly. †

Lord, I have heard your voice and was afraid. You have called me to an awesome task in a grave and perilous hour. You are about to shake all nations and the earth and also heaven that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. O Lord, my Lord, you have stooped to honor me to be your servant. No man takes this honor upon himself save he that is called of God as was Aaron. You have ordained me, your messenger to them that are stubborn of heart and hard of hearing. They have rejected you, the Master, and it is not to be expected that they will receive me, the servant.

My God, I shall not waste time deploring my weakness nor my unfittedness for the work. The responsibility is not mine, but yours. You have said, “I knew you—I ordained you—I sanctified you,” and you have also said, “You shalt go to all that I shall send you, and whatsoever I command you, you shalt speak.” Who am I to argue with you or to call into question your sovereign choice? The decision is not mine, but yours. So be it, Lord. Your will, not mine, be done.

Well do I know, O God of the prophets and the apostles, that as long as I honor you, you will honor me. Help me, therefore, to take this solemn vow to honor you in all my future life and labors—whether by gain or by loss, by life or by death—and then to keep that vow unbroken while I live.

It is time, O God, for you to work, for the enemy has entered into your pastures, and the sheep are torn and scattered. False shepherds abound who deny the danger

† A.W. Tozer. *Voice of a Prophet: Who Speaks for God? Compiled and edited by James L. Snyder. (Minneapolis: Bethany, 2014), 197. The text has been slightly modified to make it more understandable for modern readers.*

and laugh at the perils which surround your flock. The sheep are deceived by these hirelings and follow them with touching loyalty while the wolf closes in to kill and destroy. I beseech you, give me sharp eyes to detect the presence of the enemy; give me understanding to see, and courage to faithfully report what I see. Make my voice so like your own that even the sick sheep will recognize it and follow you.

Lord Jesus, I come to you for spiritual preparation. Lay your hand upon me. Anoint me with the oil of the New Testament prophet. Forbid that I should become a religious scribe and thus lose my prophetic calling.

Save me from the curse that lies dark across the modern clergy: the curse of compromise, of imitation, of professionalism. Save me from the error of judging a church by its size, its popularity or the amount of its yearly offering. Help me to remember that I am a prophet—not a promoter, not a religious manager, but a prophet. Let me never become a slave to crowds. Heal my soul of carnal ambitions and deliver me from the itch for publicity.

Save me from bondage to things. Let me not waste my days puttering around the house. Lay your terror upon me, O God, and drive me to the place of prayer where I may wrestle with principalities and powers and the rulers of the darkness of this world. Deliver me from overeating and late sleeping. Teach me self-discipline that I may be a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

I accept hard work and small rewards in this life. I ask for no easy place. I shall try to be blind to the little ways that could make life easier. If others seek the smoother path, I shall try to take the hard way without judging them too harshly. I shall expect opposition and try to take it quietly when it comes. Or if, as sometimes falls out to your servants, I should have grateful gifts pressed upon me by your kindly people, stand by me then and save me from the blight that often follows. Teach me to use whatever I receive in such manner that will not injure my soul nor diminish my spiritual power. And if, in your permissive providence, honor should come to me from your church, let me not forget in that hour that I am unworthy of

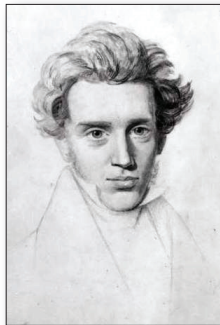


<http://ourabbjesus.com/articles/what-does-the-word-christ-actually-mean/>

Continued on page 7

The Problem Is in the Pews as Well as the Pulpit

A Parable by Soren Kierkegaard



Soren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) was a Danish philosopher, theologian, and social observer. He was a fierce critic of the established state church in Denmark, exposing the hypocrisy of those who profess to believe the gospel but don't live by its precepts. Some of his most insightful writings made use of irony, metaphor and parables.[†]

Imagine that geese could talk—and that they had planned things in such a way that they, too, had their divine worship services. Every Sunday they gathered together and a goose preached. The gist of the sermon was as follows: “What a high destiny geese have, to what a high goal the creator”—and every time this word was mentioned the geese curtsied and the ganders bowed their heads—”had appointed geese. With the help of their wings they could fly away to distant regions, blessed regions, where they really had their homes, for here they were but alien sojourners.”

It was this way every Sunday. Afterwards, the assembly dispersed and each one waddled home to his family. And so to church again next Sunday, and then home again—and that was the end of it. They flourished and grew fat, became plump and delicate, were eaten on St. Martin's Eve—and that was the end of it.

“...Pray that I may declare [the Gospel] fearlessly, as I should.”

—Paul, Ephesians 6:20

Yes, that was the end of it. Although the Sunday discourse was so very lofty, on Monday the geese would discuss with each other what had happened to the goose who had wanted really to use his wings according to the high goal set before it—what happened to it, what horrors it had to endure. Of course the geese would not talk about it on Sunday; that, after all, was not appropriate. Such talk would make a fool of God and of themselves.

Still, there were a few individual geese among them who looked poorly and grew thin. The other geese said among themselves: “There you see what happens when you take seriously this business of wanting to fly. Because they harbor the idea of wanting to fly, they get thin and do not prosper, do not have God's grace as we have it, and become plump, fat, and delicate. For by the grace of God one becomes plump, fat, and delicate.”

[†] Taken from *Provocations: Spiritual Writings of Kierkegaard* (Farmington, PA: The Plough Publishing House, 1999), 412–413.



So it is with our Christian worship services. We, too, have wings, we have imagination, intended to help us actually rise aloft. But we play, allow our imagination to amuse itself in an hour of Sunday daydreaming. In reality, however, we stay right where we are—and on Monday regard it as proof that God's grace gets us plump, fat, delicate. That is, we accumulate money, get to be a somebody in the world, beget children, become successful, and so forth. And those who actually get involved with God and who therefore suffer and have torments, troubles, and grief, of these we say: Here is proof that they do not have the grace of God.

The Purpose of Preaching

The goal of preaching is not just to impart information but rather to communicate a sense of God's presence. An unknown writer has expressed the impact a certain preacher had on him in the following poem:

For me 'twas not the truth you taught
To you so clear to me so dim
But when you came to me you brought
A sense of Him.

And from your eyes He beckons me
And from your lips His truth is shed
'Till I lose sight of you and see
The Christ instead.

for righteousness' sake, to imagine he is in the way to heaven. These are false prophets in the truest sense of the term. These are traitors to both God and man. These are sons of Satan. They are far worse than ordinary cut-throats because they murder the souls of men."

What does a false prophet look like?

But do these false prophets look like false prophets? By no means! If they did, they would lose their ability to destroy. You would take alarm and flee for your life. Rather, they are masters of disguise. They come to you "in sheep's clothing." In other words, they come to you with an appearance of harmlessness. They seem to be watching out for your soul and helping you to find the path of eternal life. They have the appearance of religion and seem to be zealous for God. Above all, they come with an appearance of love.

How can we recognize a false prophet from a true prophet?

Our Lord knew how difficult it can be to discern truth from error. Therefore, he gave a short and simple rule that can be easily applied in every situation: "You shall know them by their fruits" (7:16). First of all, we need to ask: What are the fruits of their teaching as to themselves? What effect has it had upon their own lives? Are they holy and blameless in all things? Do they have the mind of Christ? Are they meek, lowly, patient, lovers of God and man, and zealous for good works? Secondly, we need to ask: What are the fruits of their teaching as to their hearers? Do their hearers have the mind of Christ? Do they walk as Christ walked? If so, it is a manifest proof that these are true prophets, teachers sent by God. But if not, it is a manifest proof that they are false prophets; God has not sent them.

But perhaps you will ask, "But what if my pastor is a false prophet? Ought I not, then, to leave my church immediately?" This is a weighty question and deserves the deepest consideration. For many years I was almost afraid to speak at all concerning it. But Jesus' words in another Scripture add further light on the matter. "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, so practice and observe whatever they tell you – but not what they do. For they preach, but do not practice" (Matt. 23:2–3). Now these were clearly false prophets and Jesus is warning his follows to beware of them. Yet he does not forbid them to hear even these preachers. Furthermore, unto

false prophets is frequently committed (O grief to speak it!) the administration of the sacraments. To direct men, therefore, not to hear them, would be, in effect, to cut them off from the ordinances of God. But this we dare not do, considering the validity of the ordinance does not depend on the goodness of him that administers but on the faithfulness of Him that ordained it!

Therefore, all I can say on the matter is this: in your particular situation, wait upon God in humble and earnest prayer, and then act according to the best light you have. Do what you are persuaded will be best for your spiritual advantage. If hearing these pastors hurts your soul, then hear them not. Leave quietly and find a true prophet who can nourish your soul. On the other hand, if it does not harm your soul, then remain where you are. But take heed how you listen! Hear with fear and trembling lest you too should be deceived. Receive nothing until you have first weighed it in the balance of God's truth. Believe nothing these prophets say until you have confirmed it by Holy Scripture.



In closing, I feel constrained to address a few plain words to those of whom I have been speaking. O you false prophets, O you dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! How long will you tell lies in the name of the Lord? How long will you pervert the truth, calling darkness light and light darkness? How long will you teach the way of death and call it the way of life? How long will you deliver to Satan the souls whom you profess to bring to

God? Woe to you, you blind leaders of the blind! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. You neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in. Those seeking to enter by the narrow gate you call back into the broad road that leads to hell. Those who hunger and thirst after righteousness you warn not to be too fanatical. You are causing seekers after God to perish on the very threshold of salvation! They will die in their iniquity, but their blood God will require at your hands! Take warning from Him in whose name you speak: "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (7:19). Stop now before it is too late. Don't damn yourselves as well as those who hear you. Humble yourselves and cry out to God for mercy. There is still time for Him to bring even your souls to life and give you the gift of faith, the faith that works by love. Then by your fruits people will know that you are a true prophet of the Lord. And when you have turned many into the way of righteousness, you will shine like stars forever and ever!

Classic Text on Pastoral Care (Acts 20:17–38)

By Richard Baxter



http://www.tracts.ukgo.com/richard_baxter.htm

Richard Baxter (1615–1691) is regarded as one of the outstanding writers on pastoral theology in the Western world. Baxter’s book *The Reformed Pastor*[†] is a study of Paul’s farewell discourse to the Ephesians elders (Acts 20:17–38). Still today the book deserves to be read by anyone who seriously aspires to care for the flock of God. Near the end of the book, Baxter summarizes the pastoral principles found in Paul’s words directed to those who would be leaders in the church.

Fellow pastors, let’s set before us the pattern in our text (Acts 20:17–38) and thus learn our duty. O what a lesson is here before us! I think this one speech of Paul is more worthy of a year’s study, than most things seminary students spend their time upon. O brethren! Write it on your study doors and spell it in capital letters, so that this text may be ever before your eyes. Could we but learn well two or three lines of it, what preachers should we be!

1. Our general business: “...serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials...” (v. 19).

[†] Richard Baxter. *The Reformed Pastor*. Edited by William Brown. (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1656), 228–30. This text has been slightly modified and updated to fit the purposes of this article.

2. Our special work: “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God...” (v. 28).
3. Our doctrine: “...testifying of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 21).
4. The place and manner of teaching: “...teaching in public and from house to house...” (v. 20).
5. The pastor’s diligence, earnestness and affection: “...for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears” (v. 31).



6. The pastor’s faithful-ness: “...I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable... I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God” (vv. 20, 27).

7. The pastor’s absence of selfish ambition and self-denial for the sake of the Gospel: “I coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. In all things I have shown you

that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus,

Continued on page 7

Pulpit Power continued from page 1

want to raise the question: What is central in worship? Around what hub will we organize our church’s identity and purpose?

Ever since Luther reformed the church by calling us back to Scripture *alone*, Protestants have instinctively understood that the proclamation of the Word of God is the central event in worship. Yet today, this understanding of what happens during a church service seems to be slipping away. Replaced in some churches by “worship” (usually meaning music and singing) and in other churches by the Eucharist, those who attend services in these kinds of churches often leave having only tipped their hats to the place of God’s Word.

This issue of *The High Calling* is dedicated to the power of the pulpit. No single reality has a greater potential

for influencing our nation than the pulpits of America. More than Hollywood, Washington D.C., Harvard, or Wall Street, the pulpits of our land will determine our future... for good or for ill. When filled with prophets of God, pulpits are a source of untold blessings. But when pushed to the margins or when they become purveyors of spiritual junk food or heretical teaching, then God’s judgement and wrath are not far away.

Like Amos, I look at myself in the mirror and want to say, “I [am] no prophet, nor [am] I a son of a prophet” (Amos 7:14 NKJV). In fact, I work for a non-profit organization! And yet no need is greater in our land today than this: true prophets, anointed by God, who courageously stand in their pulpits and boldly preach the Word of the living God.

The Pulpit Leads the World

By Stan Key

In the novel *Moby Dick*, Herman Melville devoted three chapters to a detailed description of a worship service at the Whaleman's Chapel of New Bedford, Massachusetts. Entitled "The Chapel," "The Pulpit," and "The Sermon," these chapters are rich in imagery and set the background for understanding the entire narrative. Ishmael, the main character, quietly slipped in the chapel and found a pew near the door. He was looking for divine reassurance before setting out to sea with Captain Ahab on the whaling ship *Pequod*. Like most churches in New England in those days, the pulpit was a lofty one. Access to the sacred desk was possible only by means of a rope ladder. When the time came for the sermon, Father Mapple, the saintly pastor, stood and walked toward the pulpit.

Halting for an instant at the foot of the ladder, and with both hands grasping the ornamental knobs of the man-ropes, Father Mapple cast a look upwards, and then with a truly sailor-like but still reverential dexterity, hand over hand, mounted the steps as if ascending the main-top of his vessel.

"The Bible defines who we are, what we believe, and how we should behave."

Once inside his lofty perch, Father Mapple leaned over the edge and pulled up the rope ladder, storing it neatly away in his impregnable little fortress. He then preached a powerful sermon on Jonah, the disobedient prophet. It was a message of sin, punishment, repentance, and deliverance. No one who heard the Word that day was unaffected.

But it wasn't just the sermon that impacted young Ishmael. Plaques hanging on the wall gave the names and ages of those lost at sea. And a large mural depicting a ship struggling valiantly in a storm also captured his attention. But the most dramatic feature of the little chapel was the shape of the pulpit itself, its symbolism not lost on Ishmael. The Bible rested squarely on the foremost point of the pulpit which was carved to resemble the bow of a ship. Indeed, Melville made sure the symbolism was not lost on any of his readers either.

What could be more full of meaning?—for the pulpit is ever this earth's foremost part; all the rest comes in its rear; the pulpit leads the world. From thence it is the storm of God's quick wrath is first descried, and the bow must bear the earliest brunt.



From thence it is the God of breezes fair or foul is first invoked for favorable winds. Yes, the world's a ship on its passage out, and not a voyage complete; and the pulpit is its prow.

Today, few churches resemble Whaleman's Chapel and I've never seen a pulpit shaped like the prow of a ship. And yet Melville got it right: the preaching of the Word is the center of the church... and the world! The Bible defines who we are, what we believe, and how we should behave. The preaching of the Word of God is not a liturgical option of secondary significance. It is central to all we believe and practice. The pulpit leads the world!

The Francis Asbury Society *Ministry Matters*

In May, The Francis Asbury Society re-launched the e-newsletter companion to *The High Calling* printed newsletter. We have given this e-mailed newsletter a new name, *Ministry Matters*.

Our ministry at FAS does matter. We also want to update you on what is going on at FAS on a regular basis, and that is the purpose of *Ministry Matters*.

To minimize costs and enable information to be communicated in a more timely manner, *Ministry Matters* will only be sent via e-mail. To sign up for this e-newsletter, please click the "Sign Me Up for Email Updates" button on www.francisasburysociety.com or call the office at 859-858-4222.

The Prayer of a Minor Prophet *continued from page 2*

the least of your mercies, and that if men knew me as intimately as I know myself, they would withhold their honors or bestow them upon others more worthy to receive them.

And now, O Lord of heaven and earth, I consecrate my remaining days to you; let them be many or few, as you will. Let me stand before the great, or minister to the poor and lowly; that choice is not mine, and I would not influence it if I could. I am your servant to do your will, and that will is sweeter to me than position or riches or fame; and I choose it above all things on earth or in heaven.

Though I am chosen of you and honored by a high and holy calling, let me never forget that I am but a man of dust and ashes, a man with all the natural faults and passions that plague the race of me. I pray you, therefore, my Lord and Redeemer, save me from myself and from all the injuries I may do myself while trying to be a blessing to others. Fill me with your power by the Holy Spirit, and I will go in your strength and tell of your righteousness, even yours only. I will spread abroad the message of redeeming love while my normal powers endure.

Then, dear Lord, when I am old and weary and too tired to go on, have a place ready for me above, and make me to be numbered with your saints in glory everlasting. Amen.

**“One word of truth
outweighs the world.”-
—Alexander Solzhenitsyn**

Classic Text on Pastoral Care *continued from page 5*

how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (vv. 33–35).

8. The pastor’s patience and perseverance: “I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus...” (v. 24).
9. The pastor’s prayerfulness: “Now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (v. 32).
10. The pastor’s purity of conscience: “I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you” (v. 26).

Write all this upon your hearts and it will do yourselves and the Church more good than 20 years’ study in seminary of those lower things, which though they may get you greater applause in the world, yet if separated from these, they will make you but as “a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal” (I Cor. 13:1).

The Uncion Function

By Stan Key

*Ye have an unction from the Holy One...
(I John 2:20. KJV)*

I went to church to find the Lord,
I hoped my faith could be restored,
But worship left me only bored;
I feel ashamed to say it.

I sat in silence on the pew
Awaiting something God would do,
But he was absent (this is true);
Only men were present.

I heard a nice man try to preach,
He entertained us with his speech,
But my real need he failed to reach;
I groaned in inward anguish.

He told some stories full of wit
And made us laugh a little bit,
But left me in my deep, dark pit;
Just the way I entered.

And when the singer’s voice was heard
The music soothed... no need for words,
Sentimental thoughts were stirred;
Such a great performance.

And though the music made me cry,
Brought drops of moisture to the eye,
My soul remained so dead and dry;
Is this what some call worship?

And when I went to Sunday School
The teacher sitting on the stool
Let us know he was no fool;
Spewing facts and data.

He taught the Bible, “Fully true!”
He quoted Greek and some Hebrew,
He awed us with the things he knew;
But was the Spirit present?

Teacher, preacher, singer too
May have gifts that dazzle you
Yet there’s something they can’t do
With only human talent.

If the unction isn’t there,
Worship doesn’t have a prayer,
Its just verbiage, empty air;
Mocking all who hear enter.

So I write with great compunction
And pray my poem will serve the function
To help us plead for holy unction;
Grant it, Lord, today!

God's Method of Blessing and Cursing a Nation

Excerpted from a sermon by George Whitefield†



<http://www.pbs.org/godinamerica/people/george-whitefield.html>

As God can send a nation or people no greater blessing than to give them faithful, sincere, and upright ministers, so the greatest curse that God can possibly send upon a people in this world, is to give them over to blind, unregenerate, carnal, lukewarm, and unskilled guides. And yet, in all ages, we find that there have been many wolves in sheep's clothing, many that daubed with untempered mortar, that prophesied smoother things than God did allow. As it was formerly, so it is now; there are many that corrupt the Word of God and deal deceitfully with it.

† George Whitefield. "The Method of Grace." Select Sermons of George Whitefield. (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1958), 75.

Hemlock Inn Retreats 2015
 Bryson City, NC
 August 25–27
 August 27–29

The Potter's House
 ...Until Christ is formed in you
 (Galatians 4:19).

The High Calling—July–August 2015

The High Calling is a bimonthly publication of The Francis Asbury Society to serve as a link between FAS and its constituents, building loyalty and awareness so that the teaching and experience of Christian holiness may continue to be lived and proclaimed throughout the world.

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- In This Issue:**
- Pulpit Power
 - Beware of False Prophets
 - The Prayer of a Minor Prophet
 - The Problem Is in the Pews as Well as the Pulpit
 - Classic Text on Pastoral Care
 - The Pulpit Leads the World

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